

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION & SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

ⵎⵓⵙⵙⵓⵏⵉ ⵓⵏⵉⵔⵉⵎ ⵏ ⵓⵙⵓⵣⵓ

ⵕⵓⵏⵉⵔⵉⵎ ⵏ ⵓⵙⵓⵣⵓ

ⵕⵓⵏⵉⵔⵉⵎ ⵏ ⵓⵙⵓⵣⵓ

MOULOUD MAMMERI UNIVERSITY OF TIZI-OUZOU

FACULTY OF LETTERS & LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



جامعة مولود معمري - تيزي وزو

كلية الآداب واللغات

قسم الإنجليزية

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in English

FIELD: Letters and Foreign Languages

BRANCHE: English language

SPECIALITY: Literature and Civilization

Title

**Colonial Education, Identity and Gender in Ngūgĩ wa
Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's
Nervous Conditions (1988) : A Comparative Study**

Presented by :

MOUSSAOUI Said.

Supervised by:

Dr. AZIZ Rabea

Board of Examiners :

Mrs. SEDDIKI Sadia, MCA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, **Chair;**

Mrs. AZIZ Rabea, MCA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, **supervisor;**

Mr. BEN HMIDA Fayçal, MAB Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, **Examiner;**

Academic year: 2024/2025

Dedication:

To my parents, brothers, sister and close friends

Acknowledgments :

From the very first attempt to realize this humble piece of research, the challenging experiences embedded in the latter came to be achieved thanks to the help of many people. I am deeply thankful to my supervisor Dr. Rabea Aziz, for granting me permission to work on her suggested topic. The professional help, guidance, and supervision she provided throughout the realization of this work are both instrumental and endless. I would like to give my due thanks to the panel of examiners who generously accepted to read and examine my dissertation respectfully. My full appreciation is credited to all the teachers of The Department of English at MMUTO, as to thr great contributions and encouragements they offered throughout my academic journey.

Table of Contents

Dedication:

Acknowledgments :	I
Table of Contents	II
Abstract:	IV
1.Introduction:	01
1.1. Literature Review:	02
1.2. Issue and Working Hypothesis:	05
2Methods and Materials:	07
2.1. Methods:	07
2.1.1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's theory of Identity :	08
2.1.2. Judith Butler theory of Gender:	09
2.2. Materials:	10
2.2.1. Summaries of The Novels:	10
2.2.1.1. Summary of <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964):	10
2.2.1.2. Summary of <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988):	11
2.2.1.3. Biography of the Authors:	12
2.2.1.3.1. . Ngugi wa Thiong'o:	12
2.2.1.3.2. Tsitsi Dangarembga:	14
2.3. Results:	16
2.4. Discussion:	18
2.4.1. Chapter One: Colonial Education and Identity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988):	20

2.4.1.1. Education and Hope in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988) :	21
2.4.1.2. Education and Identity Crisis in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988) :	28
2.4.2. Chapter Two: Colonial and Gendered Experiences in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988) :	36
2.4.2.1. Gender and Access to Education in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988):	37
2.4.2.2. Education and Patriarchy in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's <i>Weep Not, Child</i> (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988) and Gendred Rebillion for Girls:	46
3. Conclusion:	53
4. Bibliography:	55

Abstract:

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). It focuses on Colonial Education, Identity and Gender. The analysis is based on postcolonial theoretical frameworks that consider cultural hybridity, gender experiences, and linguistic imperialism. These frameworks have helped us analyze identity crises and cultural alienation caused by colonial education in postcolonial African societies. The research particularly highlights the manner in which education, although promoted as a path to empowerment and liberation, was used as a means of control and displacement. Having read both novels in close detail, we come to the following results: first, Ngũgĩ and Dangarembga uncovered colonial education as a symbolic domination that alienates individuals from their native identity and values. Second, both novels stress the gendered character of this alienation, especially in the experience of Tambu, who has to face both colonial and patriarchal oppression through colonial education. Finally, the research reveals that the authors are in favor of decolonization and cultural recovery by illustrating the individual and collective suffering endured by their characters. *Weep Not, Child and Nervous Conditions* are thus literary records witnessing the protracted battle for identity, defiance, and self-definition in the postcolonial context

Keywords: Colonial Education, Gender Experiences, Identity, Patriarchal Oppression, Postcolonial Context

I. Introduction:

The art of literature has long been seen as a mirror of societal worries, struggles, and ideas. This study depicts at how at the way colonial education shapes identity in postcolonial nations, as shown in the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Tsitsi Dangarembga *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) respectively. Both authors explore in their works how European-founded education aimed to create a group of individuals who became alienated from their native cultures while still being treated as outsiders within the colonial system. As a result, the characters in the aforementioned novels face deep inner conflicts, torn between adhering to the traditions of their communities and adopting the norms and values of the imposed Western ideas instilled at school.

It offers a comparative study of the two novels that show how colonial education affects young Africans. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer, and Tsitsi Dangarembga, a Zimbabwean author, tell the stories of the characters, who struggle with both the benefits and limits of education under colonial rule. The books are set in different historical periods. On the one hand, Kenya lived under the Mau Mau Uprising of the 1950s, a violent struggle for independence from British rule, affecting family structures. On the other hand, following the 1960', Rhodesia was marked by racial segregation and long-lasting effects of British Colonialism on African education and gender roles. Therefore, both novels are deeply rooted in the legacies of imperialism, highlighting the tension between education as a way to gain power and its role in keeping people oppressed.

In both Kenya and Zimbabwe, the British colonizer used education to control people, creating a gap between the Western-educated elite and the local majority. In *Weep Not, Child*, which is set during Kenya's fight for independence, education seems to offer hope for freedom. However, the novel's main character dreams are shattered by the brutal realities of

colonial violence and racism. Likewise, in *Nervous Conditions*, the main character sees education as a means to escape poverty, yet it turns out that it distances her from her culture and family. It's a quest of identity for both characters as they try to reconcile colonial teachings with the need to follow their native traditions.

The identity crisis caused by colonial education is extensively portrayed through the novels, as characters feel lost and disconnected from their cultures. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, argues that teaching in European languages worsens this problem by alienating students from their native ways of thinking. On the other hand, Dangarembga shows how colonial education affects African women, who also face gendered struggles, through their stories. Both authors highlight the challenges of fitting in, resisting colonial influence, and quests of identity in postcolonial societies.

1.1. Literature Review:

Based on postcolonial and feminist theories, this work has focused on exploring how colonial education, identity, and gender are connected. These studies examine how these themes influence each other and shape experiences, highlighting their important role in understanding historical and social contexts. These thematic ideas central to postcolonial theory are richly evoked in such novels as *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions*, where characters experience illustrates how systems of colonial education are tools of cultural hegemony and construction of identity. Existing scholarship has highlighted the complex ways in which social, cultural, and political forces converge to express individual and collective identity, and indeed gendered identity. In the context of these two texts, it is evident that colonial education is not only a system of institutions, But it is also a very strong force that shapes and limits a person's identity, especially for women living in a postcolonial society.

Gordon Douglas Killam in *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*.(1984) argued that Ngũgĩ shows how colonial education alienate African students from their own culture. He stated that “To make economic and political control the more complete the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping to control a people’s values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self” (p. 26). He maintains that this idea is also shared by other postcolonial writers like Chinua Achebe and Tsitsi Dangarembga, who explore similar themes in their works. Njoro’s hopeful views about education clash with the harsh truth of a system designed to benefit colonial powers, not the people it was meant to serve. Ngũgĩ, in his writings, explains that colonial education was not just about transmitting knowledge. Instead, it was a tool used to control the minds, making African societies value European ways of living over their own. As a result, many individuals became disconnected from uprooted, believing that European culture was superior. This created a sense of loss and confusion, as people struggled to stick to their identity while being conditioned to reject it. Ngũgĩ’s work highlights the deep damage caused by this system and calls for a return to valuing and preserving African heritage. (Killam, 1984).

Peter Nazareth in *Critical Essays on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*. (2000) argued that Ngũgĩ, in his *Weep Not, Child*, used land as a powerful symbol of indigenous identity. He emphasizes that “the land is not just a setting for the action but a central symbol of the people’s identity and aspirations” (p.15). For many Africans, land is not merely a property but represents economic independence, cultural roots, and emotional stability. In the novel, Njoro’s father, believes that reclaiming their ancestral land is key to restoring his family’s dignity and pride. His deep anger and frustration over losing the land drive him to support the Mau Mau resistance, reflecting the real-life struggles of Kenyans fighting against colonial rule. However, critics such as Simon Gikandi in *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*. (2000) explains that the

novel also illustrates how the colonial system is structured to prevent indigenous people from reclaiming their land. The laws and power structures favor the colonizers, making it nearly impossible for Africans to regain what was once theirs. This unjust system leads to feelings of hopelessness and anger, as people realize they are trapped in a cycle of loss and oppression. The novel highlights not just the pain of losing land but also a sense of belonging and identity, fueling the ongoing struggle for justice and freedom. (Peter Nazareth, Simon Gikandi 2000).

Vicki Briault in *Gender and Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions* (2003) explained that *Nervous Conditions* illustrates how colonialism and patriarchy work together to marginalize women in society. She observes that the novel “shows how the colonial experience exacerbates gender attitudes within the colonised community and prevents the women in the novel from constructing their sexual and social identity harmoniously” (p. 23). Tambu’s mother, Ma’Shingayi, embodies the struggles of rural African women, expected to labor tirelessly for their families while possessing little control over their own lives. They bear heavy burdens, often without recognition or the freedom to make their own choices. In contrast, Tambu’s uncle, Babamukuru, though educated and respected, enforces strict rules over women in his household. This dynamic demonstrates that education does not necessarily lead to equitable attitudes toward women; instead, it can perpetuate existing power structures, confining women to limited roles. The novel highlights the dual struggle women face: oppression by both colonial systems and patriarchal traditions within their communities. This compounded adversity makes it even more challenging for them to break free and find their own voices. Through characters like Tambu, the book explores the hope and determination of women who strive for education and independence despite numerous obstacles. (Vicki Briault 2003).

