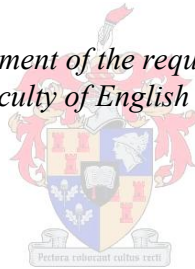


Representations of Women, Identity and Education in the Novels of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Kopano Matlwa

by
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of women, identity and education in the works of Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (1989) and *The Book of Not* (2006), and Kopano Matlwa, *Coconut* (2007) and *Spilt Milk* (2010), through the lens of postcolonial studies. The arguments presented deal with the complicated factors associated with the formation of new identities in independent Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa. I focus on how African women are represented in the texts taking place at particular socio-historical moments, including implications and interpretations of the literal and cultural shift from the indigenous, rural or segregated environments to Western, urban and racially mixed ones. My argument outlines the ways in which the stories are allegorically the stories of the fledgling democracies from which they emerge. I explore the texts in terms of symbolics of food, language, accents, family, academic settings, and the liberating and limiting elements associated with each. The authors present a complicated reality for the women of the novels, one where education is prioritized although somewhat to the detriment of traditional values and norms. The representation of women in the novels varies, leaving few successful role models for navigating workable identities for the characters as mothers, wives, and autonomous individuals. The novels offer interesting imaginaries for the future of their respective countries. The texts promote education tempered with a respect for home cultures and racial reconciliation.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die uitbeelding van vroue, identiteit en opvoeding in die werke van Tsitsi Dangarembga en Kopano Matlwa vanuit die oogpunt van postkoloniale studies. Die voorgestelde argument hou verband met die ingewikkelde faktore van identiteit-vorming in 'n onafhanklike Zimbabwe en 'n post-Apartheid Suid-Afrika. Ek fokus op die uitbeelding van swart vroue in hierdie tekste wat gedurende spesifiek sosio-historiese oomblikke plaas vind. Dit sluit in die gevolge en interpretasies van letterlike en kulturele verskuiwings vanaf inheemse, landelike en gesegregeerde omgewings tot Westerse, stedelike en veelrassige omgewings. My argument sit uit een hoe hierdie vroue se stories as allegorieë vir die jong demokratiese lande waaruit hul na vore kom, beskou kan word. Ek verken die tekste ook in terme van die simboliek van voedsel, taal, aksent, familie en opvoeding, en fokus verder op die bevrydende en beperkende elemente van elk. Die skrywers bied 'n ingewikkelde werklikheid vir vrouens in die romans aan, een waar opvoeding 'n prioriteit is, maar ietwat tot die nadeel van tradisionele waardes en norme. Die uitbeelding van vrouens in die romans wissel en bied min suksesvolle rolmodelle aan waarvolgens die karakters identiteite soos moeder, vrou en selfstandige individue kan vorm. Die tekste bevorder wel die verkryging van 'n volledige opvoeding, maar nie tot nadeel van tradisionele kulture, of die moontlikheid van rasseversoening nie. Beide die romans bied 'n interessante blik op die toekoms vir die onderskeie lande deur hierdie uitbeelding van die vroulike karakters.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the complex position that African women face in light of the detrimental effects of colonization and its impact and legacy as it assimilates with traditional patriarchal structures. Education and identity are the two aspects that my thesis analyses in the works from Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga and South African author Kopano Matlwa. The authors each deal with the unique circumstances of girls and women in southern African countries in the heights as well as the aftermaths of their freedom struggles, using the struggles of black women as an exceptional metaphor for the evolving identities of these freshly independent nations. I examine how these struggles are represented in the selected novels primarily through inter-cultural relations and the role of education for young African women. The novels offer insight into the struggles of the women moving from traditional indigenous environments or dealing with the detrimental racial segregation of Apartheid to Westernised metropolitan spaces, particularly in academic and domestic settings. The stories are particularly relevant to the problems women face in these countries today as gender roles are being redefined and cultural assimilation and cohesion continue to pose difficult problems.

I would like to begin my discussion of the issues taken up by the novels with a contemporary political anecdote because it sheds light on the problematized and complicated identity formation black women today experience and how it is reinforced through discrediting their cultural authenticity or allegiance to their race.

During early 2011 in the South African parliament, an outburst occurred between Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande (ANC) and DA national spokeswoman Lindiwe Mazibuko. The statement from Nzimande reads: "If the matric results are bad, this serves as proof that this government of darkies is incapable. If the pass rate goes up, it means the results have been manipulated by these darkies" (Majavu). To which Mazibuko then commented that the word, "darkie" was derogatory and should not be used in parliament. Nzimande then muttered in Zulu: "Kuyahlupha ukungakhuleli elokshini (That's the problem with not having grown up in a township)." The press carried the story and columnists soon stepped up to the debate. Headlines on news sites read: "Darkies' and 'coconuts' trends in Parliament" and "Darkies' is dangerous for MPs". My focus on this is not about the use of the term 'darkies' but, rather, on the responses to

the objection of its use. In his article, “Shedding light on us darkies” (Times LIVE 20 February 2011) Fred Khumalo noted:

My own children, though they can speak Zulu, did not grow up in a township, which is why they do get lost when we elders venture into township lingo. But that does not make them coconuts. Had Nzimande called Mazibuko a coconut, it would have been an insult. A coconut refers to a self-loathing black person who looks up to white people to validate his or her self-worth. Mazibuko is not that.

Coconut is almost as hurtful as "kaffir". Perhaps even worse because it says, "Look, some time ago you were a kaffir, but then you got some education and moved to the suburbs, but the bush still resides in you. You are wallowing in that twilight zone where your fellow kaffirs don't understand you, and the whites you are trying to mimic do not want you. They only tolerate you." That's how venomous the word "coconut" is. (Khumalo)

The word ‘coconut’ is compared to ‘kaffir’ here and what makes it interesting is the growing power of the word. The history of the term ‘kaffir’ and its use links inextricably to the history of Apartheid in South Africa; white people used it as a derogatory term for black people. What makes ‘coconut’ particularly cutting is that its use is also drawn along racial lines but it loses some of its potency when used by someone white. The remark is most cutting coming from another black person because it represents an attack on the authenticity of ‘blackness’. The generation who made it through the struggle is now drawing lines in the sand. Black identity in South Africa cannot escape the political and social past and yet comments like these seek to trivialize the sacrifices and strife of those who prospered after 1994 and moved from the townships to the suburbs.

There are many more facets to explore in this parliamentary exchange: the publicity of it, the politics, the racial overtones, embarrassment, and the personal nature of the attack that occurred. In mocking Mazibuko’s Model-C (or semi-private education) upbringing and education, Nzimande was really attacking her authenticity as a black African, making her insights seem irrelevant. Furthermore, she is a black woman opposing the ANC, the party of Mandela. In a move that mirrors how women are displaced from centres of authority in the texts I examine, Mazibuko’s opinion is marginalized and her status trivialized. The attack on the type of education she received is also a matter of contention: the comment marks her privileged upbringing to connote the putative loss of her roots and, as a result, charges her of not being able to relate to those who *actually* struggle in tougher neighbourhoods, like townships.

These complicated issues of identity formation that constantly inform political and social debates are also occurring in the confines of the literary medium of the novel. Problems surrounding the frustrating and challenging identity issues women are facing are the central topic of Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007). Identity issues are discussed in Matlwa's *Spilt Milk* (2010), are challenged in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006) and they can even be the actual *Nervous Conditions* (1989) Dangarembga refers to in her title.

Since there is no fixed identity, what we have to work with are *representations* of black women at particular times and in particular places *by* black women at particular times and places. My study aims to explore representations of the traditional women's roles of mother, daughter, wife, sister, aunt, and grandmother, and how they are expanding to include that of scholar, provider, educator and autonomous individuals in southern Africa. Education, in the Western sense, seems to stand out as an important status marker for the women and cultures in the novels examined. Although there are examples of informal schooling in some of the texts, there is a focus on Western education and its connotations. Schools are the settings for many scenes in each novel; however, the representation of a mission school, a convent school, a Model-C school, and an exclusive black private school each serve to generate possible alternative identities for their pupils/characters. There is a multiplicity of perceived functions of education in these texts. In Dangarembga's texts, girls are sent almost reluctantly to school. In the instances where the girls are educated the expectation is not a more diligent and intelligent person, but merely an opportunity for a woman to be able to marry above her circumstances. Matlwa's texts do not deal as much with the gender aspect as they do with the class and racial aspects of education.

I would argue that education has been used as a systematic way to indoctrinate the young into the dominant ideologies of particular cultures, whilst simultaneously opening up crucial opportunities and spaces for advancement for women. Colonial education deemphasises important and fruitful aspects of indigenous philosophies and practices. It can be seen as a mechanism of control and a symbol of status. Similarly, the impact of Christianity in Africa is also touched on in the novels. Matlwa in *Spilt Milk*, especially, places the cultivation of a black elite school in the context of South African religious and educational history. The character of Father Bill in that novel is, I argue, an allegorical representative of colonial education.

Missionaries were among the first waves of European settlers in Africa setting up many of the schools while on civilising assignments in the continent. Considering the cultural ideologies of the Europeans, including their religions, and the inherent patriarchy of the indigenous people of the southern African region there was a significant and arguably detrimental intersection of beliefs about women.

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, religion is grappled with chiefly through Tambu, the protagonist, and her uncle, Babamukuru, the head of the family and the mission school. We are told that he was taken to the mission early in his life, eventually educated there and then sent to South Africa and England for tertiary studies. Though coming from a Shona background, Babamukuru embraces Christianity – perhaps mostly because it guaranteed his salvation from squalor. He also requires belief from those in his family and discourages un-Christian rituals and behaviour. Being the leader of the family and a mission school very much narrows the freedoms and abilities of the women in his charge. In this way, Babamukuru represents both the mimic and the figurehead of the power structures against which the women in the novel attempt to rebel and define themselves.

Nervous Conditions centres on Tambu, a young woman finding her independence in the midst of turmoil and exterior forces that seek to keep her submissive and under their dominance. I argue that metaphorically, Tambu is young Rhodesia becoming Zimbabwe, adapting to new responsibilities and perspectives while trying to shed the history of oppression and become autonomous. *The Book of Not* is not where we hope to find Tambu as the story continues. In a literary way, as noted by one critic¹, we want the sequel go be something along the lines of Tambu continuing to excel at Sacred Heart, perhaps getting a scholarship to go to England, becoming disillusioned by the experience and returning back to Zimbabwe to embrace her roots and at least some of the traditions and ideas she had rejected. Instead, for better or worse,

¹ –This is the sequel I had imagined: Tambudzai continues at the Sacred Heart academy, does well, receives a scholarship to study in England, and discovers in exile the regretful, cynical voice with which she narrates both novels—finding too late that in her desire for advancement in the European world she had lost her connection to family, to history, and to herself. In the second novel, I imagined, she would begin to retrace her steps to find what she had lost. In any case, I expected that I'd still like the plucky yet imperfect narrator, whatever obstacles she may have to overcome” (Talatu-Carmen).

Dangarembga chose rather to punish Tambu, in a manner of speaking, by becoming a mimic and with a mediocre life and career. The most allegorical event of the novel takes place towards the end where Tambu has graduated from Sacred Heart and is working for her white former classmate, Tracy, at an advertising firm. Her latest task is to develop an advertisement for a hair straightening product (something already hinting at hair politics and identity in black women) which a white copywriter commends, then steals it as his own.

The sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not*, places Tambu squarely in the position of the mimic. While at the convent school Tambu distances herself from her Shona roots by refusing to speak her home language with the few other girls there who share that culture. She is not the self-aware individual we leave in the first book but Dangarembga plays out her idea of the bitter reality of the African condition on her character, whom she often seems to disdain. Towards the beginning of the story Tambu uses the white toilets instead of the ones designated for her and her transgression is punished severely. After the rebellion is beaten out of her she submits to the stringent regulations placed on her by the nuns at the mission school.

In *Spilt Milk*, the protagonist, Mohumagadi, in contrast, greatly fears the idea of mimicry and avoids it at all costs which is portrayed by her severe and blatantly bitter character. It is shown, however, that Mohumagadi's callous character is the result of personal betrayal of a white lover early in her life, deepening her resolve to promote Black consciousness and deemphasise white culture. She is the principal and founder of Sekolo sa Dithlora (School of Excellence), which receives some bad press and is pressured to have some religious influence considering the nature of the scandal. This resistance stems from a deeply held resentment of her former status under Apartheid justifying her resistance to religion because "God was not there when we were chained" (Matlwa *Spilt* 7). She reluctantly invites a white priest who has fallen from the good graces of the church into the school to run a temporary detention class. His presence is met with a variety of reactions from the students, but their judgements are made along racial lines and represent Father Bill as the recipient of racial prejudice.

Matlwa's first novel, *Coconut*, offers religious commentary but focuses primarily on the notion of identity of the black girl in a white-favoured class system; another example of cultural alienation that can take place in the space of the classroom. Much like Tambu makes the move from rural homestead to mission school to an almost exclusively white convent school in 1960's

Rhodesia in *Nervous Conditions*, Ofilwe Tlou makes the move from township to a Model-C (formerly white) school in the mid-90's where she is one of the few black scholars.

For Ofilwe, assimilation into the dominant white culture is encouraged by her parents. Almost every other instance in all the texts exemplifies a marked fear of “whiteness” or “Englishness”, echoing similar fears portrayed in Dangarembga's novels. Fikile, the other protagonist of *Coconut*, finds herself obsessed with glamour magazines originally there for her to practice her English. Her grandmother urges her to give them a rest claiming they have taught her “nothing but to be a snob” (Matlwa *Coconut* 117). Similarly, Tambu's mother often refers to “Englishness” as a disease, one that killed her son and has infected her daughter. Mohumagadi instils a great aversion to all things considered “white culture” into her students. At one point, Father Bill brings in some movies for the kids to watch including *Lord of the Rings*, *Titanic*, *Pretty Woman*, and *Gone with the Wind*. One of the more outspoken students chucks his school bag to the floor and tells Bill, “We do not watch stupid movies. Movies about white people's fantasies, their minor problems and crises. We prefer not to fill our minds with candy floss and chewing gum. Unless it is African history, which it never is, we are not interested” (Matlwa *Spilt Milk* 110). This pushing back and radical rejection of all things white and Western is not represented favourably and is rather seen as a refusal to submit to the call of the “rainbow nation”.

The version of national identity proposed by the “rainbow nation” slogan is what the novel constantly interrogates. Where are South Africans socially after a decade and a half of freedom and how are they relating to each other? The novel answers that South Africa is not quite there yet being that it showcases only black resentment of whites and places little culpability on the only white character. *Coconut* explores some notion of national identity, though at a slightly earlier historical moment with the Tlous being one of the first recipients of Black Economic Empowerment benefits. Matlwa's novel illustrates that it is not just passing laws that will create acceptance of the Other.

Matlwa's texts are also inseparable from their national ties. *Coconut* comments on how identities are changed and perceived in the early years after the disbandment of apartheid. *Spilt Milk* seems to be a more direct allegory of nationhood on the sweet sixteen of the first democratically held elections in South Africa. The opening of the book is a poetic montage of images of the celebrations of 1994 South Africa fading to the present,

... after the inaugurations and commemorations, after the mounting of new statues where the old ones used to stand, after shaking hands and swapping gifts, after they had sat around round tables and drafting new bills.... after the elation and hysteria... after the delirium and drama... after the excitement pierced the air and prospect ripped the sky, after it all, things came apart. Came apart slowly, but came apart nonetheless. (Matlwa *Spilt* 2-3)

The cynical list highlights the cautionary and somewhat pessimistic tone of *Spilt Milk*.

This study is broken down into six chapters. Following this introduction, the second chapter maps the context of this enquiry. Since these novels are so closely related to their respective countries' histories, a contextualised discussion of the significance of those histories is imperative, with a special focus on their educational policies. In this chapter I will discuss the roles of women before colonization and how those roles changed over time. I will also relate the political progressions from colonies to independent states. The chapter summarizes the theories I draw from in order to contextualise my readings of the novels. The concept of cultural entanglement, as put forward by Sarah Nuttall, offers a nuanced examination of identities, particularly in South African writing, that are in flux. In this vein, Stuart Hall's conception of cultural identities as incomplete productions informs my analysis of the novels. My reading of Achille Mbembe's theories of African modes of self-writing illuminates the complexities and patterns in the representations of the characters across the selected works as they grapple with their identity through cultural and political frameworks that set them up to fail. The next section of this chapter highlights the political activity that is the backdrop of each of novels, namely, the Zimbabwean war of independence and the Apartheid government and the aftermath of its demise.

Following the contextual chapter are two sections of close readings of Dangarembga's and Matlwa's works, respectively. The discussion of *Nervous Conditions* in chapter three will focus primarily on the dual female protagonists and their particular struggles to understand, create, and accept their identities and the forces that shape their views. In addition to a study of the overt representation of patriarchy and indigenous views of Western culture, there will also be an exploration of education as cultural transmission. The close reading will explore Western education as a symbol of liberation, as well as captivity. In addition, I discuss how cultural markers such as culinary traditions are used symbolically in the novel.

Nervous Conditions tells the story of Tambudzai, a girl from rural Southern Rhodesia who is given the opportunity to study at a mission school after the death of her brother. She lives with her uncle, Babamukuru, who is the headmaster of the school and his family, who have recently returned from living in the UK. Through Tambu's formal education and her interactions with her anglicized and independent-minded cousin, Nyasha, she becomes aware of the rifts and contradictions between the culture she had left and the one she is experiencing, finding herself often more bound to than liberated by both. The struggle of the shift from traditional to modern society is represented through Tambu's observations regarding progress and self-betterment, and through the ideas imposed on her and the other female characters in the novel. In particular, the types of femininity to which the characters are expected to conform, and their own rebellion/complicity against/with those expectations.

The book opens in the early 1960's, a pivotal point for the struggle for nationhood in Zimbabwe. Setting the story in the historical context of an independence movement is a strategy of the novel but it is more a depiction of personal identity rather than nationalist. On the other hand, the sequel, *The Book of Not*, has a much more socio-political theme.

The Book of Not deals with Tambu's continued education at the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. The setting is now the 1970's and the struggle for an independent Zimbabwe is an all out war. Tambu is characterized as one who is blinded by ambition, seeking the 'vengeance of success' to hold over her disapproving mother and her white classmates as one critic characterizes it. Tambu rejects her Shona heritage and attempts to become what she is told to become, even knitting socks for the Rhodesian soldiers. Scholar Fawzia Mustafa describes the novel as being "replete with scene after scene of institutional and individual (racial) humiliation accompanied by Tambu's tenacious rationalization and ultimate acceptance and justification of said humiliation. Maintaining an obsessive concentration upon her own development and social mobility" (394).

The sequel was published nearly two decades after *Nervous Conditions*. Dangarembga notes in an interview that:

... [I]t was difficult for me to engage with a sequel because it took place during the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe and racial issues were very . . . well, there was a lot of conflict around racial issues. I didn't know what effect the book would have. I wanted anything I wrote to have a positive effect in terms of

opening up spaces for dialogue and negotiation. So I was a bit worried about the subject matter and the issue of the liberation struggle. But in 2000, when the current spate of land invasions began in Zimbabwe, I felt I needed to go home. There I saw that some of the issues had not really been dealt with.... (Rooney 57)

The Zimbabwe of the late 1980's was characterized with such hope and promise, while the Zimbabwe of just a few years after the millennium was, and arguably is still, seen as a lost cause, with an undemocratically elected leader and one of the highest inflation rates in the world. This is perhaps the reason Dangarembga chose to end her novel on a less than satisfactory note.

In chapter four, I look at the chosen works of Matlwa and how they represent African women's struggle for equality and education, as well as how the characters are cultivating and evaluating their identities relative to the white spaces in which they live and work. *Coconut* deals with the struggle for self-realization in a similar structural way to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in that there are two female protagonists that serve as foils for each other. Ofilwe and Fikile negotiate their identities in terms of beauty, language, and personal aspirations which seem to be consistently linked to a pressure and a desire, respectively, to assimilate into a dominant white culture in South Africa. *Spilt Milk* cautions a complete rejection of all things Western by portraying a spirit of exclusion in the black private 'school of excellence'. It is a national allegory, but using two older and somewhat bitter characters and a small cast of intellectually gifted children to understand what goals we should have in the attainment and acceptance of identity suggests the failure of the last generation to reconcile and looks towards the future for tempered hope.

Following these chapters, I will present a comparative analysis of the texts and how their concepts and key themes intersect, highlighting shared struggles and solutions for women of these southern African nations. *Nervous Conditions* and *Coconut* are compared structurally because each has dual female protagonists who approach education, culture, and identity from two distinct perspectives. The action in *The Book of Not* and *Spilt Milk* takes place primarily in a school setting; although one is a convent school and the other a prestigious black institution respectively, they map out the gendered and racial disparities in the national post-independence educational system. In comparing how these novels share stylistic and arguably political aspects, I aim to draw attention to the disenfranchisement of the black women in modern South Africa

and Zimbabwe. I analyze how each of these novels share a close connection with national identity; Dangarembga ultimately illuminates the unfulfilled dreams of Zimbabwe, while Matlwa delivers a critical report of South Africa 16 years after the first democratic elections.

CHAPTER 2: PLACING TEXTS IN CONTEXT

Tsitsi Dangarembga and Kopano Matlwa examine in detail the intricate cultural and political frameworks that their characters negotiate in the quest to define their identities. These frameworks are inextricably linked to the socio-political climates and histories of the countries in which these stories take place. The umbrella term of post-colonial studies offers much in the way of grappling with these types of narratives. Edward Said suggests in this regard that “stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world” and “...also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and existences of their own history” (xiii). In this way, the texts studied in postcolonial literature are necessarily framed by their historical and political contexts and traced along the structures of power. This analyses the works of fledgling African countries, disenfranchised by great empires, and the women subjugated by their indigenous cultures. I focus on the shifting roles and identities of women after the colonial moment through globalization in order to inform these discourses.

In examining the modern African cultures that are struggling to redefine themselves in the light of a new and certainly more Westernised society, it is very important to look at the components and categories of identity. The narratives I deal with are, to borrow Françoise Lionnet’s description, “fictional works [which] make concretely visible the networks of influence and the questions of identity that are central to the debates over authenticity” (187). Authenticity is one of the problems emerging from these struggles with identity, as the anecdote in the introduction underscores. I will be looking very closely at the interpretation and creation of identities. In this sense I borrow the definition from James D Fearon who argues:

...“identity” is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed “social” and “personal.” In the former sense, an “identity” refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. (2)

In my study I will categorize language, class, nationality, race, and gender, amongst others, as facets of identity. The theoretical framework in which this study situates itself is primarily a postcolonial feminist approach. My study deals with the representation of women and their

shifting roles and expectations in relation to men and each other in the societies within the texts. Lastly, it is necessary to see how identity is constructed purposefully and symptomatically through education. Discussions of education are interpreted politically because educational systems are inevitably bound up with the nation and government.

An issue that persists through all of the novels is uneasiness with tradition and a reconsideration of what should be retained from home cultures when there is a dominant one that expects assimilation. This gap between the cultures ultimately leads to a type of alienation. Although the alienation may not be an altogether negative thing, as interpreted by Abiola Irele, the mitigation between indigenous and ‘modern’ cultures can be seen as a ‘practical necessity’ in that ‘we [formerly colonized people] have a claim upon Western civilization as well as considerable stake in it as the instruments for the necessary transformation of our world’ (222). Although this assertion is used largely in relation to *Nervous Conditions*, aspects of cultural assimilation and gender issues are explored in its sequel, as well as in Matlwa’s novels.

Representations of women in the texts vary. Dangarembga on the whole defines women based on their shared oppression (Andrade 41) while on the other hand also illustrating their diversity and so ‘negat[ing] the notion that African women’s voices constitute a homogenous ‘third world voice’” (Patchay 146). Central to the novel is its preoccupation with the ‘complementary and contradictory aspects of African women’s experience and psychology’ (Aegerter 234). This focus on the emotional and psychological being of the colonized African woman is influenced in no small measure by the novel’s title and epigraph, which it takes from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Aegerter notes, Tambu and Nyasha ‘are the ‘split subject’ characterized by Frantz Fanon ... alienated from themselves and from their traditional culture by the oppressions of their own culture as it intersects and collides with colonial patriarchy’ (234). Pauline Uwakweh articulates these representations further by detailing the categories of the ‘entrapped’, the ‘escaped’, and the rebellious females of the text (79). Meanwhile Matlwa portrays the ways in which women compensate (or, perhaps in the case of Mohumagadi in *Spilt Milk*, over-compensate) for their subject positions both as women and as Africans. This (over)compensation is illustrated not just through the severity of Mohumagadi’s character but also the establishment and spirit of the school she runs. The establishment of the school is characterized as a political and racial stand. Racial attitudes affect Ofilwe’s

educational experience in *Coconut* as she attempts to assimilate into a mostly white school and her education takes on an informal study of herself and her identity. Susan Andrade asserts in her discussions of *Nervous Conditions* that, “Education is bound up with the imperatives of decolonizing nationalism, and, though one of the promises decolonizing nationalism makes is to create the New (and educated) Woman, education itself is seen as the provenance of men” (45). The women are thus expected to learn but somehow not *know*. The accomplishment of an education is undermined by tradition and is expressed, particularly in *Nervous Conditions*, symbolically through food. Food is usually considered the domain of women, and it is often used symbolically, as when Tambu sells mealies for school fees. Her efforts are thwarted by her brother, who steals her crops, and her father, who claims that her eventual profits should belong to him. The following sections outline the cultural nuances of Zimbabwe to contextualise the value system and environment Tambu grows up in and comes back to in both novels.

Zimbabwe: Placing Dangarembga’s Novels into Context

An investigation of Shona culture (pre and post colonization) is necessary in this particular study to identify the links and divergences of indigenous and Western ideologies. The following section will also elucidate the role of women in traditional society and how it has changed over time. A historical, political and social overview of Zimbabwe is important to understand key themes and issues that are explored in the literature. I will also explore the education policy put in place by the government during colonization as it is often discussed and dramatized in the novels.

Today, Shona and Ndebele peoples make up close to 96% of Zimbabwe’s population. Each society had been patriarchally structured before European colonization. Shona communities were based on a subsistence farming economy and there was no individual ownership of land. In this society controlled by men, only a few women held positions equalling them through religious or political standing. In general, women, according to Elizabeth Schmidt, experienced an increase in status over the course of their lifetimes (15). Marriage increased a woman’s prestige because it guaranteed to bring in a dowry for her family and it also cultivated a network of people “who could be called upon in times of economic or military distress” (Schmidt 15) by creating bonds between the extended families of the bride and groom. The practice of *lobola* (bridewealth) secured a husband’s reproductive rights to his wife and usually

consisted of a four or five head of cattle and various household items. It should also be mentioned that, as Katrin Berndt puts it, “the dealing of bodily functions and sexuality was less Puritan than in Christians societies,” yet, “loose behaviour was not accepted” (qtd. in Schmidt 13). There were fixed systems of rules of conduct and it was often the case that the perception of a male as a ‘man’ was influenced by his ability to sexually satisfy a woman. This is important to note because during colonial occupation, officials would often cite the overly-sexual nature of the African women that cause labour shortages in the mines.

