

Article

Modernity, Representation of Violence, and Women's Rebellion in Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract: In 1980, after decades of violent war, the apartheid regime came to an end, Zimbabwe was declared an independent state, and Robert Mugabe's party the Zimbabwean African Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ascended to power. While black leaders concentrated on the struggle against the tyranny of racial segregation, independence did not challenge gender hierarchies or minimize patriarchal privilege. Women soldiers who participated in the guerrillas were excluded from the spheres of power and relegated to poverty and invisibility. Here, I analyze how Dangaremba's novel *Nervous Conditions* unveils women's response to multiple forms of violence that target their bodies and minds. Although Dangaremba does not refer explicitly to the *Chimurenga*, also known as the bush war, in the novel, the sadness, bitterness, and sentiment of betrayal subsume women's feeling about their absence in the construction of a new nation. For women writers, the representation of violence, through a feminine and postcolonial perspective, opens up creative ways to pursue textual liberation, thus defying literary genre and literary forms often very connected to systems of power. In this sense, her narrative instills in the reader the sentiment which evolves from women's condition in the novel.

Keywords: representation of violence; modernity in Zimbabwe; textual liberation; gender hierarchies

1. Introduction

Slavoj Žižek, in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, argues that concrete, palpable violent reactions, often perpetrated by identifiable agents such as various forms of societal disruptions, have been generally related to more abstract forms of violence. For Žižek, invisible forms of violence become “inherent to the “normal” state of things” (2), and thus, the violence embedded in linguistic discourses and political decisions also damages people's lives. Here, I examine how Dangaremba's novel *Nervous Conditions* utilizes literature to unveil multiple forms of violence that target the bodies and minds of women who avoid complying with the societal order. Vulnerable to illness related to nervous conditions, such as depression, anxiety, anorexia, bulimia, and madness, Dangaremba's female characters share their pain with the readers. In the novel, women's violent reactions against their perpetrators metaphorically represent their resistance to black leaders who struggled to liberate the country from the apartheid regime and white rule but did not consider women's conditions and gender hierarchies in Zimbabwean society when they came to power. Tambudzai's narration imbricates the lives of different women who are part of her life. Her protagonist is her cousin Nyasha, a powerful and intriguing girl who arrives in Harare from the United Kingdom, but cannot come to terms with her culture, her language, or her own father, Babamukuru, who becomes the headmaster of a missionary school. In Zimbabwe, Nyasha does not accept cultural norms regarding feminine roles, patriarchal privilege, and racial and social divides; therefore, she develops nervous illness.

Nervous Conditions was published in 1988. The title of the novel refers to a quote from the preface written by Jean-Paul Sartre for Frantz Fanon's (1967) book *The Wretched of the Earth*. In the preface, Sartre (1967) states that “the condition of ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent” (17). The novel's setting is the period

of independence, the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe from white minority rule and colonial powers. In the opening paragraph, Tambudzai, the narrator, states that the events happened in 1967, placing the novel during the bush war or the war for Rhodesia's liberation—the Second *Chimurenga*¹. Thirteen years later and after an armed conflict, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwean African Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ascends to power in Zimbabwe.

What is now known as Zimbabwe was named Rhodesia during the colonial period, after Cecil Rhodes. In 1880, Rhodes' British South Africa Company initiated the colonization of Rhodesia. In Rhodesia, white settlers secured privileges through an apartheid regime in exchange for their support to the project of colonization. As Richard Bourne (2011) argues, fear, contempt, and sexual anxiety towards the African population contributed to laws which demanded that “each African man had to carry a registration certificate and be ready to show it” (26). After the Second World War, nationalist movements spread in Africa and decolonization was a reality across the continent. Ghana became independent in 1957, and Nigeria in 1960. The Rhodesian white minority took some measures to prevent an independent state governed by a majority rule. Prime Minister Ian Smith, in 1965, declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, the UDI, which aimed to maintain the white minority's privilege, colonial power, and segregation in Southern Rhodesia. The UDI did not change the conditions under which Africans lived in Zimbabwe, but it “ratified the dominant social and political position of European settlers” (Astrow, 10). The UDI was followed by the bush war, which is also known as the Second *Chimurenga*, a reference to the First *Chimurenga*, the Ndebele–Shona revolt against the British which happened in 1896. During the ensuing Second *Chimurenga*, the two main African parties—the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), under Joshua Nkomo, and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), under Robert Mugabe—fought to liberate the country, espousing the main socialist principles of land reform and access to education.