Colonial rule in Rhodesia forced Western values onto African communities, breaking down their traditional ways of life and sense of identity. Anne McClintock (1995) argued in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* that *Nervous Conditions* deconstructs colonialism as a system that not only exploits African labor and land but also transforms the way people think and behave. The novel illustrates how colonial education serves as a key instrument in this process, creating a conflict between traditional Shona values and the Western ideals imposed upon the people. Characters like Tambu and Nyasha struggle to balance their African heritage with the expectations of colonial education, which often devalues their culture. This tension leads to confusion, frustration, and a sense of loss, as individuals feel torn between two worlds. The novel highlights how colonialism doesn't merely extract resources; it also reshapes individuals' perceptions of themselves, their families, and their traditions. Through its characters, the book reveals the deep and lasting damage caused by colonialism, as it's not only the land but also the hearts and minds of the people. As McClintock (1995) observes, "From the outset, people's experiences of desire and rage, memory and power, community and revolt are inflected and mediated by the institutions through which they find their meaning and which they, in turn, transform" (p. 5). (Anne McClintock 1995).

1.2. Issue and Working Hypothesis:

From the above short review of the literature, it is clear that the role of colonial education in shaping identity has been a key topic in studies of postcolonial works. Researchers have depicted at how colonial schools were used as a way to control cultures, often making people feel disconnected from their own traditions. Writers like Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Tsitsi Dangarembga have been widely discussed for their depiction of this issue. For instance, in *Weep Not, Child*, the main character's struggles with the British colonial school system have been analyzed, showing how it shaped his dreams and

frustrations during Kenya's fight for independence. On the other hand, *Nervous Conditions* has been studied for its focus on how colonial education affected women, highlighting the emotional and cultural struggles faced by female characters.

However, while much has been written about colonial education and its effects in the previously mentioned novels, there is a gap still when it comes to comparing how it created identity crises for male and female characters. Most studies have either focused on the general representation of alienation or on male and female experiences of education separately. To my best knowledge, little research has been conducted to directly compare how colonial schooling impacted the self-identity of male and female protagonists in these two novels.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating at how colonial education influenced identity in *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions*, with particular emphasis on gender. By comparing the experiences of the main characters in the two novels, this research explores the ways in which colonial education disrupted their sense of identity, caused inner conflicts, and reinforced gender inequalities for male and female students. This approach offers new ways to understand the connection between colonial education, identity, and gender in postcolonial African literature. It presumes that while both genders are adversely affected by the dissolution of identity through colonial education, female characters have the dual weight of colonial and patriarchal oppression on their shoulders, resulting in a greater and more fractured struggle over identity than their male equivalents.

2. Methods and Materials:

2.1.Methods:

To achieve our objectives, we'll draw on some theoretical concepts from Postcolonial theory, focusing on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's thoughts about Identity some concepts from Judith Butler's ideas about gender as performativity to extend the focus gender roles.

The two novels we have chosen, *Weep Not, Child* (1964) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga, explore recurring themes of colonial education, cultural dislocation, and the struggle for identity as well as gender inequalities stemming from colonial power structures. These themes have been deeply discussed by thinkers like *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* in *Decolonising the mind* (1986) and Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), thereby it is worth to explore how these two novels reveal the impact of colonial education on the characters sense of identity and belonging. Postcolonial theory gives us a helpful lens to understand the challenges people face as they navigate the lasting effects of colonialism. Before diving deeper, it's important to first lay out some key ideas from selected theoretical frameworks.

A. Post Colonial Theory:

Post-colonial theory is an intellectual movement that developed in the decades following the end of colonial empires. It analyzes the cultural, political, and psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizers and the colonized. Scholars in this field studies how colonial rule affected ideas of race, identity, history, and power and how they still influence the world today. This theory became especially prominent in academic circles after the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking book *Orientalism* in (1978). In the la

ter. Said argued that Western authors and intellectuals had tended to distort Eastern cultures, portraying them as exotic or primitive. *Orientalism* challenged these portrayals and laid the groundwork for what would come to be known as postcolonial literary theory, which analyzes how literature and culture portray and challenge colonial ideologies.

When it comes to defining post-colonial literary theory, thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Edward Said argued that it came about to challenge the imposed European discourse that attempt to distort the realities and local cultures of former colonies. They stressed the fact that European theories are based on their own cultural traditions which often claim to be universal. Postcolonial discourse which was translated into theories came to speak on behalf of the unheard of who are often silenced by the dominant ideas of colonial ways of knowing. (pp. 11–13, 66–69)

These theorists also said that European traditions were seen as provided, which created a view of culture and politics during colonial times. This Eurocentric thinking helped European empires grow in the 19th century and led to the cultural suppression of colonized societies. In response, local theories like post-colonial theory emerged to challenge this imbalance and to help build a stronger sense of identity in different nations and regions. (Amir Ali, 2024, para. 2)

2.1.1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's theory of Identity

Post-colonial theory is highly interested in matters of identity, language, and cultural resistance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o powerfully examines in *Decolonising the Mind*. For Ngũgĩ, language is not a simple means of communication but a vehicle for culture, memory, and identity and hence central to the colonial endeavor of control. He argues that the imposition of colonial languages like English has the consequence of alienating colonized people from their

own worldview and histories, a split consciousness by which individuals are distanced from their native cultures while socialized to see the language and values of the colonizer as superior. He argues that this linguistic hegemony leads to a battered and dependent identity where self-esteem and epistemology are measured in terms of foreign standards. In contrast to philosophers such as Homi Bhabha, who deconstruct mimicry and hybridity as spaces of negotiation, Ngũgĩ implores discarding the language of the colonizer and the utilization of local languages in order to reclaim cultural sovereignty and construct post-colonial self. This understanding makes decolonization not just political but also psychological and linguistic a recentring of the self in one's own cultural and linguistic pool, and a resistance to the original deep-seated structures of colonial dominance that continue to operate even after political freedom. (Ngũgĩ, 1986.).

2.1.2. Judith Butler theory of Gender:

Theorists, like Judith Butler, made significant contributions to gender theory. In her now canonical book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler formulated the concept of gender performativity, arguing that gender is not a fixed or essential identity but rather a series of repeated acts and behaviors that are guided by social expectations.

As an example, Butler takes drag performances as a way to show how gender can be imitated and performed, illustrating its constructed nature. She also challenges the traditional binary understanding of gender, showing how these categories delimit expression of the self and augment structures of power. Butler's analysis successfully overturns the idea that gender is natural, enabling more fluid and diverse understandings of identity.

Her novel points out that what we would most like to term 'masculine' or 'feminine' is not the performance of some universal truth but the result of cultural repetition and

conditioning. By thinking in terms of identity as performance, Butler removes the argument from fixed meaning and enables subversive modes of gender expression that challenge dominant norms. This transformation in theory has been extremely influential within feminist theory, queer studies, and identity politics debates in the current era.(Butler, 1990).

2.2. Materials:

2.2.1. Summaries of The Novels:

2.2.1.1. Summary of *Weep Not, Child* (1964):

Weep Not, Child is set in Kenya during the 1950s, a time when the country is under British colonial rule and facing political turmoil due to the Mau Mau uprising, a rebellion by the Kikuyu people against colonial oppression.

The story centers on Njoroge, a young Kikuyu boy who is full of hope and believes that education is the key to a better future. Njoroge is determined to succeed in school and dreams that through education he can help his family and his people escape poverty and injustice. His hope reflects a deep desire for freedom and progress.

Njoroge's family, however, is caught in the struggles caused by colonialism. His father is a poor farmer who once owned land but lost it due to unfair colonial policies and the encroachment of white settlers. The family faces many hardships, including poverty and fear as the political situation grows tense.

As the Mau Mau rebellion intensifies, Njoroge's father becomes involved in the struggle for independence and is eventually arrested by the British colonial authorities. This leads to great distress and tragedy for the family. Njoroge's mother also suffers, and the family's unity begins to fracture under the pressure of violence and loss.

Throughout the novel, Njoroge experiences a deep conflict between his hopes and the adverse realities of the society. His belief in education and peace is challenged by the violence of the rebellion and the oppressive colonial system. He struggles to maintain faith in his dreams as his community is torn apart by war and betrayal.

The novel ends on a tragic note, with Njoroge's hopes shattered by the ongoing conflict and personal losses, reflecting the heavy toll that colonialism and war have on individuals and families.

2.2.1.2. Summary of *Nervous Conditions* (1988):

Nervous Conditions is a novel written in Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) during the 1960s and 1970s, the period of colonialism and social disturbance. The novel is written in the perspective of Tambu, a rural Shona child from a poor background who wishes to be educated and improve to her life.

Tambu comes from a poor family, and like the majority of girls in her village, she is under the traditional constraints that limit her future. But when her elder brother is suddenly murdered, Tambu is given a chance to go to school a luxury that was reserved for girls at that time, substituting him.

She goes to live with her uncle Babamukuru, who is richer and more educated, and who loves learning. His school and home bring new opportunities, but also bring problems with culture and gender roles. His wife, Maiguru, is well-educated too, but she feels unhappy because women are treated unfairly in a male-dominated society.

Through studies, Tambu learns about the complexities of colonialism, race, and gender inequalities. She struggles to shape her own identity, between Shona culture, colonialism, and her own desires.

All along, Tambu witnesses the social and psychological tensions on her family and others. Her cousin Nyasha, having spent time at school in England, is masterfully influenced by the clash of cultures and expectations, tormented by what the novel refers to as "nervous conditions", mental and emotional anxiety resulting from colonialism, sexism, and culture conflict.

The book explores the effect of colonialism, women's struggle for power and self-determination, cultural identity, and the struggle to become an adult in a world that is modernizing.