A woman’s social status was determined by her relationship to her husband and his kin, and her fertility. A wife acquired prestige through childbearing; it was further enhanced when she became a grandmother. Man exercised control over his family, wealth, labour and land. In this way, the more dependants a man had, the more protection he had against economic calamity and political strife (Schmidt 14). And thus, polygamy was an accepted pre-colonial practice which afforded a man more labour for his fields.

In 1890, Southern Rhodesia was occupied by the British South Africa Company, a private British charter company under the dictatorship of Cecil Rhodes (“Zimbabwe’s Freedom Fighters”). The colony was turned over to the British by the small community of white settlers after having been ruled by the company for several years. Great Britain declared it a self-governing colony and the settlers instituted a white minority government, which expropriated the best lands, guaranteed preferential employment opportunities for whites, and forced Africans into a low-wage labour market. In this way, women’s work was depreciated while the load increased exponentially.

Although African chiefs and elders were generally opposed to all things colonial, many of them welcomed the government’s attempt to stifle women in the reserve areas, notes Schmidt. Being that women solidified kinship alliances, bridewealth secured daughter-in-laws and the labour of women generated food crops as well as access to lineage land and fractional wages from husbands abroad. It is in this way that the older men in the reserves secured control over women and their labour, capital, mobility, and offspring. Yet, women’s contribution was still seen as unimportant because it was unpaid. This view can be attributed to the “Victorian ideal,” as Berndt puts it, which viewed home and workplace as separate, while at the same time the men’s workplace happened to be far away from their families (Berndt 17). She also points out

that patriarchal British and Shona concepts of women's contribution in the economic functioning of the family and the clan overlapped and intermingled. While Berndt's idea touches on the intersection of colonizing and colonized cultures, I contend that the merger between the two cultures is necessarily an untidy one with many gaps and fissures, particularly as it applies to African women.

These cultural concepts of women are well documented in colonial records that are filled, Schmidt describes, with "adjectives characterizing African women as indolent, lazy, slothful, immoral, frivolous, savage, and uncivilized" (735). One particular official noted that although the African men were "[r]emarkably receptive of European ideas," he said, women turned a deaf ear, "cling[ing] to the old superstitions, the old customs and the old methods" (qtd. in Schmidt 735). This view of the African women as less worthy of education was the opinion of the missionaries as well. Given that one of my primary texts contains an account of growing up as a female under missionary education, I find the following quotation of particular interest:

Describing Chishawasha schoolchildren in the early years of the mission, one Jesuit asserted that the girls were far more difficult to handle than the boys because they were "flighty, lacking in concentration, moody and anxious for notice." Father F. J. Richartz, the Jesuit superior of Chishawasha, pronounced Shona girls "totally devoid of seriousness, both of mind and character." Another Jesuit opposed the employment of African women as teachers or catechists on the grounds that "their characters make such serious occupation impossible. ... The women are too ignorant, too volatile and feather-headed to allow them to be entrusted with such a charge." Moreover, he maintained, "they would not be listened to with any respect, even by the natives themselves. Their efforts to instruct would only be laughed at. (Schmidt 736)

This demonstrates that even the ostensibly enlightening doctrines of missionary education conceived of African women as incapable of progress and contrary to the norms they were attempting to instil. These norms were often inconsistent in their application and even (at times) in conflict with the ethos of the colonial authorities. For example, Berndt notes how the missionary ideal of monogamy for the colonized subjects was at odds with the colonial authorities, whose administration profited from the linking together of families that resulted from polygamy (18).

Those same colonial authorities had enacted a series of measures designed to introduce wage labour among the indigenous population. These measures included stringent taxation measures and land policies designed to force men to seek work in the mines and other colonial

industries. This in turn occasioned a gendered division of the labour sphere, with men leaving their homesteads in search of urban employment, while women remained in the rural areas, forced to undertake “subsistence cultivation to feed themselves and subsidize the men’s wages” (Schmidt 733). The migrant workers were paid and lodged in accordance with the employer’s assumptions regarding the needs of the single man; families left in the rural reserves were expected to be self-sustaining. However, “once wage earning surpassed food production as the determining factor in household survival, women’s social status deteriorated further” (Schmidt 734).

Concomitant with this trend was a growing legislated impoverishment of the rural land areas in which the indigenous inhabitants dwelt. The earlier Land Apportionment Act of 1925 had allocated Native Purchase Areas to these inhabitants. They were given land which was generally infertile and undesirable, and this land became the homes for the women, children and old people of the homestead. Thus, the role of women as providers for the household began to dwindle in material comparison to the importance of male labour.

Their roles were further marginalised by the demonization of traditional female roles by both church and state. As an example of this, the crackdown on traditional religions and non-European forms of healthcare meant that the role of women as spirit mediums and midwives were undermined. These traditional spheres of influence were derided as backward and primitive by the colonial authorities, who sought to impose European alternatives on their subjects. These alternatives prescribed a submissive role to women, and “tried to convince African women to exchange African patriarchal rules for the Christian variant” (Berndt 17). The aims of the colonial and missionary systems combined here, as women were taught “that they had to stay at home to cook, to clean, to raise healthy Christian children, and that it was their duty to obey and respect their husbands” (Berndt 17). They were not encouraged to pursue literacy, as their primary role was not one in which such skills would be important.

As migrant labour began to displace the subsistence economy, male elders, who remained in the rural areas and were not wage earners, began to be displaced as the primary locus of wealth and power (Schmidt 86). Their access to wealth, Schmidt argues, “was contingent upon their gaining control of the wages earned by junior men” (86). They did this by manipulating the bridal dowry system, which became an increasingly commercial transaction in which women

were the bartered goods. As women ensured the continuity of the lineage, male elders traded on the reproductive capacities of the young women. A patriarchal economy developed in which male elders were the recipients of dowries from the young men who in turn had to seek work in the urban areas to pay the dowries necessary for marriage to take place. The agency of women in this system was minimal to non-existent.

The rise of the urban woman was thus seen as an unwelcome development by African males. As Schmidt asserts, “male elders objected to the departure of their daughters from the rural areas, where they were so crucial to agricultural production and lineage reproduction” (757), as they feared the loss of their patriarchal control over young women. These women were regarded as being prone to, and inspiring, vice. As a result, male elders feared that an urbanised woman would lose her virtue in the cities, with a resulting drop in the dowry that could be demanded from a suitor.

The negative response of African men to the urbanization of African women was mirrored in the colonial authorities’ attitude towards the subject. Both groups sought to control and mediate women’s mobility and sexuality as far as possible. Schmidt argues that, “blinded by gender as well as racial prejudice, colonial officials and missionaries blamed African women for most of the perceived ills of African society, including adultery, venereal disease, divorce the male labour shortage, and general contempt for law and order” (98). That the colonial authorities and missionaries colluded with African structures of patriarchal control to subjugate women is crucial; it links the two patriarchal systems, indigenous and European.

In 1934 the Southern Rhodesian Bantu Congress formed, petitioning white settlers for justice. The party was known as the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (ANC) after World War II. By 1957 the aims of the ANC changed from attempting to correct the discriminatory practices of the white system to instigating a Black Nationalist movement (“Black Insurgency Movements”). The ANC grew at such an alarming rate that by 1959, the government banned the organization, arrested its leaders, and declared a state of emergency. Then in 1961, after many attempts to form new parties were banned, the Zimbabwe African Peoples’ Union (ZAPU) was formed under Joshua Nkomo. Violence, at this point, was the accepted means of change and reform. ZAPU militants were sent to countries such as Algeria, Ghana, Czechoslovakia and China for training. The following year ZAPU split into two factions, one

breaking off and becoming the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963 calling for ‘one man, one vote’ and focussing on political activism within the country. The conservative white party, the Rhodesian Front (RF), elected Ian Smith as the new Prime Minister and he announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) for the state of Rhodesia on November 11, 1965. Great Britain declared the *coup d’état* illegal and the UN also condemned the unilateral action resulting in a call for guerrilla warfare by both ZAPU and ZANU. This would be referred to as the second Chimurenga².

Each nationalist party set up and mobilized separate military forces. ZANU created the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), while ZAPU began the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). ZANLA was operating in the liberated zones of Mozambique, making recruitment and deployment effective. Their strategy was to stretch the Rhodesian forces throughout the country, attack white farms and increase Rhodesia’s economic costs in prosecuting the war. ZIPRA was operating from the west but made little attempt to politicize the peasantry and seemed more poised to engage ZANLA in the future rather than the immediate Rhodesians (‘Zimbabwe’s Freedom Fighters’).

All UN members imposed a total embargo on all Rhodesian goods by 1968 to reject the UDI (Coggins 370). The lack of African support in the country thwarted Smith’s attempts to negotiate with Great Britain and the UN. In 1973, Rhodesian Army constructed ‘protected villages’ to force hundreds of thousands of black people into strategically guarded areas in an attempt to isolate the guerrilla forces from their support. The following year, Smith was in talks with liberation leaders offering equal representation to take place within forty-sixty years. Guerrilla warfare intensified over the next couple years and ZANU (now under Robert Mugabe) and ZAPU (still under Nkomo) merged into the Patriotic Front and became unified in leadership. Smith’s ‘internal settlement’ promised universal adult suffrage and independence by the end of 1978 but it was rejected by the Patriotic Front because the political, military, and judiciary power would remain in the hands of white people. In 1979, elections established a black majority rule, with most of the votes going to Bishop Muzorewa’s United African National Council and Muzorewa was called on to craft the new government. The governmental bureaucracy was still

² The first Chimurenga (1896-1897) was an uprising by the indigenous people against the white settlers (‘Rhodesia Declares Independence’).

under white control and the Patriotic Front condemned the election as a sham thus perpetuating the civil strife. Zimbabwe declared independence in 1980 under Robert Mugabe (“Zimbabwe’s Freedom Fighters”).

Education Policy and the Literature Bureau of Zimbabwe

There is another factor that had shaped the people of the nation and that is the education policy and, more specifically, the Literature Bureau. In the period between the two World Wars, projects were designed to provide education at little cost to the state and to address welfare concerns in an era of global depression, but they were also meant to forestall political movements that threatened the colonial order” (Windel 2). Specifically,

In... Southern Rhodesia, settler needs required a civilizing mission that would convert Africans, through what was recognized as a long process, into proto-Europeans who would peacefully co-exist with their tutors in civilization while inclining them toward the economic practices of modern capitalism – i.e., individuated labour that was free enough from the obligations to land and community to be sold cheaply on the market. (Windel 4-5)

The significance of this cannot be understated. Intentions and discourse surrounding the education of the youth, particularly the African youth, are essential in examining the cultural gaps formed between home cultures and imposed European culture. Moreover, the relationship between church and state is necessary as is their educational mission and goal to “... shore up indigenous languages and cultures” against corruptive Western influences (Zwicker 6).

The church had, by this point, begun to see education of the indigenous population as a double-edged sword. This was because “[t]oo much mission schooling ... produced a politically dangerous African elite that had by the early 1920s shown tendencies toward pan-Africanism and nationalism and hostility toward the settler population and the machinations of government in native affairs” (Windel 12). They thus advocated for an adapted education which sought to produce functioning yet docile colonial subjects. This adapted education circumscribed the roles of its African participants, insisting first on an adherence to Christian values and doctrines, and then subjugation to the colonial authorities. The principle of educating the African on African lines implicit therein proposed that the relationship between colonized subject and colonizer could be improved if the colonized subject was educated to a level befitting that position (as

colonized subject), rather than an indiscriminately administered education which exposed the indigenous inhabitants to ‘unhealthy’ (anti-colonial) ideas.

It is significant that the implicit understanding of indigenous identity held by the colonizing ideology attempted to draw traditional African identity into the ostensibly protective aegis of Western civilization. The aim was clearly not to facilitate the development of African identity itself, but rather to provide an efficient labour force. The effect of this education system is depicted in the texts under examination in this thesis. The Africans who underwent missionary education were invariably made aware that they occupied lower socioeconomic and political strata in comparison to the white Rhodesian settlers. On the other hand, they were also aware that education allowed an escape, to some extent, from the disadvantages imposed by their racial categorization.

As with the processes of African urbanization discussed above, women invariably did not benefit from accessing the limited education options available to them. In fact, the same processes of patriarchal control that conspired to keep women in rural subjugation were brought to bear on the question of education for women. As the colonial education system, which was imposed on Africans, itself carried implicit patriarchal norms it dovetailed with the Shona patriarchal understanding of the duties of women in society. Education would enable women to hold semi-skilled and skilled employment, thus eliminating the economic dependency by which men retained their societal authority.

The dominant social position of males meant that they were seen as natural recipients of colonial education. Daughters were de-prioritized, with families often preferring to educate the son(s), while the daughters worked the land. When females were educated, it was often reduced to three or four years, with a view towards providing spousal partners for the educated African male (Berndt 16). Women were not encouraged to emancipate themselves from their burdens: in fact, the educated/urbanized female was seen as detrimental to the integrity of the family unit and as a threat to the social system. As Berndt points out, “urban women were usually considered ‘immoral’ because they did not live under the observation of the male lineage” (19).

Various measures were put in place by the colonial system to control women, their actions and their movements. These measures were instituted formally after Ian Smith declared

Southern Rhodesia's independence (Berndt 20). Legally, African women were defined as minors. They had to have a (male) guardian's approval for marriage, irrespective of age. In addition, basic legal rights, such as entering into contract or holding a private bank account were denied to them. At every point, male authority was required to gainsay any legal decisions made by women (Weiss 112). To say this is to note the presence of a gendered dynamic in the forces of authority that were brought to bear on African women. This dynamic manifests in the processes of literacy that were enacted by the colonial authorities. A Literature Bureau was set up in 1954, ostensibly, for the emancipatory purpose of preserving Ndebele and Shona languages, and thereby producing a meaningfully literate populace (Zwicker 7). As a cultural body, it sought to "facilitate the transfer of a viable literary system to the colony" (Ellerman 6).

Tsitsi Dangarembga asserts that literacy-reading and writing produce a sense of identity, and that such a sense of identity was forcibly withheld from black Rhodesians during the years leading up to independence, and that the Literature Bureau, one of the "forces of power," "deliberately trained minds of would-be Zimbabweans in particular ways" (Zwicker 4). Dangarembga also suggests, in her comment "they would only allow tales of witchcraft, wives poisoning their husbands, ... that kind of thing," that this curtailing of identity was directed against women in specific ways, entraining them to become or stay "traditional" at the very moment that a rising nationalist movement was holding out alternative ways of being. Dangarembga highlights a familiar yet still disheartening example of how feminism gets hived off from nationalism in the process of decolonization (Zwicker 4).

Literature, in this case, is seen as an instrument of control and a pattern from which to create a national and gendered identity. Ellen Ellerman's research documents

[The] Literature Bureaus as a widespread phenomenon in former colonies. She argues that they serve contradictory purposes: conceived as tools of decolonization that would shore up indigenous languages and cultures, they nonetheless perpetuate colonial mechanisms and betray their indebtedness to an Arnoldian sense of education as social pacifier. (qtd. in Zwicker 6)

The texts examined scrutinize these concepts at length, particularly in *The Book of Not*. "The cultural effects of the Literature Bureau are often ambivalent," notes Zwicker, "but it is clear that its machinations are inextricably wrapped up in the transmission of cultural values" (6).

Outlining the objective and position of Zimbabwe's Literature Bureau helps to detail the circumstances Tsitsi Dangarembga was facing in the late 1980's, while attempting to publish her first novel, *Nervous Conditions*. Although Dangarembga does not out-right accuse the Literature Bureau of preventing the publication of her novel, she does help to convey the state of affairs and the general view of the governmental branch that is described above. She describes a publishing industry that had little interest in accurate depictions of the lives of real Zimbabwean women and, perhaps, less interest in female authorship. Zwicker notes that "in several interviews [Dangarembga] has told the story of how the manuscript languished in a publishing house until she asked for its return" (Zwicker 4). "I had the distinct impression," comments Dangarembga, "that the sympathetic young male editor found these women [characters] too nasty to be allowed to exist... it seems to be very difficult for men to accept the things about women write and want to write about and the men are the publishers (Zwicker 5). The novel was picked up by Women's Press, based in London, and was reprinted in North America by Seal Press. However, when it was reviewed in *Moto Magazine*, a popular forum for Zimbabwean current events, the subtitle read "Woe unto bossy man!"

South Africa: Placing Matlwa's Novels into Context

Similar to the way in which Dangarembga's novels are intrinsically bound up with the history of Zimbabwe, so Matlwa's novels are bound to the South African history. The history of South Africa is marked by numerous conflicts with often shifting allies and enemies. The original inhabitants were the Khoisan people followed by the Bantu people a millennium later around 500 CE. Bantu-speakers include Nguni peoples (the Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, and Ndebele), the Sotho-Tswana peoples (Tswana, Pedi, and Basotho) as well as Venda, Lemba, and Shangaan-Tsonga peoples (Marasinghe 827)

The first settlement was established in 1652 by Jan van Riebeeck and the Dutch East India Company around Table Bay with the primary purpose of being a stop on the Spice Route between Europe and Asia. The Company was apprehensive about trading with the local Khoisan people and attempted to avoid interaction all together by releasing employees from their contracts and enabling them to set up their own farms with which to supply the settlement. These farms expanded and the settlement grew. A majority of the white settlers were still of Dutch

descent but there were also Germans, Scandinavians, and French present in the area. The Dutch East India Company began to import slaves from Madagascar and Indonesia and the settlements were expanding into Khoisan territory. The Dutch farmers (or Boers) trekked inland with the intention of independent rule with a heavy Christian influence (Gerhard 225).

The British moved in and occupied Table Bay towards the end of the 18th century, hoping to keep the trading post away from Napoleonic France. Power was briefly given back to the Dutch in 1803 and then taken back with full force in 1806. The Congress of Vienna established British sovereignty of the area in 1815. The British stumbled upon the brewing tensions between the Xhosa and Boers regarding borders and decided to remedy the problem by adding 5000 British immigrants as a buffer zone. Although this did little to aid the problem, it established a solid British presence in the colony. This also created the distinct differentiation of the two white groups: the largely uneducated farmers of Dutch descent and the educated middle-class urban Brits. Yet other than the British abolition of slavery in 1834 the British views on the racial ranks and orders differed very little from those established by the Boers (Byrnes).

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberly seems to be the tipping point for the Boers and they rebelled and won against the British in 1880. The second Anglo-Boer war in 1899 lasted longer than the first and the Boers were defeated by the British who were using scorched earth tactics, as well as concentration camps to secure victory. Within the first decade of the 20th century the British would make South Africa into a union – a British territory with home-rule for the Afrikaners (Boers). The subsequent legislation that came from the all-white parliament restricted non-white ownership of land to 13% of the country. A series of acts were passed to deny black people's rights to vote and banished them to reserves. In 1925 Afrikaans replaced Dutch as official language (the other being English) and an era of Afrikaner nationalism ensued. In 1948 the National Party instituted the already partially established system of apartheid which would last until 1991 (Byrnes).

The government banned opposition parties like the African National Congress (ANC) and the Communist Party of South Africa. The Apartheid era was characterized by legalised racial discrimination, intense censorship, forced removals, and civil unrest. Uprisings and protests were met with violence and multiple assassinations of dissident leaders. Another

symptom of the times was the creation of townships: areas on the periphery of towns and cities often made up corrugated tin shacks. These areas were hotbeds of protest and unrest during apartheid (Maylam 70). Townships are important to the discussion of the novel because it becomes an important setting and culture for the protagonists to define themselves against.

The 1980's saw an increase in international outcry for the dismantling of Apartheid and many governments placed economic sanctions to weaken the state. A State of Emergency was declared in 1985 and by 1990 the state unbanned the political opposition parties and released political prisoner, Nelson Mandela. The first universal suffrage general elections took place in 1994. In 1998 the South African government launched the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme as an attempt to level the socio-economic divides that Apartheid had created. At this point, white people made up less than 10% of the population and controlled an overwhelming majority of the wealth. BEE legislation sets the immediate context for *Coconut*; Ofilwe's father is among the first wave of BEE beneficiaries which enables him to move his family from the township of Mabopane to a country estate in Sandton.

History of Education and Education Policy for the African Population

Education is a method of control. It instils a desired value system into impressionable youth. Analyzing the specific aims of education for the Black South Africa population is important because it helps illuminate the deliberately engineered inferior status and also highlights how it has been used to create identities. It is also important in my reading of *Spilt Milk* given the setting of an exclusive black private school and what that means for the identities of the characters.

As described by Jonathan D. Jansen, the black educational history of South Africa can be broken up into five eras:

Traditional African education was led by community elders through an oral tradition based on cultural transmission and was closely integrated with life experience. The first European settlers introduced an era of slave education based on simple Christian religious instruction. The early 1800s saw the era of mission education in which Christian missionary societies introduced a European form of education to the schools. The 1920s have been described as the era of Native education and were characterized by the rapid structural deterioration of Black schools and the introduction of the first state-mandated segregated

curricula Bantu education, derived directly from the official policy of apartheid, was introduced in 1953. (Jansen 195-6)

The missions set up in South Africa were primarily for Christianizing; yet, some (Lovedale in Natal, for example) extended beyond the evangelical into industrial and academic subjects. Yet there was White opposition to Black education and many insisted that the purpose of educating Black people was for “social control through peaceful subjugation” (Jansen 198). There was interest in providing Black people with skills for manual labour in the 1860s as the result of discovering diamonds and gold. This aim threatened the Afrikaners as they were seeking to compete for jobs and free themselves from the ruling British. In 1889, Superintendent General of Education Dale Langham argued in the Cape Parliament for “a differentiated education thereby ensuring that the Whites maintained their supremacy, while the mass of Africans were confined to a humbler position” (qtd. in Burchell 70). As colonies became provinces in the 1910 Union of South Africa, Black people were “finally and effectively excluded from sociopolitical participation” (Jansen 199).

This calculated shift is important because it snatched all opportunity away from the Black population. Education is a stepping stool to job prospects and quality of life; these were purposefully taken off the table for the population deemed unworthy and inferior. Jansen reiterates that, “[i]t is important to understand that the curriculum of apartheid education was the Nationalist Party's response to what it perceived as the “inappropriate” liberal arts curriculum orientation of the mission schools, which were the main providers of schooling for Blacks until the 1950s” (Jansen 200).

Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, The Minister of Native Affairs, was quite direct about the aims of the change from Church to State education for the ‘Bantu’ population. According to a 1955 article by Dr. R. H. W. Shepherd, a missionary and doctor of literature at the University of the Witwatersrand,

[Verwoerd] contended that the education previously given, and even more the atmosphere in which it was given, had led to the production of frustrated Africans, who had been made to feel that they were above their community, so that they wanted to become integrated with the life of the European community by obtaining posts in a European setting and through the elimination of Europeans. When this had not

happened, it was said, they became rebellious and tried to make their community dissatisfied because of their misdirected and alien ambition. (138)

This concept of ‘alien ambition’ adds another dimension to the discussion. As Jansen notes, “the position of Blacks in the social, economic, and political life in South Africa was both fixed and natural; thus, education and, in particular, the curriculum, for Blacks had to be directed toward serving those predetermined ends” (Jansen 200). The system was not created to facilitate the needs of the Black population but was contrived and enforced to handicap African children with the introduction of an inferior syllabus to ensure that Black people were competent enough only for menial jobs.

The change from mission to governmental education was much to the disdain of the mission schools and religious communities around the country. The general consensus being that a rotten education for Black people was better than the one they would get on the street. Although some mission schools closed with the intention of leaving the school rooms vacant, the majority allowed the government to lease the buildings from them. With that in mind, Shepherd closes his article with the declaration that, “The Church will remain as landlord- and the Government come in as tenant!”(142).

Furthermore, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 put black education not in the hands of the South African education system, but in the Native Affairs Department. The Apartheid government sought to further entrench their hold over the black education system by introducing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in all township schools. By the 1960’s liberation movements had been banned or suppressed, with leaders imprisoned. The new wave the resistance was largely carried by the youth who were working under the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement. The impetus of resistance shifted to township spaces and particularly schools. The apocryphal cry of the day was, “Revolution now, Education later”. The students would no longer accept the second rate education that was imposed upon them. One teenage activist summed it up thusly: “half a loaf is better than no loaf”. But we say: ‘half a gram of poison is just as lethal as the whole gram’ thus we strongly refuse to swallow this type of education which is designed to make us slaves in the country of our birth” (Mngxitama 1). As the 80’s dawned and the government increasingly realized that Apartheid would no longer be

sustainable, many of the restrictions or ‘Petty Apartheid’ rules began to be lifted. After the end of apartheid, schools were required to open their doors to all races; yet, there were also financial matters to consider. Matlwa’s novel, *Coconut*, deals with this, as we meet Ofilwe in 1998 while she is attending a ‘Model C’, or formerly white, school. Many of the conflicts she experiences here can be traced to the legacies of the previous regime’s education policy.

Coconut and *Spilt Milk* were both published while Matlwa was attending the University of Cape Town. The publishing of Matlwa’s novels was met with much more excitement and acclaim than Dangarembga’s first novel – a sign of ‘the winds of change’. Matlwa was 21 years old when she won the European Union Literary Award for best novel in 2007. Matlwa maintains distance from her characters and claims that they are used to depict extreme cases of the ways in which young South African women are pressured to Westernise themselves.

Given the title, *Coconut*, Matlwa already plunges into the territory of imprecise or muddled identity. ‘Coconut’ is a derogatory term used to describe someone as, ‘black on the outside and white on the inside’ (qtd in Spencer). The novel explores the complexity of coherent identities in the contemporary South African context. With so many options and connotations and implications, which direction is right? What identity is the correct one? These questions are explored by two female protagonists, Ofilwe and Fikile. Both of these characters find themselves formulating a personal identity in a context where ‘white’ culture is seen as an indication of success. The novel is divided into two sections, one narrated by Ofilwe and the other by Fikile.

Ofilwe’s narration explores the life of relative privilege. A house in a gated gold estate and a mixed-race school are the markers of her success; yet, it also serves as a type of alienation. She has trouble fitting in with her white school friends, but pressured by her parents, she becomes obsessed with being ‘normal’, where normal means ‘white’. Fikile’s narrative depicts a young woman from the township working at an up-market cafe. She describes her tragic life, which includes witnessing her mother’s suicide and being orphaned, left under the care of her uncle who repeatedly molested her.

Spilt Milk was written as a ‘sweet sixteen’ novel for the nation but it falls short of this aim. The major themes in the book – race, gender, education, and religion – show how deeply

divided the country once was and the strength of the adhesives used in the 16 years since. The use of such characters as a disgraced white priest and a proud black woman and the ruminations of their bitter past love affair, works symbolically, while they try to guide the future of the country, the children, spiritually and intellectually. The representations of women, identity, and education explored in the following chapters focus on the coming-of-age stories linked with the fledgling nations from which they originate.