During the armed struggle, both the ZANU and ZAPU strengthened their armed wings through the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), with training and help from Mozambique's Frelimo and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC). The ZANU and ZAPU had some internal and violent conflicts, and in 1976, they agreed to meet at the Conference of Geneva, which involved Britain to mediate in the situation of Southern Rhodesia. The conference dealt with the various disputes and diverse interests of nationalist movements. There, the ZANU and ZAPU agreed to end internal disputes by merging into one political party, the Patriotic Front. In 1979, the Lancaster House Conference was the last step towards Zimbabwe's independence. The Conference set a new Constitution for Zimbabwe and the parties ZANU and ZAPU decided to run for the elections as independent parties: PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF. Mugabe's ZANU-PF won the majority of 57 seats, Nkomo's PF-ZAPU won 20 seats, and Muzorewa's The United African National Council UANC won three seats. Independence was declared on 18 April 1980, with Robert Mugabe becoming the Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe. For Muzondidya (2009), the ZANU-PF faced some major challenges in bringing together a society “deeply divided along the lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and geography” (167).

The participation of women in the war has generated extensive debate. As Mitsi et al. (2009a, 2009b) point out, in the ZIPRA army around 10% were of women (of 20,000 guerrillas), and in the ZANLA, 2000 women were in the army. He states that these numbers reflect only part of the story as many other women supported the guerrillas (159). Although Dangaremba does not mention the war explicitly, *Nervous Conditions*, which was published eight years after independence, resonates these debates about women's status after the liberation of the country. Other creative works explicitly mentioned the participation of women in the war of liberation, for example *Flame*, Ingrid Sinclair's film, a moving story that deals with the low status of women soldiers during the war and their exclusion from the

¹ The First *Chimurenga*—the Ndebele–Shona revolt against the British—occurred in 1896. After 13 years of armed conflict Robert Mugabe's political party, the ZANU-PF, ascended to power in Zimbabwe.

spheres of power after independence. *Flame*, as Young (2006) points out, deals with sexual abuse within the nationalist movement, and “the use of rape and sexualized favors as punitive strategies to control women’s soldiers” (133).

2. The Rhetoric of Violence and Women’s Survival

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai, an adolescent girl who lives in the village, witnessed her brother’s opportunity to pursue education while she stayed home, confined to domesticity. Babamukuru, an uncle who arrived from London after concluding his graduate course, decides to help one of his brothers’ children to get an education. Nhamo, Jeremiah’s elder male child, has the privilege of moving into his uncle’s house and going to missionary school. Tambudzai, his sister, who observes her brother’s opportunity, gets bitter and frustrated. Her parents explain to her that investing time and money in women is the same as putting one’s money in the neighbor’s house because women contribute to their husbands’ families. Men should have a career because they are family’s providers, while women get prepared to take care of their husband and children. Therefore, things do not happen according to Tambudzai’s family plans. At his uncle’s house, Nhamo gets meningitis and dies. As the family did not have another male child, the death of the brother gives Tambu a chance to occupy his place in Babamukuru’s house and go to missionary school. Dangaremba’s novel opens up with Tambu’s striking statement:

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young, and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than the mere consequence of age. (*Nervous Conditions* 1)

The narrator gives us an idea of her state of mind and how reality affects her in many ways. This is a story of a girl coming to age—a *bildungsroman*, a literary genre originally from Germanic tradition, which tells the story of a character which goes through major changes by entering adulthood. As Tambudzai acknowledges that the death of her brother benefited her, she implies that, paradoxically, her brother’s death means survival for herself. She enjoys listening to the uncle’s statement that “there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need” (*Nervous Conditions* 56). By using linguistic violence, Dangaremba’s narrative subverts not only language but also societal rules. If Tambu has the courage to state that the death of the brother provides her with the opportunity she desires, violence through language becomes part and parcel of her path to freedom.