2.2.1.3. Biography of the Authors :

2.2.1.3.1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (born January 5, 1938, Limuru, Kenya died May 28, 2025, Buford, Georgia, U.S.) was a Kenyan writer who was considered East Africa's leading novelist. His popular *Weep Not, Child* (1964) was the first major novel in English by an East African. As he became aware of the effects of colonialism in Africa, Ngugi adopted his traditional name and wrote in the Bantu language of Kenya's Kikuyu people. Ngugi received bachelor's degrees from Makerere University in Kampala in Uganda, in 1963 and from Leeds University, Yorkshire, England, in 1964. After doing great work at Leeds, he served as a lecturer in English at University College, Nairobi, Kenya, and as a visiting professor of English at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, U.S. From 1972 to 1977 he was senior

lecturer and chairman of the department of literature at the University of Nairobi. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

The prizewinning *Weep Not, Child* is the story of a Kikuyu family went into the struggle for Kenyan independence during the state of emergency and the Mau Mau rebellion. *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), generally held to be artistically more mature, focuses on the many social, moral, and racial issues of the struggle for independence and its aftermath. A third novel, *The River Between* (1965), which was his first novel, tells of lovers kept apart by the conflict between Christianity and traditional ways and beliefs and suggests that efforts to reunite a culturally divided community by means of Western education are doomed to failure. *Petals of Blood* (1977) deals with social and economic problems in East Africa after independence, particularly the continued exploitation of peasants and workers by foreign business interests and a greedy indigenous bourgeoisie. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

Ngugi presented his ideas on literature, culture, and politics in numerous essays and lectures, which were collected in *Homecoming* (1972), *Writers in Politics* (1981), *Barrel of a Pen* (1983), *Moving the Centre* (1993), and *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* (1998). In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), Ngugi argued for African language literature as the only authentic voice for Africans and stated his own intention of writing only in Kikuyu or Kiswahili from that time on. Such works earned him a reputation as one of Africa's most articulate social critics. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

After a long exile from Kenya, Ngugi returned in 2004 with his wife to promote Mũrogi wa Kagogo. Several weeks later they were brutally assaulted in their home; the attack was believed by some to be politically motivated. After their recovery, the couple continued

to publicize the book abroad. Ngugi later published the memoirs *Dreams in a Time of War* (2010), about his childhood; *In the House of the Interpreter* (2012), which was largely set in the 1950s, during the Mau Mau rebellion against British control in Kenya; and *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening* (2016), a chronicle of his years at Makerere University. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

2.2.1.3.2. Tsitsi Dangarembga:

Dangarembga is the first black woman from Zimbabwe to publish a novel in English. Her *Nervous Conditions* (1988), winner of the African segment of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989, is a feminist novel that was initially rejected for publication in newly independent Zimbabwe, a region dominated by patriarchal attitudes. It was eventually accepted by an international publisher. Dangarembga is also recognized as the first Zimbabwean black woman to direct a feature film, *Everyone's Child* (1996), which she also co-wrote, calling attention to the AIDS crisis in Africa. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

Dangarembga was born in 1959 in Mutoko, in the British colony of Rhodesia, a region in central South Africa that now comprises the country of Zimbabwe. From age two until the age of six she lived in England, where she attended school before returning to Rhodesia in 1965, where she subsequently was educated at a missionary school in the Zimbabwean town of Mutare, then completed her secondary education at a convent school. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

In 1977 she entered Cambridge University with the intention of studying for a medical degree; before completing her degree, however, she went back to Rhodesia, just prior to Rhodesia's gaining its independence from Britain in the spring of 1980. She subsequently

finished her undergraduate studies in psychology at the University of Harare in Zimbabwe, working for some time as a copywriter for a marketing agency. At this point she became influenced by the celebrations of Zimbabwe's independence, began reading contemporary African literature, and discovered the oral tradition of the Shona. While at the university, Dangarembga also wrote several plays for the college drama group, including *The Lost of the Soil* (1983), which she also directed, and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987). (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

In addition, she joined Zambuko, a theater group, and in 1985 published her first story, "*The Letter*," in Sweden. She gained literary repute in 1988 with the publication of *Nervous Conditions*, which has been acclaimed by critics. Dangarembga also maintains an interest in film direction. She continued her schooling at the Deutsche Film und Fernseh Akademie in Berlin and composed the storyline upon which the movie *Neria* (1992) was based, and also co-wrote the screenplay for *Everyone's Child* (1996), which has been shown all over the world. In 2006 she published the novel *Book of Not*, which continues the story of the narrator of *Nervous Conditions*. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga treats such themes as education as it relates to gender especially the impact of a colonial education on a vulnerable, impressionable young African girl and how women in colonial Rhodesia suffered a twofold oppression: from the race-based imperialism of the British and from the patriarchal system of the Shona community. In the partially autobiographical *Nervous Conditions*, the narrator Tambudzai ("Tambu") looks back to her own adolescence and her relationships with her female relatives, including her mother, her aunt, and her rebellious, English-educated cousin Nyasha. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

As the novel opens, Tambu is living on a poor farm in colonial Rhodesia during the late 1960s. Following the death of her brother Nhamo, who attends a colonial mission school, Tambu moves to live with her wealthy and authoritarian Uncle Babamukuru, the Western-educated headmaster of the mission school. He selects Tambu to go to school in Nhamo's place so that she can help provide for her family. Tambu, though excited at the opportunity of an education, eventually experiences conflict and emotional distress over the dichotomy of her position as a traditional Shona woman being forced to abandon her heritage in order to conform to middle-class British racist, sexist, and socially condescending attitudes. The novel also addresses the nervous disorders suffered by women, including hysteria, depression, anorexia nervosa, and bulimia, as they face multiple levels of oppression based on gender, race, and social status. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

2.3. Results:

The analysis of *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions* illustrates the understanding of colonial education as both an alienating instrument and a liberatory promise, which has a profound impact on the identity of the protagonists.

In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel, Njoroge views education as a path to personal and national freedom, yet his dreams are shattered by the violent realities of colonial oppression under the Mau Mau Uprising, exposing the limits of academic achievement under colonial occupation. Likewise, in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu seeks empowerment through education, only to find that her advancement comes at the cost of alienation from her Shona culture and traditional family values. Both heroines are caught in the paradox of education: while it holds out the potential to overcome poverty and social restrictions, it also carries a Western worldview that alienates them from their heritage. This

alienation is reinforced through the use of colonial languages in education, which, Ngũgĩ argues in *Decolonising the Mind*, alienates students from indigenous modes of thought.

Furthermore, Dangarembga's portrayal highlights how this system specifically impacts African women, adding gendered oppression to the already fraught identity struggles. This way, the two novels demonstrate how colonial education generates fragmented identities, and the educated individuals become strangers both within the colonial order and in their own societies.

2.4. Discussion:

This thesis analyzes the profound impact of colonial education on gender and identity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), two foundational African novels that critically address the cultural and psychological impacts of British colonialism. In the lives of Njoroge and Tambu, both novels capture how colonial education is a double-edged sword: outwardly, it seems to be the path to progress and personal self-improvement, but in reality it leads to cultural disalienation, inner contradiction, and fragmentation of self.

The colonial education and identity construction are addressed in the first chapter. The chapter explains how the protagonists tread the precarious middle ground, between their African heritage and the Western values they receive in colonial schools. Postcolonial theory is employed in the chapter to explain how education is both a means of empowerment and internalized at the same time a sign of oppression. It ultimately calls into question the protagonists' sense of self and cultural identity.

Chapter two brings in gendered analysis, examining how the systems of colonialism and patriarchy intersect to affect the lives of male and female protagonists differently. Whereas Njoroge must carry the burden of masculinity in a colonized world, Tambu is doubly disavowed and excluded not only by class and race but also by the patriarchal norms of both colonial and native systems. Citing both feminist and postcolonial views, this chapter specifies the manner in which education is both an act of resistance and subordination, particularly for African women.

Together, the chapters demonstrate how Ngũgĩ and Dangarembga, using their own experiences as colonial-era student subjects, offer nuanced analyses of how empire operates not only through political control but also through psychological and cultural conditioning. In

their textual representations, they depict how colonial education irrevocably stigmatizes African identity as both a realm of potentiality and a location for loss.

2.4.1. Chapter One: Colonial Education and Identity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988):

This chapter explores the representation of colonial education in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's trailblazing novel *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's prize-winning *Nervous Conditions* (1988), focusing on the profound and often contradictory impact this system of education has on the shaping of identity among the young African protagonists. These books explore colonial education in a deep and complex way. They show how it can both empower and alienate people. The characters, like Njoroge and Tambu, are deeply affected by it. Colonial education influences their thoughts and culture. As they grow up, they struggle between their traditional roots and the strong influence of Western colonial ideas.

The stories clearly show the inner struggles of the characters, who are torn between staying faithful to their own culture and following the goals taught in colonial schools. Their sense of self is constantly challenged and confused by these two opposing forces. These tensions will be explored in this chapter, utilizing post-colonial theoretical frameworks in order to deconstruct such hegemonic themes as identity struggle, internalized oppression, cultural hybridity, and the multiple and ongoing quest for self-definition in a context of historical subordination and cultural dislocation.

It is particularly significant to note that both Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o draw extensively on their own individual experiences in colonial schools, and this provides compelling authenticity and proximity to the concerns and psychological turmoil voiced in their work. By exploring the analysis in these autobiographical elements, this chapter will highlight how the authors critique not only the obvious political and social hierarchies of Colonialism but also the pernicious psychological mechanisms through which colonial education seeks to remake and often subvert indigenous selves. Lastly, this chapter

aims to demonstrate how in their literary works, Ngũgĩ and Dangarembga reveal the enduring influence of colonial education on African identity, illustrating the contradictory means through which education could serve as a promise and wound, possibility and loss, freedom and entrapment, shaping the consciousness of a generation who stood between two worlds.