CHAPTER 3: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN, IDENTITY AND EDUCATION IN THE NOVELS OF TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

This chapter aims to explore representations of traditional women's roles of mother, daughter, wife, sister, aunt, and grandmother and how they are changing to include that of scholar, provider, educator and autonomous individual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's two novels *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*³. Education, in the Western sense, stands out as an important status marker for the women in the novels examined. Although there are examples of informal schooling in the texts, there is a focus on Western education and its effects in the fractured Zimbabwean colonial society in the years leading up to independence. The classroom is the setting for many scenes in each novel; however, the representation of a mission school, a convent school, and an exclusive black private school each serve to generate possible identities for their pupils/characters. What is interesting to note is the multiplicity of perceived functions of education in these texts, because it undermines the assumption that education is value-neutral. In Dangarembga's texts, girls are sent almost reluctantly to school – it is assumed that it will not benefit the girls directly but could function as a desirable and advantageous quality in marriage negotiations later on. This is because their parental figures believe education would instil in them the values necessary to be good women. Furthermore, education functions as an insurance policy as well as a communal commodity. In this respect, the chapter will examine how Dangarembga's novels create an awareness of the contradictions inherent in the colonial educational systems as well as contradictions on a personal scale that arise out of the conflict between a self-aware, educated subject and the expectations of traditional patriarchal society.

The discussion of *Nervous Conditions* will focus primarily on the dual female protagonists and how Dangarembga's narrative uses the characters of Tambu and Nyasha to highlight the complexity in, and potential of, the African female subject. The girls in the novels struggle to understand, create, and accept their identities and the forces that shape their views. In contrast to the narrative voice in *Nervous*, which is more reflective and removed, the tone in the second novel is one of self-centred bitterness. My discussion will include a concentration on female relationships in the text, as these relationships form the basis for the novels' reflections

³ I will abbreviate the titles to *Nervous* and *Not* respectively.

on female solidarity and its functions within a patriarchal system. The traditional Shona culture and Western education intersect at the concept patriarchal privilege; this intersection is brought into focus through the characters of Tambudzai and Nyasha as they cultivate their own battlegrounds for their struggles to become educated women. Those struggles are conveyed in the text through the metaphorical and symbolic use of food; this trope recurs in *The Book of Not* as well. In addition to studying the representation of patriarchy and indigenous views of Western culture, I will be exploring the larger discussion of education as cultural transmission. That is, I examine how education functions as a medium for Western values and norms. Through close reading of the two novels I will argue that Western education comes to be seen as a symbol of liberation, as well as of captivity.

The Book of Not is a continuation of the story in *Nervous Conditions*, but it details a number of different aspects, particularly those of race in the historical moment of Zimbabwe being on the cusp of independence. The story follows Tambu from the Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart, where most of the novel is situated, and past matriculation on to a thankless teaching job and later a position in advertising against the backdrop of Rhodesia violently transitioning into Zimbabwe. The book deals with identity in terms of troubled assimilation, rebellion, and then an overwhelming sense of self-pity and submission, serving as a national allegory and a commentary on the 'new Zimbabwe'. The text meditates on gender roles and relationships between women in a different way to the first novel's focus on collective female identities. In the later novel, we see Tambu's younger sister assisting the rebels in the war effort and Tambu's mother's readiness to side against anything English as two factors which alienate Tambu from them, primarily since Tambu is in the process of being indoctrinated with the ideologies of the white convent school she is attending. In this way, identity formation is also closely linked to the story of the nation: the texts ask the readers to consider what it means to have an identity of one's own that is strongly influenced by the setting of the 1970's liberation struggle or the second Chimurenga.

The first twenty pages of *Nervous* create an awareness of who Tambu is and the context in which she is emerging. She is beginning to ask questions and witnesses the changes in her village in rural Rhodesia. The colonial intrusion is small at first – from taking up real estate in

view of the washing and bathing area so that those things must be done further down river to taking note of the uncle's success in the ways of the white man and his education. An education awarded to her uncle not because of his particular sharpness, as his brother would put it, but perhaps because of his perseverance. For Tambu, the questions mount and the answers are unsatisfactory. What are the reasons a woman should not be educated; Tambu's aunt is an example of an educated women who does not merely serve up books for her husband to eat for supper. Tambu refuses to be denied and subsequently grows and sells mealies to pay her school fees (Dangarembga *Nervous* 17).

Tambu's development proceeds against the wishes of the males in her immediate social environment. First her father and her brother are reluctant, even openly hostile to the idea of her advancing herself, with Jeremiah even arguing that, "Tambudzai's sharpness with her books [would be of] no use because in the end it would only benefit strangers" (Dangarembga *Nervous* 56). Babamukuru supports Tambu because she would at least have an opportunity to contribute to her own family before joining her husband's family (Dangarembga *Nervous* 56). Tambu receives inspiration from the stories from her late grandmother, an example of female solidarity, oral tradition, and informal education. Tambu says of the stories she told of how Babamukuru came to be educated that "[t]he suffering was not minimised but the message was clear: endure and obey, for there is no other way" (*Nervous* 19). Later, at the mission she attends, she finds herself learning from both her cousin, Nyasha, and her aunt, Maiguru, while at the same time growing closer to her more free-spirited aunt, Lucia. Each of these females in their own way inspires her to achieve more. The *dare* scene in the middle of the narrative illustrates the women's situations quite clearly. While the members of the patriarchy are having a meeting about Lucia, the women are in the domestic space of the kitchen complaining about the injustice of the situation. Maiguru is singled out for an opinion but is more or less provoked in order for Tambu's mother, Mainini, to point out that Maiguru is not one of them. Tambu starts to see the ways in which education could be burdensome.

Seeing how education has materially improved the lives of Maiguru and Nyasha and even the effect it has on Lucia, she finds herself becoming increasingly judgemental of her mother whose lack of education has ensured that she remains oppressed. This is because "[i]lliteracy and

lack of training virtually ensure servitude for a woman in postcolonial times. The squalid conditions under which Tambu's mother lives testify to this" (Andrade 38). Her mother's despondency and wretchedness inspire Tambu to be more successful in her educational pursuits, so that she can become a successful educated woman like Maiguru, rather than a failure like her mother.

However, as the novel progresses, Tambu comes to realize that education is not always the key to liberation. Maiguru has the same level of education as Babamukuru and is the most educated woman in Tambu's inner-circle, but is not credited with her contributions to the family and the reader is not made aware of any additional achievements outside the domestic sphere (Andrade 38). The money she earns is not hers to use, but goes towards supporting Babamukuru's family who are under the impression that he is their sole benefactor. Similarly, Nyasha's level of education places her in constant and sometimes violent conflict with her father who reacts to her assertiveness by striving to remove her agency. Nyasha was raised in England and exposed to changing value systems which gave women greater civil liberties and this complicates her adjustments back into Rhodesian society with its pervasive and dominant structure of patriarchy.

From early on in the novel we experience Nyasha's alienation as well as her rebellion as a contestation forged upon her body. Later, Tambu suggests that Nyasha prefers angles to curves (in relation to her body image) which can imply that Nyasha has interpellated Western notions of feminine beauty. Although she does not approve of the patriarchal dynamics and practices of her native Shona culture she yearns to embrace her African heritage once again. At best, Nyasha's relationship to Shona culture has been formalized into an almost anthropological interest in traditional crafts like basket making. She has, however, been stripped of the tools with which to be African. Hyphenated by her Anglo-African experience, she thinks of herself as a "hybrid" (*Nervous* 78).

The contrast between Tambu and Nyasha forms one of the novel's focal points. Nyasha's worldly confidence clashes with Tambu's naivety, and her open protest is a foil to Tambu's initial desire to obey. Tambu's maturity in *Nervous Conditions* is facilitated very much by

Nyasha. The latter defies the traditional expectations levelled upon her by the culture she is attempting to reclaim. Through Nyasha, Tambu learns that resistance is indeed possible, even to Babamukuru and everything he represents. Nyasha's urban, anglicized personality allows Tambu to see her own ties to the homestead in sharp relief. Perhaps more significantly, Tambu is narrating the story of her adolescence from the perspective and wisdom of adulthood. I think it is quite interesting that Tambu is aware of Nyasha's influence and of the seeds of political and historical consciousness this exhibits in her own life:

Nyasha taught me this history with a mischievous glint in her eye. I was like a vacuum then, taking in everything, storing it all in its original state for future inspection. Today I am content that this little paragraph of history as written by Nyasha makes a good story, as likely if not more so than the chapters those very same missionaries were dishing out to us in those mission schools. (*Nervous* 63)

For Nyasha, Tambu personifies the "African self" with which she is attempting to achieve an affinity. Their friendship gives Nyasha a vital tie to the culture to which she longs to be reacquainted. Supporting this, Aegerter contends that Dangarembga uses the two female protagonists as a narrative device to illustrate "the communal ethic at the heart of her African characters' individual and cultural identities" (234). She argues the dual protagonists, "metaphorically heal the colonial rupture of rural and urban African peoples" (234). This point is crucial: although Tambudzai and Nyasha are individuals, "it is only in their friendship that their greatest fullness and integrity of identity are experienced; it is, in other words, within community rather than individuality that African women's autonomy is fully realized" (Aegerter 234). The creation of identity conceived between these two females is an attempt to bridge the gap and forge solidarity in their mutually destabilizing situations. Nyasha, especially, is able to cope with the difficult demands placed upon her by Babamukuru as long as Tambu is there to bear the burdens of being female in a patriarchal society with her. But their relationship disintegrates when Tambu departs for Sacred Heart, suggesting that without a sense of community, Nyasha cannot withstand the constant demand and that she submits to an externally imposed idea of what it means to be female. The text informs us that Nyasha is isolated from the other students at the mission school because they do not like her accent and she is condemned for "think[ing] she's white" (*Nervous* 95). Tambu had eventually accepted Nyasha and this allows her some stability as there was at least one person who was not calling her identity into question. As the story

develops past the point of Tambu's departure, the girls' individual solitude breeds solipsism: Tambu forgets about Nyasha, and rejects the homestead completely. Meanwhile, Nyasha becomes progressively more obsessed with maintaining control over her body, using it as the site of her rebellion against Babamukuru. As we see, Nyasha "quickly succumbs to the 'nervous conditions' her friendship with Tambudzai had deferred" (Aegerter 237).

I argue that Tambu's increasing alienation from her rural beginnings stems from her search for the autonomy she has been denied by her father's family. While she develops an increasingly self-conscious awareness of her individuality, she finds herself moving beyond the point where her brother, Nhamo, became distanced from his family and culture. Tambu points out that at some point, "[a]ll this poverty began to offend him, or at the very least to embarrass him after he went to the mission... something he saw at the mission turned his mind to thinking that our homestead no longer had any claim upon him" (*Nervous* 7). While her brother was secure enough in his masculine authority to disdain his cultural background in favour of one which increased his authority, Tambu is not prepared to entirely forego the homestead in favour of the colonial way of life. This demonstrates how her idea of what it means to be female is mediated through the experience of the homestead, where there are few examples of women who are liberated from the holds of patriarchy. Her search for more positive female models highlights the pervasive effect of patriarchy on women's lives. The earliest example of a strong female influence, her grandmother, sacrifices herself so that Babamukuru can be educated. Tambu's own mother is coerced into marrying Jeremiah at a young age, and leads a life of hardship and sorrow as a result. The young Tambu recounts an incident in which her brother sends her little sister, Netsai, to the bus stop to collect trivial items of luggage, "knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him" (*Nervous* 10). Tambu tries to get her sister to resist but this resistance only results in the little girl being beaten by her brother when Tambu is out of earshot. The instance is retold not only for its own significance but because it shows how her younger sister, who turns on Tambu for not letting her obey her brother, has accepted the gender dynamics of

the homestead⁴. This scene allows us to contrast Tambu, who is aware of the injustice already, with her sister, who is happy to accept the status quo. It gives us a glimpse into a squandering, or rather, a misuse of the privilege of education. Robert Muponde even coined the

term “Nhamo syndrome” to indicate a flight from communal responsibility and history (*Nervous* 390).

Tambu’s time at Sacred Heart takes place during the war of independence and the convent is no stranger to atrocity. Netsai’s missing leg haunts Tambu during her time there, and she is confronted with the tragedies of the white girls at the convent school and harbouring a dull guilt. When a pair of twins at the convent loses their father in the civilian attacks, the white parents write letters to the school because they feel “their children couldn’t be safe in a place that allowed the children of terrorists” (*Not* 128). These details help to illuminate the state of Tambu’s self-identity at this point in the novel as well as providing the context of the cultural climate at the time.

Away from the homestead we see that Nyasha, who presents the strongest case for an independent female subjectivity, struggles to resist Babamukuru effectively. Even Maiguru, with her Master’s degree, still conforms to her place in the hierarchy of the family both at the mission and on the homestead. At each point, the women Tambu knows are subjugated. Where women do hold places of authority, as with Tete Gladys, Babamukuru’s sister who is allowed access to meetings of the patriarchy, the authority still functions within a patriarchal mode. I would argue that this shows the overwhelming presence of masculine authority in the spheres Tambu occupies.

Tambu soon comes to recognize the conflict in the expectations placed upon her by her education, a conflict embodied in the speech Babamukuru gives Tambu on her duties as an educated African woman:

Babamukuru had summoned me to make sure that I knew how lucky I was to have been given this opportunity for mental and eventually, through it, material emancipation. He pointed out that the blessing I

⁴ Gugu Hlongwane interestingly points out that that Netsai’s character changes completely in the sequel. Whereas in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu dismissed Netsai as “the type that will make a sweet, sad wife” (*Nervous* 10), in *The Book of Not*, Netsai is actually a freedom fighter who risks her life for the freedom of her people (Hlongwane 452).

had received was not an individual blessing but one that extended to all members of my less fortunate family, who would be able to depend on me in the future... Lastly, he explained, at the mission I would not only go to school but learn ways and habits that would make my parents proud of me. I was an intelligent girl but I also had to develop into a good woman, he said, stressing both qualities equally and not seeing any contradiction in this. (*Nervous* 87-88)

This quotation shows that the quality of being ‘a good woman’ is placed separately in Babamukuru’s world-view from the quality of being ‘an intelligent girl’. The former is evidently insufficient on its own, for he stresses how she must learn the ways and habits of a submissive daughter. We are mindful here that Nyasha, an intelligent girl, is a source of disappointment for Babamukuru because she does not possess the requisite good womanly qualities. As she spends more time at the mission, Tambu discovers that the conflict between the two qualities limits her development as a female subject in ways she could not have anticipated. It is significant here that when we see opportunities for confrontation between Babamukuru and Tambu in the novel, Tambu is happy to accede to Babamukuru’s authority with only one exception. I would argue that when she first arrives at the mission, she does not feel herself entitled to claim her selfhood on the same grounds that the men do. This would account for why she initially sees Nyasha’s behaviour as bad, and why she is able to rationalize Babamukuru’s treatment of Nyasha in contrast to his treatment of Chido, Nyasha’s older brother.

I would argue that the author introduces Lucia, Mainini’s sister, to provide an alternative to the models with which Tambu has been presented up to that point. Given the patriarchal structure she has been exposed to, Tambu finds Lucia difficult to place because she threatens the orthodox way of doing things: Lucia’s brazen spirit and assertive manner contrast with the timidity and diffidence displayed by the other females at the homestead. “For ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ women alike, their role as housewife dominates the narrative horizon” (Andrade 39). For the men in the novel, their place at the head of the patriarchal pecking order is directly due to their ability to subjugate the women around them. Lucia is an exception to this social order:

Lucia, the only unmarried adult woman beside the servant, Anna, is free precisely because she is not responsible to a husband and, as a childless woman (up to that point), is not hampered by the burdens of motherhood. These facts, normally considered severe limitations in the African context, enable her to have a sex life based primarily on pleasure, and she is the only woman who does. (Andrade 39)

She evades set roles and expectations as far as is possible within the context of the homestead. As a result, she is a target of resentment and mistrust from the women around her, and a figure of consternation to the men. But Lucia's role is a complex one, for it involves both open resistance and strategic complicity, something which Nyasha and Tambu struggle to understand. Lucia's shining moment is during the *dare* scene when the patriarchy is assessing the situation she finds herself in when she goes to live at the homestead and is impregnated by Takesure, a distant relative of her father. The family is listening to Takesure's story while Lucia's point of view is not requested. However, Lucia marches into the meeting uninvited during Takesure's deposition to grab him by the ear and tell her side of it boldly and without intimidation, which gains her the admiration of Nyasha. Yet, later in the novel, Babamukuru gets Lucia a job and at the news of it, she drops to her knees in praise of him and Maiguru chimes in, "That is why they say education is life," she cried. "Aren't we all benefiting from Babamukuru's education?" (*Nervous* 161). Tambu herself describes it as an "intoxicating occasion" where she felt the instinct to "join the adoring women on the floor" (*Nervous* 161) until she is kicked by Nyasha under the table. Lucia's decision to move back into the hut with Takesure, and her later decision to approach Babamukuru for a job initially seem at odds with her rebellious behaviour. When Nyasha approaches Lucia on the subject of unnecessary "grovelling" to Babamukuru, Lucia simply states, "Babamukuru wanted to be asked, so I asked. And now we both have what we wanted, isn't it?" (*Nervous* 162). However, her success demonstrates that resistance to a monolithic patriarchy must involve compromise, or even complicity, at times.

I argue that, taken together, the narratives of Tambu and Nyasha represent both complementary and contradictory aspects of African women's experience and psychology during UDI - the period of pre-independent Zimbabwe. Separately, the girls epitomize the "nervous conditions" of the novel's title: they are the "split subject" characterized by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, alienated from themselves and from their traditional culture by the oppressions of their own culture as it intersects and collides with colonial patriarchy.

Dangarembga's title seems to signify that this collision of patriarchal cultures creates the landscape for "nervous conditions" to occur in the African subject. On the issue of the novel's title, Supriya Nair offers the following account and analysis: it is "a title that 'signifies' upon the absent bodies in Fanon's analyses of colonized natives. The epigraph quotes a line from Sartre's

Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*: “the status of [the] native is a nervous condition.”” (qtd. in Mustafa 390) The ‘absent bodies’ are, of course, female; Sartre’s diagnosis is not necessarily metaphorical; the epigraph is correctly identified as Sartre’s but not necessarily through attribution. With a different kind of attention, Caroline Rooney observes that “the title of Dangarembga’s novel is taken from a translated paraphrase of Fanon, indicated by the novel’s epigraph. She cites, perhaps even mis-quotes or re-paraphrases Sartre’s paraphrase of Fanon but neither Fanon’s nor Sartre’s name is given. ‘Nervous Condition’ is henceforth under the signature of Dangarembga, a ‘dandestine translation’ to re-phrase a phrase from the novel” (qtd. in Mustafa 390). The act of appropriation on Dangarembga’s part is significant in that it claims an authority over the narrative of self which has been denied to female subjects. It is important, then, to examine how these ‘absent bodies’ respond to the situations and events that facilitate the ‘nervous conditions’ that occur in the novel. Doing so may tell us more about African female subjectivities and their formation within colonial and post-colonial times.

It is Nyasha’s experience of alienation which is most marked in the novel. When she returns with her family to the homestead, she is unable to communicate with her cousins, having forgotten most of the Shona she knew before the family left. To her cousins and the other family members, she seems ill-mannered and petulant, and they do not appreciate her precocious personality in a society where children are meant to be obedient and not speak out of turn. We read Tambu’s negative pronouncements on her clothing and eating habits, and note that Maiguru refuses to let her join in the celebratory dancing, suggesting that her body is always under scrutiny. Tambu notes that Nyasha’s skirt was too short and she knows it, “observing everybody though veiled vigilant eyes to see what we were thinking... I could not condone her lack of decorum. I would not give my approval” (*Nervous* 37). Tambu’s approval, interestingly enough, would be the least of her troubles.

Nyasha’s running battles with her father, which escalate over the course of the novel, demonstrate the problems of trying to maintain traditional gender roles once Western education has taken hold. For Babamukuru, his ability to maintain his traditional role as head of the patriarchy is both affirmed by education (which places him in a privileged position materially) and challenged by it: Nyasha’s education enables her to challenge his authority, albeit with violent results. The key example of this is the fight scene which occurs over the seemingly

innocuous school dance. Nyasha stays out a few extra minutes just outside her house with a boy after a dance. The fight that proceeds gets violent, culminating in Babamukuru striking Nyasha and –condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness” (*Nervous* 118) as Tambu puts it.

Education is a status symbol, as well as a tool; yet, it affects the characters of Babamukuru and Nyasha in very different ways. Babamukuru’s education does not challenge his dominant position in the family structure, indicating that the kind of mission education he has received is, to some extent, also grounded in patriarchy. Nyasha’s education is seen by the reader as key to her identifying her oppression. This surely demonstrates the ambivalent nature of the Western education scheme in its effects on the subjects of colonialism.

Babamukuru is the first representative of this class of educated Africans seen in the novel. In fact, he actually completes tertiary studies in the field of education in South Africa and England. His story, told to Tambu by her grandmother, shows the development of his status by the missionaries. Babamukuru’s mother had taken him to –the holy wizards” (*Dangarembga Nervous* 19) in only a loincloth at the age of nine begging them to prepare him for life in the changing world. Babamukuru was actually one of six children who were impoverished by losing a father to the mines. He went to school at the mission and –they thought he was a good boy, cultivatable, in the way the land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator” (*Nervous* 19). After doing odd jobs at the mission he is able to send some money to his family at the homestead, a trend that extends through his entire life. The moral that Tambu’s grandmother takes from the story of her son’s ascension is –endure and obey” (*Nervous* 19). The missionaries, as Gugu Hlongwane argues, are –concerned more with the creation of a puppet-like black middle class and not at all with the –others”, as Nyasha astutely observes” (Hlongwane 452). Robert Muponde offers an interesting reading on Babamukuru’s education and subsequent upliftment project for the family, particularly that the ‘scholarship’ Babamukuru provides is not without strings attached:

The gift Babamukuru provides is a colonizing one as it takes over and objectifies the lives of the powerless, and exploits its resources (the children of the poor and powerless Jeremiah) in the name of modernity and progress. The colonizing gift induces all the debilitating symptoms of nervousness associated with the colonial condition. (391)

It is the rural cosmology of wizards and bewitchment that adds interesting insight into the collective view of Englishness and education. The distrust of the ‘white wizards’ is understandable. The colonizers took land by force, set up mines and made the disenfranchised Africans work in the hazardous conditions for the gain of the Empire. The spiritual implications are intriguing though, Tambu’s grandmother makes a distinction between the ‘white wizards’ and the ‘holy wizards’, an acknowledgment of religious respect that could be forged between the cultures. Babamukuru and his wife are offered scholarships, which they hesitate to accept due to their children and concerns of uprooting them. Yet, as noted by Tambu, declining the offer “would have been a form of suicide. The missionaries would have been annoyed by his ingratitude. He would have fallen from grace with them and they would have taken under their wings another promising young African in his place” (*Nervous* 14).

It is in this way that Dangarembga illuminates a response to English education from the uneducated African perspective. Tambu is only allowed to go to the mission and be educated after her brother, Nhamo, dies quite suddenly of mumps while pursuing his education. There had been a disconnect growing between Nhamo and the homestead, especially when he refused to speak Shona anymore, which was the only language his mother knew. When Tambu’s uncle returns to the homestead to inform her family of Nhamo’s death her mother becomes hysterical and tells Babamukuru and Maiguru: “You are a pretender, you. First you took his tongue so that he could not speak to me and now you have taken everything... You bewitched him and now he is dead” (*Nervous* 54). Mainini makes this claim later during the dare scene when she feels betrayed by Maiguru’s lack of support, “Today I have said it and I am saying it again: she is a witch, a witch. Have you heard me properly? She-is-a-witch. She steals other women’s children because she could only produce two of her own, and you can’t call those two people” (*Nervous* 142-3). The idea of education as a form of bewitchment, and the notion of “tongue” stealing and other anatomical significances of “Englishness” are a central theme in *Nervous Conditions*. While Tambu is inclined to think of education as nourishment for the starving African self, her mother diagnoses it as an affliction, a curse that has taken Babamukuru and Nyasha, and will get Tambu too if she is not careful (*Nervous* 207).

The twin effects of colonial power and male domination playing out on women are emphasized in the ways Tambu and Nyasha each deal with the world around them. Tambu, who sees herself as part of a larger project to uplift her family, is more accepting of each form of domination. Nyasha, on the other hand, rejects the supposed ‘sustenance’ of such ways of thinking. This is thematized in her struggle to control her body, which results in her developing an eating disorder. The power and domination of Babamukuru’s education plays out on men as well. Muponde contends that it is a “technique of social control as well as self-capitalization,” which effectively, “unmans Jeremiah by usurping and thwarting any suggestion of initiative he might have had to rescue his family from poverty, and reduces him to a fawning, uncreative, hero-worshipping, spineless and indolent dependant” (396). Jeremiah and Babamukuru are used in the novel, consistently, as the manifestation of the patriarchal point of view against which Nyasha and Tambu are attempting to define themselves.

In *Nervous Conditions*, food and nourishment/sustenance are important and evocative tropes. There are various points in the novel where food is equated with knowledge in both positive and pejorative senses. Crucially, food is a marker of belonging and authenticity: Nhamo’s tea-drinking early on in the novel identifies him as being on the path to educational and cultural success. It is used by Mainini to scorn her daughter for her greediness. Food appears often as a means of suggesting domesticity, as a way of defining feminine roles, and as a symbolic economy of exchange. The idea is directly evoked when Tambu’s mother starts selling food at the bus terminus to pay for Nhamo’s education (*Nervous* 15). Here, Tambu is aware of her being excluded from the commerce of food and education: they cannot eat the food her mother sells, and the money garnered is only just sufficient for Nhamo’s education. Tambu understands the situation, but struggles to accept it. Significantly, her father Jeremiah uses the trope of food to scorn her efforts at education: “Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean, Grow vegetables” (*Nervous* 15). But when Babamukuru arrives at the homestead for the first time since he and his family left the country, Jeremiah takes a more laudatory approach: “Our father and benefactor has returned appeased, having devoured English letters with a ferocious appetite! Did you think degrees were indigestible? If so, look at my brother. He has digested them!” (*Nervous* 36). Tambu is confused by her father’s reproach to her: “Maiguru was educated, and did she serve Babamukuru books

for dinner?" (*Nervous* 16) She comes to the unhappy conclusion that her father is not sensible, and resolves to absorb the nutritive benefits of her education.

Later in the novel, we read about Tambu's first night at the mission, when she usurps her brother's position in the family's upliftment. In a scene that highlights the importance of food as a bearer of identity, Tambu struggles to cope with the grandeur of the meal she is served. Tambu is acutely aware of how her inability to eat the food and use the utensils separates her from her educated family members. Crucially, we see in this scene how Nyasha has ~~replaced~~ "sustenance with learning/education. Maiguru attempts to comfort Tambu by relating a story of her time in England and her terrible time getting used to the food. Nyasha interjects and openly admits that she does not ~~mind~~ going to bed hungry... when I can't sleep usually what I need is a good read" (*Nervous* 84). Nyasha is then reminded about the book she is currently reading, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a book Babamukuru and Maiguru both have deemed inappropriate for her and thus have hidden without Nyasha's knowledge; upon realising this, Nyasha excuses herself from the table, food unfinished. This causes a confrontation with Babamukuru who, after Nyasha has left to go to her bedroom, grumbles that ~~there's~~ something wrong with her, something very wrong. A good child doesn't behave like that" (*Nervous* 85). I argue that this scene foreshadows much of what will happen to Nyasha in the course of the novel; an aversion to food, an affinity for reading and an antagonistic relationship with her father books and sustenance are the weapons for the war that wages between them. Babamukuru sees himself as the bread winner of the family; Maiguru as the preparer of food. Their lifestyle makes their children able to be educated, yet the knowledge that they, Nyasha in particular, apprehend does little to make them docile or submissive. After the exchange at the dinner table Nyasha sneaks off to smoke a cigarette, an obvious rebellion taking place on the body.