In her study on Calixte Beyala’s works, Kalisa (2009) points out that in African women’s literature, linguistic violence becomes a vehicle of liberation. For women writers, the representation of violence, through a feminine and postcolonial perspective, opens up creative ways to, as Chantal (Zabus 2007) argues, “the violation of requirements of European prose narrative” (133). By pursuing textual liberation, Dangaremba defies literary genre and literary forms often very often connected to systems of power. In this sense, her narrative instills in the reader, through language and discourse, the sentiment which evolves from women’s condition in the novel. For Lauretis (1989), there is a semiotic relation that connects the social with the discursive in ways that they become interchangeable, as she argues, “once a connection is assumed between violence and rhetoric, the two terms began to slide and, soon enough, the connection will appear to be reversible” (240). In *Nervous Conditions*, the representation of violence not only reveals the reality that affects the minds and bodies of their female characters, but the text unravels how a feminine postcolonial perspective conceives violence in modern Zimbabwe. If epistemic and systemic modes of violence become visible, through the deterioration of female bodies and minds in *Nervous Conditions*, as De Lauretis affirms, “the very notion of a ‘rhetoric of violence’ presupposes that some order of language, some kind of discursive representation is at work not only in the concept of violence but in the social practices of violence as well . . . ” (240). The connection between linguistic discourses and social practices of violence imposes a perspective which disturbs not

only literature and genre but provides the reader with new forms of conceptualizing a usual, but an improper subject. As female characters attempt to regain humanity through their violent reactions, the writer also carves a site for herself in a world where literary genres and aesthetics do not always permit counterviolence or counter-hegemonic discourses.

Tanner (1994) argues that by shedding light on the suffering body, literary representations of violence must subvert literary genres and conventions “as a means of unsettling its own dynamics and pushing the reader into a position of discomforting proximity to the victim’s vulnerable body” (10). On one level, in transposing forms of violence to a discursive level, Dangaremba pushes the reader to the limit, while on the other, her narrative challenges the ways in which violence of representation has defined black and African women in hegemonic discourses. In revealing invisible forms of violence that define the lives of those who, most of the times, are considered by hegemonic groups “the appropriate objects of violence” (Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse 4), the narrative subverts hegemonic discourses, either colonialist, nationalist, or patriarchal, which appropriate cultural terms to determine “what are the right and wrong ways to be a human being” (Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse 24).

When Tambudzai’s brother, Nhamo, is still alive, she describes one of her moments of insanity when she attacks him with fury. With the prosperous uncle living in London, her parents could not afford to send both children to school. They decided to pay the fees for the male child. Meanwhile, Tambu has the idea to grow maize to pay her own fees. She puts her idea into practice, but her crop starts to disappear from the field. Tambu discovers that Nhamo is stealing her maize as a way of mocking her. Frustrated with her situation and surprised by the cruelty of the brother, Tambudzai utilizes physical violence to make her voice heard.

I remember at one moment I was playing pada, Nhamo and I rolling about in the dirt of the football pitch, a group of excited egging us on. They said I went straight to my brother and brought him down on a single charge. The element of surprise was on my side. I sat on top of him, banged his head into the ground, screamed and spat and cursed. Nhamo heaved. I fell off him. He pinned me to the ground, not striking, only holding me there, the malicious twinkle back in his eye. What’s the matter with you? He drawled. “Have you gone mad?” (Nervous Conditions 23)

After that episode, Tambu reveals that she considers her brother a betrayer who always enjoyed his masculine privilege. When the uncle Babamukuru chooses Nhamo to live in his house, Nhamo starts changing. He gradually begins to despise his own culture, language, and family. Nhamo forgets how to speak Shona, and when he visits the house, prefers talking to his father in English. His attitudes, particularly towards language and culture, infuriate his sister, who cannot accept his betrayal.

Nhamo’s death metaphorically represents a desire to destroy a betrayer, someone she could not rely on. It means the end of a dream of solidarity and brotherhood. Tambu’s feeling towards the death of the brother represents the feeling of sadness and bitterness of women who expected loyalty from those once called brothers or comrades. The sentiment of betrayal in the novel subsumes women’s feeling about their participation in the Second *Chimurenga*, and their subsequent absence in the construction of the new nation.

3. Women’s Conditions at the Uncle’s House

A metonym for the new government, the uncle’s house is the place of a diligent, intelligent and prosperous black leader, the house of Babamukuru, the missionary school’s headmaster. The myth of origin of Babamukuru traces back to the arrival of the missionaries in Rhodesia. Tambudzai’s grandmother recounts a story of her giving a child to the missionaries. They took good care of her son and provided him with an education. After missionary school, Babamukuru went to South Africa where he got his degree; after that, he was awarded the scholarship to pursue a graduate course in London. When he returned from London, Babamukuru became the headmaster of the missionary school, becoming the only African to live in a white house where missionaries used to live.