2.4.1.1. Education and Hope in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) :

As Coming to the content of the two novels, Both *Nervous Conditions* and *Weep Not, Child* present education as a path to freedom and upward mobility with Njoroge and Tambudzai believing it to be a way out of colonial hegemony. Both protagonists must contend with the tension between personal aspirations and the structural limitations of postcolonial and colonial society. But while the two books differ in their approach to gender and family expectations, *Nervous Conditions* brings to the forefront Tambudzai's struggle with patriarchal expectations, while Njoroge's existence is conditioned less by the support and lower class of his family. And while *Weep Not, Child* is a tragedy whose tone resonates with the disillusion of post-independence Kenya, *Nervous Conditions* is a more complex, continuing struggle of postcolonial Zimbabwe, and Tambudzai's future is uncertain but not negative. Both novels ultimately demonstrate that even though education gives hope, it cannot always override the deeply rooted societal and cultural forces inhibiting the characters possibilities.

In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o introduces us to colonial Kenya during the Mau Mau rebellion, a period marked by the violent struggle between African nationalists and the British colonial administration. The novel follows the story of Njoroge, a young Kikuyu boy who sees education as a noble and empowering tool that will allow him to liberate both himself and his family from poverty and oppression. Ngũgĩ presented Njoroge as a hopeful

character, one who initially believes in the promise of progress through hard work, moral virtue, and scholastic achievement. This belief is conveyed early in the novel when the author, reflecting on his protagonist, says:

"To Njoroge, education was a beacon of hope, a way to rise above poverty and colonial oppression. He believed that through learning, he could secure a better future for himself and his family. Yet, as the story unfolds, he realizes that the very system that promised liberation through education is the same one that maintains colonial control. What was once a symbol of hope becomes a reminder of the harsh limitations imposed on him and his people, showing that education, while a powerful tool, can also be manipulated by oppressive forces." (p. 45)

This statement encapsulates the idealistic hope of the protagonist, showing us the innocence with which most youths in colonial times looked at the prospect of education. Ngũgĩ places these hopes in a larger socio-political context where education, instead of being a way to liberty, seems to be a cause of more disillusionment. The assumption by Njoroge that school can bring him above his station is increasingly tested by the critical conditions of colonial life: land seizure, political persecution, and the breakdown of household life that erode his sense of possibility. Throughout the action, Njoroge's belief in education as a means of mobility is continually tested. The imprisonment of his own father and the murder of his brothers are poignantly tragic reminders of how colonial violence tears away the very fabric of family and community.

Despite being the first of his family to attend school, Njoroge is not immune to the political instability and the deep existential crises that define his world. The belief that diligence and application are sufficient to lead to a decent life is shattered when, despite his intellectual potential, poverty and domestic emergencies force him to leave school. Nevertheless, in spite of all these setbacks, the narrative permits hope. Ngũgĩ's presentation of his journey suggests that even though colonialism is rigid and dehumanizing, there is still the potential for individual and group resistance, even though it is often difficult to win a case, when Ngũgĩ says:

"He had always believed in the future. He had always believed in education as the key to that future. Now, as he walked home, he felt the weight of the world pressing down on him. The world was not as simple as he had thought. It was not enough to have faith, to work hard, to hope. There were forces greater than himself forces that could crush a man's dreams and leave him with nothing but despair." (p. 136).

This moment represents a turning point on Njoroge's journey, where education as the key to success and liberation breaks down. Njoroge had grown to believe that through education, he would be able to transcend his conditions, that it was the means by which he would break free from the drudgery of the colonial world assigned. In view of his experiences, he realizes how this potential has been drained. His intellectual development, under the tutelage of the colonial education system, now appears to be divorced from the reality of the pain of his people.

What he has learnt, instead of empowering him or providing alternatives, tends to be aligned for the purpose of the colonizer, and he finds himself disconnected from his people and himself. His head, which is full of foreign ideals and ideas, no longer serves him purposes of clarity or tools to tackle the deeply entrenched injustices that he sees everywhere. The burden of his people's sufferance and oppression overwhelms him, pointing to the tension between the education he has acquired and the freedom he had envisioned.

Njoroge's hopeful belief that colonial education would bring change. Education, which had previously been synonymous with opportunity, is a source of great disillusionment. Instead of being used as an instrument of empowerment, it is a tool of psychological and emotional pressure, highlighting the disjunction between colonial ideals and colonial reality. Ngũgĩ uses this disillusionment as a basis to condemn the colonial schooling system. By illustrating the bitter disappointment that education could not alleviate individuals from systemic oppression, he lays bare how the system of colonialism employed the dreams of the colonized to lead them to believe in a guarantee of equality and ascension that was never possible. In Njoroge's

experience, Ngũgĩ discloses the bitter truth that colonial education was more inclined to reinforce to subvert the institutions of oppression and inequality.

Conversely, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is about another teenage African heroine, Tambudzai, who also believes education is a path to liberty. But while Njoroge's struggle in *Weep Not, Child* is closely linked to national consciousness and resistance against colonial domination, Tambu's struggle is largely private, intra-household, and societal against the deep-seated patriarchy that governs the domestic sphere of her family and community. Set in colonial Rhodesia, Dangarembga's novel offers a feminist analysis of how gender and colonialism intersect to shape the lives of African women in profoundly limiting forms. Tambu, like Njoroge, is from a rural working-class background, but her path takes a very different turn when the loss of her brother improbably becomes the key to her own education.

This tragedy is a turning point in her life marking the start of her intellectual maturation and awakening within her the desire to defy the gendered norms that restrict her. Education is not simply a question of individual growth for Tambu, but an active way of defying domestic toil, cultural expectation, and social hierarchy, which enclose women into servile roles. Her own life attests to a battle of layers not merely against colonial constructs but, more urgently, against the everyday patriarchy that is codified in family procedure and cultural norms. She reflects:

“I was not sorry when my brother died. I was glad. I had been glad since the moment I had heard the news. It was as though something had been unlocked, as though a door had been opened for me, and I was going to walk through it. For so long, I had lived in his shadow, measuring my worth against his strength, his choices, his path. His death did not bring me joy in a cruel sense, but it gave me space to breathe, to imagine a life that was mine alone.” (p. 1).

This startling statement signifies Tambu's desperation to rise above her circumstances and hints at the gendered nature of opportunity in her world. While boys are expected to

subservient tasks benefit from education and public opportunity as in Ngũgĩ's novel, girls are expected to serve.

Tambu's journey is one of persistent negotiation between these gendered expectations and her desire for autonomy. Her existence is driven by a deep belief in education as the path to personal liberation and a brighter future. She has dreamed since her early years at the mission school of transcending the poverty and limitation that have marked her family life. Admission to a better school provides her with the expectation that education will result in autonomy, respect, and self-worth. She initially approaches her studies with enthusiasm, viewing them as a gateway to empowerment. As she progresses, however, she starts to experience firsthand the realities inherent in colonial education. The very system that holds out the promise of advancement also estranges her from her culture and her sense of self.

Her cousin Nyasha, who travelled to England and returned radically transformed, serves as a warning example: despite her academic achievements, Nyasha is severely psychologically troubled, demonstrating that education through the lens of colonialism can be damaging. Tambu around her observes women who are intelligent, ambitious, and full of promise, but routinely silenced by the overlapping forces of patriarchy and colonialism. Her uncle Babamukuru, whose success through education she used to idolize, represents the rewards and also the limits of this system. He demands submission and reinforces oppressive structures even as he claims to be uplifting his family, by using his success through colonial education to assert control over his family, particularly women.

While he claims to uplift them by providing education and material support his authority mirrors both patriarchal and colonial systems, expecting obedience and conformity in return. His treatment of Tambu and Maiguru reveals how he upholds traditional gender roles and enforces the idea that success must come through assimilation into colonial norms. Thus,

Babamukuru becomes a symbol of how so-called upliftment can perpetuate the very oppression it claims to overcome. Through these experiences, Tambu's understanding of education is transformed. She understands that her empowerment cannot be achieved through academic achievement alone, but must also involve the retrieval of her voice, culture, and identity.

Dangarembga develops Tambu's transformation slowly and subtly. By the end of the novel, Tambu no longer believes uncritically in the promise of education. She begins to understand that true liberation must come from a deeper, internal rejection of the values that seek to oppress her. The novel ends with Tambu preparing to write her story, a symbolic gesture that represents the beginning of her resistance. She says:

"I began to see that the story I had been telling myself was a lie. I had been brought up to believe that education was the way out, that if I studied and worked hard, I would rise above the poverty and limitations that had defined my mother's life, my aunt's life. But I was wrong. Education had been the bait. I had swallowed it, only to find that I was being digested by a system that was never meant to accommodate me. It was not education that would free me. It was telling my lens of the truth." (p. 123)

This revision represented both a personal and political act. Unlike Njoroge, who succumbs to despair, Tambu survives by asserting her voice. While she does not find complete freedom, she emerges with a heightened awareness of the systemic forces working against her and with a new determination to resist them.

Both novels, therefore, reflect on the theme of liberation and social mobility not only as political ideals but as deeply personal struggles marked by betrayal, conflict, and awakening. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Tsitsi Dangarembga used their protagonists to expose the contradictions of colonial systems that promote education while denying real empowerment.