In one of the last scenes of the novel, Nyasha and Babamukuru have another fight at the dinner table over her lack of appetite. She cuts short the fight by pretending to comply with his demands to eat by shovelling down the rest of her plate and secretly running to the bathroom to purge. The struggle is over something greater than father-daughter tensions. It comes down to her ~~hybridised~~ state and the root of the tensions in the conflicting cultures she has been raised in. Tambu notes her weakness over the following days which culminate with a nervous breakdown, a surge of anger and anxiety over the existential state that she and her people are in:

“Why do they do it, Tambu,” she hissed bitterly, her face contorting in rage, “to me and to you and to him? Do you see what they’ve done? They’ve taken us away... They’ve deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We’re grovelling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him.” (*Nervous* 204-5)

Babamukuru and Maiguru run in after hearing the commotion to find Nyasha shredding her history book between her teeth (“Their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies.”), breaking mirrors, her clay pots, anything she could lay her hands on and jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh...” (*Nervous* 205). What is significant here is after all of the references in the novel to consuming knowledge and letters and books, Nyasha destroys a history book with her teeth; an act that is quite obviously conveying that she can no longer “swallow” colonial lies and justifications.

Food is surely not just the measure of the masculine power to provide but it is certainly used as a quantifiable, as well as metaphorical, evaluation of the feminine. There is a family meeting that takes place at the homestead over the span of a week. There are twenty-four family members to attend to and the senior wife, Maiguru, is responsible for feeding them all. Babamukuru brings more meat than can be refrigerated and much of it begins to rot by the fourth day, which we are made aware of by Tete’s, Babamukuru’s sister, comment after spitting out a “mouthful of greenish meat into her handkerchief and, turning green herself, suggested that Maiguru be more responsible in the future” even adding that “It surprises [her] that Mukoma can swallow such food” (*Nervous* 138). Tambu relates that this comment affects Maiguru since she was a “good woman and a good wife and took pride in this identity” (*Nervous* 138). Maiguru’s complex and alienated role as senior wife, head cook, and degree holder is attacked later during the family *dare*, a somewhat official assembly of the patriarchy, which meets to assess the situation happening at the homestead with Lucia, Takesure and Jeremiah. The women spend most of the meeting in the kitchen since it is not their business to be in on the meeting. The ladies are rallying around Lucia, who is upset that she is unable to defend her own name, and who decides to “drag Maiguru into the fierce, sisterly solidarity they had established” (*Nervous* 140). Maiguru denies comment as gracefully as possible, believing it to be none of her business. When she leaves the kitchen, Lucia is the only one to tell her “Good Night” and this is when Mainini sees an opportunity to pounce. She rhetorically asks the kitchen why they did not respond to Maiguru and quickly responds herself:

–Because Maiguru is educated. That’s why you all kept quiet. Because she’s rich and comes here and flashes her money around, so you listen to her as though you want to eat the words that come out of her mouth. But me, I’m not educated, am I?” (*Nervous* 143)

Here again control is established through the metaphors of food and education. Maiguru’s words are likened to something tangibly consumable. Later in this conversation, Mainini takes her aggressions to her own daughter, whom, she feels, has betrayed her. Here again, food is used as a symbol for the treachery she feels has been committed against her:

You think your mother is so stupid she won’t see Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her white ways? ...If it is meat you want that I cannot provide for you, if you are so greedy you would betray your own mother for meat, then go to your Maiguru. She will give you meat. I will survive on vegetables as we all used to do. We have survived, so what more do you want? You have your life. Go to your Maiguru and eat sausage. (*Nervous* 143)

The use of meat and sausage is used as a symbol of economic superiority. Mainini cannot provide Tambu with the lifestyle that she is now used to; Tambu’s predilection for the finer things is maligned and equivocated with their relationship. Tambu is now criticized for being too good for her own mother, a criticism that Nhamo had not received.

The effects of the dual powers of colonialism and patriarchy are touched on in the novel through references to the freedom struggle brewing in Rhodesia, although only briefly mentioned by the young and sheltered narrator. –Tambu comments once that Nyasha wishes to understand "why UDI was declared" (*Nervous* 93), a reference to Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1965, a time which Doris Lessing dates as the beginning of the Zimbabwean War of Independence (439). Later Tambu admits to herself that in 1970 "I was not concerned that freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists" (Sizemore 70). The novel works to suggest that the national struggle can best be understood through the individual stories of those people who live within it, especially those who are subject to various forms of oppression. The engagement with individual identities in the novel is a strong counterpoint to normative ideas of nation-building.

Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* is more closely aligned with the story of the nation. The sequel takes a dramatic departure from *Nervous* thematically, as well as character depictions, and most importantly, Tambu’s narrative voice. Where *Nervous* is a book of hope and escape and

arguably ends with a clear light at the end of the tunnel and reassurances of how things have turned out, the continuation of the story is much more disgruntled and pessimistic. It is my assertion that the gap between publications (1989 and 2006) has much to do with a changing perspective on the nation. In a 2007 interview about the more political themes present in the *Book of Not*, Dangarembga notes, “I see my engagement with that kind of history as something that needs to be done to inform present practices and ways of seeing. I think we have not really unpacked the consequences or the impact of that era sufficiently” (Rooney 58). She later mentions that, “in *Not*, the war is definitely for me one of the characters. You can see this in the way it moves through the novel and informs everything” (Rooney 59). *Not* explores the freedom struggle and cruelties of war in how they affect the African women in the society. That tone is immediately set in the first chapter where Tambu witnesses her sister’s leg being blown-off by a landmine. The optimism of the late 1980’s and the innocence of youth in *Nervous* is juxtaposed with the cynical, even jaded, view on what it is to be a new Zimbabwean and a woman in *Not*.

Ideas of identity change in Dangarembga’s sequel, *The Book of Not*. As I have argued, identity for Tambu in the first novel has much to do with perseverance, female solidarity, and defining herself against her home culture and Western ideals. In *Not*, by contrast, the pillar of female solidarity is absent, she has deserted her home identity, and she finds that perseverance is not always ultimately successful. There are various reasons for this. I would argue that Tambu’s key misstep is a classically Fanonian one as she internalizes her oppression and becomes complicit with it in ways she does not at first realize. As I will detail over the course of this section, Tambu becomes “overdetermined from without” (*Black Skin, White Masks* foreword xiii) and loses her agency, as her desire to succeed places her at ever greater remove from her culture.

The novel opens with an older Tambu witnessing the summoning of her uncle Babamukuru to a tribunal at the village homestead. She is older and more cautious, and her alienation from her mother is apparent even in the opening pages of the novel: “Oh, you *wekuchirungu*! Do you still like *matumbu*, Tambudzai! Can you white people eat *mufushwa* with peanut butter” (*Not* 7) A glance at the glossary that appends the novel tells us that “*wekuchirungu*” means “People from European places”. The idea that Tambu’s distance from the homestead and life at the European-dominated school would have left her unable to eat her

culture's staple dishes resonates with the discussion of food and eating as bearers of cultural identity in the previous section and "Tambu's identity as a black woman is effectively erased by her mother who refers to her as an aloof white person" (Hlongwane 457).

This takes place at a different point in history from where *Nervous Conditions* leaves off. The latter novel hints briefly at the changing times with a passing reference to Ian Smith's UDI, but in *The Book of Not*, the political situation in Southern Rhodesia has become serious enough that it forms a constant presence in the novel. The battles between the white minority in charge of the country and the Black rebels fighting to liberate it form a backdrop to the first part of the novel, and Tambu's position leaves her confused as to which side she ought to be taking in the conflict. The novel's timeline progresses past the point where independence is won and Rhodesia becomes Zimbabwe. In this regard, I discuss how the promise of freedom is undermined by a reality that continues to frustrate Tambu's desire for advancement.

The novel sees a marked shift in the roles of women, which is directly related to the historical conditions of the time. Tambu's sister becomes a Freedom Fighter, and the existence of women who take up arms presents a new category for Tambu beyond those who submit and those who resist. The novel focuses at length on the idea of what role women ought to hold in society: we see Tambu being uncertain over what is demanded of her, an uncertainty highlighted by the following moment of introspection: "Oh, Netsai, how I-wish-you-were-not my sister, who informed you a woman's business is aiming communist rifles at people like kind and gentle Sister Catherine" (*Not* 31). For Tambu, her sister is rendered unfamiliar to her, while the agent of her oppression, symbolised in Sister Catherine, a teacher at Sacred Heart, becomes a welcoming model for her to follow. This reverie emphasises Tambu's state of denial where her identity is concerned: she is motivated to identify with the seemingly benevolent Sister Catherine, rather than her own sister. What is disturbing about this alignment is an instance in class where Tambu is daydreaming and unwittingly grabs the Sister's hand as she is coming back to reality. Sister Catherine recoils and Tambu accepts unquestioningly the disgust that the educator feels by her skin contact (*Not* 31). Beyond skin colour, there are other factors that determine the social order in at the convent. Dangarembga uses food again as one such symbol in the text, in particular, as a marker for prosperity in the dormitories. "The girls took great pride in telling each other how far they'd gone to propitiate their gustatory fetishes. Diverse fish and meat pastes, yeasts extracts,

the powders of beans and grains, whose consumption proved the consumer was a better being compared with others, were stacked at the centre of every table” (*Not* 39).

Tambu holds herself apart from Ntombi, the only other black girl who is of the same age, from the beginning, but we are made aware of the fact that Tambu has access to foods that Ntombi does not and this gives Tambu a sense of entitlement. There is an instance one evening in the dorms where we see food is used as a divisive form of social currency. Patience, one of Tambu’s dorm mates, is admonished for getting in the wrong line for bedtime biscuits and milk with a slap on the wrist. Tracey, a white classmate, offers her biscuits to Patience who “looked at it, and then at Tracey as though both were dirty” (*Not* 75). Tambu is unfazed and takes the biscuit for herself which ultimately ignites a fist fight in the dormitory during which Tambu is accused of a lack of respect and a tendency to side with white people. The biscuit itself is a catalyst for the explosion in the dormitory which gives another example of Tambu’s difficulty in relating to the other African females around her. It is interesting that many of her encounters with other Africans not in her family are mediated by food. We see this when Tambu is served in the dining room of the convent and “[t]he maids came and slammed the plates down in front of Ntombi and [Tambu] at the table as usual. When they had something – a platter of bread, a jug of milk – to set in front of the white girls, they did it smiling gently” (*Not* 122). Similarly, this happens to Tambu in her professional life with her and the “tea boy,” Raphael, as discussed later.

The trope of food is used even further when it is linked to war. There are sisters at the convent whose father is killed in the surrounding violence of the war. Ntombi describes that, “Whenever they look, it’s as if something’s devouring them. Shame, hey, something’s got inside of them and it’s eating them! Completely! It’s even digesting them” (*Not* 129). In this way it is the detrimental effects of the war that is consuming the girls. Dangarembga utilises this metaphorical positioning of abstract usages of food and eating, as discussed in relation to *Nervous Conditions*, again in the sequel. More akin to the food and language metaphors of the previous book, we do, in fact, have an instance of Tambu, “devour[ing] [her] O-Level texts like a cow eating grass to be regurgitated as cud upon the examination paper” (*Not* 165). Devouring language is used when Tambu recites a text during studying: “The words tasted good upon my tongue, seasoned with the memory of my O-Level triumph” (*Not* 171).

The familial climate is markedly different from the previous novel as well. The informal education Tambu was receiving from Nyasha and the inspiration of Maiguru's achievements are lacking in *The Book of Not*; in fact, Tambu has no role models and no friends. The only reoccurring figure is her mother against whom she is determined to define herself. Nyasha, herself, is heavily medicated and prone to zoning out and plays a significantly smaller role. Even Maiguru, who stands up to Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions*, is back to baby talk and fussing in the second novel. Mainini, Tambu's mother, thus becomes the focal point of everything Tambu is trying not to be. The relationship shows signs of strain in the first novel but it is peppered with some level of empathy and understanding of circumstances. Mainini, enraged by Tambu's education, sets in motion the chain of events that lead to Babamukuru's branding as a sell-out at the *morari* but more importantly, this gesture endangers Tambu for her complicity in her white education (Hlongwane 457).

Tambu is always aware of the judgement that her mother passes upon her, although a lot of it is hypothetical. Several times Tambu goes to lengths to describe her mother and "the awful covetous emptiness in her eyes" (*Not* 9) or at one point speculating "if [Mainini] had spirit, it was not great enough, being shrunk by the bitterness of her temper" (*Not* 11). Hlongwane contends that the characterization of Tambu's relationship with her parents is actually a commentary on the education she was receiving, noting, "the shame and embarrassment with which Tambu regards members of her family illustrates the fact that her education is fundamentally racist" (451).

Furthermore, the women, who Tambu would seem to have the most in common with, the girls sharing her "African dormitory" at Sacred Heart, are sources of much grief and alienation. Part of this is because Tambu no longer resists any constraints or injustices with which she is faced. She no longer questions the agents of her oppression but takes her anger out on those with even less agency than her. She is not angry when her white classmate, Bougainvillea, coldly and condescendingly doles out some chocolate milk for Ntombi, her African classmate, but is cross with Ntombi for embarrassing herself and "begging" in the first place (*Not* 43). When Ntombi comes close to subverting the power relations in this exchange, Tambu is again annoyed that she

does not follow it through. Interestingly enough, at this time Tambu is practicing *unhu*⁵; a mode of being that recognizes the humanity of other people. Ensuring the wellbeing of others, she thinks, will ensure her wellbeing in turn. Yet, her interpretation is flawed or misdirected, for in the aforementioned instance in which Tambu condemns Ntombi's begging, her aim is, in a way, to shelter Ntombi and the other girls from that kind of humiliation rather than to question the power relations that occur in the exchange.

Dangarembga goes to great lengths to emphasise Tambu's self-hatred: After Tambu is caught using the white girls' toilets and punished harshly, she vents as follows:

—Idiotic women! The fools who couldn't use a decent sewerage system! If they'd only shown they were conversant with those contrivances, I was sure there wouldn't have been any bans- not on anyone from the bathrooms! Had these people I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all. No one would have been standing here in this humiliation... Oh, I felt yet another surge of dislike for the other girls in my dormitory!" (Not 71)

The event that alienates Tambu, almost completely, from the other African girls in her dorm is her choice to volunteer to knit for the Rhodesian forces. She separates herself from the other African girls. Her desire to advance herself, to distinguish herself from the other African girls, and thus earn the goodwill of her white classmates and teachers, overpowers the sense of community that ties her to the homestead and to the other Black women. This provides another example of how much Tambu, as a character, has changed from the previous novel as she has now internalised her complicity. The knitting is synecdochal of her betrayal of community in the pursuit of her own advancement. In identifying with the war effort, Tambu believes she is advancing her *unhu*, when in fact she is betraying her own community. The reader notes the irony in that at the very moment where Tambu stands in the hall, thinking that she is developing her sense of *unhu*, a concept similar to *ubuntu*, she is aware that the very people she is endeavouring to support do not regard her as a Rhodesian. She allows herself to be comforted by the 'Rhodesians never die' banner, justifying to herself that if they never die then the war was not about decimating people" (Not 154).

⁵ The word *unhu*, which means humanness in Shona, is an African philosophical concept which privileges authentic or meaningful human connectedness as opposed to the individualism that Tambu unsuccessfully fights against (Hlongwane 458).

She wants *unhu* to form part of her consciousness and identity. Her *unhu* is self directed – she seeks to gain *unhu*, which in itself is contradictory to the concept for it is a practice and not something to be acquired and hoarded. In this way, she proceeds to think of *unhu* as a commodity, something to be exchanged. When the other girls in her dorm become aware of her knitting for the Rhodesians, they begin to avoid her; Tambu’s main concern is that the lack of interaction interferes with her “*unhu*” (Not 44). Because she thinks of this philosophy in this way, it is constantly denied to her. Her logic ascribes *unhu* to those who have, like Babamukuru, while denying to those who have not. Her thinking leads her to equate *unhu* with materiality. At this point in the story, the rest of the girls prefer the radio to interacting with Tambu and in this way Tambu questions the amount of *unhu* possessed by the radio and, furthermore, questions whether interpersonal relationships are necessary for acquiring *unhu* or if it just comes down to what people are willing to give you. This thought process continues when she asks herself whether “was it the *unhu* you possessed that earned you your possessions, or did you acquire *unhu* once you possessed them... it became apparent one path to *unhu* was the way of material preponderance” (Not 145).

In this way, Tambu is trying to marry a traditional ideal to a Western value system or trying to understand a Western value system through the lens of a traditional idea. The schism between these two goes unnoticed by Tambu at first but it is clearly visible to the reader. This exemplifies a cataclysmic failure to understand reciprocal ethics. At every instance when she attempts to live out the idea, she is met with disappointment. However, Tambu does not make the cognitive leap to understanding *unhu* as not based on reciprocation but rather on ethical fidelity not premised on the expectation of return. This speaks volumes about Tambu’s relations to others racially: she is unable to see the other Black girls as sharing the same conditions, even with what she assumes is a shared sense of *unhu*. She blames them, or herself, for each disappointment that is inflicted by those in charge. And with each disappointment, she resolves to better herself, so that she will not be lumped with the other African girls, or her mother. To say this is to point out that “Tambu’s disappointment here is foundational” (Mustafa 397). It motivates her development, inspiring her to do what she can to better herself. When she expresses her desire to better her mother by having her learn to read, it is not an altruistic urge, but a selfish one. This is because “the ostensible desire of “educating” her mother is her gesture of “incorporating” her, but only as a copy of her (illusory) self, not as her own, “native,” person”

(Mustafa 397). If she can improve her mother, she can improve herself. Yet she seems to essentially fall short of all of the hopes, dreams, and glory she thought that education was going to bring her. Because she is not allowed to sit in on the science classes held at the boys' school, she does quite poorly in her tests. This seems to be the tipping point where Tambu's development begins its downward spiral. Shortly thereafter her uncle makes it well known that she is "a great disappointment" (Not 186) and accuses her of squandering the education that he has so benevolently provided: "Your education," he rebuked me sadly, "is your greatest commodity! It is as if I have taught you nothing, because you have simply wasted it!" (Not 191).

From this point, Tambu's belief in the benefit of education is cruelly exposed, as it proves to be insufficient to sustain her. In an ironic twist, the only profession that will take her after she has failed to attain educational success is the field of teaching. The stymieing of her developmental path by factors outside her control is visible to the reader: Tambu, however, is unable to see that "the promise of development" is only one of several ruses in maintaining the colonial order of things" (Mustafa 398). She is unable to shake off her denial and see her failure for what it is, namely, an indictment of the colonial system which promised her so much only to fail her at the crucial moment. She blames herself, instead: "But I believed in the college with a practically ferocious tenacity. I may have thought differently, but I didn't believe it. Belief prevailed" (Not 164). Perhaps Tambu is too idealistic in her academic pursuits; yet, throughout the previous novel, she was motivated primarily by the belief that with enough will power and hard work, education would pay dividends, perhaps not making room for external factors she could not foresee. In this way, as Mustafa notes, "Tambu solidifies the groundwork of her displacements: the mode of negativity" she names here, and frozen in the novel's title, is the complex of false consciousness, alienation, misidentification, internalized self-denigration, and misreading" (Mustafa 395). Her education had not prepared her for the possibility of failure. She expresses a profound rage after attaining her degree and describes feeling "petrified by intense surges of aggression" (Not 199). She admits even focusing her rage on her landlady: "Insupportably, she had managed when I hadn't. Yes, I felt passionately indignant when I thought about it... An impulse to perform drastic and damaging acts upon my landlady's body welled up whenever I caught the sound of her footsteps in the hallway" (Not 199).

Her post-academic life is marked by a sense of bitter passivity. She goes to work as a

lowly copy writer at an advertising agency, under her key rival from school, Tracy. Descriptions of this time include her co-workers, none of whom she really likes. Even those described as friendly are suspected and mostly hated by Tambu. An exchange with Pedzi, the perky and pretty receptionist, seems to encapsulate this idea. The younger girl goes out of her way to greet and compliment Tambu, whom she obviously admires as an example of a successful black woman. Tambu is unable to respond to Pedzi's overtures in good faith. She is aware of the insecurity the self-assured Pedzi generates in her and she responds coldly:

Yes, something each time closed at her adulation; a small pane slide down that had always remained raised when I spoke to colleagues in the dormitory and at university who did not exhibit this admiration. When this thing locked I believed this girl who looked like a goddess was mocking. Could a mocking person be liked? How indeed! (*Not* 214)

I argue that Tambu is so caught up in the idea of herself as a failure that she is unwilling to see Pedzi's friendliness for what it is. Her self-image being so damaged at this point, she is not only unable to accept friendship and compliments but hostile to the very idea. The comparison between her and Pedzi is illuminating because in Pedzi we seemingly have a black female who is well resolved and ambitious. If she lacks Tambu's intellect, then the novel shows that this does not handicap her unduly. Indeed, it only further serves to emphasise the idea the education is not the key to happiness.

When Tambu is given her due she is unwilling to accept it with good grace, however, as we can see in her exchange with Raphael, the "tea boy," when she is disrespected and disdained she accepts the treatment as warranted. The exchange occurs when Raphael enters the office to refill tea. Tambu is in conversation with her white co-worker, Belinda. The latter stops what she is doing to exclaim, "Great! Here's the tea boy!" (*Not* 218). This demeaning title obviously aggravates him, causing him to lash out at Tambu, whom he sees as closest to his position. Tambu has not acknowledged his presence, which is signified by the fact she has not yet been to her own desk to collect her mug. On seeing this, Raphael responds with hostility: "I'm not going back down the office. Next time be there if what you want is tea to drink!" he snarled at me in Shona. "I'm not your boy! I'm not your servant, he! We're all workers here! You better hear me properly" (*Not* 219). It is significant that all of this is said in Shona, which not only

excludes Belinda but implicates Tambu. When she gets back to her desk she finds her tea cold with

[a] little puddle around the bottom, where Raphael had plonked it down. This put me into another dilemma. Should I go and throw the tea away in the bathroom? What if the cleaners complained of the stains and dregs? What would Raphael do if he had to carry back a mug of cold scummy liquid? I held my breath and downed the mug's contents. He was so annoyed that I'd forgotten to ask him for sugar. My stomach curdled at the horrible liquid and the tension had it bubbling back up as heartburn. (*Not* 220)

It is interesting that Raphael's demeanour seems to mirror Tambu's, although she is not consciously aware of it. She shares his wretched state. Just as Tambu is more than willing to denigrate Pedzi, whom she envies, we see that Raphael reacts similarly to Tambu. In Tambu's worldview, Raphael's behaviour and state is more normal than Pedzi's because they are more in accord with her own.

Although her relations are strained with her African co-workers, she seems to get along fine with her white colleagues. The dynamics no doubt mirror the larger situation in the country and also magnify Tambu's self loathing. In her stint at the advertising agency she is asked for advice on a campaign for a women's hair care product, Afro-Shine, by a senior copywriter, Dick. Tambu describes the meeting with Dick as one of the happiest moments of her life, feeling the ultimate validation for her work, "I could not recall when I had been happier... For now I had moved forward and been recognised as a result of my own resources" (*Not* 234). The relationship she has with Dick seems to hold allegorical significance. While they are discussing work at a coffee shop she imagines that the patrons are seeing "an intriguing new Zimbabwean couple" and in an uncharacteristically optimistic observation she notes that she could feel the people watching them "nurturing their smiles like hope at this reconciliatory, post-independence harmony" (*Not* 236). She herself basks in her soon-to-be triumph and soon "reward would be reaped for effort" (*Not* 234). Just as her academic acknowledgement had been stolen by Tracey Stevenson at the convent, it is another white person, Dick, who is stealing the glory and efforts of Tambu. And, again, she says nothing and accepts the defeat. She is unwilling and unable to voice her disappointment. Through Tambu's silence, author makes us aware that she is failing to articulate what are highly complex feelings. She even attempts to justify the injustice to herself, thinking "what was good for Afro-Shine was good for the agency which I was a part of, thus what was good for Afro-Shine was good for me. This act that put Dick's name to my work was

good for everybody” (*Not* 237). Soon after, Dick is given an award for the great copy during a social evening for the agency. Tambu’s reaction is to let Dick buy her a drink and then slip out early to her desk to type up a resignation letter claiming that she is about to be married and her husband does not want her to work. Her response to the glib way in which her colleagues mistreat her is emblematic of the nervous conditions of the original novel, where the ideological battle takes place solely in her mind. This compares well with Nyasha’s outburst in the first novel but because Tambu is unable to articulate the confusion and injustice of the situation, she slinks away in a posture of defeat.

The realm of the professional is not the only unsatisfactory aspect of Tambu’s post-academic life. She continues to be alienated even in her living quarters. She describes the anxiety she feels when she enters the dining room of the hostel she stays in, claiming that “these girls on occasion went so far as to prevent my joining them by whispers as pointed as arrows, and sidelong glances” (*Not* 223). The female solidarity felt in the first novel is very much absent from the sequel. For instance, Mainini phones Tambu towards the end of the novel, hostile as ever, attempting to make plans for a visit. After a conversation ridden with guilt, Tambu thinks to herself, “As usual, in my dealings with Mai, shame welled up. Was there any misfortune in the world as bad as being the daughter of this woman!” (228). “In the final analysis the relationship between mother and daughter,” according to Hlongwane, “seems almost unsalvageable... Tambu remains deeply ashamed of a mother who, in turn, does not have much respect for her daughter” (457).

The Book of Not is a very different novel in character, if not form, to *Nervous Conditions*. The feminist voice is subverted to the voice of the fragmented colonial subject in *The Book of Not* whereas in *Nervous Conditions* the feminist voice is in active resistance to being co-opted. The later novel takes on a more filmic tone, but this does not well into the novel medium. The attempt to display the destructive fragmentation of the colonized psyche in the novel’s real-time is over-wrought: it lacks the subtlety of the previous novel in this regard. The sense that the novel is trying too hard to tell an instructive story is reinforced by Dangarembga’s statements on the novel, “I know that many of the younger writers are very concerned to engage with present-day problems which they see as most important. But I think some of us older writers perhaps see some continuity in settler culture and the problems that Zimbabwe is experiencing today. I, for

one, would like to look at those linkages” (Rooney 59). Tambu is no longer an assertive, optimistic female subject (contrast her attitude as a child to the ending), but is a colonized, unresisting subject. In terms of the status of African feminism, the dangers of assimilation, compounded with the growing pains of a newly independent nation, are difficult aspects for women to overcome. With these issues in mind, I will explore similar concerns as depicted in the novels of Kopano Matlwa.