The house's opulence, luxury, and location strike Tambu, who could not imagine that her uncle was so wealthy and fortunate.

At the time that I arrived at the mission, missionaries were living in white houses and in the pale painted houses, but not in the brick red ones. My uncle was the only African living in a white house. We were all very proud of this fact ... except Nyasha, who had an egalitarian nature and had taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England. (Nervous Conditions 63)

Nyasha, Babamukuru's rebellious daughter, does not accept the privilege of her father. Although Babamukuru spends Christmas at his brother's compound and takes care of his children to provide them with formal education, the uncle's position in Zimbabwean society reassures social hierarchies which contribute to maintaining intact internal contradictions. For instance, the narrator describes Babamukuru's house as a kingdom, while her father Jeremiah, Babamukuru's brother, lives in a place with "great holes gaped in the mud-brick walls of tsapi the latrine ... feces and urine contaminated every surface" (NC 123).

The uncle's house is a very socially stratified place where women experience violence. In the entrance of the house, Tambu meets two dogs, a black one and an albino. She cannot help feeling scared.

a huge hairy hound appeared in front of me from nowhere. It leapt out on the thin air and scared me to death. Its black lips wrinkled up to show piercing incisors spiking out of gums that were even blacker than its lips ... its eyes stretched upward in a demonic squint ... The albino hound was even more unsettling. Everything about was either pink or white ... To me they were loose, ferocious guardians of the gates of this kingdom ... that I should not have been entering. Their lust for my blood was justified: they knew I did not belong. (Nervous Conditions 65–6)

The presence of the dogs reminds her that she does not belong to that place. Both the black and the albino dogs make her understand that she is not welcome. With a very cynical metaphor, Dangaremba's narrative reveals how women do not feel part of the nation and how they are trapped between two poles of violence. While men, such as Babamukuru, work within an ambivalence which permits them to fight for liberation, but also secure that the order cannot be totally disrupted, they paradoxically maintain the order of a complex society rooted in masculine authority and ethnic, racial, and class divides. The new leaders end up preserving some old colonial and patriarchal structures which contribute to women's poverty, displacement, and disempowerment. As Tambu understands that she does not belong to that world, and realizes that both dogs crave for her blood, she should find ways to subvert an order which is usually imposed through violence.

By entering through the back door of the uncle's house, the narrator can observe and analyze its flaws, not easily perceived by those who enter the house through the living room. After the first impression of opulence, luxury, and glamour, Tambudzai could see that there was something beyond the appearance of hygiene and cleanness, which metaphorically refers to whiteness, segregation, and apartheid regime, a very fine and almost imperceptible layer of dust occupies the whole place. She concludes that the cleanness is only at the surface. It is an illusion. "After a while, as the novelty wore off, you began to see that the antiseptic sterility that my aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level because the buses that passed through the mission ... rolled up a storm of fine dust" (Nervous Conditions 71).

The dirt is there, even if it is not perceptible. That red fine dust reminds Tambu of her brother Nhamo who got so fascinated by the luxury and comfort of the house that he could not perceive the dust. At that moment, she promises herself that she is not going to be like the brother: "I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother" (Nervous Conditions 71). For her, Nhamo was blind because he was not being able to perceive that not everything at the uncle's house was real. That illusion of purity and cleanness contributed to Nhamo's death. A metaphor for the flaws

of the independent state, the red dust represents the new rule's corruption, bad governance, and agreements with old structures that create peripheral modernity which reinforces capital influx but also maintains privilege and social hierarchies. The hybrid and ambiguous state of the house also means the incomplete process of modernity in Zimbabwe. As Murray (2002) points out "modernity fails to deliver the serious social good or delivers Africans into the hands of false gods who require from them the uncritical worship of goods and the good life" (194). Modernity does not provide liberation, freedom, and equity for all citizens in Zimbabwe, for the society has been divided along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. As Tambudzai reflects on her role at the uncle's house, she thinks about witches on hyenas:

"a shrill, shuddering wail pulled me abruptly out of my thoughts, made my armpits prickle and my mouth turn biller. It wailed and trembled for ten long seconds, during which images of witches on hyenas back, both laughing hellishly, fitted through my mind". (Nervous Conditions 71)

Images of hyenas are recurrent in African literature. They usually represent corruption, dirtiness, racism, and bad governance. Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambéti, Senegalese filmmakers, utilized images of hyenas to represent dirty and corruption in their country. Ken Bugul also utilized images of hyenas in *Le baobab fou* to represent the racism and cynicism the protagonist has gone through in Belgium. Dangaremba also utilizes the hyena as a symbol of the assimilation, dirtiness, and corruption implied in Tambu's fear of becoming a corrupt and ending up dying like her brother. The death metaphor also represents the ways in which male leaders forgot their own ideals and compromise with the people's struggle. In the end, they were not loyal to the people. Like Nhamo, who could not perceive the red dust at the luxurious house, Dangaremba's narrative suggests that male leaders in Zimbabwe were enchanted by the new power.