As Franz Fanon says in *The wretched of the earth*:

"Colonial education, while ostensibly offering the tools for advancement and liberation, in reality functions as an instrument of control and alienation. It inculcates a

sense of inferiority and dislocation in the colonized subject by valuing Western knowledge systems over indigenous ways of knowing, thereby perpetuating the very inequalities it claims to eradicate." (p. 96)

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge's collapse illustrates the futility of seeking personal advancement in a system designed to exclude Africans from real power. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's developing critical consciousness points to the need for self-definition and cultural reclamation as forms of resistance. Furthermore, both authors demonstrate how colonialism distorts traditional family structures and cultural identities. Njoroge's family is decimated by land loss, imprisonment, and poverty, while Tambu's is torn between tradition and the mimicry of colonial values. The family becomes a part of both struggle and survival, reflecting larger societal tensions. In both cases, hope is fragile and conditional; it is often deferred or destroyed under the weight of systemic oppression.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are trailblazing postcolonial novels that critique the fraught dynamics of identity, education, and freedom from the postcolonial condition. Drawing on the work of postcolonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ himself, the novels reveal how the mechanisms of colonial education are instruments of empowerment as much as of cultural hegemony. In Njoroge and Tambudzai's lives, we can witness how education as a potential for social mobility is also used for internalized colonialism and the disintegration of indigenous identity.

Beyond mere mapping of individual trajectories of disappointment and hope, the novels deconstruct the colonial past's long-lasting psychological and structural violence. They expose the duplicity of colonial modernity that is the colonized self being urged to enter into regimes that necessarily efface them as cultural selves. Both novels, therefore, demonstrate the postcolonial condition: a space of hybridity, contradiction, and ongoing negotiation of power and meaning. In *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions* both argue that

decolonization on colonial terms is infeasible. Instead, freedom demands an epistemological shift a retrieval of indigenous self, language, and history. These books therefore are not only literary fiction but acts of cultural resistance, in that they call for a reconstitution of the self that eschews colonial imitation and demands postcolonial subjectivity on its own terms.

2.4.1.2. Education and Identity Crisis in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) :

While the previous section of this chapter dealt with Colonial Education and Identity, this section will treat the subject of Education and Identity crisis. Both *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions* present a sharp critique of how colonial structures serve individuals from their cultural roots, leading to a profound sense of displacement.

In *Weep Not, Child*, the land functions not only as a means of subsistence but as a repository of identity, history, and community. For generations, Gikuyu families such as Njoroge's lived in harmony with the land, which was central to their cultural and spiritual existence. The colonial expropriation of this land by British settlers like Mr. Howlands is more than material theft, it also represents a spiritual and psychological rupture. Njoroge's attachment to the land and his subsequent humiliation as a squatter on ancestral ground reflects a broader loss of dignity, and the breakdown of generational continuity. His belief that he must serve the white landowners, even when that service leads to self-abasement, underscores how deeply colonialism has eroded traditional social structures.

Njoroge, although not directly working the land, internalizes this rupture differently. He sees education as a path forward, but this modern route pulls him further away from the physical and symbolic importance of his heritage. He now views his culture not from his own personal experiences but through the distorted stories shaped by colonial influence. His detachment

from the land becomes a detachment from his self, leaving him rootless when the promises of colonial education fail. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o says in *Decolonising the Mind* :

“Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control.” (p. 3).

This mental domination explains why Njoroge's hopes for liberation through education result not in empowerment, but in resistance. Colonial mental domination works by telling colonized people how they ought to see themselves and where they stand in the world, shaping their identity in terms of the colonizer's values and narratives rather than their own cultural heritage.

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge's education becomes a site of internal exile, where the hope for emancipation through Western education ultimately leads to a deep and painful identity crisis. The colonial education system presents itself as a passport to prosperity, dignity, and a brighter future but secretly teaches Njoroge to downgrade his own cultural heritage, language, and traditions. This schooling impresses the hegemony of the colonizer's worldview upon him and makes him see his heritage as old-fashioned or outdated. Thus, Njoroge becomes disconnected from his land and people but also from himself.

The school, rather than being a place of empowerment, is a place where his indigenous identity is broken down and swapped with a blemished, borrowed conception of progress. He is trapped between two worlds one that rejects him in front of assimilation, and the other that is being methodically dismantled. This shattered sense of identity illustrates how colonial education, rather than offering authentic emancipation, is more likely to result in psychological dislocation and disinheritance from culture. Njoroge's experience illustrates that

genuine freedom can only be achieved via internalization of the colonial values alone but via a conscious reclaiming of cultural identity, history, and traditional knowledge systems.

In *Nervous Conditions*, the loss of identity roots is subtler but equally powerful. Tambu's journey from the rural village to the mission and later to Sacred Heart convent school exposes her to an alien cultural world that devalues her origins. The rural life, characterized by communalism, traditional roles, and indigenous knowledge, is depicted as backward in the colonial narrative. Tambu begins to absorb this view, feeling shame at her village's poverty and her mother's unrefined mannerisms. Her desire for cleanliness, order, and discipline qualities promoted in the colonial school system, signals an internal rejection of her roots.

The school becomes for her a space not only for learning but for cultural cleansing. Tambu's mother warns her, "when you go to that mission, you cease to be my child," showing her concern that Tambu will abandon her family and culture with Western education. As Tambu develops further in her studies, she slowly drifts away far from her origins, though she feels guilty about it and knows what she is losing. Just like Njoroge, to lose one's culture is not always something about becoming an adult or being educated, it's an extremely personal problem that affects who they are on the inside, as Homi Bhabha mentions in *The location of culture*:

“Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. It is this ambivalence that turns the colonized subject into a site of splitting, where the acquisition of colonial knowledge does not empower but destabilizes identity. The effect is to produce a blurred copy of the colonizer, a subject who is at once similar and alien, authorized and marginalized, civilized and degraded” (p. 86).

In *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions*, education is not a straight path to freedom but a colonizing mirror in which identity is distorted and resistance is deepened. Figures like Njoroge idolize learning as one of the ways of acquiring dignity, leadership, and

national salvation. But this search for knowledge, so deeply ingrained in colonial arrangements, quietly realigns to a yearning not to defeat domination but to be the oppressor's. As Njoroge clings to his books while his people strike back in rage, he is increasingly isolated, caught between a Westernized vision of advancement and the lived reality of his people. Education, rather than positioning him to resist, deceives him into copying colonial ideals, and he finds himself in an identity crisis where he is neither fully identified with his community nor accepted by the system he is copying. Therefore, education becomes a device of self-estrangement, subjecting the expectation of freedom to the irony of becoming what one resists.

Moreover, the language of education which is English functions as a barrier between Njoroge and his cultural world. Colonial languages alienate African students from their native cultural expressions. Njoroge's moral and intellectual development occurs within a framework that devalues Gikuyu knowledge, oral traditions, and communal values. The more he immerses himself in English literature and colonial curricula, the less he is able to act meaningfully within his own society. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, illuminated this inner dislocation:

“To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will be alienated.” (p. 38).

In *Nervous Conditions*, this alienation is portrayed even more explicitly through the character of Nyasha. Having spent formative years in England, Nyasha returns to Rhodesia unable to reconnect with her Shona identity. She is too British to fit with her peers, yet too African to be accepted by the colonial system. Her hybrid identity leaves her emotionally fragmented. She thinks through the hypocrisy of colonial education how it strips African students agency, while pretending to empower them but feels powerless to resist it. Her

rebellion takes the form of eating disorders and psychological breakdown, a physical manifestation of her inner conflict. Nyasha's tragic arc demonstrates the mental and emotional cost of being educated in a system that invalidates your identity.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's schooling is not simply a narrative of personal growth but also one of the overwhelming weight of responsibility that she bears as a representative of her community and family. Her achievement at school is not seen as hers alone but as a source of hope and progress for those she leaves behind. This creates a constant strife between her own ambitions and the ambitions of those who are relying on her to lift them up. Education then becomes less about discovering oneself, but more about fulfilling the expectations of proving herself to be deserving of the opportunities she's been given. Tambu's struggle, therefore, is not so much one of cultural identity as it is one of coming to terms with the emotional and social cost of being the one chosen to succeed, at the cost of her own emotional life and sense of agency.

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge experiences a slow unraveling of the self. At the novel's outset, he sees no contradiction between education and national liberation. However, as the political situation deteriorates and his family is torn apart by colonial violence, his dreams prove tragically to be naive. The institutions he trusted, mainly the church, school, colonial justice, offer no support or resolution. In the end, he stands alone and his idealism is shattered. His attempted suicide is not just a moment of despair but a symbolic gesture. He can no longer exist within the fractured identity imposed upon him by Colonialism. His failure is not personal but systemic; he is the product of a system designed to divide and weaken rather than empower. As Frantz Fanon states in his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961):

“Colonialism does not merely occupy land; it invades minds. It severs people from their past and fractures their present, leaving them suspended in a future not of their

own making. In such a world, identity is not a birthright but a battlefield, one where the self is constantly at war with imposed narratives and internalized hierarchies. For the colonized subject, survival often demands a fragmentation of self a splitting that permits external conformity at the cost of internal coherence. This is the tragic irony: to be accepted by the very structures that deny your humanity, you must abandon the parts of yourself that made you whole.” (p. 210).

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu’s identity crisis is more introspective and ongoing. She survives, unlike Nyasha, but carries the burden of duality. She becomes increasingly aware that she is being shaped by two opposing forces: one that pushes her toward the assimilation into the colonial elite, and one that urges her to remain faithful to her Shona heritage. Unlike her cousin, Tambu is more reserved, but her internal conflict is no less intense. She questions whether the version of success she is chasing is truly her own or simply a construct of colonial validation. Her silence and obedience are strategic because they allow her to move between the competing forces of colonial assimilation and loyalty to her Shona roots without direct confrontation.

Compliant outwardly, she rebels inwardly with the cost of success and whether it actually belongs to her values or to the colonial powers. Unlike Nyasha, whose open resistance leads to collapse, Tambu uses restraint as a survival tactic, giving her time to think and keep open doors of opportunity but they also indicate repression and self-doubt.

Nyasha, on the other hand, under the pressure. Her articulate critiques of colonial patriarchy, her rebellion against her father, and her struggle with food and body image all point to a fractured identity. Her breakdown is not just personal but symbolic of a trapped generation that expected to embody the ideals. Her famous outburst “It’s bad enough... when a country gets colonized, but when the people do as well! That’s the end, really, that’s the end” (p. 45). is a piercing recognition of internal colonization, the final stage of identity erasure.