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN, IDENTITY AND EDUCATION IN THE NOVELS OF KOPANO MATLWA

The South African socio-political landscape has undergone a great deal of change in the last two decades and great strides have been made in our critical understanding of the social, cultural and political dynamics at play therein. Here, Sarah Nuttall's usage of the term 'entanglement' is very helpful. Entanglement, as Nuttall describes, "is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies human foldedness" (1). She engages with the concept in her work of South African fiction, noting that "the term carries perhaps its most profound possibilities in relation to race... but brings with it, too, other ways of being, modes of identity-making and of material life" (Nuttall 2). My particular focus is on the representations of black females and the multiple identity positions that are emerging in the post-apartheid nation, and the role education plays in the formation of these identities. Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) sets up a double narrative of two black girls, Fikile and Ofilwe, growing up in post-apartheid South Africa, and narrativises each girl's struggle to define her own identity in a space where culture is conflated to signify class position. *Spilt Milk* explores the lingering tensions in post-1994 South Africa through the narrative of school principal Mohumagadi and disgraced priest Father Bill and their young pupils. Both Matlwa's stories depict how young black women negotiate the ways in which their home cultures mix with the increasingly globalized and media-saturated reality they see around them. Education is a component of this as well and schools are the setting for much of the girls' socialization and interactions with different cultures, while simultaneously being depicted as racially problematic institutions in the novel. Education is seen not only as a status marker in the novel, but as an escape from the troubled home-lives of the girls.

Intriguingly, the role of education is also complicated through its sometimes negative effects on the characters in the novel. Both the girls and their families have a complex relationship to education, Ofilwe's mother is judged and ridiculed by the family for not having completed high school while Ofilwe's brother, Tshepo, a very accomplished high school student, is urged by his father to study Actuarial Sciences rather than African Literature. Tshepo himself realizes that the status accorded to a prestigious education is illusory (Matlwa *Coconut* 29, 80).

Fiks, or Fikile, in her turn, de-prioritizes the importance of education when she drops out of high-school, although she acknowledges the importance of tertiary education in reflections about her uncle's failed attempts at the University of Cape Town. With no successful educated people around her to act as role models, she sees networking with financially successful older men as her ticket to prosperity.

Coconut's exploration of the issues of Black identity in post-Apartheid South Africa is focalised through the two accounts of Ofilwe and Fikile, which run parallel to each other and at times intersect. The novel's title derives from a derogatory term used to refer to a person who is "black on the outside but white on the inside" (McKinney 17). This "white on the inside" part refers to many cultural markers of identity, particularly language. As Lynda Spencer elaborates, "[the term] refers to one who speaks English most of the time, choosing it over an African language, or who is unable to speak an African language, and who is considered to 'act white'" (67). Matlwa uses dual protagonists and narrators to examine the cultural identity of contemporary Black South African women. In order to showcase the identities of the protagonists, Matlwa details intricate cultural landscapes for the characters. The narrator and protagonist of the first half of the novel is Ofilwe Tlou, or Fifi, the daughter of one of the early beneficiaries of BEE and the sections follows her and her family in a gated community in Sandton. Fikile, or Fiks as she prefers to be known, relates the second half of the book: she is an orphan who stays with her destitute uncle in the Mphe Batho Township.

The structure of the novel is peculiar since it is certainly not chronological and has a break in the middle where a different story is told with a different narrator. The two narrators and protagonists, Fifi and Fiks, each recount one day in their lives, but the accounts are littered with flashbacks and asides. Fifi's is the story of not fitting in as a young black child inserted into a white world. Her deep desire to fit in socially is contrasted with her resistance to her Pedi rituals and heritage. Fiks' is the story of a young girl growing up in a township and desperately wanting to attain and be all that her glossy fashion magazines advocate. The two young ladies meet at the Silver Spoon Café, where Fifi and her family are customers and Fiks is their reluctant waitron. Here, Lynda Spencer contends that "[b]y having two narrators the author succeeds in providing the different perspectives of two characters located on each side of the socio-economic fence while struggling to negotiate self-identity in post-apartheid South Africa" (68). I would like to

argue that the structure of the novel is, in itself, a comment on the fractured identities of the protagonists and that, although they share the same heading of *‘coconut’*, the protagonists are ~~speak~~[ing] from two distinct subject positions: one from within the privilege of the plush, gated estates, a private-school education and the modern shopping malls of the suburbs; and one from a sub-economic township” (Spencer 68).

The novel’s structure mirrors Stuart Hall’s concept of differences in cultural identity as ~~the~~ unstable points of identification... which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin’” (226). Hall further problematizes this notion by noting the occurrence of the ~~idea~~ of otherness as an inner compulsion [which] changes our conception of 'cultural identity'. In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (226). Matlwa does exactly this, by having two females of the same nation, race, and age dealing with similar identity struggles from two different economic and cultural settings she emphasizes, as Ralph Goodman notes, ~~the~~ experience of emotional diaspora, of being divided against oneself – and the restlessness of mind caused by it” (110).

Hall goes on to add that each individual has ~~negotiated~~ their economic, political and cultural dependency differently. And this 'difference', whether we like it or not, is already inscribed in our cultural identities” (228). Having established this working definition of cultural identity it is interesting to see how Hall then notes the difficulty of having to represent the multiplicity of identities: simple binary oppositions - 'past/present', 'them/us' fall away as they are no longer viable. Hall’s concept of identity illuminates my reading of Matlwa’s text which is not simply a narrative of black /white, occurring in one fixed time and space. Rather, it stages the marginalized identities of these young girls in a diverse South Africa and the complexities and hindrances they face in their search for themselves. In this way the novel echoes Hall’s understanding of marginal identities that

challenge the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings, which, as Norris puts it elsewhere, 'disturb the classical economy of language and representation'. Without

relations of difference, no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized. (229)

Telling a new story with new characters in the new South Africa seems to necessitate an entirely new style of narration. Ralph Goodman contends that in ~~w~~orking to call into question former ways of framing and narration, the manner of story-telling itself here suggesting how shifting performativity (in Judith Butler's sense of the word) strives against the dominance of traditional racial stereotypes in order to define identity in a postmodern era" (109). Defining identity in the postmodern era is quite the complicated task. Goodman continues, positioning the notion of ~~b~~inary thinking as inextricably complicit with racism in the impoverishment of life during the apartheid era," and it is in this way that ~~t~~hat the concept of entanglement offers a useful way of framing the current South African dilemma" (Goodman 109). It is these complexities of identity in concurrence with the multitude of external factors which are explored in depth in Matlwa's novels.

The depiction of identity is in line with what Spencer calls a trend for ~~e~~merging female writers", such as Matlwa, to ~~f~~ocus on representing conflicting, contradictory and ambiguous identities and revealing the complexities of the female experience in both public and private spaces" (67). There are several instances in the novel which help to map out the terrain of the two main characters by not only showing glimpses into their psyches but also by flashing back to critical moments in their respective lives and interrogating their identities as it pertains to public and private spaces. Public and private spaces are important in regards to interrogating identity in this novel. There are many defining moments throughout the novel as the characters *must* interact, however reluctantly, with their communities.

Ofilwe's narrative focuses mainly on her complicated interactions with her community, and her attempts to understand and define what constitutes her community. She notes that at Pedi ceremonies her interaction is limited, mostly ~~s~~tanding in reverence, [staying] out of everybody's way," and, ~~f~~eeing most inadequate amongst a group of people who all seem to know exactly what roles they play in the age-old Pedi rituals" (*Coconut* 8). She notes her status as an outsider in the midst of her family and people. Matlwa is careful in the way she articulates Ofilwe's perspective, tempering it to reflect her successful assimilation, as well as her ignorance.

Ofilwe states, “I attend this ancient church because I am comfortable here. I understand nothing of the history of the church. I do not know what the word ‘Anglican’ means nor can I explain to you how the church came to arise” (*Coconut* 9). The unprompted admittance of ignorance is crucial.

As such, Ofilwe fits into church just fine, but the social circles of her peers are far more challenging and we witness Ofilwe constantly and consistently being rejected and corrected. During a game of spin-the-bottle at a slumber party she is refused a kiss by a white boy who exclaims, “No ways! Her lips are too dark!” (*Coconut* 45), a phrase that reverberates in her thoughts. One of the only other black boys at her school rebuffs her, declaring that he only dates white girls (*Coconut* 24). She is also given lessons on ‘proper’ pronunciation from her friend, Belinda, who attempts to correct the way she says ‘oven’, “Uh-vin not oh-vin” (*Coconut* 49). Ofilwe reflects on these moments and the pains of her assimilation and the toll that explaining her parents’ customs takes, mentioning that even the other “brown kids” tend to “treat [her] like the scum that they believe they are” (*Coconut* 49). After recalling her memory of Belinda correcting her articulation of English, she expresses that “[h]ate sits heavy on my heart. It reeks. I can smell it rotting my insides and I taste it on my tongue” (*Coconut* 49). It is these moments which really separate Ofilwe from Fiks, this sense of not wanting to be changed completely. She even strives to try to incorporate Pedi words into her everyday speak in an apparent attempt to reconnect with her culture.

Fiks, on the other hand, wishes not to be associated with anyone in her community. From a young age Fikile is reluctant to associate with her peers. Gogo, her grandmother and primary caretaker, urges Fiks to play outside:

„They are all the same’, ‘they are boring’, ‘they can’t speak English’, they are stupid’, ‘they steal my stuff’. You always have an excuse, Fikile. I am fed up with you sitting in here all day reading those fashion magazines. I have a good mind to take those magazines away from you. I thought that they would be a fine way for you to practise your reading but they have taught you nothing but to be a snob. Go outside and play. (*Coconut* 131)

Matlwa consistently demonstrates Fikile’s lack of connectivity to her community, but more than that, her unusual lack of Sapphic relationships. There is even a point where a mother and small child are sitting next to Fiks in a taxi and the sleeping child leans and drools on to Fiks. This is

followed by a loud outburst to the boy's mother and a scathing inner-monologue with the continued wishes to be extracted from her situation:

I am not one of you, I want to tell them. Some day you will see me drive past here in a sleek air-conditioned car, and I will roll up my windows if you try to come near me, because I am not one of you. You are poor and black, and I am rich and brown. (*Coconut* 140)

Her identity and self-awareness is consistently mediated through race, even to the point of preferring the term ~~brown~~ to ~~black~~ as shown above. This reductionist account of identity is also mediated through wealth which is fitting for the job she has waitressing at an up-market café, not-so-subtly called The Silver Spoon. This café is the touch-point for the two protagonists, but at the same time is the setting for many interactions and detailed dynamics.

Fikile's waitressing job allows her to ~~mix~~ with the who's who of this country" (*Coconut* 41). She coddles every whim and each request from her glamorous, white customers yet refuses outright to wait on black families, declaring that ~~they're~~ just an annoyance and a waste of my time" (*Coconut* 164). This is a feeling she seems to confirm upon the Tlou's exit: ~~of~~ course they go without leaving a tip, what more does one expect from black people?" (*Coconut* 176). Fiks' maligning of the entire black race continues when she sides with a white patron who has offended her black co-worker Ayanda by stating:

[d]on't Ma'am me, I can read, thank you very much. If it wasn't for us you wouldn't be able to read so don't you patronise me. Just take it back and bring me a cheese sandwich without dairy products, please!" (*Coconut* 150)

Another instance occurs when she is propositioned by one of her regulars, an older white man who consistently over tips and flirts with Fiks. She considers his offer at one point: ~~Anything~~ worth having comes at a price, a price that isn't always easy to pay... He seems to really like me and I enjoy his company, what is there to lose?" (*Coconut* 176). This is in obvious contrast to her revulsion for black men. This categorical refusal to interact with black people is challenged on the train, where a black man tries to speak to her and Fiks' is eyeing his briefcase, which she assumes is too fancy for the man, ~~I~~ do not look at this man, this man who is a thief like all the other men in this train, and probably an alcoholic and a rapist too" (*Coconut* 133). She meets this man again on her way home. I would argue that his character functions as a small beacon of hope for Fikile. We are made aware that his briefcase is a gift from his boss and soon after, he recalls

to her an experience that he had had that day at his daughter's school. This anecdote serves as an allegorical subtext for the story and both protagonists' struggles for identity and assimilation.

The man relates that he was picking up his daughter at school and was observing the children, "And then suddenly a little chocolate girl walks past me, hand in hand with the cutest half-metre milk bar I have ever seen in my life" (*Coconut* 188). His story takes a turn from its initial positivity to mention that he had "been thinking of home-schooling [his daughter]. She refuses to speak a word of Xhosa and I know it is the influence of that school" (*Coconut* 188). The man notes that the children "were so joyful, those kids. But, you know, I couldn't shake the feeling that they were only happy because they didn't know... And she is just so happy, you know. But, I can't shake a certain feeling" (*Coconut* 188-9). He goes on to outline the plight of the new generation, "I just got so confused as I stood there at the edge of that playground, because I knew that they were happy and I was happy that they were, but listening to all those little black faces yelping away in English, unaware that they have a beautiful language at home that they will one day long for, just broke my heart" (*Coconut* 189). As the man says this, the reader is aware of the complexity of the man's position: integration is encouraged and preferred to segregation, but with assimilation comes the consequence of wiping out diversity. The man is standing at a cultural and generational cross-road that Fiks refuses to acknowledge or examine. The man's statement does seem to directly address Fikile's full embrace of Western values, with no interest or even nostalgia for what she is leaving behind. Fikile is uncertain of what she ought to say to this man's pronouncements, which (the reader is aware) implicate her own position as well. He continues:

Standing at the edge of that playground, I watched little spots of amber and auburn become less of what Africa dreamed of and more of what Europe thought we ought to be. Standing at the edge of that playground I saw tiny pieces of America, born of African soil. I saw a dark-skinned people refusing to be associated with the red soil, the mud huts and the glistening stone beads that they once loved. (*Coconut* 189-90)

This story seems to comment on the future of the country and the dilemmas that assimilation will bring. The novel does not have a clear ending or any indication of what happens to the main characters. Ironically, the man's story of the school children is the closest we get to closure in the girls' stories. As Spencer succinctly puts it, all characters "are forced to negotiate a continuous tension between ethnic African ideals and global values of 'whiteness', life in the black

township and the cosmopolitan promises of the city, the traditional prioritizing of family and community and the allure of self-invention” (69).

The indications of this are seen best in Fikile’s private moments. The one that stands out the most is Fiks’ private thoughts about her uncle. Other than the overt molestation that is outlined, one of the most telling instances is one in which Fiks is looking at a photo album of her Uncle with a white family that Gogo had worked for, “White children *smiling* for Uncle! I remember being filled with such a wild envy and rage that I was unable to understand why that couldn’t be me in the photo, why the Kinsleys hadn’t thrown such a party for me, why nobody had ever thrown any kind of party for me” (*Coconut* 123). Fikile’s desire to be accepted is shown by Matlwa to be delusional, based on superficiality rather than reality. There is no wisdom or experience to draw from, as Fikile, as well as Fifi, are in unique positions generationally, moving into inter-racial and inter-cultural spheres. *Coconut* thus aims to highlight the assimilation process in the new South Africa.

This novel shows how “emerging voices are finding cracks in which to foreground, interrogate, engage and address wide-ranging topics which lacked a form of expression in the past” (Spencer 67). In the next section of this chapter, I examine how these protagonists voice their embodied, corporeal experience of being Black and female within the dynamic of their societies, with attention given to concepts of beauty. From the first page of the novel, there is a concentration on unattainable beauty and the agony that attempting it entails. Ofilwe’s scalp is covered with potent chemicals that are meant to straighten her naturally tightly curled hair. The agony is emotional but also very much physical which is detailed by the narrative: she “was not bothered by the tenderness of [her] scalp... No, [she] was just delighted to be beautiful again” (*Coconut* 4).

It is in this way that the novel focuses on the representation of women by opening with the politics of hair and beauty. Fifi describes the image of the “black American TV girls” radiating from the box of relaxer while she is experiencing “[a] painful exothermic chemical reaction. Burn. Burning. Burnt” (*Coconut* 4). Jessica Murray asserts that “[t]he “pain” mentioned in the phrase from *Coconut* ... extends to the pain that women experience when they are obliged to construct their identities in a social milieu that is fundamentally hostile towards them” (91-2). The situation here implies a lot about Fifi’s lifestyle very early on in the novel, namely having

the luxury of getting her hair done at a salon. Butler argued that gender is performative and is “produced as ritualized repetition of convention” (31); following that logic, hair care and styling become a performance in adherence to beauty standards (Patton 36). Derek Hook expounds on Fanonian concepts of identity noting that

Practices of hair-straightening, skin-lightening... and the enthusiastic adoption of the accent and language of the oppressor, all of these are examples of *inauthenticity* for Fanon. They are voluntary kinds of masking, symptoms of what is wrong in the colonised subject’s psyche. These are negative bids at identity – processes of negation – that constantly *affirm* the coloniser’s culture as the superior term, and dismiss the colonised culture as inferior. (Hook 115)

The concept of beauty is defined, moderated and perpetuated by the hegemonic culture in society. The shared belief that the female body is in some way imperfect and in need of altering is a patronymic concept that goes back centuries to Chinese foot-binding (Patton 25). Matlwa goes to lengths not only to convey the painful processes that need to be endured, but she is also careful to position the act of beautification in the Black feminine space. Zmitri Erasmus asserts that “Black hair is politicised by class and gender. It is also racialised,” highlighting the fact that “racial hierarchies and values of colonial racism have left a deep mark on our conceptions of beauty” (12). Murray contends that “[i]n hair we ... see a powerful example of the well-known feminist insistence that the personal is political and that a rigid separation between the public and private spheres is untenable” (92). In the mirror of the salon, Fifi observes “a comb with the finest of teeth. In the mirror in front of me sat a girl with the coarsest of hair. That the two could work in harmony, I would never be convinced. Such pain” (*Coconut* 3). What is most telling here is that the idea of harmony is belied by the pain of straightening and taming her natural curls. Murray notes that “Ofilwe’s narrative reveals that she considered attaining beauty to be more important than avoiding physical pain” (94). I would argue that this is a metaphor that is contributing to the motif throughout *Coconut* which is an ‘entanglement’ of often contradictory identities: black/white, traditional/Western. To get through this beauty session, Fifi gives herself a pep-talk drawing on fictionalized wisdom, “Pain is beauty’, grandmother used to say. Well, not *my* grandmother, but I am certain *somebody*’s grandmother used to say that, and if my grandmother cared for such, I am sure she would say it too” [emphasis in the original] (*Coconut* 3). Tradition is something that does not need to be real: it is a matter of belief. As the story progresses, we learn that Ofilwe makes a concerted effort to assimilate into the world of her

white classmates, at one point choosing a slumber party at a friend's over a funeral in the township where her family used to live (*Coconut* 9). In using these signals and metaphors, the text —interrogates the various ways in which cultural tensions created by the historical legacies of apartheid, conjoined with American global power, produce a cultural hegemony that privileges —whiteness” over —blackness”, and results in —whiteness” becoming a new form of aspirational identity” (Spencer 68) .

This prioritization of the white culture is frequently brought up in the text. From Ofilwe's realization that she only had white celebrities covering her walls (*Coconut* 92) to Fiks' recollection of answering her teacher's inquiry about what she wanted to be as an adult to which she replied, —White, Teacher Zola. I want to be white” (*Coconut* 135). For Ofilwe, her indoctrination to the dominant culture takes her by surprise to an extent, for she only realises there are no faces of colour on the walls of her room when Tshepo points it out to her. Ofilwe is somewhat ashamed at her brother's acknowledgement of her coconutness,

In his eyes I saw what was only to hit me many years from then. I think it was on that day that Tshepo saw me for what I really was. I wish I had then too; maybe things would have worked out differently (*Coconut* 92-3).

Fiks, on the other hand, actively seeks an association with whiteness and white people. Most of her narration is focused on her negation of her black identity and disparaging her surroundings and the people around her. As she sorts through her belongings, she tells the readers that the items serve a dual purpose and that is to —serve as a constant reminder to me of what I do not want to be: black, dirty and poor. This bucket can be a daily motivator for me to keep me working towards where I will someday be: white, rich and happy” (*Coconut* 118). She maintains this sentiment in her descriptions of the people she passes and sits near on her way to work:

The men disgust me. All of them are a bunch of criminals. A bunch of uneducated criminals. They look at me like they want to rape me and I know they would do it if there weren't so many people around. (*Coconut* 129)

Her self-loathing and outright racist convictions seem to show her conscious alignment with the hegemonic ideas of the white society. Fikile curses, —Black people! Why must they always be so damn destructive? And to think, they have never invented a thing in their squalid lives” (*Coconut*

134-5). Her words suggest that she holds herself apart from Blackness: her ~~a~~alienation from her background is such that she is accused by a black man of being one of the abo mabhebeza‘ [women who reject black traditional ways] who are always wishing to be something that they ain‘t never gonna be‘ (*Coconut* 133)” (Goodman116). The novel shows that this self-alienation has been present from an early age. In a confrontation with her grandmother, Fikile defends her preference for staying indoors with her fashion magazines by stating that ~~H~~‘s hot outside and my skin will get dark” (*Coconut* 131). Her concern with not appearing black‘ is ~~s~~haped by contempt for blackness, it is also informed by her life experience, which has shown her that power and privilege are associated with whiteness” (Murray 103). This conformity appears in Fiks‘ description of the precious items found in her special box, which include some fashion magazines she has collected since her youth; this helps to illustrate Spencer‘ s point that ~~d~~espite inhabiting freedom in a new political dispensation, masses of black people continue to be socialized into whiteness *via* mass media” (*Coconut* 75). The most expensive item she owns, green contact lenses. Fiks explains what the lenses represent to her:

The dainty little emerald-green coloured lenses that float gracefully in the sapphire blue contact-lens solution are a reminder of how far I have come, from the naive orphan child living in a one-bedroom house with her incompetent Uncle in another family‘ s backyard in yet another decrepit township to the charming young waitress with pretty green eyes and soft, blow-in-the-wind, caramel-blond hair (pinned in perfectly to make it look real), working at the classiest coffee shop this side of the equator. (*Coconut* 117)

The box includes skin-lightener, sunscreen, makeup, blond hair extensions, and continuing Patton‘ s argument of the economical standards of beauty, Fiks notes ~~the~~ pieces of caramel blond hair extension which were brought for me as a child to braid my hair with but never used because Uncle misplaced the money he was supposed to pay the braiding lady with” (*Coconut* 117). Beauty for Fikile is understood in terms of money and whiteness; however, her character is far from flattened. As Murray discusses:

Despite these very problematic notions about the superiority of whiteness, Fikile does exhibit many strong and laudable qualities. To dismiss her as a mere victim who has internalized racist assumptions would be an oversimplification that does a disservice to the rich totality of her character. Her determination is clear when she asserts that she knows what she wants and that she is "prepared to do -anything in [her] power to get it. (Murray 103)

It is in the way, as Spencer notes that “Matlwa explores the extent to which the body becomes the site where culture and identity encounter the individual in the construction of an identity” (75). Fifi too puts effort and energy into her appearance, but she displays awareness, albeit a fraught one, of her blackness. Fiks, as Spencer discusses, is amongst “those who do not have access to an alternative world-view that affirms and celebrates blackness”, and as such she begins “to internalize white supremacist thought and values” (75). She is constantly surrounded by images that enforce whiteness as the dominant standard of being. The influence of Western culture on the protagonists of *Coconut* is felt in more than just notions of beauty but in the all encompassing ways in which the young women present themselves, including how they speak.

What stands out in the novel repeatedly is the relationship between language, education and identity. Representations of education play out in numerous different ways, especially in Ofilwe’s family. Her mother is uneducated and thus her views are marginalized by both Ofilwe and her father. Further, Ofilwe’s brother, Tshepo, is also a figure who necessitates discussion because of his political awareness. He has a perspective in the novel which is similar to Nyasha’s in *Nervous Conditions*. Tshepo makes for an intriguing study in that his education and privileged background are scrutinized when he gets a job serving fast food. His education makes it difficult for him to not only be accepted by his black co-workers, but to be acknowledged by his white, condescending boss or the customers. In this way education is illustrated as an accomplishment that is not immune to racist tendencies, no matter the promises and opportunities that it implies.

Ofilwe recalls an incident when the white men come to her school to survey the children’s home languages and she is interrogated and ultimately dismissed for claiming English, the annoyed teacher punishing Ofilwe by making her stand with her nose against the wall. One of the men responds, “Just tick her under Zulu, it’s all the same” (*Coconut* 57). By framing education as maintaining exclusionary practices, Matlwa complicates the notion that it is a bearer of enlightenment. Nazir Carrim contends in his article on the educational discourses of post-Apartheid South Africa that:

'white' schools make consistent reference to an 'us' and 'them' language, which not only indicates the racially exclusivist ways in which they define their own identities, but also the predominance of assimilationism in their experiences of the desegregation of their schools. The assumption here being that

'they' are coming to 'us' and the more 'they' are like 'us' or the more 'they' become like 'us', the more acceptable 'they' become. The 'host' culture is not viewed as lacking, since deficiencies, if any, are seen to be tied inextricably only to the incoming 'other'. (311)

The onus of learning and assimilating is solely placed on the black population; they are the ones having to play catch-up. There is a moment Ofilwe further describes the inherent racism and ethnocentric views that dominate the education in the upper-middle class area her family moves to. She recalls that

Our new home was closer to my father's Sandton City offices and Tshepo's preparatory school. I was to begin nursery school that year and Tshepo grade one, although he should have been in grade two but was held back a year, because he did not speak English as well as his new, elite, all-boys' school would have liked. (*Coconut* 6)

From this we can see that education is a status marker for Ofilwe and her family; it distinguishes her from her relatives in the township and identifies her as a child of privilege. Spencer points out that in the township, ~~her~~ older relatives treat her differently from her cousins, who have been educated in township schools. Fifi is encouraged to concentrate on her books, while they run around attending to all her needs" (71). We see that Ofilwe develops an inflated sense of her own importance, from the way she justifies this special treatment: ~~It~~ is because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently. I knew from a very young age that Sepedi would not take me far" (*Coconut* 54).

