

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945 /GUELMA

جامعة 8 ماي 1945 \قائمة

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

كلية الآداب و اللغات

DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS & ENGLISH LANGUAGE

قسم الآداب و اللغة الإنجليزية



Option: LITERATURE

**Forms of Fighting Back Women's Oppression in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World***

A thesis Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Anglophone Language, Literature, and  
Civilization

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2016-2017

## Dedication

I express my gratitude towards Allah the all beneficent, the most merciful for the quality, the patience, and the capacity He has offered me to compose this dissertation. It is my genuine gratefulness and warmest regard that I dedicate this work to:

My dear mother, Houria BOUSSOUF, the only person who has always been there to support, motivate, and encourage me during my whole studying career. The first person, who believed in me and pushed me toward success and achievements.

My father, BOUSSOUF Ahmed, who taught me that only education would make a better person out of me. He was the first to teach me how to be responsible, strong, and self-confident.

To my twin brother, Moussa, I dedicate this work to show my love and appreciation. Your personal condition forbids you from continuing your studies, so here I am eager to share with you this success.

To my precious sisters: Houda, Sihem, Samira, Fouzia, and Hanene. Thank you for your help, wise counsel, and sympathetic ear.

To my lovely little angels: Taki E-dinne, Adem, Djawed, and the beautiful Lyna, and their fathers: Mouhammed, Arbi, and Hakim.

To my beloved, intimate, faithful friends: Sarra, Khawla, Meriem, and Noussa. Thank you very much my sweetest friends for your daily support and cooperation. In addition to Besma, Ibtisem, Imen, Manel, Romaissa, Karima, Hadjer ,Nesrine.

Of course special thanks to you Fatah, Chiheb, and Aymen. Thank you all for being part of my life.

Special thanks go to my dearest: Warda, Nacira, and Leila who have always been there for me and have never let me down.

Thank you ALL for being an important part of my life; I will always appreciate all what you have done to me!

## Acknowledgements

I would like to pay my special gratitude, thankfulness, respect, and appreciation to the mentioned below who positively contributed to make my research successful:

My supervisor, Miss Khawla BENDJEMIL, for her guidance, assistance and patient encouragement.

All the teachers of the English Department of the University of 8 Mai 1945, Guelma. Many thanks to all of you for your efforts, advice and precious knowledge you shared with us during these five years.

I would like to acknowledge the entire faculty and the English Department whose services helped me to finish my humble research thesis.

I would like to honor my dearest teacher, Miss Sihem GUETETLIA, for her unlimited help, support, advice and welcomed cooperation. I will never forget your special touch in my career.

Finally, I would like to thank all my primary, middle and secondary school teachers who were my first educators, monitors, and guiders. Especially Mr. GUETETLIA Radouene, whose love to the English Language affected me as well.

ALL YOUR SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE ARE DEEPLY APPRECAITED.

## Abstract

This thesis uses the feminist theory to analyze Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1968) and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* (1988). The study aims to examine the state of the African women and describe the issue of the double oppression and injustice they suffer from. It also discusses the different forms that these female characters resort to in order to fight back such oppression. This work accordingly aims to describe how Tsitsi Dangarembga and Assia Djebar seek to valorize women's role in the different societies they belong to, respectively. Moreover, this thesis reveals the true image of the African societies being an Algerian or a Zimbabwean, in which, women kept constrained by its traditional values. Consequently, it examines the various changes that occur to the female characters' lives.