In *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Tsitsi Dangarembga present a critical analysis of colonial education as a double-edged sword that

equally inspires hope for liberation and causes cultural identity. Through the characters of Njoroge and Tambudzai, the novels expose how education, although originally viewed as a means to individual progress and liberation, gradually turns into a tool of psychological domination and fragmentation of identity where Edward Said says in *Culture and Imperialism*: “What imperialism means is the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; it includes a vast range of educational, political, economic, and cultural activities.”(p210)

Njoroge, driven by idealistic expectations of the potential of education to uplift his family and folk, is disillusioned as colonial violence dismantles his world and reveals the inability of the system to bring real empowerment. He finds himself alienated from his heritage, and unable to reconcile the promises of education. With the brutal reality of colonial rule, falls into despair. Tambu, however, navigates both patriarchal and colonial structures that seek to circumscribe and define her. While she initially views schooling as her only way of escape from gendered subjugation, her exposure to Western values further alienates her from her cultural identity, ushering in an inner conflict reflected also in the cataclysmic breakdown of her cousin Nyasha. But while Njoroge dies, Tambu survives by establishing a critical consciousness; The fact that she decides to speak about her own life is an act of self-definition and resistance.

Both novels end up contending that colonial education, instead of being a neutral or empowering institution, entrenches structures of domination by socializing minds in the colonized to internalize inferiority. The path to true liberty, as these tales suggest, is not the path of mimicry of colonial virtues but of retrieval of cultural identity, language, and self. These works are therefore not just literary analyses of individual identity crises but

postcolonial resistance acts that assail the dominance of colonial epistemologies and demand the reconstruction of identity on indigenous terms.

2.4.2. Chapter Two: Colonial and Gendered Experiences in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) :

This chapter critically examines the complex dynamics of colonial and gendered experiences in *Weep Not, Child* (1964) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga. It pays close attention to how systems of colonial and patriarchal domination shape, constrain, and distort the identities of the adolescent African protagonists, Njoroge and Tambu. Both novels explore the social and psychological consequences of colonialism, particularly how colonial education operates not only as a tool of cultural erasure and alienation, but also as a gatekeeper to privilege, power, and perceived progress.

However, gender introduces a critical surface to this experience. While Njoroge is burdened by the patriarchal expectations placed on African men within a fractured colonial state, Tambu is doubly marginalized excluded by the intersecting forces of racial, colonial, and gendered oppression. In her pursuit of education and personal independence, Tambu must confront not only the pervasive influence of colonial ideology but also the entrenched patriarchy within her own family and society.

Based on postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks, this critique explores how the protagonists' internal conflicts torn between cultural authenticity and the external imposition of Western ideals reflect broader themes of fractured identity, internalized oppression, and the dialectics of empowerment.

Both Ngũgĩ and Dangarembga, based on their own experiences of being within colonial systems of education, provide strong analyses of how empire and patriarchy cross over to police bodies and minds and dictate the futures of those who are at the crossroads of resisting or conforming. This chapter argues that such novels offer a critical examination of

the dual burdens of colonial and gendered oppression, projecting education as an arena of possibility and a means of deep psychological and cultural loss.

2.4.2.1. Gender and Access to Education in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988):

In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, education emerges not only as a personal aspiration but also as a contested site shaped by colonial and patriarchal structures of power. Education in the two novels seems to be a potential means for liberation and self-determination. However, access to it is extremely biased, particularly for girls, whose opportunities are limited by social expectation and structural discrimination.

In *Weep Not, Child*, while the focus falls more on Njoroge's education, the absence of female education narratives and the silencing of women in the novel reflects a society where colonial conquest and patriarchal traditions intersect to exclude girls from formal education and public life. Similarly, in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga dramatizes Tambu's pursuit of education within a framework of gendered expectations that relegate women to the domestic sphere. Tambu's aspirations are consistently thwarted by a system that invests in male achievement at the expense of female desire, one that is starkly dramatized in the contrast between her sacrifices and the privileges granted her brother. These novels not only draw attention to the lack of access to education, but reveal how entrenched ideologies actively inhibit female empowerment. By placing these criticisms within individual narratives, both authors illustrate how the denial of education to girls is not random but a strategic form of control. Through their characters' experiences, *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions* powerfully condemn the converging forces that deny women the right to learn, imagine and shape their futures.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* is a novel written during the time of British rule in Kenya. The book explores the interaction between colonialism, gender, and education. While *Nervous Conditions* is about a girl's experiences, Ngũgĩ's *Weep Not, Child* is about Njoroge, a boy. His desire to go to school is seen as something good and promising. To Njoroge, education is the progress of the country, a way to resist discrimination, and something he feels proud of. His family supports him, and the colonial schools consider him the ideal African pupil. But the girls in the story are not given the same chance. Njoroge's sisters share the same tough circumstances, but instead of going to school, they stay at home, do domestic chores, and learn to be wives and mothers. This is no coincidence. It is due to a culture that deems educating girls unnecessary or worthless. Ngũgĩ comes back to directly address this in his novel in which he says:

“Nyokabi was proud of having a son in school. It made her soul happy and lighthearted whenever she saw him bending double over a slate or recounting to her what he had seen at school. She felt elated when she ordered her son to go and do some reading or some sums. It was to her the greatest reward she would get from her motherhood if she one day found her son writing letters, doing arithmetic, and speaking English.”(p13).

Ngũgĩ uses the figure of Nyokabi, Njoroge's mother, to highlight the way colonialism and patriarchal culture were both in league to value the education of boys over girls'. Nyokabi is proud to say that her son can attend school, and it is one of the most gratifying things about being a mother. Her pride indicates a generalized cultural attitude that even women share about educating boys being more valuable than educating girls. This is grounded in the colonial influence, which redirected traditional cultures to a paradigm that considered educating men to be vital to national development and overlooked educating girls.

Through Nyokabi's support for her son's schooling and her expectation that her daughters stay at home to perform domestic tasks, Ngũgĩ critiques the gender inequality entrenched in colonial-era educational policies. Although Nyokabi supports Njoroge's

dreams, she passively accepts the cultural notion that girls are undeserving of the same opportunities. This acceptance isn't attributed to ignorance but to generations of social conditioning that equated a woman's value with her role in the home. Even when educational possibility becomes a reality for Njoroge's sisters, it is fleeting and outweighed by their expected domestic work. Just as in *Nervous Conditions*, where educated women remain exceptional and greatly constrained by communal norms, so too does Ngũgĩ describe a world in which women are consciously denied education, public life, and intellectual activity. The result is a society in which women's ability is made invisible, not coincidentally, but purposively.

In *Nervous Conditions* set in post-colonial Rhodesia, Dangarembga describes education not only as a tool for social mobility, but as a radical act of resistance for girls living under patriarchal rule. For Tambudzai, the teenage protagonist, school is not just a site of learning but a battleground where identity and self-worth are contested. Her journey highlights how the denial of education to girls is not only an issue of gender inequality but a strategic way of maintaining colonial and patriarchal control. Tambu's insistence on attending school, despite being expected to perform domestic duties, signals a shift from passive acceptance to active defiance. In this way, education becomes more than access to knowledge, it is a tool for reshaping the self and challenging entrenched systems of power. Dangarembga thus offers a new lens: that for girls like Tambu, learning is liberation, and every step into a classroom is a step away from erasure. This awareness becomes clear when Ma'Shingayi tells Tambu: "This business of womanhood is a heavy burden. How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today. I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the way men do. No. It's not allowed. You have to make sacrifices." (p16).

This quiet resignation underscores a much broader emotional burden shared by many

young girls who are socialized to accept invisibility and sacrifice as normative. Even though Tambu gets to go to school after her brother dies, her path is not easy or free. She has to surrender like her family connections, her culture, and parts of her identity to move forward in her education. Her success is not achieved without hard work because the world is against women making progress. The challenges she faces stem from the colonial rulers, men's control, and also from inside herself, where she has learned what women are supposed to want. Education is not just a way to feel powerful; it is another place where Tambu has to fight to be herself. For example, Maiguru is educated but still has to obey her husband, showing that learning often means giving up freedom. This shows that even when women get education, they may still be trapped by old rules and expectations. Tambu's story reminds us that education alone cannot fix all problems if society does not change too.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's story is not just about getting an education; it is about how women like Tambu must keep fighting the systems they have to join. Her story is about strength and struggle, where her dreams meet the heavy pressure of culture, gender roles, and colonial history. Tambu's journey teaches us how hard it is for women to find their own voice in a world that is often inclined to silence them. It also shows the courage it takes to keep going, even when the road is full of obstacles. This fight shows what it is like for African women after colonialism to try to be independent. It reminds us that true freedom means more than just going to school; it means changing the rules that hold people back. Tambu's story is a powerful example of hope and resistance for many women who want to realize a better future.

What unites *Nervous Conditions* and *Weep Not, Child* is that they both have a shared explanation for the exclusion of girls from education as resting fundamentally in long-standing patriarchal systems rather than being directly a result of colonialism. In both novels, the exclusion of girls from school is the result of deeply rooted gender expectations that pre-date, or are independent of, colonialisms. In *Nervous Conditions*, this exclusion results from a society grappling with internalized patriarchal expectations, where women's roles are socially restricted regardless of colonial legacy. The pressure placed on female characters to normalize

themselves into domesticity even in the face of education-driven ambition is evidence of a resistance in culture to women empowerment through education. In *Weep Not, Child*, even in the colonial period, the educationally gendered inequities reflect broader cultural hierarchies that take the value of education and pin it squarely upon the boys' shoulders. Boys' education is not only portrayed as a colonial superimposition, but also as a continuation of already established gender-role presumptions and family expectations, where Edward Said declared in *Culture and imperialism*:

“While colonialism imposed its own hierarchies and disciplines, it often worked by reinforcing existing systems of power particularly patriarchy which predated colonial rule. The subjugation of women, codified in both colonial and native traditions, became one of the most enduring and least questioned legacies. The complicity between imperial structures and indigenous gender norms shows that not all oppression can be laid solely at the feet of empire; local traditions and their resistance to reform must also be interrogated” (278).