She feels that her grasp of ~~the~~ TV language; the one Daddy spoke at work, the one Mama never could get right, the one that spoke of sweet success" (*Coconut* 54) guarantees her success, and thus is disinclined to learn Sepedi because she associates it with her cousins and their relative poverty: ~~What~~ has Sepedi ever done for them? Look at those sorrowful cousins of mine who think a brick is a toy. Look at me. Even old people know I am special. At family reunions they do not allow me to dish up for myself" (*Coconut* 54). For Ofilwe, the fact that the older members of her family treat her with more due than she would otherwise be accorded can only strengthen her view of education as a tool of upliftment. Her education, she feels, elevates her and makes her better than her less prosperous relatives. But, as Lynda Spencer points out, she ~~is~~ deluded in her belief that her education will concomitantly offer her access to certain privileges while uplifting her cousins from their underprivileged circumstances" (72). Ofilwe's

feeling of superiority in terms of her education is in part reinforced by her father's treatment of her mother. During an argument in the novel he shuts her down quite sweepingly by attacking her lack of education saying, "Don't give me that rubbish, Gemina. You understand nothing of the real world. You could not even finish high school" (*Coconut* 81). Ofilwe follows her father's lead and uses this idea that her mother is uneducated as an excuse to not inform her about what is happening in her academic career in an attempt to not be embarrassed by her mother's thick accent:

Mama didn't go to high school, so what was the point of telling her about the parents' evenings? In theory, parents' evenings are there to give parents an opportunity to assess their children's scholastic progress, to ascertain if all milestones are being... Mama would not understand any of that... (Coconut 51)

In this way, Ofilwe's education is functioning as a growing gulf between herself, her mother and her culture, as Spencer argues,

her [mother's] presence at Fifi's elite school is a tangible reminder that Fifi does yet not truly fit into this world. Matlwa seems to be suggesting that when Fifi uses language as an excuse to exclude her mother from participating in certain aspects of her life, she is effectively still being controlled by others' use of the language: she is forced to disavow her mother and thus to deny a part of herself. The freedom Fifi finds in English is ambiguous indeed. (70)

There is a concentration in the novel on the function of language and accents as a signifier of race, class and identity. As mentioned above, there is a point at which Ofilwe's friend helps to correct her pronunciation of English words, "now say b-ird. ' Not b-erd', but b-ird" (*Coconut* 49). The event resonates deep within Ofilwe, although she does not like to be corrected, it was at that point at which her accent is prioritized and as Spencer notes, "Fifi sacrifices Sepedi, her first language and the language of communication with her mother, for a fluent White South African English accent, because it will give her the recognition she desperately desires" (71). However, what separates Ofilwe from Fikile in terms of their perceptions of language and accents is that there is a point toward the end of Ofilwe's narrative where she actually begins to attempt to start implementing Sepedi words into her everyday speech, perhaps as a generational desire to get back to her roots, in a manner of speaking. Spencer contends that, "[w]hile language functions to exclude Fifi, Fiks envisions the articulation of an English accent as a sign of achievement and privilege" (71).

Fikile takes it upon herself to perfect her accent, she explains her motive, “People don’t realise how much their accent says about who they are, where they were born and most importantly what kind of people they associate with” (*Coconut* 154). Language and accents are an undeniable component to the way in which she situates her identity. Carolyn McKinney, in her study of Black accented English in South Africa, describes an interview with a young female learner, Gugu, who comments on the distinction that can be made:

Gugu shows her association of ‘white people’s English’ with snobbery and furthermore with a particular kind of elite consumerism in the reference to exclusive international fashion designers such as Vuitton and Gucci. Similarly, on another occasion where learners at this school were discussing varieties and different accents of English in their English lesson, Gugu speaks about ‘Louis Vuitton English’ as a kind of ‘posh’ English... [which] speaks of the social class dimension in different accents and varieties of English in South Africa; Gugu is not merely linking posh English to white speakers but also to wealth and the ability to consume or at least to the desire for elite consumption. (McKinney 14)

This reflects Fiks’ perspective and value placed on accent. Accent is image is an argument Fiks makes at numerous times in the novel (*Coconut* 137, 146). Spencer describes the perceived importance of English, noting that “[i]n the global structure, English, the currency of business, is linked to power and associated with whiteness; in the South African context, in spite of eleven languages being designated as enjoying ‘official’ national status, English remains the dominant language of power and finance” (69).

Fikile boasts that she had “even started speaking in the English language even when I do not need to. I am no longer concerned with what I sound like because I have come to believe that I sound like any other English-speaking person” (*Coconut* 137). It is not just pronunciation but diction itself is emphasized as she details that she can “use words like ‘facetious’ and ‘filial’ in everyday speech and speak boldly, without hesitation. Not like Uncle, who spews out fragments of Shakespeare that makes little sense to him or anyone else, but with true insight and understanding” (*Coconut* 137). Just before the transition into Fikile’s narrative, Ofilwe adds this ominous yet profound appraisal the process of racial and cultural assimilation in post-Apartheid South African schools:

In every classroom children are dying. It is a parasitic disease, seizing the mind for its own usage. Using the mind for its own survival. So that it might grow, divide, multiply, and infect others. Burnt sienna

washing out. DNA coding for white greed, blond vanity and blue-eyed malevolence. IsiZulu forgotten. Tshivenda a distant memory. (*Coconut* 93)

Here Ofilwe outlines the pervasive cultural assassinations that happen in the educational institutions of the country. As a result, there is an inherent preference and desirability for whiteness over blackness. This sentiment is echoed at the end of Fikile's narrative.

Language is a divisive subject for the Tlous. Education is more than a status marker for the Tlous; it is not only about which schools are attended but, in the case of university education, what subjects should be studied. It is interesting here that in this and the other novels examined, there is an often very singular goal of education in the views of the adult characters. Education is seen as a necessary tool for advancement and procuring a suitable career that will facilitate a spouse and children. Tshepo is the most politically conscious and self-aware character we come across in the selected texts, the second being Nyasha. He serves an interesting function in *Coconut* as someone who is able to successfully incorporate some of the more contradictory elements of his cultural context and his newly privileged life. A crucial moment here occurs when Tshepo and Ofilwe's parents discover what they think is a mistake on Tshepo's university application. When they confront him to discover why his form says he has applied for a Bachelor's of Arts Majoring in African Literature and Languages, and not the Actuarial Sciences degree they had agreed on, Tshepo's reaction stuns them with him stating, —I want to write' ” speaking out for himself in a way that runs contrary to his character (*Coconut* 79). Tshepo's experiences are actually detailed quite extensively in the text. His character functions in the way that Nyasha's does in *Nervous Conditions*, meaning that he is the politically aware outcast. There is a point in the novel where Tshepo goes to work at a fast-food restaurant. We get a glimpse of his experience via a journal entry of his that Ofilwe finds. The entry outlines his difficulties in assimilating into the work environment; his first problem is in feeling that he is too good to be lumped in with the rest of his colleagues as the boss rages:

She asks us, between profanities, why it is that we have difficulty distinguishing between the two, and whether it is because we only have a crèche-school level education. I am offended. I must correct her, point out that I, Tshepo Tlou, in fact graduated as Dux Scholar from my junior school, taking all the subject prizes including The Reader Award and the certificate for Most Promising Pupil from an Underprivileged Background. She will curl up in shame when she hears I have received honours three years in succession at my current highschool, am Vice-Captain of the senior cricket team despite my age, co-chair of the debating

society, deputy president of Student Link and have just recently been offered a scholarship to further my education at any tertiary institution in the country. I, however, dare not utter a word, it is still early, I must be patient, there will come a time when I will educate this woman. (*Coconut* 27-8)

Yet, his feelings are complicated by the fact that he wants the kitchen staff to accept him as one of their own; he imagines them thinking: “These Model C children know nothing of the real world. They are shocked by the ways of Umlungu [white people]. It is good you have come to work, boy. There is much you must learn” (*Coconut* 29). It is not just dynamics with his co-workers that create tension for him but also the customers’ often rude and dismissive behaviour irks him: “I want them to listen to the manner in which I speak. I want to slap their stuffed faces with my private school articulation and hurl their empty skulls into a dizzy spin with the diction I use... I demand respect” (*Coconut* 29). The frustration is echoed in each of the novels examined, especially in *Spilt Milk*, as it is the primary motivation for Mohumagadi’s founding of her school of excellence. Many characters struggle with being treated poorly because of skin colour; yet, find it difficult to establish or assert their academic credentials in every day social situations.

Fikile, on the other hand, drops out of high school preferring instead to begin work as a waitress. Her education is not obtained through classes, novels, or even just an intellectually curious spirit like Ofilwe’s, but through her reading of fashion magazines, which reinforces her English but instils superficial values. The role of education is less than ambivalent: her uncle prides himself on being educated (although he only attended varsity for a year before dropping out), but he is to all intents and purposes a failure. Through flashbacks in the narrative, educational institutions are also shown to be spaces of racism and prejudice. Fikile lives with her uncle, who is characterised by constantly quoting Shakespeare. She covers his background and we are made aware that at one point her uncle was in university, sponsored by the family his mother, Gogo, worked for,

No one knows what exactly went awry in his head because as the story goes Uncle just came home after his first semester at the University of Cape Town with a letter of exclusion from the medical school in his bookbag... He lay in bed for weeks sobbing and eating whatever Gogo put at his door and that was the end of it, the end of Uncle the smart one, the one who spoke the white man’s language, the one who would save us. (*Coconut* 126)

Here, education is represented as a means of upliftment that was disappointed by her uncle’s failure. Fikile adds that, “Gogo told me that some blamed it on the Kinsleys, that they had seen a

capable young black boy and thought it their right to remove him from his home and his people in the township where he belonged and whisk him off to their thatch-roofed house in the suburbs where they confused him with their white this or that and then dropped him when he crumbled in the real world” (*Coconut* 126). It starts to make sense that Fikile deprioritises the idea of education as her Gogo seems to frame it as merely a white ploy to just be taken away, or more than that, as something that is actually emasculating as she notes that, “[o]thers secretly suggested that it was Gogo’s fault... for allowing him to go to university and not encouraging him to work like other men” (*Coconut* 127). Her view is that her uncle was simply not intelligent enough to succeed, “Uncle failed dismally and was excluded from the medical school at the University of Cape Town because he was an idiot. Simple. Uncle was an idiot and got what idiots got. He probably didn’t study for any of the tests because he idiotically thought he was too smart to study” (*Coconut* 127).

Fiks explains the purpose for her exit from academics noting that, “when I got back to school in January, Vula Mehlo Secondary School, mind all air-brushed and sweetly scented in Ridgley’s new fragrance, I felt strangely out of place, detached, as if I was watching them. Bo Zanele, bo Thabo, bo Meshoe seemed to be on Bop TV in black and white. There were so dull, so dirty, smelling of petroleum jelly and wearing the same old faded brown tunics, white socks (now yellow) and worn school shoes” (*Coconut* 167). She concludes that she no longer belonged in school, explaining that “It was like I was a puzzle-piece, pulled out of the puzzle and bent and now I could never fit back in. I’d seen pictures of another life, a better life, and I wanted it. So I walked out of the school gates and never went back. That was 1999, the beginning of grade ten, the beginning of Project Infinity” (*Coconut* 168). Project Infinity is the name of Fikile’s plan to be successful and get out of the township. The goal of prosperity is a very serious one for Fikile, and she often imagines scenarios in her lavish future where she gets to glimpse at the others she has left behind. This element of imagination close to delusion can help to account for the fact that Fikile admittedly fictionalizes her own personal story as a means to gain status and acceptance from patrons and co-workers at the cafe. Lauren Berlant’s notion of “Cruel Optimism” could be applied to Fikile’s situation. Berlant defines this concept as that which

points to a condition different than that of melancholia, which is enacted in the subject’s desire to temporize an experience of the loss of an object/scene with which she has identified her ego continuity.

Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss.
(21)

Fikile's practice of her false identity is her attempt to gain the appearance of having an adequate social and economic background:

My name is Fiks Twala. I have a second name, Fikile, which I never use because many find it too difficult to pronounce and, I must admit, I really do like Fiks better. I grew up in white environments for the most part of my life, from primary school right through to high school. (*Coconut* 146)

As the reader is aware, her childhood is not at all how she portrays it. She goes on to explain, "I have never been able to relate to other blacks, that is the honest to God truth. Gogo with her endless praying, Uncle and his laziness, the dirty kids at school, I understood none of that. And the part about my name, well, I mean, everybody that matters to me calls me Fiks so it might as well be my first name" (*Coconut* 147). In a somewhat uncharacteristically reflective moment Fikile justifies the lie, "The pretend stories of my life serve the purpose they are required to fulfil, 'Fake it 'til you make it'" (*Coconut* 147). The formation of identity is also significant in the naming of the characters or, rather, the self-naming of them, as seen here with Fiks, though it can also be pointed out that Ofilwe is often referred to as 'Fifi'. This seems to be Matlwa's comment on the practice of compromising and 'de-Africanization' in the emerging black middle-class.

Matlwa references the dynamics of young women in their families in many different ways, emphasizing their very real economic and cultural entrapment that still exists in the post-Apartheid South African context. The dynamics of the Tlou family structure is quite interesting in that they are financially prosperous but still very much affected by traditional patriarchy. There is a point in the novel where Ofilwe eavesdrops on her mother's phone call to Koko, Ofilwe's grandmother:

Koko was speaking softly and so sternly with Mama. Koko said that Mama needed to stop acting like a spoiled child. Koko said that John – Daddy – was a man and that men do these things with other women, but that it does not mean he does not care for Mama. Koko said that Mama lives a life that many women from where she comes from can only dream of and that she cannot jeopardise that by 'this crazy talk of divorce'.
(*Coconut* 12)

The patriarchal system here is intriguingly reinforced by an older female family member. What seems to resonate the most with Ofilwe is when Koko tells Gemina, “Without him, my girl, you is nothing.” Nothing. Such a strong word. Nothing. I wondered about many things after Koko put down the phone and Mama walked up the stairs to slam her bedroom door” (*Coconut* 13). Matlwa skilfully uses Gemina as a reminder that a woman of means is not immune to the setbacks of womanhood. She is uneducated and without many other options, her own mother chastises her naivety and her perceived ingratitude. This is a subtle nod to the importance of education: similar to Tambu’s mother, Mainini, in *Nervous Conditions*, Gemina is depicted as being trapped and held down by her culture and lack of education.

Matlwa is careful to detail the uneasy merging of the Tlous’ traditional culture with their new surroundings. There is a memorable and rich moment that seems to fully encapsulate the experience of the Tlous reassessing their identities in terms of their circumstance. An attempt to hold a thanksgiving ritual in the Little Valley Country Estate, where the Tlous live, goes dismally awry. Both sets of in-laws come to enjoy freshly brewed traditional beer and to be present for the ritualistic slaughtering of a cow. When Ofilwe’s father arrives, he has not brought a cow and instead turns up with a “subdued chicken in an unnecessary cage” (*Coconut* 72). He does, however, recall that “Koko had stressed the importance of a cow, so Bra Alex had suggested that they buy a slaughtered one at the butcher and had requested that its blood be collected in a Tupperware dish so that it could be used for the ceremony” (*Coconut* 73). The mishaps continue as the residential security arrives at their home citing infractions of rules from the Little Valley Country Estate Code of Conduct which outlined that livestock was not to be in the possession of any residents. The last straw for Ofilwe’s mother is when she rages at her own mother while simultaneously scrubbing out the animal blood that had spilled on to her carpet. Gemina scolds her mother, “you happy now, ma? Now that you was embarrassing me in front of the eyes of my in-laws and my neighbours” (*Coconut* 74). What seems so heartbreaking about this scene is the embarrassment, followed by anger, that Gemina feels when the ceremony is performed outside of the context of the township. Spencer argues, “Fifi’s mother denounces the ceremony as ‘witchcraft’ and a reminder of ‘our backward ways’, berating Grandmother Tlou – the chief bearer of traditional values and practices – for covering her ‘carpet with blood’ and filling her ‘kitchen with dirty flies’” (*Coconut* 74). In Matlwa’s text, this invasion of the undesirable components of her indigenous culture, which focuses on and violates the family’s

space, evokes Fifi's deep concerns with issues of identity and place in the new South Africa, concluding as follows:

I do not know where I may have lived before, or who I may have been. I do know that this world is strange, though, and I somewhat of an anachronism. Locked in. Uncertain whether I have come to love this cage too. Afraid of the freedom that those before the time before-before knew. There is jeopardy in the sky.
(*Coconut* 75)

The focus on the lack of generational experience is a running issue in the novels examined. Fikile's familial situation is far more dismal than Ofilwe's. Fikile explains that her mother had committed suicide while Fikile slept next to her as a young girl, "After my mother slit her wrists and let her blood spill all over me, right until I was soaked through to my skin as I slept against the hollow of her stomach, Uncle was the only one who was willing to take me in" (*Coconut* 114). Early in her narrative she describes her living situation with Uncle and his over-whelming self-pity, which often turns into sexual abuse, she describes, "Uncle would then take my little hand and gently slip it into the loose tracksuit pants he wore at night" (*Coconut* 113). She even minimalizes the experience noting that, "Uncle had never touched me in a bad way and all I had ever done was rub his snake when he was sad to stop him from crying" (*Coconut* 115). She does have a relationship with her grandmother, but we are shown glimpses of the difficulties of women whose job it is to raise other people's children. "How come you never make cupcakes for me, Gogo?" "I don't have money, Fikile." "But you have money to bake for madam's children!" (*Coconut* 163). The abuse in conjunction with her blatant feelings of neglect gives us a fuller picture of the challenges that she, as a black woman in South Africa, faces without a strong, supportive family structure. The incident helps contrast the economic disparities between Fikile and Ofilwe, highlighting the privileged life that Ofilwe leads and how that opportunity is not without its challenges in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Matlwa's second novel, *Spilt Milk*, addresses the progress and shortcomings of the rainbow nation after just over a decade and a half of democracy. The story grapples with racial reconciliation after Apartheid, but outlines how the next generations are carrying the torch much more successfully. Women in this story continue to deal with constraints of maternal and marital expectations, using education as a means of upliftment for the protagonist herself, as well as her pupils.

Decades after a childhood love affair earns upright school principal Tshokolo Mohumagadi and disgraced preacher Father William Thomas (a white priest) expulsion from their communities, the two characters are brought back together under the most unlikely of circumstances. Mohumagadi, headmistress of the elite Sekolo sa Ditlhora School for talented black children, takes in Father Bill as an after-school teacher much to the dismay of her students and faculty. Thus begins a battle of wills and wits for the hearts and minds of the students living in the shadow of revolution and change. Using two characters, Father Bill and Mohumagadi, Matlwa tackles the uneasy relationship that exists not only between races, but even between Christians and atheists, as well as men and women. This novel is different from the ones discussed previously in that it is narrated from the perspective of the educator rather than the learner. It is thus not a bildungsroman, but it aligns itself thematically with the other texts in that it also focuses on function of education as well as the representation of black female identity.

The novel, for the most part, follows Mohumagadi. It does, however, begin with a long, dramatic, and –beautifully lyrical description of the birth of South African democracy and its rapid descent into rampant consumerism and corruption” (van der Schyff). The story tackles the bitterness that remained, or in some cases, grew in the 15 years after 1994. Percy Zvomuya describes the opening lines as a "cavalcade of a sentence, broken up by more than 10 commas, goes on and on, building to a euphoric climax. It is a sentence reminiscent of novelists writing in the Romance languages and after reaching its peak it is followed by yet another that goes on for half a page” (Zvomuya). This immediately sets up the allegorical motif of the novel: the bitter and broken pasts of those on both sides of the racial divide and how the schism is not yet mended. Matlwa seems to give us plenty of reasons as to why the divide has not been closed, but interestingly enough, she seems to place it squarely on the shoulders of the protagonist, Mohumagadi, whose reactionary and exclusionary practices and bitterness ultimately lead indirectly to the death of a young student. Mohumagadi sees herself as the leader of a struggle to arm the black youth with an education, whilst in the reality of the novel, as summed up from the plot, she is giving them ideologies that are no longer viable in a diverse social landscape. The novel ends with a similar voice to that of the beginning, closing with: –She had never stood up from her chair during assembly before, let alone to hold someone’s hand, a white man’s hand, but even Mohumagadi knew that we had to stop hating at some point” (*Spilt* 195).

The narrative does not wholly focus on Mohumagadi; Father Bill's journal entries interrupt her focalisation. Father Bill's diary, addressed to God, becomes a supporting document in the service of Matlwa's national allegory, rather than an illustration of the character's deepest thoughts and emotions. The white priest and the black principal, former lovers, both deeply affected by their separation in 1994, create the framework for this South African allegory. After 1994 Father Bill disgraces the church and is somewhat shunned by them, whereas Mohumagadi is praised and feared for her tenacity and gumption, but has an empty house and life. The plot of the novel is rather sketchy, apart from Father Bill's arrival at the school and the obvious threat his presence holds for Mohumagadi's carefully constructed facade of power and control. He steps in to mentor the brilliant and troubled students but is essentially a glorified babysitter, there to watch them complete their lessons after class. Since the story functions largely as an allegory, the characters seem to be exaggerated tropes, and interestingly enough, these caricatures provides a cautionary tale for those who are unwilling to leave the past behind them. As Litheko Modisane puts it,

the narrative does not struggle to help the readers navigate their fingers towards the authorship of these failures, the new black middle class. Apparently, black people, chiefly represented by the protagonist Mohumagadi, are caught in a time-warp of anti-white-ism and are not prepared to forgive the past. Against this sorry state, the novel suggests that it is not wise to cry over spilt milk". (Modisane)

The novel attempts to get at some greater truth or lesson in the current South African context but somehow falls flat. Mohumagadi's anger is one of personal hurt, which is then placed on to anything deemed white'. Allegorically, this serves to supposedly mimic residual resentment from apartheid but only in a very one-dimensional sense. Worse, though Bill is a disgraced priest, he is the moral high-ground, proposing a philosophy that is closer to the rainbow nation philosophy than Mohumagadi's militaristic mind-set.

Mohumagadi, the main character in the text, is represented as an empowered black female. What I and other critics (Modisane, van der Schyff, and Zvomuya) would argue is that the creation of this character and how she is represented in the novel actually seeks to blame the racial tensions on black people, specifically on members of the middle class. The book, when read as a South African story, follows the mingling of races, masked as a love story gone awry, and details the bitterness that grows out of the innocence of 1994. This dawning of political

awareness and freedom is not, perhaps, what was expected, and the stringent rejection by Mohumagadi of any and everything considered white is essentially criticised for its narrow-mindedness. The only white character, Father Bill is characterized as bumbling, awkward, afflicted with rashes and warts, and yet overall portrayed to be ‘good’. His easy-going attitude and love of pop-culture contrasts with Mohumagadi’s militant and uptight focus on political history and black empowerment. This is a particularly poignant description of the two early on in the story:

And even though Mohumagadi seemed like a tormented, angry woman, understood only by those she had worked with for years, and even though she appeared to have to try hard to be politically correct, everyone was thankful she was focused on making the school great, and everybody, even the white newspapers, agreed that it was a good thing. At least she was not Mugabe-angry, at least she was not that. (*Spilt* 6)

Matlwa continuously reminds the reader that Mohumagadi is angry and bitter, highlighting the allegorical significance of the still-broken race relations that 1994 aimed to reconcile. There seems to be some large gaps in her characterization and life story. Zvomuya even argues that “[t]he characters have been pruned of so much personality that they only work allegorically” (Zvomuya). We get the idea that Mohumagadi has sacrificed her personal life to take on the noble and necessary task of educating the future, “She was patient, patiently developing a group of young people who would make the change” (*Spilt* 45). But there are reflective points in the text where Mohumagadi rethinks and justifies to herself her decisions that have relegated her to an empty home, “She hated the fact that her house smelt of nothing. Not of *sebeta*, gravy and pap cooking on the stove, not of Domestos on clean tiles, not of children jumping on a bed, not even of sun. Not that she wanted any of that. She just wished it smelled like something” (*Spilt* 95). We glean a clearer picture of the struggle that Mohumagadi has as a woman; she is not immune to the expectations of her society to marry and procreate:

But they didn’t understand there was no other alternative for her and not everyone was made for the three children, a husband and ousie. She had a white maid, a school full of exceptional children, a column in the newspaper, and no man to slow her down. They didn’t see that some people needed to sacrifice their personal lives for something greater than themselves, and that it was a labour of love. She was no more unhappy than the wife of some BEE giant who drove around in a fast car with a bunch of Grade Ten girls. We all choose. She just chose differently. (*Spilt* 96)

What is interesting here is that she seems to parallel her decision with Father Bill's choice of profession, in that they both seem to have required personal sacrifice. The 'they' that Mohumagadi refers to does not seem to really exist. The second page of the novel informs us that –She belonged to no people... No place, no person, no friend, no neighbour, no preschool teacher who could identify her. And at a time in this country when to get anywhere or anyplace one needed to be known, it was quite a risky thing she did, coming out of nowhere, with no struggle, no prison, no party, no nothing" (*Spilt* 2). At the end of the book, Mlilo, the brightest of the pupils, has died, and Mohumagadi quite harshly tries to fathom it all. Interestingly enough, she uses imagery that also gives us a sense of her lesser-known nurturing side, –She had failed the children, fed them the bitter milk from her withered breasts" (*Spilt* 193). It is interesting in the way that she presents her femininity as possibly toxic.

Moreover, Mohumagadi is characterized as being a very stubborn and controlling figure, which is allegorically significant and also her downfall,

A large, angry, anxious, afraid part of her did not want to just sit there and do nothing while he, a threat to her world, her planet, her universe, moved freely within her school. She did not want to fight the deep desperate desire to get up and go out her office and back down that corridor, a desire so strong she ended up urinating on herself on her seat. It was not the first time her body rebelled against her mind. (*Spilt* 112)

And it would not be the last. Mohumagadi has more than metaphorical control issues, she actually wets herself at one other point in the text when her and Bill have their climactic and title-inspired fight. The first incident quoted above occurs when Mohumagadi decides for the first time since his arrival not to visit Bill's classroom. In the first incident, she tried to analyze the situation herself, –[s]he was angry. Again. This time a frustration kind of anger, for whom was she to direct it at?" (*Spilt* 112). Mohumagadi's impotent rage is only turned inwards. Her actions, motivations and behaviours are judged by the reader relative to Father Bill's. It is hard to imagine Mohumagadi as anything less than a racist in many ways. As Modisane notes,

[t]he motif of 'spilt milk' recurs in the encounters between the book's bitter protagonist, Mohumagadi, and her past in the form of Bill and any symbol of whiteness... William does not escape her deep-seated hatred for white people... But the consequences are not as pretty as the children who, having harvested liberal doses of Mohumagadi's vision, also throw anti-white sentiments about. Poor, disgraced Bill is the first in line to taste the bitter taste of Mohumagadi's poisoned chalice to the children. (Modisane)

Although the description is harsh, it is not inaccurate. It is the exclusionary practices and views of the school that ultimately pose the largest problem in the novel, which is only addressed after the death of a student and the ending where the black woman and the white man hold hands. Modisane argues that, “In spite of her apparent progressiveness, Mohumagadi simply fits the bill of a fascist and atheist black matriarch who pollutes the minds of the precocious pupils. Her cultural consciousness finds resonance in the buildings, gardens and playgrounds of the school which, ostensibly, bear out her disdain for whites” (Modisane). This disdain is not unique to Mohumagadi’s character; the descriptions that the children give of their respective mothers offer insight into the problems with reconciliation that the novel highlights.