## المخلص

تستخدم هذه الأطروحة النظرية النسوية لتحليل روايتي كل من الكاتبة تسييتسي دانغاريمبغا تحت عنوان " الظروف العصبية" (1988) ورواية الكاتبة آسيا جبار " أطفال العالم الجديد" (1962). وتهدف الدراسة إلى دراسة حالة المرأة الأفريقية ووصف قضية الاضطهاد المزدوج والظلم الذي تعاني منه. و كما تناقش هذه الأطروحة السبل المختلفة التي تلجأ إليها هذه الشخصيات من أجل محاربة هذا القمع. بالإضافة إلى ذلك يهدف هذا العمل إلى وصف الكيفية التي تسعى إليها تسييتسي دانغاريمبغا وآسيا جبار إلى تقديس دور المرأة في مختلف المجتمعات وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن هذه الأطروحة تكشف عن الصورة الواقعية للمجتمعات الأفريقية سواء كانت جزائرية أو زيمبابوية، حيث ظلت المرأة فيها مقيدة بقيم تلك المجتمعات التقليدية. بالتالي، فإن الأطروحة تدرس التغيرات المختلفة التي تحدث لحياة الشخصيات الأنثوية في كل من الروايتين السابق ذكرهما.

## **Abstrait**

Cette thèse utilise la théorie féministe pour analyser *Les Conditions Nerveuses* de Tsitsi Dangarembga (1968) et *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* d'Assia Djébar (1988). L'étude vise à examiner l'état des femmes africaines et à décrire la question de la double oppression et de l'injustice dont elles souffrent. Il traite également des différentes formes auxquelles ces personnages féminins recourent pour lutter contre cette oppression. Ce travail vise donc à décrire comment Tsitsi Dangarembga et Assia Djébar cherchent à valoriser le rôle des femmes dans les différentes sociétés auxquelles ils appartiennent, respectivement. De plus, cette thèse révèle la véritable image des sociétés africaines comme algérienne ou zimbabwéenne, dans lesquelles les femmes sont contraintes par leurs valeurs traditionnelles. Par conséquent, il examine les différents changements qui se produisent dans la vie des personnages féminins.

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## Introduction

Feminism is a literary theory concerned with women's issues and their social and political life's experiences in the whole world. It supports gender equality and seeks to establish justice between men and women. Thus, this theory aims to obtain the same social, political, and economic rights and opportunities for both genders. Feminist writers use literature as a tool to voice women's thoughts concerning their bad conditions. Indeed, their pens have been of great influence on the established changes in the life of women. Hence, feminists' works discuss many issues, such as, oppression, identity, race, sexism, racism, rape, gender role and others. In such writings, feminists describe the daily issues and obstacles that prevent women from living a balanced life like the one that men enjoy. They also examine patriarchy and men's injustice to deprive women their freedom. Besides, they analyze the forms that women adopt to resist and get over their brutal life and oppression.

Similarly, African Feminism has the same principles of Western Feminism but it is more related to the issues of women in the African continent. Specifically, this theory addresses African women after the civil rights movement that took place in Africa in the 1970's when people started to recognize their human rights. Because of the faulty interpretation Western Feminism had on African women, African Feminism emerged to highlight and discuss the issue of these women and redefine them after the stereotypical images this Western world shared. African feminist writers are the microphone speakers for all African women who are silenced, subjugated and oppressed in a patriarchal dictator world. Among the themes this theory deals with is rape, oppression and double oppression, identity, color, patriarchy, sisterhood and women's solidarity, racism, sexism and social discrimination and resistance. Assia Djebar and Tsitsi Dangarembga are among the figure writers of African Feminism. Hence, this study is devoted to identify the different forms of

resistance and fighting back women's oppression in both Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World*.

The different forms of fighting back women's oppression in both novels under study reveal the unfair and the patriarchal social framework encountering them which considers women as inferior and submissive wives and prevents them from education. In addition to many other reasons of sufferance like poverty for instance, men also are considered as another source of women's oppression. Hence, this study aims to depict the different forms of oppression exercised over the female characters. It also seeks to explore how these females face their life obstacles. Therefore, it describes how education, courage, action and women's involvement in the revolutionary war against colonizers could bring a change to women's status. Thus, the purpose of this study is to highlight the bounding relationship between the female characters that empowers and strengthens them. In other words, how these characters help, motivate, and encourage each other to resist, and react. Finally, it examines how women's resistance and solidarity changes their lives, and creates for them a balanced, and an independent life status.