Girls are typically summoned to do domestic chores or be ready for marriage, while boys are encouraged on to formal schooling. Both books show education as an ambivalent to be progressed in order to bring liberation, but also holding the social conventions that exclude the girl. Education becomes a terrain on which social expectation and personal desire collide. Here, the struggle over educating girls in these texts is not simply one of access to education, but one of challenging strong gender ideologies that determine who must be taught and why.

In addition, the impacts of excluding girls from education extend far beyond the individual. Both novels suggest that when half of a population is denied the opportunity to learn and grow, the entire society suffers. By preventing girls from accessing knowledge and developing critical consciousness, societies deprive themselves of future leaders, thinkers, and agents of change. The emotional and intellectual arrested development from the female characters reflects the broader stagnation of the societies in which they live.

Both Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasize that true transformation requires not only changes in educational policy but a deep rethinking of the cultural values that define societal roles and aspirations. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga reveals how entrenched gender norms suppress the intellectual and emotional development of girls, illustrating how this stifles broader societal progress. Characters, like Tambu and Nyasha are limited not just by access to education, but by a culture that devalues their potential.

Likewise, in *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ critiques colonial educational systems that alienate African students from their heritage and silence local voices. He argues that a system built on foreign values and exclusion not only marginalizes individuals but also impairs national development. For both writers, systemic change must include a cultural shift that embraces equality, critical thought, and indigenous identity as foundations for a more just and dynamic society, when Ngũgĩ says: "Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation, and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next." (p15).

The absence of girls in the classroom in *Weep Not, Child* and *Nervous Conditions* is a powerful challenge to the institutions that perpetuate inequality. Both narratives are indicators of cultural, institutional, and ideological currents that intersect with one another to maintain girls in a state of subordination, maintaining a pyramid in which male knowledge is valued and female experience is suppressed. But both novels are also invitations to intervene. By making the lives of resistant, questioning, and dreaming characters the focus, they show a vision for transformation. They remind readers that education is not just an individual achievement but a political act especially for women who must fight to gain the right to learn.

By so doing, they challenge us to imagine a world where education is not a privilege for the elite but a right for everyone regardless of gender.

The impact of this uneven access to education is not just social and economic but also deeply psychological. *In Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's internalized conflict is magnified because she lives in a world that is not built to accept ambitious girls. Even when she succeeds to be educated, she becomes increasingly aware of the cost of estrangement from her family, remorse about the death of her brother, and pressure to conform to the demands of her uncle Babamukuru's household, which the difference stems from the fact that *Weep Not, Child* was published during the colonial period while *Nervous Conditions* during the post-colonial period, in which we recognized that there is around 20 years of misalignment.

Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is a poignant foil for an educated, eloquent, and smart girl who is ultimately consumed by the psychological toll of being a woman in a system that does not value her voice. Nyasha's intellectual deterioration is the untenable position of the educated African girl between colonial expectation, to assimilate into Western ideals while denying her own cultural identity and personal agency. Educated in England, Nyasha is expected to conform to British norms of behavior and thought, yet upon returning to Zimbabwe, she is also subjected to traditional patriarchal structures that further limit her autonomy. These conflicting demands create an impossible situation where her intelligence and voice are undervalued, as colonial systems reinforce gender inequality and deny African women the dignity and freedom granted to their male counterparts. Her psychological deterioration reflects the destructive impact of a colonial framework that educates girls without truly empowering them.

“I simply was not ready to accept that Babamukuru was a historical artifact; or that advantage and disadvantage were predetermined, so that Lucia could not really hope to achieve much as a result of Babamukru's generosity; and that the benefit would only

really be a long-term one if people like Babamukuru kept on fulfilling their social obligation; and people like Lucia would pull themselves together.” (p162).

In *Weep Not, Child*, silence regarding girls’ education is itself telling. The lack of narrative focus on women's desires quietly reproduces the same marginalization Ngũgĩ deplors. He criticizes colonial rule and how it hurts African communities. But he does not evoke what women’s aspirations or give female characters a chance to share their stories, especially about education. This shows he misses an important issue, similar to the unfair treatment. By doing this, he unintentionally supports the idea that men are more important than women, leaving women and unvoiced out both in the story and in society.

The women in Njoroge's life nudge him toward his aspirations but are never given the chance to dream on their own accounts. His mother and sisters work under the burden of tradition and survival, their lives controlled by immediate needs and not possibility. Njoroge’s education is shown as a sign of hope and progress for the country. But leaving girls out of this idea shows a big problem in the plan for the nation. If boys’ education represents the future of the country, then exclusion of girls means that A significant portion of the population is being left behind in the vision of that future. This novel do more than just show what is real; it make the reader think about what is lost when girls are not allowed to learn, think, and become leaders. Where Ngũgĩ didn’t focus on the subject of education for women because of his being a man.

Both Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o’s *Weep Not, Child* present education as a difficult struggle in post-colonial Zimbabwe and rebellious Kenya. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga depicts how girls have talents but never get to use them not because they aren’t talented, but because the system doesn’t support them. Education is not just a good thing by itself; it is controlled by men and colonial powers, and leaving girls out is part of that control. *Weep Not, Child* also considers how colonialism

affects hopes for education, but it focuses more on boys' experiences. Dangarembga, however, focuses on girls are especially kept away from education and power, showing the long-lasting and often ignored harm this causes.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu articulates the emotional and psychological cost of being a girl in a world that disciplines her into silence, invisibility, and shame in which she says:

“The victimization I saw was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem. What I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed to and inferior to maleness.” (p120).

This reflection confronts the systemic nature of female marginalization. It is not simply a matter of economic disadvantage or colonial legacy, but a deeply embedded cultural hierarchy that defines women as inferior to men. Her realization resonates powerfully with the silence in *Weep Not, Child*, where the girls do not even have space to articulate such resistance. There is also the factor of chronology, as one novel published in 1960's and the other one in 1980's. Tambu begins to speak, while the girls around Njoroge remain voiceless.

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge is disenchanted and emotionally destroyed when education fails to change his life as he had imagined. Unequal access to education that. The dreams of a better life after colonialism are not being realized. Girls are not allowed in schools points to a bigger problem in society: the inability to imagine a fair and equal future.

2.4.2.2. Education and Patriarchy in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Gendered Rebellion for Girls:

The dialectic of patriarchy and pedagogy provides an essential anchor in which to place the gendered life of the postcolonial African adolescent girl in literature. Schooling in most of the literature of the postcolonial African condition is not background but active and contested ground on which ideological warfare is fought, and that is over gender. This is particularly pronounced in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, in which education is both a potential site of empowerment and terrain that is wounded by patriarchal domination.

Both novels, set in different colonial histories Rhodesia for Dangarembga and Kenya for Ngũgĩ are interested in interrogating how female characters survive in a world in which access to information and social mobility is truncated to a great extent by gender norms. The lives of the girls and women educate how education can both empower and oppress, rendering their lives microcosms of macro-level resistance to colonial and patriarchal ideologies. Through their low-keyed portrayals, the novels demonstrate how school contexts, as neutral or as being may they appear, have much to do with the reproduction of gendered oppression, where girls are forced to continuously negotiate, resist, and conform to the roles prescribed for them.

Weep Not, Child is a modest interpretation of women's participation at school and resistance. The novel primarily follows Njoroge, becomes the center of hope and future salvation for his family amidst political instability in colonial Kenya through schooling. While the novel centers on lives and aspirations of men, it does not entirely deny the roles of women in striving to uplift their families and society. Characters such as Nyokabi and Njeri,

though marginal within the official narrative path of schooling, themselves display forms of inner strength and resilience. Their sacrifices, particularly in the domestic and affective spheres, are what allow the trajectory of Njoroge, and thus foreground a form of behind the scenes resistance which is often overlooked. These women do not resist in a direct fashion, nor are they given the opportunity to pursue formal schooling for their own interests, but their agency is seen in the ways they reproduce and maintain the group survival of their family, in which Ngũgĩ says: “Njeri and Nyokabi went to the shamba or market together. Sometimes they agreed among themselves that while one did that job the other would do this one... If you have a stable centre, then the family will hold.” (p43).

Women like Nyokabi and Njeri do not resist colonial domination or pursue education in direct language, nor are they given such a choice; but their agency is tapped in the infinitely significant, yet often overlooked, roles they occupy as family survival and forward movement. While the book concentrates on Njoroge's educational path as a symbol of hope, it implicitly acknowledges the inner strength and resilience of women like them, whose emotional and domestic sacrifices make his ambitions feasible. By keeping a house and looking after their children in moments of political turmoil, they are participating in an unofficial, behind the scenes opposition that preserves the collective health of their communities and families, demonstrating that resistance can also happen through care work, endurance, and sustenance of life.

This depiction speaks to another, less-known type of resistance that of caregiving, and maintaining cultural continuity in times of crisis. It is a rebellion that shuns confrontation for survival and continuity, upholding the importance of female roles even in narratives where they are secondary. As Nyokabi maintained in chapter two of the novel:

“The women in the novel, though often confined to the domestic sphere, embody a quiet resilience that sustains their families and communities. Their sacrifices and emotional labor form the backbone of resistance against colonial oppression, even if their actions remain largely invisible within the dominant political narrative” (p112).

Girls’ exclusion from school in *Weep Not, Child* is a means of maintaining the long established gendered disparities in both precolonial and colonial spheres. In Ngũgĩ's account of Gikuyu women's lives during colonialism, the girls are simply excluded from public space, Their work is summoned to a purpose that is never fulfilled, nor deemed of any worth. Unlike Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, who fights and has access into the educational system, the girls in *Weep Not, Child* are silenced within the novel; their dreams are shuttered before they have an opportunity to realize them. This deficiency is significant; it is a representation of a broader social reality in which the intellectual development of women is not encouraged or supported.