Again, as has been my argument thus far, the novel best functions on the level of political allegory; this effect is due in part to the characterizations of the children. The greatest criticism of the characters of the children has been that the dialogue is hard to swallow being that the vocabularies and conceptualizations the children have are hardly believable, as Zvomuya notes, “Some of the dialogue, for one thing, is not credible. Who has ever heard a 10-year-old girl who speaks in this way: “My mother wrote a book on the sexual emancipation of black women, a sexual awakening of sorts, a wonderful, timely book that has really liberated so many of our African sisters.”” (Zvomuya). Further, van der Schyff groups the children along with the already present exaggerated South African tropes, “The four children Father Bill meets at the school show occasional glimmers of fascinating and complex personalities, but for the most part they, too, remain two-dimensional characters in the service of a larger allegorical message and, thus, often speak in ways no ten-year-old child ever would” (van der Schyff).

The incident for which the young students are being punished is first told to just be sexual acts on the bus; however, later, we are told that the students had actually been making a biology project in which they were using their own rapidly changing genitalia as the visual focal point. In a strange and awkward part of the novel, Father Bill agrees to let them screen it in the classroom.

They all settled down to watch their biology project. It was really them on the screen; their genitalia, their breast buds, their pubic hair. Although they covered their eyes, peeped between fingers, hid their faces behind their books and giggled in profound embarrassment, there was no vulgarity to any of it. It was the strangest thing Father Bill had seen in his entire life. The film really did explain the developmental process well. He was impressed but tried not to look at the private parts of a bunch of overzealous, highly ambitious

kids who has taken one school project a little too seriously. He shook his head and chuckled silently to himself. Sekolo sa Dithhora it was indeed. (*Spilt* 175)

This is the crux of the plot because shortly after this Mohumagadi walks in on the screening and essentially ransacks the classroom in anger: –she opened up their school bags and overturned them, threw the contents of their chair bags onto the floor. She kicked down the bookshelf...” (*Spilt* 177). Mohumagadi’s rage unintentionally strengthens the already growing bond between Father Bill and the students.

One of the students is daughter of a DJ turned writer and activist; Ndudumo Mazibuko, is, in her own words, –[t]en years old and sexually conscious” (*Spilt* 21). Her character is representative of women’s sexual liberation and female independence which would seem to be a positive portrayal but it is cautionary as well in the way she has to defend her mother from being called a slut to Zulwini, the most religiously affiliated student. She defends her mother’s working pointing out that it is –[b]ecause people like you are always going around telling kids that being a virgin keeps you more beautiful and that even in marriage the number of times you hump should be kept to a minimum. I think you are all lying. You set rules that you can’t even keep yourselves. That’s all my mom’s trying to say. Why does that make her a slut?” (*Spilt* 121).

The mothers of the students deserve some scrutiny in terms of the representation of women, as, unintentionally; perhaps, Matlwa’s text condemns working mothers. Ndudumo’s mother is represented as a jet-setting career woman coming off the heels of new-found fame, essentially abandoning her daughter and leaving her at the school. Mohumagadi herself is quite judgemental of the woman, as we are privy to her private thoughts as she examines this particular woman, judging her controversial career and her insistence on making her tea with worm water and not from the kettle. Moya, the other, shyer girl in the group, explains to Father Bill the influence that Ndudumo’s mother has on Ndudumo, –she says her mom said it’s healthy and that a girl should not only examine herself every day to see how she is growing but touch herself too” (*Spilt* 136). The details of this are discomforting, as they are intended to be. No surprise that Ndudumo herself actually kisses Father Bill while they are chatting and their eyes meet –then she kissed him, she kissed him like she was strangling him but there was no disputing it was a kiss. He wanted to push her away” (*Spilt* 122). There is an acknowledgement of the kiss

a few pages later where they both agree not to tell anyone; it is thereafter never touched upon again in the novel.

Zulwini, the most devoted of the priest's student admirers, recalls a memory for Father Bill of his mother who "is CEO of Maatla Power House" and once, as a birthday wish, he asked her to go to church with him, "One of the greeters at the door was wearing an old National Party T-shirt... mama was so angry" (*Spilt* 158). She leaves in the middle of the service and he goes home to find she has eaten his birthday cake. Zulwini shares the story as a way to express how he has been victimized for his beliefs, in the school and by his own mother. This is another representation of the mother as intolerant, bitter, with a noted distrust of white people and religion.

Moya's mother is another example of the evidently poor role models the students have for themselves in these cultural landscapes. Moya describes her mother as having an overwhelming fear of the night, which translates to her making excuses and lying to people about evening meetings (*Spilt* 141). Moya explains that her mother is simply scared of "crime and stuff" and opens up a bit more to reveal that her mother is a diplomat. The fear is so paralyzing for Moya's mother that she will not even let Moya eat in the car for fear that the "smash-and-grab guys at the lights" (*Spilt* 143) would give them trouble for it. The interesting part is Moya's mother's even more complex problem, fearing her own insecurities in claiming that "only white people complain about crime, only white people immigrate" (*Spilt* 143).

The references to language in the novel are also used to show the exclusionary practices of the school. In fact, it is actually a selling point for the parents, for "when they heard that there was an alternative to the schools where brown boys and girls only ever got certificates for Xhosa and Zulu, well, their minds were made up" (*Spilt* 6). Mohumagadi continues to make every attempt to represent herself as a politically conscious, black middle-class educator who will not let the children fall into the evil greedy hands of the white man. This is evident not only in the way she treats Father Bill, but the students' reactions to him. The introductions in the first meeting are important in that we feel the very real gap in the cultures immediately. Father Bill tries to make small talk with Mlilo, "So, where are you from, Mlilo? You speak English beautifully. All you children speak so beautifully." To which Mlilo unflinchingly replies, "Fuck off" (*Spilt* 84).

A look at the particular type of school Mohumagadi has cultivated: Sekolo sa Dithhora (School of Excellence), is telling. The students are taught only by those in possession of PhDs; she notes that “[t]he teachers were carefully selected; only those who were believed to have the ability to inspire growing minds, encourage a pursuit of knowledge and instil a sense of ambition were chosen. And what a relief it was for mothers now that they didn’t need to wake up a little earlier to force hard straw hats onto course(sic) hair and unwilling heads” (*Spilt* 6). The authoritative teaching style and very strict regulations even borders on brainwashing. As opposed to the other novels examined, in *Spilt Milk* there is more attention paid to the actual landscape of the educational institutions. Modisane points out that

[t]he campus is bedecked with insignia of Africa’s historical memory and political consciousness. In this, the novel makes the gross error of lending to Africanist political and cultural thought, the function of a blanket anti-white attitude. In doing so, it adopts a seriously misplaced aesthetic choice and ideological course. (Modisane)

Yet, Mohumagadi’s actual vision of it does not seem so bleak and exclusionary, but it has been implemented in such a way that it functions as an overcorrected reaction to white domination. She hopes for it to be “[a] place where Mathematics would not simply be a tool taught to tally mortality rates, to compute debts and to add zeros to failing economies, but a means to as something to the nothingness, to create change, fill space, organise thinking and multiply results” (*Spilt* 4). She goes on to imagine it, ironically enough, as “[a] place where History would not be a subject of chronicled post-independence dates of resentments, war and hatred but would stand as a witness to all things overcome from all centuries gone by. A reminder of where we have been and where we no longer want to be” (*Spilt* 4). I find this proclamation particularly interesting since much of the novel’s plot is set around Mohumagadi’s own bitterness regarding the past.

Her representation as a black South African depicts her as crude and idealistic, especially in her plans for the school to be a place

where circumstance would not divide us, and poverty would be left outside the gates. A place where the elderly listened to the young and the young took the podium and led. A place of pride. A place of truth. She said it would be a place where the begging bowl was overturned and used as a stepping stone... And if we didn’t believe it? We could fuck off. (*Spilt* 5)

In her initial claim, there would be no divisions; however, not much later she talks about how she attempts to reach out to those with means, “They were smart kids, all the kids in her school were, that’s why they were here, but she was smarter and had much to teach them, especially the moneyed ones” (*Spilt* 24). She wishes to create a generation that is independent economically and psychologically, while still somehow being prejudiced against and intolerant of white people and culture. Perhaps the novel is more a warning of the dangers of grudge holding.

The second point that should be made about the long quote occurs where she tells all that do not believe her to “fuck off”. The diction here is quite telling in that although she is the headmistress of a school the priority is the message and not necessarily elocution or simply times tables. Mohumagadi’s ideologies are regurgitated back to her by her students. She asks Mlilo, after finding him ditching Father Bill’s class, “Is impertinence the culture of this school, Mlilo?” “No, Mohumagadi, but neither is bringing a white priest into our classrooms” (*Spilt* 60). Zulwini out-right refuses to attend a class where the instructor is an atheist. The novel uses powerful imagery to evoke the dominant ideologies of the cultural disharmony in present South Africa. But somehow the revolutionary names inscribed in Mohumagadi’s school seem to suggest that it is no longer necessary to continue fighting the struggles of the past; rather to consider the healing power of reconciliation, and more blatantly, religion. Father Bill, as a character and an allegorical representative of white South Africa, has his own demons to deal with, although his are not tagged so much with any racial tag, but more an innocent ignorance. Father Bill is not really made to respond to injustices of the past, either in his personal life with Mohumagadi or in the allegorical sense of apartheid. The portrayal of Mohumagadi’s anger is the focal point, the text encourages us to dismiss any part Father Bill may have had in breaking her heart or any responsibility the white population held for apartheid. He is a bumbling, disgraced, man of God and we are made to feel sorry for him, while Mohumagadi should know better than to hold such a grudge and she is punished for doing so with the death of Mlilo.

Both of Matlwa’s texts sift through the complicated aspects of pluralistic identities in the ‘new’ South Africa. Presentational facets from colour to accented speech to level of engagement (or lack thereof) in ‘white’ culture are crucial to the creation of modern African female identities. Education is a means to attain material success and acceptance, Mohumagadi is a facilitator of

education and ideologies that she deems important the preservation of black culture in South Africa. In my next chapter, I further discuss the novels as stories of the nation.

CHAPTER 5: HYBRID IDENTITIES, POWER, MORALITY AND NATIONAL ALLEGORIES IN DANGAREMBGA AND MATLWA

In my previous two chapters I have analyzed key symbols and motifs that both authors employ in their representations of women, identity, and education. Until this point, both authors have only been read individually. In this chapter I will be integrating the texts from Dangarembga and Matlwa, by comparing their approaches, intersections, and contradictions in representing the female African experience in the form of the Bildungsroman. In looking across all four novels I will be arguing that they each function as allegories of their respective nations. The concept of cultural hybridity, that is the notion that cultures (values and rituals) are mixed through contact with one another, comes up in each of the four novels. The way I am going to analyze this concept will be through the representations of identity, more specifically as it relates to language and values, including accent and education. I would also like to look at education as it relates to identity and power.

Hybridization is represented more as a problem than a solution; Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* is a self-proclaimed hybrid and she cites it as the reason her father is disappointed in her. What makes it problematic is Babamukuru's inability to relinquish (patriarchal) power while his daughter is finding hers. Nyasha can no longer speak Shona when she comes back from England with her family, and is unaware of customs, as observed by Tambu early in the novel. Nyasha even begins making traditional pots in an effort to re-connect with her lost roots. Having experienced this, Nyasha cautions Tambu when she is accepted to the convent school. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi contends that "Nyasha is afraid that growing up in such a space colonizes the self through the process of assimilation that encourages one _to forget who you were, what you were and why you were there" (NC 178-79)" (Nfah-Abbenyi 63). Nyasha's fear is that Tambu will experience the same alienation from her cultural background that befell her. And I argue that it ultimately does.

The first pages of *The Book of Not* detail Tambu being summoned to the homestead to watch Babamukuru be beaten by guerrilla soldiers essentially for his perceived collusion with the whites. Tambu does not, at this point, have any discernable political views. In this same vein, Tambu's mother, Mainini, an assumed conspirator in Babamukuru's attack, regards Tambu as

being on the wrong side of the struggle because she has chosen to go to the convent school and to embrace Western ways. On their way to the meeting with the soldiers, Tambu assesses, “I believe she would have spoken differently if she had thought I was more of an ally. But Mai was probably frightened of this girl who was growing beyond her into the European world” (Dangarembga *Not* 10). Tambu’s hybridized identity seems to allow her loyalties to be called into question. The hybridization of Tambu’s identity has led to a mistrust of her values, offering an interpretation of the post-independent Zimbabwe. Dangarembga represents Tambu, to borrow a term, as a “coconut”. But unlike Fifi in Matlwa’s novel, Tambu in *Not* does not seem to be able to function in her new environment; she is aimless, somewhat educated, jobless, homeless, and estranged from her family.

Similarly, in *Coconut*, the various characters experience issues with their identities because of their socio-historic positioning. The novel takes place in post-1994 South Africa, the girls look to the West for their cultural cues and there is a distinct movement away from and much trepidation about the traditional ways. As Ofilwe notes:

At nuptial and burial ceremonies, at thanksgiving days *ge re phasa Badimo*, I stand in reverence, out of everybody’s way, silently taking it all in, feeling most inadequate amongst a group of people who all seem to know exactly what roles they play in the age-old Pedi rituals. As the only female grandchild, I fear that day when my turn comes to run these sacred occasions. Organise, arrange, coordinate, sort out, control, fix... (Matlwa *Coconut* 8)

This anxiety associated with hybridity happens in other social situations as well. Ofilwe’s brother, Tshepo, describes his own fears in dealing with his black co-workers:

I am afraid of them, I know I am different. I reek of KTV, IEB, MTV and ICC, although I have tried to mask it behind All-Stars sneakers and a free Youth League election T-Shirt. I am certain they will catch me out as soon as I open my mouth. (Matlwa *Coconut* 26)

Fikile has obviously adopted some of the superficial values and aesthetic standards of the West; I would even argue that consumerism and the pursuit of “whiteness”, as she defines it, is her ultimate motivating force. Yet, unlike Ofilwe, she occupies a different economic situation as she shares a room with her uncle in the township. She invests all of her focus and energy into her “Project Infinity” which is her goal to be “rich and brown” instead of “poor and black” (Matlwa *Coconut* 140), even if she has to lie, flirt or steal, which she does. She steals black work pants

(119), flirts with A-list customers (176), and deliberately fabricates her background and family life when asked (147).

Ralph Goodman argues that in *Coconut*, —Both Fifi and Fiks are continually engaged in socially transgressive behaviour which is conscious and intended to carve out an acceptance of new entangled identities, alongside existing identities – and much of the text constitutes a debate around such issues” (117). This suggests that instead of settling for an identity that is hybrid, or some amalgamation of cultures and identities that already exist, they are essentially creating something new by challenging their situations and positions, even if it is not particularly enabling. The work of Sarah Nuttall comes to mind here. Her usage of ‘_entanglement’ is helpful in discussing emerging identities as Nuttall applies this term directly to her study of South African texts, noting that in this context, —the term [entanglement] carries perhaps its most profound possibilities in relation to – racial entanglement – but it brings with it too, other registers, ways of being, mode of identity-making and material life” (2). This is to be contrasted with a traditionally —solitarist’ approach to human identity, which sees human beings as member of exactly one group” (Sen xii). Matlwa’s fictionalized South Africa is characterised, in part, by a focus on power and identity, which is created through a particular perception of education. In *Coconut*, education is a mark of prosperity whereas in *Spilt Milk* it is a means of revolution and simultaneously a tool of maintaining control. I do not believe that either author advocates a singular pure identity; the success of Lucia in *Nervous* and Tshepo in *Coconut* map out, at least rudimentarily, a way in which to navigate issues of plural identities.

Mohumagadi of *Spilt Milk* enters into this power paradigm as well. Often in the novel, she has internal political rants to justify her life pursuits, particularly her commitment to the school she began. Mohumagadi often meditates on identity and power and how it relates to race relations in South Africa; she says, —The perilous thing about being the victim... is that you are never forced to hold the mirror up to yourself. No one ever asks you to evaluate *your* actions, *your* motives, *your* intent, and so you continue with no points checked and no questions asked” (Matlwa *Spilt* 4). This quote comes at the tail-end of a small rant about the state of things post-1994, the white fear that had been diminished —[b]ecause... the *Dark People* became their own

oppressors” [Italics in the original] (Matlwa *Spilt* 4). She gives this rant as a contextualization of the atmosphere in which she began her school of excellence.

Allusions to mortality rates, debts, and aid connote the problems Africa has been riddled with during and since colonisation. Mohumagadi aims to lift the antiquated idea of what it is to be African up to a more intellectual and thoughtful identity. The implied meaning in this passage suggests that for Mohumagadi, the way for her to create change is through education, and not just an education for herself, but in educating others, much like Babamukuru. Peter Ekeh makes an interesting observation on the relationship between power and education in the postcolonial sense:

Standing somewhat apart from the rest, but central to the ideological promotion of the legitimacy of the colonizers in Africa, is the pervasive emphasis on the distinction between 'natives' (that is Africans who have no Western education) and Western educated Africans. (99)

This notion can be applied to many instances in the novels discussed. The perception of education as a distinguishing factor for the new independent African female identity and status is prevalent in each of the novels. In *The Book of Not*, Tambu updates the reader on Nyasha’s status, noting that she

had missed a year of school, because of her bulimia, so she was only in form three. As a result of her being held back, combined with my new aim that pushed me forwards, I felt equal to engage her. As she was at the mission school, where Maiguru could keep an eye on her in case she relapsed, Nyasha’s books were of the inferior African syllabus. However, that her texts were beneath the standard of those we possessed at Sacred Heart did not matter in my cousin’s case as she was herself so superior. (Dangarembga *Not* 116-7)

Here we see for the first time, Tambu standing up against her once intellectually intimidating cousin. Here the novel highlights the distinction between the ‘_naive’ (for my purposes, Tambu’s use of ‘_inferior African syllabus’ as ‘_native’) and Western education. Immediately after her observation of the ‘_inferior African syllabus’ she unknowingly contradicts this position by revealing her own ignorance, while still maintaining her colonial-inspired racist views:

[Nyasha] shrugged a shoulder at the exercise from her own bed, where she was reading a book she had not bothered to share with me, which rather than being revolutionary seemed to be about agriculture for it was

called *A Grain of Wheat*, written as far as I could see, by someone like poor Bongo in the Congo, a starving Kenyan author. (Dangarembga *Not* 117)

Tambu here illustrates the influence that the school and contact with white culture has had on her views, in a greater sense; the text seems to punish Tambu for her misguided interpretations of what it is to be the new African woman. The novel gives us a sense that Tambu's rival at Sacred Heart, Ntombi, will be successful and is not having as much trouble finding her way. She seems to have a purpose and has a similarly politically-aware point of view to Nyasha. The text details that "[Ntombi] was studying languages in order to enable communication later between Africans who could not understand each other as they spoke French or English or Spanish or Arabic or Portuguese" (152). Tambu is not at all grounded in her identity, not even enough to pick a side for the war; she is almost indifferent to the outcomes, knowing only that her sister's leg was a casualty. I argue that it is one of the key theme in *The Book of Not* where Tambu's education is initially seen as a collusion with white people, yet, in reality, it actually does not end up setting her apart from others of her race nor does it propel her into any sort of measurable success. She, at one point, volunteers to knit for the Rhodesian military, earning herself the label of 'traitor' by her African dormmates; yet, she is too passive to stand up for herself to any white person. She aims to please the white people, and condemns her own people, but the novel still ends with her jobless and homeless. We can see the extent to which she buys into the illusion that all that is decreed by the convent school is holy and right. Babamukuru receives a letter describing Tambu's bad behaviour at the convent school. Only later does she realize that the practical ineffectualness of her education and adopted point-of-view keep her alienated from the metropolitan Zimbabwean identity she wants to attain while also keeping her culturally separated from her past. Not that education as a whole is ineffectual, but Tambu did not stand up and fight for the acknowledgement of her marks, and just passively lets Tracey receive the accolades. She makes a similar choice when she does not stand up for the credit she is due at her job at the ad agency and the text punishes her weakness. She does not seem to know exactly where she fits into the cultures of Zimbabwe.

This cultural separation can be found in how Tambu equates the war effort taking place while she is in school with the concept of a Christian education. Her head mistress at the convent school addresses the ladies: "The troops are mounting a great exercise to enable us to continue

to with our mission to educate you in a Christian way. I think it would be appropriate to show our appreciation. Volunteers, please raise your hands” (132). Tambu then proceeds to raise her hand and simultaneously drives another wedge between her and the other African students. After Tambu’s poor final marks and subsequent and unenthusiastic start as a teacher, she is pessimistic about her prospects.

As Fawzia Mustafa points out about Tambu in *The Book of Not* that—in a canny recreation of the Foucauldian power/knowledge nexus, the cousins are discussing Nyasha’s teacher’s limitations in the grammar of standard English, and Nyasha’s reconciliation over her teacher’s authority to “correct” her otherwise correct usage” (Mustafa 402). The practice of “correcting accents” is used over and over again in the novels as a representation of the inherent condescension and ethnocentrism in the act of correcting. In both of Matlwa’s novels, she illustrates situations of accent anxiety. Lynda Spencer notes that, “*Coconut* exposes the anxieties experienced by Fifi’s inability to articulate English in the proper accent and the challenges she faces in negotiating her way in the suburbs” (70).

Ekeh argues that in defining education in terms of moral and amoral that, “[t]he native sector has become a primordial reservoir of moral obligations, a public entity which one works to preserve and benefit. The Westernized sector has become an amoral civic public from which one seeks to gain, if possible, in order to benefit the moral primordial public” (100). Although, it more specifically applies to the metropolitan area in which Tambu ends up, the more rural areas are very much within Ekeh’s “native sector”. Babamukuru does not have to grapple with the secular much, perhaps only in England. Babamukuru takes up becoming educated almost as a service to his family to lift them out of squalor. Tambu, in speaking of arriving at the mission in *Nervous Condition*, informs us that, “the real situation was this: Babamukuru was God, therefore I was an angel, or at the very least a saint, and forgetting how ordinary humans existed— from minute to minute and from hand to mouth” (Dangarembga *Nervous* 70). His educational achievement, and of course his status as the patriarch, are regarded as moral traits. Tambu notes the moral nature of her education in *The Book of Not* reminding herself that, “[t]his intellectual exercise, I reminded myself, and the moral manoeuvring that resulted, were a part of building up of character I needed to make my way in the world” (Dangarembga *Not* 120). Tambu mediates her education and development in terms of morality, and even through the religious themes that

emerge. Nyasha's dissenting opinion throughout *Nervous*, along with Tambu's refusal and resentment towards her parents' Christian renewal of their vows, reflects the push for secularism implicated in the novels.

Matlwa seems to have very interesting views on religions' influence on black culture, which will be explored in greater detail in the discussion of *Spilt Milk*. Both Fifi and Fiks reflect on religion, God, and prayer in their own unique ways. Fifi, at one point, attempts to grapple with the greater aspects of her identity as a black girl in the Anglican Church by asking her mother, "Tshepo says they, the missionaries, tricked us Mama. Or doesn't it matter?" (*Coconut* 9). Her mother's response is one of capitulation to their present circumstances, which, I would argue, implies a degree of complicity in the perpetuation of this hegemonic discourse. Fiks too explores her identity by means of religion, yet it is still passed through her innately racial interpretations. At one point Fikile details her Gogo's fervent prayer rituals, Fiks sees it as futile and thinks to herself, "Gogo, she never considered that perhaps God made some races superior, as an example for other races to follow. If only someone had suggested that theory to Gogo, then she would have spared herself (and me!) a whole lot of carpet burn and time spent sending off bootless prayers" (*Coconut* 157).

What this novel demonstrates through these depictions is that the formulation of physical identity for these two Black female protagonists is beset by the influence of a hegemonic culture that intervenes in how they see and construct themselves. It is one of the novel's recurring preoccupations, and it segues fittingly with what I discuss in the following section, namely the effects of education and language on the protagonists' formulation of identity.

In *Spilt Milk*, Zulwini, one of the students serving detention, tells Father Bill that he looks just like God (157). It has a much different effect here, however. Father Bill is a disgraced white priest, so the comparison to God is only skin deep; he only looks like God because he is white. Race is then tacitly equated to moral character. Race and religion are forces that play back and forth in *Spilt Milk*, as Zulwini's mother is put-off by her only visit to church when one of the attendants is wearing a National Party shirt. This opposition to white culture and religion is established much earlier in the novel by Mohumagadi, when she learns of Father Bill's situation, "the bishop was desperately searching for a place outside of the church to station a priest who had _defaulted and fallen prey to the desires of the flesh", Mohumagadi rejoiced. How perfect to

bring in a banished white priest!” (Matlwa *Spilt* 9). It is precisely statements like this which have drawn critics to charge that Mohumagadi’s attitude and antagonism towards anything ‘white’ seems to call for a majority of the blame for the lack of racial cohesion post-Apartheid, on the black-middle class, if looked at allegorically⁶. Yet, Father Bill only brings a more open and accepting view point, essentially giving the students enlightenment and exposure to mainstream ideas, not even religion. The text is suggesting that bitterness and resentment of the injustices of the past is poisonous; only a tempered and racially neutral view is worth exploring.

Similarly, anti-white-ism is a prominent trait in Tambu’s mother, Mainini, in both of Dangarembga’s novels. In contrast to Mohumagadi, she rails against education, although a school like Sekolo sa Dithlora certainly was not an option in the circumstances of pre-independent Zimbabwe. After her son, Nhamo, dies, her resentment is directed towards Babamukuru, his family, and the education and colonial values he represents. Those resentments are then placed onto Tambu. Mainini cannot provide Tambu with the lifestyle that she is now used to; Tambu’s predilection for the finer things is maligned and equivocated with their relationship. It is a relationship that continues its decline in the second novel. Tambu describes the cause of her avoidance of the homestead and her mother:

I did not have the heart to return three times a year to fetching water from the river, the juddering paraffin lamp light and sadza with only one, extremely small, portion of relish. There was, in addition to that, my mother’s constant innuendo, ‘Oh, you, wekuchirungu! Do you still like matumbu, Tambudzai! Can you white people eat mufushwa with peanut butter?’ (Dangarembga *Not* 7)

This mockery only serves to drive Tambu further away from her mother and the ways of the homestead. The class-distinctions that are associated with food can be found in Matlwa’s novels as well.

In *Coconut*, one way that Fifi identifies herself against her community is through the class-consciousness associated with food, —. inside my home it is not the smell of sautéed

⁶ Litheko Modisane succinctly puts it in his review of *Spilt Milk*: “Importantly, the narrative does not struggle to help the readers navigate their fingers towards the authorship of these failures, the new black middle class. Apparently, black people, chiefly represented by the protagonist Mohumagadi, are caught in a time-warp of anti-white-ism and are not prepared to forgive the past. Against this sorry state, the novel suggests that it is not wise to cry over ‘spilt milk.’”

prawns and ricotta stuffed pasta with mushroom sauce that wafts into the garden, but rather the sharp smell of *mala le mogodu*” (Matlwa *Coconut* 75). This connection with the domestic space and food appears again when Fifi is describing her mother’s role in the house, detailing that “[s]he wakes to intermittently stir the samp and beans which she had left in a pot to soak overnight so that they are soft and pulpy, ready for Daddy’s breakfast at 7am (nothing else fills his stomach quite the same)” (Matlwa *Coconut* 79). In addition to the class associations, another view is that these are examples of Fifi’s mother holding on to tradition. However, there are examples in the text that illustrate facets of the culture that is rejected, as Goodman points out the reaction to “Fifi’s mother denounces the ceremony as ‘witchcraft’ and a reminder of ‘our backward ways’, berating Grandmother Tlou – the chief bearer of traditional values and practices – for covering her ‘carpet with blood’ and filling her ‘kitchen with dirty flies’ (Matlwa 74). In Matlwa’s text, this invasion by the corporeal, which focuses on and violates the family’s space, evokes Fifi’s deep concerns with issues of identity and place in the new South Africa...” (Goodman 114).