Before moving into the uncle's house, the narrator explains that Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife is an elegant, independent, and smart woman, a true role model for her. Later on, Tambudzai changes her mind and understands that Maiguru is a dependent, frustrated woman accused by her daughter of complaining all the time. She does not have access to her own wage, which her husband appropriates to provide to his own family. As Tambudzai deconstructs her myth of the empowered Maiguru, the aunt explains to her niece that for a woman in her country to be married always means "to have to choose between self and security" (Nervous Conditions 101). Despite being an educated woman, Maiguru has been trapped by cultural norms. She has done all her efforts to meet cultural expectations. Maiguru confesses to Tambu that she does not have access to her own wage. By taking the wife's wage to help his brother Jeremiah and other relatives, the husband follows traditions, thus meeting cultural norms regarding masculinity. From his point of view, what women, such as Maiguru, Nyasha, and Tambudzai, consider violence and tyranny, Babamukuru considers as established norms that should not be disrupted. His role in the family is symbolically connected to his role in society as someone who helps to maintain the regular order. However, women characters in the novel understand that this maintenance of order is a way to perpetrate invisible forms of violence. In the private space, Babamukuru continuously inflicts epistemic violence on women through his authoritarian and tyrannical discourses, and sometimes physical violence. As the headmaster of the missionary school, he also commits systemic violence, contributing to class divides in a modern society which will become more capitalist, modern and more socially stratified. In this sense, in modern Zimbabwe, social, gender, and racial inequities have been strictly connected to maintain a hierarchical society which does not present room for disturbing the order. While Babamukuru has revealed a legitimate preoccupation with racial equity and with the end of the apartheid regime, other forms of social inequities do not bother him.

Nyasha, Babamukuru's daughter, does not always behave as parents expect, challenging her father's authority and reflecting more deeply about gender and class and her condition as an African woman. The first serious disagreement between Nyasha and Babamukuru happens around a D. H. Lawrence's book. Her parents think a good girl cannot read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Without her permission, the father takes the "immoral" book that contributes to pervert the daughter.

Babamukuru was distressed, looking sad, then hurt, then ultimately annoyed . . . "I don't no sense of decency, none whatsoever". So saying, he took the book and left the room, returning a minute later without the offending volume. (Nervous Conditions 81)

When Nyasha realizes that her parents are censuring her reading, she gets frustrated, interrupts her meal, and asks to leave the table. Babamukuru's abuse is always associated to Nyasha's femininity. He accuses her of indecency, calls her a whore, and finally accuses her of having a sexual relationship with one of the Baker boys, a white man. An African girl educated in the United Kingdom, Nyasha cannot meet her father's expectations regarding the appropriate feminine behavior in Zimbabwe. As the father attempts to fit her in the society, his continuous bullying becomes as indigestible as the food Nyasha cannot eat. Kalisa (2009) points out that in African societies "patriarchal violence combines European models of violence against women with models of patriarchal oppression that existed before and after colonialism" (Nervous Conditions 77). Nyasha's response to patriarchal violence is her refusal to eat which may be interpreted as metaphorical and political. It is a metaphor for her inability to cope with cultural norms, patriarchal dominance, and the inconsistencies of a modern society which secure masculine privilege. It is also her political response to the food scarcity that was a serious problem in Zimbabwe, especially during wartime, and if Babamukuru could provide this family with an abundance of food, this was not a reality across the country where the majority of Africans lived segregated and without enough to survive, as was the case of Tambu's father, Jeremiah. As Brendon Nicholls states, "by refusing to eat, Nyasha effectively abjures her father's material privilege and magnanimous gestures of generosity that this privilege enables" (109).