Education is seen as specific to boys, while girls are expected to take care of the home and follow social rules, not pursue their own plans. Even in such exclusion, feminine protagonists have their due share of power. They participate in household decision-making, provide emotional ballast during periods of political turbulence, and underwrite the passing of cultural values. Their resistance is not public or visible but it is conspicuous in everyday practices and invisible tasks that they maintain their communities.

In Contrast, *Nervous Conditions*, heroine Tambu is a representative figure of gendered resistance as she pursues education. Her story begins from a keen realization of structural inequalities in her family and society, where the boys have the opportunity to go to school and girls are expected to remain within domestic spheres. Tambu's refusal to take this for granted and her subsequent fight to gain access to education are an expression of a revolt against a patriarchal society that undermines women's ambition. This quest for education, therefore, is

more than individual desire; it's a rebellion against the social hierarchy that would be liable to her development.

Though Tambu, Dangarembga demonstrates how education could be a transformative force, in that it allows young women to do away with their traditional roles and imagine a brighter future for themselves. And yet, this transformation isn't simple and isn't entirely redemptive. As Tambu goes through the colonial education system, she becomes increasingly aware of the contradictions inherent in it. Rather than allowing unqualified freedom, education estranges her from her cultural roots and places her in a liminal position where she is forced to constantly negotiate contradictory values. Tambu's choice to get an education is both a source of resistance to the oppression of women and a cause of estrangement from her culture. She finds herself in a situation in which she must balance two sets of opposing values. Education allows Tambu to confront the traditions that oppress women and to imagine a life beyond laboring in the home. But at the same time, it also makes her feel alienated from her own culture because she starts to take on Western ideas and modes of thought that she adopts from the colonial system.

This change is bittersweet. As Tambu learns more, she begins to accept some of the unfair systems that she once fought against. This creates a conflict between who she is becoming and where she belongs. Tambu finds herself between the traditional ways of her culture and the new requirements of colonial education. She remains in a tense and confusing environment, and where power lies in solitude and endless searching for self. Her English-educated cousin Nyasha, coming back home in Rhodesia in a state of acute disorientation, is the psychological displacement that this kind of cultural estrangement can bring about. Nyasha's emotional distress and inability to fit into either the colonial or the indigenous are symptoms of the psychic toll such systems take on women who live in between two worlds

that are irretrievably antagonistic to each other. And this quotation explained this case when Tambu says:

“Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion.” (p.204)

Education is not represented in *Nervous Conditions* as an easy path to liberation for girls but rather as a double-edged sword that brings new challenges while opening new doors. Tambu's opposition, which at first is insistent about her desire for school, becomes generalized as a resistance with Susan's femininity, without being marked by overdramatized acts of defiance but by a slow, steady refusal to collaborate with the demands placed upon her because of her status as a girl. This quiet, long-term resistance is a radical act in itself, for it gradually redefines the boundaries of what is possible for women in her world. As Dangarembga's narrative makes evident, Tambu's transition is merely related to individual achievement but to dismantling the structures that deny women autonomy.

The novel thus complicates those classic narratives of empowerment by showing how access to schooling, as a necessity, is never sufficient in itself to downplay established patriarchal ideologies. Resistance in *Nervous Conditions* is ontologically political and intensely personal, based on everyday choices, affective struggle, and intellectual illumination. The novel thus locates female rebellion as a personal experience conditioned by internal and external struggles rather than as spectacle.

The two novels have different ways women resist male control, based on the authors' choices and the times they lived in. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's progress is a personal and emotional kind of resistance. The author, Dangarembga, focuses on the thoughts and feelings of girls growing up under both colonial rule and male dominance. Here, resistance is

painful but also a way to heal and grow. On the other hand, *Weep Not, Child* shows women's strength mostly through their roles as mothers and heads of family. Ngũgĩ's story cares more about the country's fight against colonization than about women's personal experiences. Women's contributions to this fight are often in the background. These choices reflect the interests of the authors. Dangarembga wants to explore how gender shapes personal identity, while Ngũgĩ focuses on the national struggle against colonialism. Even though the novels are different, both novels explore how women quietly challenge social restrictions, revealing the complex connection between power and gender in African societies after colonialism, as Steve Biko says in his book *I write what I like* (1978):

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Colonial education, as a tool of domination, seeks not only to colonize the land, but to colonize consciousness to render the colonized complicit in their own subjugation. In such a system, education does not liberate; it disciplines, isolates, and reconfigures identity in ways that reproduce both imperial and patriarchal hierarchies.” (p.68)

Even as these books increase ambition and tone, they are finally brought together as rejections of patriarchal societies that foreclose women's possibilities for education and autonomy. Education is a highly troubled power in both books soliciting freedom but full of cultural and ideological compromise. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's experience goes through the worst, that even if women have access to education, they have to endure the non-alienating force of colonial curricula and psychic costs of straying out of tradition. In *Weep Not, Child*, depriving girls of education is structural violence to uphold gender inequality. In all the books, patriarchy is not only presented as a convenient grid of discriminatory actions, but an ubiquitous ideology permeating all places of living spaces from homeland to nationality. Such descriptions demonstrate the extent to which gender is entrenched in colonial and postcolonial life, affecting not only the destiny of individuals but communities as well.

On the other hand, both books highlight the inseparable relationship between colonialism and gender, particularly through the lens of education. In these narratives, education is depicted not as a purely positive force but as a contested space where imperial, cultural, and gendered values converge and often diverge. In *Nervous Conditions*, the colonial education system functions as an instrument of cultural imperialism, enforcing Western norms at the expense of African traditions. Characters like Nyasha endure the psychological turmoil caused by this clash, illustrating how colonial schooling fractures identities and distances girls from their cultural roots. Similarly, *Weep Not, Child* portrays colonial education as a pathway to success that remains largely inaccessible to most women, with benefits unevenly distributed and frequently illusory.

The system reinforces male dominance and confines women to roles of sacrifice and support. Through these portrayals, the texts suggest that addressing colonial legacies requires more than political and economic change; it also demands confronting the gender inequalities entrenched in both indigenous and colonial institutions. They imply that achieving authentic liberation involves fundamentally rethinking gender roles and the educational frameworks that sustain them.

3. Conclusion:

This comparative study of Colonial Education and Identity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, has brought to light the profound impact of colonial education on the formation of identity in postcolonial African societies. It has illustrated how colonial education, albeit appearing to empower and provide social mobility, in reality resulted in alienation and cultural dislocation in Njoroge's and Tambu's young lives. Ngũgĩ and Dangarembga, in their narratives, unveil the dual face of education as a tool of oppression and a means of liberation, creating subjects torn between indigenous traditions and Western imposed values.

This examination began by placing these novels within their specific historical contexts the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya and the history of racial segregation in Zimbabwe demonstrating how colonial education unleashed fault lines in family and communal life. Working with postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly those concerned with cultural hybridity, gender relations, and the politics of language, we drew out how the characters identity crises of characters encapsulate broader socio-political tensions wrought by imperialism.

Ngũgĩ's discussion in *Decolonizing the Mind* of linguistic imperialism also resonates strongly with Dangarembga's presentation of gendered schooling, elucidating the intricate manners in which colonial education dismembers native identity and enforces a hierarchy of values. Both writers, through their vivid writings, summon a reconsideration of education's purpose in restate colonial traditions or facilitating genuine emancipation.

This study affirms that the colonial education system was not only a pedagogical apparatus but a battlefield for cultural survival and self-determination. *Weep Not, Child* and

Nervous Conditions are thus significant literary testimonies to the enduring conflict between assimilation and resistance, tradition and modernity, oppression and agency. These texts thus continue to illuminate the complexities of postcolonial identity and generate ongoing debates on decolonization, cultural reclamation, and the quest for authentic selfhood in African literature.

4. Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Dangarembga, T. (1988). *Nervous conditions*. The Women's Press.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1964). *Weep not, child*. Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.

Secondary Sources :

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (pp. 11–13, 66–69). Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Biko, S. (1978). *I write what I like*. Heinemann.
- Briault, V. M. (2003). *Gender and colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions*. In G. Olakunle (Ed.), *Gender and sexuality in African literature and film* (pp. 21–34). Africa World Press.
- Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1952)
- Nazareth, P. (1978). Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child: The Politics of Writing*. *East African Literature Review*, 4(2), 10–20.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Knopf.
- Said, E. W. (1994). *Representations of the intellectual*. Vintage Books.

Websites Sources:

- Ali, A. (2024, December 9). Postcolonialism: Critiquing the Eurocentric views of the world. The Indian Express. Retrieved June 22, 2025, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/postcolonialism-critiquing-the-eurocentric-views-of-the-world-9715379/>
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2025). *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. In *Britannica.com*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ngugi-wa-Thiongo>

- Encyclopedia.com. (n.d.). Tsitsi Dangarembga 1959–. In Encyclopedia of World Biography. Retrieved June 23, 2025, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/dangarembga-tsitsi-1959>
- Gikandi, S. (2000). *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/ngugi-wa-thiongo/CBB76AC52804B8BDDC3D1269CB2BF638>
- Killam, G. D. (1980). *An introduction to the writings of Ngugi*. Heinemann Educational. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://archive.org/details/introductiontowr0000kill>
- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*. Routledge. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from https://selforganizedseminar.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/mcclintock_imperial-leather.pdf
- Nazareth, P. (1978). *Commitment as an aesthetic form in Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Yumpu. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/34215082/commitment-as-an-aesthetic-form-ngugi-wa-thiongo>
- Stratton, F. (1994). *Contemporary African literature and the politics of gender*. Routledge. Retrieved April 23, 2025, from <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003070924/contemporary-african-literature-politics-gender-florence-stratton>