I will now look at character development and representations of gender roles and identity. I will be examining the novels informed by Achille Mbembe’s usage of the terms *selfdivision* and *objecthood*⁷ to analyze the representation in the novels of the emotional, social, and cultural fissures in the characters’ identities. Both Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Condition* are under the watchful eye of Babamukuru who has high expectations for them as young women. The expectations are gendered from the very beginning of the novel when Tambu’s father, Jeremiah, discourages Tambu from pursuing an education because she would not be able to cook books and feed them to her husband (Dangarembga *Nervous* 15). Although Babamukuru does not have the exact same take on education, he does seem to admonish Nyasha for her growing intellect

⁷ “Fundamental to both currents of thought are three historical events, broadly construed: slavery, colonization, and apartheid. A particular set of canonical meanings has been attributed to these three events. First, on the level of individual subjectivities, there is the idea that through the processes of slavery, colonization, and apartheid, the African self has become alienated from itself (*selfdivision*). This separation is supposed to result in a loss of familiarity with the self, to the point that the subject, having become estranged from him- or herself, has been relegated to a lifeless form of identity (*objecthood*). Not only is the self no longer recognized by the Other; the self no longer recognizes itself” (Mbembe 241).

and curiosity, as she has not presented the traits of a proper lady. Mustafa argues that in following an “internalized and gendered logic,” Babamukuru thought Nyasha as a failed obedient, or “good” or “ideal” *daughter*, [which] bespeaks the failure of her putatively proper person. In other words, the cost of her resistance necessarily costs her herself, and the novel (re)writes her accordingly” (393). This seems like the starting point for many of Nyasha’s problems.

What this section aims to analyse is the identity of these characters, many of which are described by critics as being broken, split, and divided. As Nfah-Abbenyi argues,

Nyasha presents a devastating crossing of political colonization and the construction of subjectivity in the post-colonial woman and subject. Assimilation alienates and negates Nyasha’s Shona-self, positioning it as Other, while affirming and reinforcing her English-self, one she is not comfortable with. (64)

This observation echoes Hall’s definition of cultural identity being in a state of transformation. Nyasha, however, is certainly characterized in both of Dangarembga’s novels as being much more self-aware than Tambu. Nyasha knows that the cost of her truth is the sacrifice of her father’s ideal of a proudly Christian and Shona daughter. Tambu, on the other hand, stumbles on her path to self-realization, quite painfully at times, particularly in *The Book of Not*. While Nyasha informs herself and accepts her father’s tacit disapproval, Tambu does not see the ways in which her surroundings are changing her and instead of forging her own path, hopelessly attempts to adopt the dominant culture of the school even the facets which negate her.

Mustafa uses Homi Bhabha to articulate the concept of “a mode of ‘negativity’ . . . a time-lag at the point at which we speak of humanity through its differentiations—gender, race, class—that mark an excessive marginality [disjunction] of modernity” (Mustafa 380). This idea relates to Tambu’s character in *The Book of Not* and how she justifies her humiliating circumstances at the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. Mustafa suggests that “the novel structures Tambu’s plunge into a Fanonian mode of ‘negativity’, by accompanying each of her rationalizations with an irrepressible action of involuntary irruption...” (395). This mode of negativity, I argue, plays out in a number of specific ways in Tambu’s character over the two novels. It happens in *Nervous Conditions* when Tambu refuses to go to her parents’ wedding, and in her physical refusal to get out of bed; she has an out-of-body experience, describing how she “appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the

bed”(Dangarembga *Nervous* 168). She does this in protest to Babamukuru’s insistence that her parents have a Christian wedding, and she temporarily escapes his authority. There is a similar, although more subconscious, moment that happens in the second novel when Tambu has an awful day-dream in a class and when she snaps back to reality to find that she has grasped the hand of her teacher, “Now shame came crashing down on me. I was appalled at having let my skin and this white person’s touch” (Dangarembga *Not* 31). I would argue that this is the personification of the notion of a third-person consciousness, which Fanon uses to describe the self-negating experience in being around white people (*Masks* 83). This negation is also apparent in the novel’s title which “is the complex of false consciousness, alienation, mis-identification, internalized self-denigration, and misreading. The development she continues to pursue... however, is also mediated, complicated, and reinforced by the re-assertion of a gender regime that *Nervous Conditions* had begun to challenge” (Mustafa 395). This idea of consciousness, either third person or divided, is grappled with in Matlwa’s texts as well.

Goodman states that of the chief underlying qualities of Matlwa’s *Coconut* is “[t]he experience of emotional diaspora, of being divided against oneself – and the restlessness of mind caused by it” (110). The novel does illustrate those concepts; even the narrative structure is divided. “Fifi, one of the young protagonists of *Coconut*, and its eponymous representative of the state of being a coconut – culturally both white and black, yet in some way neither – is as tough-minded in her intransigence as the nut after which the text is named, and she lives with a divided consciousness” (Goodman 111). This division is also experienced by Fikile. She has acquired Western values, those held by the wealthy and the white in South Africa, and distanced herself emotionally from her surroundings. Matlwa is adept at portraying characters that are uneasy with their surroundings; in both of her novels she facilitates moments of self-reflection, and often, justifications. As discussed earlier, Mohumagadi does not ascribe to any single culture – the novel makes a point to tell us that she seemed to come out of nowhere – yet, there are still moments of uncertainty where she feels the need to justify her life choices, primarily dedicating her life to the school she had opened.

Hall stresses the difficulties in encapsulating identities in the post-colonial era for those reasons: “This cultural play⁸ could not therefore be represented as a simple, binary opposition - 'past/present', 'them/us'. Its complexity exceeds this binary structure of representation. At different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited” (228). It is helpful when grappling with this concept to note what Sarah Nuttall outlines as historical entanglement, referring to the inextricable dependency that the races of South Africa have come to share (2). It is very important for Mohumagadi to define herself against the mother/wife paradigm and more subtly, against any sort of racial victimization which is paradoxically the source of her own anger. This is important in looking at the representation of other women in the text.

Mothers in *Spilt Milk* are to be read allegorically as representations of the current black middle class. Most women are shown to be flippant, fearful, busy, employed and detached; this implies that the children who end up at Mohumagadi’s School of Excellence, have been somewhat abandoned there. In Matlwa’s other novel, *Coconut*, we learn that Fiks’ mother had taken her own life while sleeping next to her when she was young. Matlwa does not seem to put forward any positive female role models in her novels; yet, the same could arguably be said of Dangarembga’s novels. Mainini is close to villainous by the time we get to *The Book of Not*, having taken part in Babamukuru’s ambush. Maiguru, Nyasha’s mother, takes a stand in *Nervous Conditions* and even leaves for a few days, but she continues her baby talk and remains in Babamukuru’s shadow.

The novels employ the genre of the Bildungsroman to interrogate the larger story of the nation. The *Bildungsroman* is “[a] novel that depicts the male character’s development into adulthood. The protagonist comes to terms with the world and gains a sense of identity in the process” (Auger 34-5). This traditionally European form has been adopted in the former colonies and serves to chart the development of the individual, as well as the society. The protagonists of such novels in the genre are traditionally male as well, so I will be looking at how the style is reappropriated in the female African context. Ogaga Okuyade contends that “African writers ...

⁸ “I use the word 'play' because the double meaning of the metaphor is important. It suggests, on the one hand, the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution. On the other hand, it reminds us that the place where this 'doubleness' is most powerfully to be heard is 'playing' within the varieties of Caribbean musics” (Hall 228).

adopt and rework the traditional *Bildungsroman* form to present different stories of young protagonists growing up and constructing identity for themselves in a postcolonial context to account for the African experience” (Okuyade 1). This relates with Achille Mbembe’s argument about the state of modern African literature noting that, “current African imaginations of the self are born out of disparate but often intersecting practices, the goal of which is not only to settle factual and moral disputes about the world but also to open the way for *selfstyling*” (242). This is a positive result of the tensions regarding identity formation in a postcolonial setting; it seems that the texts are more pessimistic than this, especially when it comes to young women. As discussed thus far, we have seen many of those factors of self-styling in each of the novel. The style of the novels helps to encapsulate the female experiences. Okuyade notes here that

African female writers have artistically complexified the structural pattern and function of the *Bildungsroman* to articulate the asymmetric gender configuration in Africa, most especially to enunciate the fact that the subordination of the women is not sudden or transitional, gradually. The female variant of the genre which Rita Felski describes as novel of ‘self-discovery’ (133) makes vivid the ability of women to move beyond sexually-defined roles in order to discover true self-knowledge and achieve autonomy and independence. (4)

Each protagonist of the novels examined is on the journey for self-discovery, looking for truths about identity for women in the African context. The texts suggest that self-discovery is a difficult and necessary road, acknowledging that there are choices to be made. There is no single path that the authors propagate, only that the old ways do not work in the new world.

Since the *Bildungsroman* is classically considered a coming-of-age story, it is interesting when looking at Dangarembga’s texts to note Tambu’s milestones. *Nervous Conditions* has most of the criteria to categorize it as a *Bildungsroman*, particularly because Tambu challenges her position as a young woman, is alienated and, does not necessarily come back into the fold, but rather carves out a new position for herself. *The Book of Not*, however, is not as clear cut. Tambu buys into the dream but does not succeed. Tambu in the second novel instead seems to lose something crucial in her development, which will be read later as an allegory for the New Zimbabwe. Mustafa asserts that “Tambu’s failure ... is her inability to see... clear evidence that the promise of “development” is only one of several ruses in maintaining the colonial order of things” (398). In this sense, Tambu has not discovered or created out some new identity at the end of *Not* but rather adopted an identity and a world view in which she is still Other.

South African literature is often associated with the story of the nation, given its famous and treacherous history. Goodman observes that, “*Coconut* exposes the tenacity of the social and legal power structures which bolstered the apartheid state, and explores the difficulties of evading their personal implications” (117). Each girl in the novel is navigating her way through a recently collapsed racist system. Their journeys are mediated by their experiences of school and peers. If looked at allegorically, we see the two sides of the coin that Fiks and Fifi come to represent, those Africans who became upwardly mobile after apartheid and those who did not. Fifi’s experience of the world is informed by television and her Model-C school and friends. Yet, as Goodman succinctly puts it:

She inhabits two fixed spaces – that of privileged white society and that of the collective underprivileged history of her people – in a way that makes her intransigent, rather than openminded, since, perhaps as a survival strategy, she compartmentalises these two spaces in the most watertight way, and oscillates between them, so that they remain as distant from each other as black and white before 1994, becoming a manifestation of apartheid in microcosm. (111)

Fiks is also a part of this microcosm; yet, her experience is much different. She lives with the unanswered promises of the better tomorrow that the ending of apartheid had hoped to bring. *Spilt Milk* is read best, allegorically, as the story of South Africa more than a dozen years after the end of apartheid. One review of the novel mentions that it “reads like an attempt at addressing the state of the South African nation at its sweet 16,” however, “[t]he country comes across as a wasteland of displaced moral values and dishonesty; a betrayal of its founding imaginary of reconciliation, nation-building and non-racialism” (Modisane). Mohumagadi and Father Bill represent both sides of the divide in South Africa, unable to connect after their great rift, with nothing in common, and caught in bitterness. The review further points out that the many socio-historic and political references in the novel serve to characterize a cultural pathology:

As the bearers of pathologies, the black middle class simply has to spew its bile against agonistic and therefore, innocent whites who, the narrative implies, have either done their penance or are simply too flawed to be denied a sympathetic embrace. After all, 16 years is a long time; the world has moved on. (Modisane)

The text, presumably taking place in the sixteenth year since the ending of Mohumagadi and Bill's relationship (and Apartheid), references the fifteen years of refusal to properly address the problems at hand. At the climax of the story, Bill and Mohumagadi finally attempt to deal with these problems, which ends up as a hostile acknowledgement their problematic past. The conversation turns aggressive after Bill likens their past to the 'spilt milk' of the novel's title. Mohumagadi rages:

Are you insane? You want to call fifteen years of pain, Bill, gut-wrenching pain; fifteen years of lack of sleep; fifteen years of fear; fifteen years of madness, agony and rage, 'spilt milk'? So I should just forget everything, is that what you are suggesting, Bill? All those promises you made in '94, I should just forget them? I should just forget the fifteen years you took from my life? (Matlwa *Spilt* 168)

Allegorically, this moment represents the interaction of the races as a love story gone awry. On the one side, as seen above, there is the voice of the black population, characterised as angry and frustrated. But on the other side, there is not the conservative, unapologetic and racist voice; there is no voice at all, for Father Bill is portrayed as an innocent who has done enough penance in the last 15 years. Mohumagadi makes it clear that she is not just commenting on her personal history with Bill, but as black woman and a white man, 'Spilt fucking milk. So that's what you good-for-nothings think? Every little thing you've put us through is spilt milk to you is it? 'Clean it up' you say? Fuck you, Bill. You and your fucking ancestors'" (Matlwa *Spilt* 169). Mohumagadi places her broken heart and broken history squarely onto Bill's shoulders. However as pointed out in a review of the novel, "at no point is Bill's whiteness qualitatively ascribed to his past. He is simply Bill, a white priest who disgraced himself through sexual misdemeanours" (Modisane). The sexual misdemeanours are not anything criminal, either, so it is difficult to see in Bill even a resemblance of the powerful and racist group in which Mohumagadi wants so desperately to place him.

The dates of the publishing of the novels are significant when looking at conceptions and perceptions of realities. Matlwa wrote *Coconut* in 2007, commenting on the state of youth after apartheid ends, *Spilt Milk* is published in 2010 as a sweet 16 for the nation. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* was published in 1989, when Zimbabwe was still a beacon of hope. The sequel, *The Book of Not*, published in 2006 seems to reflect a more pessimistic view of the state of the nation, even though both novels are set in the 60's and 70's.

Mustafa takes an interesting view of *Nervous Conditions* as it relates to the story of the nation and the reaction to the changing realities. Nyasha and her bout with bulimia has been discussed in numerous articles and interpreted in many ways, but rather than analyzing the symptoms I focus on how Nyasha as an adolescent acquired the disorder which inhibits her development. Mustafa highlights the dual meaning of “development”:

the novel tropes development in the figure of Nyasha’s body, where the symptoms of her disease quite literally challenge both the biologism of Development as a signifier, and the conceptual categories of Development as a discourse. After Nyasha’s crisis toward the end of the novel, when she shreds her history books with her teeth, and indicts a colonial authority *rather* than her father, she asks her mother to hold her. (393)

Nyasha is the embodiment of struggle and even the national story. Development is a useful lens to analyze her own struggle. She suffers from the cultural strife in her own home which is impeding her development and on a larger scale struggling against the oppression of her people. She actively rejects the euphemistic history that the West offers, and realises that Babamukuru’s shortcomings are a result of the system as a whole. Her self-starvation represents not only her struggle against patriarchy and Babamukuru, but against the colonial system. For, as Zwicker argues, it seems as if Nyasha

channels the languages of colonialism and decolonization at once, becoming a cipher for the confusion of ideologies and locations marked out in a period of intense social destabilization... [Nyasha] figures the very dialectic of colonial and anti-colonial violence that Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth*. (17)

She is stretched between a childhood in England and adolescence in Rhodesia, and between respect for her family but bitterness at the system that positions them as inferior. The country is on the cusp of a war of independence; yet, Nyasha has been waging a similar war against Babamukuru for independence, with the battlefield being her own body. Nyasha is the most socially conscious character in all the examined novels (though, I would argue that her place is taken up a bit in the second novel by Tambu’s dorm-mate, Ntombi). Dangarembga seems quite conscious of what she is doing by giving these perspectives in the novel and being sure that they do not come from Tambu herself. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu describes Nyasha’s preference for reality over fairy-tales, observing at that point in the novel that Nyasha “was going through a

historical phase” with interests in “real peoples and their sufferings” (Dangarembga *Nervous* 94). At this point, we are made aware of Nyasha’s awareness of “the condition in South Africa,” about which she interestingly “asked Maiguru to compare with our own situation and ended up arguing with her when Maiguru said we were better off” (Dangarembga *Nervous* 94).

For Nyasha, knowledge is power, her identity is her own. Tambu by contrast, merely aims to be agreeable to whoever her immediate supervisors are (Babamukuru or nuns). Nyasha’s knowledge of the atrocities that occur in her world and elsewhere, makes her violent unravelling at the end of the novel much more meaningful, particularly because she proceeds to shred the same history books with her teeth in a rejection of how the books have served to undermine the plight of colonisation, and instead claim it as a successful civilizing mission. However, it can be said that *Nervous Conditions* does end on an optimistic note, which is obliterated by the opening of the much more political sequel.

Although *The Book of Not* offers a meditation on the undercurrent of the war, there are no scenes on any battlefield or first person accounts; yet, there is a focus of how life tensions and changes in the lives of those affected. The novel opens with the detonation of a landmine that claims the leg of Tambu’s sister, Netsai. Babamukuru is beaten by rebels and Tambu is sent back to Sacred Heart where she is the victim and perpetrator of racist views. Her time at the convent, to which the majority of the novel is devoted, is characterised by constant humiliation and strife. While her other dorm-mate in the “African dorm” at least have the righteousness of their cause to rely on, Tambu instead, is plunged into negativity after her attempts to assimilate are not acknowledged. More than that, when her rightful place on the Honour Roll is over-taken by the white a more “well-rounded” classmate, she quietly accepts it. Tambu rejects her mother, is rejected by Babamukuru, and has little to show for the great education that she has received. The final line⁹ of the novel laments her place in the New Zimbabwe.

⁹ “I could not go back to the homestead where Netsai hopped unspeakably on a single limb, and where Mai would laugh at me daily. I had forgotten all the promises made to myself and providence while I was young concerning carrying forward with me the good human, the *unhu* of my life. As it was, I had not considered *unhu* at all, only my own calamities, since the contested days at the convent. So this evening I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future was for me, a new Zimbabwean” (246)

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Overall, the representations of women in these novels place a high value on independence and autonomy whilst promoting the retaining of essential facets of indigenous culture, as well as willingness to accept Western culture. None of them advocate a return to traditional culture, and *Spilt Milk* in particular cautions against holding on too tightly to the past. African women moving into Western spheres are dealing with universal issues of negotiating what role to play in world: provider, employee, mother, and wife. Family issues are prominent in the novels, highlighting not only the culture clashes but the historical uniqueness of modern circumstances. Furthermore, education in the novels varies in its representation. It is seen as a powerful tool that enables an upliftment from squalor; yet, in its very implementation, there are disadvantages, *Coconut* highlights issues with assimilation, *Nervous* and *Not* underscore inherent racism in the system, and *Spilt* cautions against close-mindedness.

It has been very import in this argument to place these texts in specific contexts, not just so they are better understood, but rather to gain some insight into whom exactly the audience is that these women are trying to reach. These stories do create fictionalized depictions of life in southern Africa as educated black women in their respective times, but that is not all that can be gleaned from these novels. Considering how loaded they are with political commentary and how they scrutinize roles of women and the condition of blackness, they almost necessarily include thoughts and ideas for the future within their covers.

The conclusions for each of the novels seem to be that the future for the post-colonial African woman, even with the asset of education to benefit them, is uneasy, as these characters are also allegorical representations of their respective nation's problems and predictions. Where *Nervous Conditions* seems to end on an encouraging note that with perseverance and a tenacious spirit, all things can be possible, the narration from an older Tambu (presumably one older than the Tambu we leave at the end of *The Book of Not*) seems to indicate that, perhaps other than Nyasha, most of the women prevail, and in a sense, Zimbabwe, even on the precipice of war. *The Book of Not* ends on a decisively different note. –The novel,” as Roseanne Kennedy points out, –dramatizes the narrator's struggle to break out of a repetition compulsion, manifested in her

obsessive desire for recognition, which continually leaves her deflated and depressed. Dangarembga's use of fiction to articulate the Rhodesian legacy of colonialism and racism is particularly significant given the taboo on speaking about race in Zimbabwe today" (Kennedy 87). The Tambu that narrates the most part of *Nervous Conditions* has not reached the place where she can positively reflect on her path. In the last quarter of the novel she has been shunned by Babamukuru for her relatively poor academic performance and disciplinary warning. Compounded by her mother's betrayal of Babamukuru, Tambu is reduced to educating the youth and then to a mediocre position as a copy writer at an advertising agency. When she writes an award-winning copy the credit is stolen without any object from meek and defeated Tambu, who thusly resigns. By the end, "[Tambu] the newly homeless, newly unemployed, —new Zimbabwean," offers another projective caesura, wherein another narrative, as yet unaccounted for, rests" (Mustafa 401). Dangarembga does emphasize the connection between Tambu and the new nation she finds herself. The final lines of *Not* read:

I could not go back to the homestead where Netsai hopped unspeakably on a single limb, and where Mai would laugh at me daily. I had forgotten all the promises made to myself and providence while I was young concerning carrying forward with me the good human, the *unhu* of my life. As it was, I had not considered *unhu* at all, only my own calamities, since the contested days at the convent. So this evening I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future was for me, a new Zimbabwean. (Dangarembga *Not* 246)

Tambu cannot go home without ridicule or the gruesome reminder of her sister's sacrifice. She meditates again on her botched idea of *unhu*, or *ubuntu*, and reflects that she does not seem to be able to recall who she was and the ambition that had propelled her to this point. The word choice in the final sentences highlights the void Tambu is experiencing; she is between jobs, homes, and identities. She does not seem to know where she is going and admittedly forgets who she has been. It is interesting too in the sense that most of the novel takes place in the midst of war. This war also indirectly destabilises Tambu's entire academic career, making her unable to attend sciences classes at the boys' school because of her race, and those were the lines along which the war was being waged. This situation could be can be illuminated by Fanon who speaks about the —special character of the colonial situation" and its societal effects:

In reality the nations that undertake a colonial war have no concern for the confrontation of cultures. War is a gigantic business and every approach must be governed by this datum. The enslavement, in the strictest sense, of the native population is the prime necessity. For this its systems of reference have to be broken. Expropriation, spoliation, raids, objective murder, are matched by the sacking of cultural patterns, or at least condition such sacking. The social panorama is destructured; values are flaunted, crushed, emptied. (Fanon *Towards* 33)

The destructured social panorama referred to here, relates directly to the listlessness and lack of direction Tambu feels at the end of *Not*.

The fractured senses of self are touched on in each of the novels, particularly Kopano Matlwa's. Her novels cannot be categorically labelled as optimistic or pessimistic as they seem to embody both. *Coconut* ends with Fiks trying to get out of a conversation with a man on a train who has just expressed his nuanced view of assimilation by using an example from his daughter's primary school. Her urgency to get out of the situation and not to listen to the points helps, again, to characterize her as unwilling or unable to critically engage with her own identity. Fifi's narrative, which ends in the middle of the novel, ends on the topic of languages and assimilation; she is being told by her brother that she will be shunned by the white people she is trying to be like, and rejected by the people and identity she has left behind, although Fifi seems to take this more in stride. The author seems to be leaning towards this idea that one cannot successfully hold on to the two worlds of tradition and modernity.

Spilt Milk ends with the holding of hands of a black woman and a white man in an attempt to illustrate the uneasy, yet necessary, reconciliation of the races in present and future South Africa, —. even Mohumagadi knew that we had to stop hating at some point" (Matlwa *Spilt* 95). Although Mohumagadi seems to disparage white South Africans and the church quite regularly, she is utmost concerned with the judgement of her peers, also arguably the perpetrators of the ways of old, the black middle class. The tone is assertive in its implication of the malfunctions of the new South Africa. As argued by Litheko Modisane, —

the narrative does not struggle to help the readers navigate their fingers towards the authorship of these failures, the new black middle class. Apparently, black people, chiefly represented by the protagonist Mohumagadi, are caught in a time-warp of anti-white-ism and are not prepared to forgive the past. Against this sorry state, the novel suggests that it is not wise to cry over *spilt milk*'. (Modisane)

This is reinforced by the novel's final scene depicting Mohumagadi holding hands with Father Bill, a symbolic healing and reconciliation between races. The suggestion being that until the anger and bitterness can be set aside, no transformation can occur, completely ignoring any conception of residual tensions and hatred still present in South Africa today. There is no invocation of A.W.B. Verwoerd, or Eugene Terreblanche in any of her historical listings; hence, white people, ~~the~~ narrative implies, have either done their penance or are simply too flawed to be denied a sympathetic embrace. After all, 16 years is a long time; the world has moved on" (Modisane). The denial of a fair and honest account of the white South African takes away much of the authority from her assertions. The crux of the message of *Spilt Milk*, I would argue, lies in the following passage in the opening pages of the novel:

And even the *Pale People* realised that they needn't ever use the just-in-case packed bags they kept underneath the staircase, in the boot, under the bed; the car they kept with extra fuel, extra oil, extra tyres; the apartment they kept in Australia, in London, in New Zealand. Because as it so happened, the *Dark People* became their own oppressors. (Matlwa *Spilt* 3-4)

While ~~the~~ novel puts a racial tag on Mohumagadi's thoughts and actions... [it] effectively denies Bill the same. This allows it to pass a too-easy value judgment on black people and to absolve whites of their historical role in the past and of post-1994 social and political problems in South Africa" (Modisane). Not to say that the criticism she levels does not perhaps have its place, but it is unbalanced. Matlwa has described the novel as an ~~allegory~~ of love lost" between black and white South Africa noting, "[w]e haven't really defined our own story and we are still battling with who we are and where we are going. It's now almost impossible to have one national story" (qtd. in Zvomuya). This is precisely the argument that falls under Stuart Hall's notion of fluid, non-fixed cultural identities. *Spilt Milk* uses the character of Mlilo, the ~~brightest~~ and most tormented" of the group as a symbol of the hope of the new South Africa, as observed by Karlien van der Schyff, adding that he is a ~~young~~ boy of mixed racial parentage – a black mother and a white father – with Father Bill and Mohumagadi symbolically taking the place of the absent parents. His dark skin and bright green eyes suggest that Mlilo physically embodies the dream of a new, hybrid rainbow nation" (van der Schyff). His life is ended in a vague attempt to run from the anger with which Mohumagadi regarded Father Bill.

Southern African's cultural and social landscapes are changing, women are accessing education with more ease than before, and the indication is that tolerance is growing. Social dynamics are still catching up to these nuanced identities, as alluded to in the parliamentary anecdote in the introduction. The representation of women in the novels varies, leaving few successful role models for navigating workable identities for the characters as mothers, wives, and autonomous individuals. The novels offer interesting imaginaries for the future of their respective countries. Moreover, the texts promote education tempered with a respect for home cultures and racial reconciliation.

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