When Nyasha begins to vomit to empty her stomach and loses weight, she demonstrates her refusal to consent to the abuses of her father. The violence perpetrated by her authoritarian father contributes to Nyasha's traumatic experiences, which start when she arrives in Harare from the United Kingdom, but symptoms of nervous conditions take a while to become visible. As Laura Brown remarks "subtle manifestations of trauma, allows us to see the hidden sharp edges and secret leghold traps, whose scars we have borne or might find ourselves bearing" (108). Nyasha gradually develops the illness as she understands her condition as a black girl, in an African country, colonized by the British and ruled by a white minority which imposed a regime of segregation. She wanted to understand the history of her country, and her position as a privileged woman in that context.

" . . . She preferred reality. She read books that were about real people . . . about Arabs on the east coast and the British on the west, . . . Japanese and Hiroshima . . . She had nightmares about these things, . . . She wanted to know many things: . . . exactly why UDI was declared and what it meant". (Nervous Conditions 93)

Nyasha prefers the reality of historical facts, but she cannot cope with the unbearable weight of reality. The UDI is mentioned only once in the novel as Nyasha attempts to know the changes her country has been going through, and how they affect her life. Conversely, Tambudzai states that she has no interest in what is happening in the country or if the freedom fighters "were referred to as terrorists . . . missionaries and other Whites in Rhodesia ought to have stayed at home". (NC 155)

By narrating Nyasha's sadness, frustration, anxiety, and the impossibility of digesting reality, Tambudzai unveils her apolitical attitude as a way of protecting herself. She wants to achieve her goals of a successful career and economic independence. Despite her determination, Tambu cannot avoid her own traumatic experiences, the poverty of her family, the feeling of frustration with the lack of autonomy of her parents. She breaks out when Babamukuru has the idea to celebrate her

parents' wedding as a way of cleansing their sinful lives. Babamukuru expects Tambu to participate in the event, but she refuses to participate in the wedding which she considers a way of ridiculing her parents, as she affirms: "I was angry with him for having devised this plot which made such a joke of my parents, my home, myself" (Nervous Conditions 149). The episode contributed to her traumatic experience. The narrator remarks that her "body on the bed didn't even twitch ... I have gone somewhere where he could not reach me" (Nervous Conditions 167). As Tambu tells the story of Nyasha, she attempts to find an escape for herself, which as (Caruth 1996) states, an "escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (7). She finds her own strategies to remain in the path she traced for herself, even if she needs to disconnect from the self to maintain her dignity and integrity, and her commitment with her goals without going through a metaphorical death.

Nyasha's nervous illness worsens when she has a serious fight with the father after a night out, at a school party. Babamukuru realizes that she stayed outside the house alone with one of the Baker boys, a white man, while her brother and her cousin entered the house. His father loses the control and hits Nyasha, stating that he needs to educate her daughter to be a decent woman. In suffering physical violence from her father, Nyasha breaks free in an explosion of kicks and punches against him.

"I told you not to hit me", said Nyasha, punching him in the eye. Babamukuru bellowed and snorted that if Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was at rest in her grave he would fight her like one. They went down on the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching ... Nyasha, screaming and wriggling and doing what damage she could. (NC 117)

After the fight with her father, Nyasha gradually enters a process of bulimia which leads to considerable weight loss. According to Wixson (2002), "her illness can be understood as her only available response to the double alienation of being a Western-educated female who has returned to Africa and cannot reconcile those two sets of conflicting cultural values" (229). Her drastic loss of weight may be considered as her ambivalent desire and inability to fit in the modern African society. As a result, Nyasha enters a process of bulimia, vomiting all the food she eats and becoming cadaverous.

4. Conclusions

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangaremba's postcolonial and feminine representation of violence reveals how women find strategic ways to cope with various forms of violence. Epistemic violence, embedded in discourse, and systemic modes of violence, which are result of political and economic decisions, target female characters in many ways. Through her text, the author shares the pain of her characters with readers, unveiling the deterioration of women's minds and bodies, but also promoting their rebellion.

In the novel, both Tambudzai, the narrator, and her cousin Nyasha cannot come to terms with an ambivalent process of modernization that maintains an inherent state of order that does not challenge patriarchal power or social, racial, and ethnic divisions. By entering through the back door of the uncle's house, Tambudzai finds escape from poverty and dependency through education, merit, and the opportunities provided by modernity, while Nyasha probably faces death. However, her death does not represent the end of her rebellion; it is through her deteriorated body that the protagonist unveils her refusal to consent to the epidermalization of discipline to which women are constantly submitted.

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