This study applies the feminist theory on both Tsitsi Dnagarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* (1962) to discuss the theme of forms of fighting back women's oppression in both novels. Simultaneously, it is an analytical study, uses the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the MLA style. It aims to describe the oppression exercised over the female characters in both novels under this study. In addition, it examines the different forms that the female characters adopt to fight back and resist the oppression. Furthermore, the application of the feminist theory in this study is an attempt to deal with inequality, women's oppression and patriarchy that are reflected through these works and seek to establish justice and equality between men and women.

The reason behind my choice of this theme and these novels goes back first, to the fact that I am a woman who likes to analyze and feel the experience of the female characters in the novels from an internal situation. Second, the fact that I belong to the African continent, is another reason and my desire to study and highlight focal issues related to African women and education is an example. In addition, because of the need to discuss the internal issues from within the context and not from an external view, I chose literature and tried to use my pen in order to convince the whole world that in the past women suffered a lot and are still suffering and their human rights are exploited. Women are still raped, exploited, humiliated, subjugated, and enslaved by men. Also, being an Algerian woman, is a necessity to speak for all the Algerian women, to voice their needs, describe how my female ancestors suffered during the colonial period. Finally, I chose this specific theme to show that women were capable to achieve success, be independent, and resist all forms of their oppression no matter how tough their life was.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical one that is divided into three sections. The first section of the chapter is devoted to give an overview of the feminist theory. This section provides some definitions of what feminism means to some scholars. In addition, it includes some principles, objectives and some social theories of the movement. Besides, this section discusses different types of this Feminist theory in addition to its history, some successful achievements of the movement. The second section of the chapter is devoted to discuss feminism in African literature. This section includes a definition of African Feminism and its objectives, in addition to some famous figures of this theory such as Mariamma Ba and Flora Nwapa. Also, it analyzes what makes black feminism different from female western feminism. The third section of this chapter discusses the female oppression in African fiction as a theme and then discusses it in relation to both novels that are under study.

The second chapter of the thesis will be an analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. It seeks to show how African women are oppressed because of men and the patriarchal social framework they are living in. The first section in this chapter gives a summary of the novel. The second section is devoted to describe different forms of oppression and men's injustice against the five female characters while the third section is to analyze the different forms of fighting back women's oppression and the way they encouraged each other to face men and get over their brutal authority. In addition, the fourth section is a description of the change that happened to these women's lives.

The third chapter of this thesis is an analysis of Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World*. The first section includes a general overview and a summary of the novel. The second section highlights the different forms of oppression over the female characters and how badly they live. Besides, the third section explores the way these characters fight the oppression and the cruelty of men and how they support each other to achieve this resistance. The fourth section in this chapter describes how the female characters' life status has changed.

Finally, this thesis intends to reveal the essential role of feminism on women's life and its achievements for gender equality. Hence, this dissertation uses this theory as an attempt to deal with gender inequality, women's oppression and sexual discrimination against women all around Africa and intends to achieve equality, justice and freedom to all the African women and establish a fair social world which respects both men and women. In addition, it highlights the different forms of oppression over the female characters of the novel and explores the way these characters used education to fight back the oppression and describes how the female characters' life status has changed.

## **Chapter One: A Theoretical Foundation**

This chapter is a theoretical one that is divided into three sections. The first section of the chapter attempts to give an overview of the feminist theory with an understanding to what feminism means to some scholars. In addition, it includes some principles, objectives and some social theories of the movement. Besides, this section discusses different types of this Feminist theory in addition to its history, some successful achievements of movement, and Simone de Beauvoir's contribution in Feminism. The second section of the chapter discusses feminism in African literature and its objectives, in addition to a presentation of some famous figures of the theory such as Mariamma Ba and Flora Nwapa. Also, this chapter attempts to analyze what makes female Black feminism different from female Western feminism. Finally, the third section of this chapter discusses the female oppression in African fiction as a theme and then discusses it in relation to both Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* (1962).

### **I.1. An Overview of the Feminist Theory**

Feminism is a literary theory that deals with the social and the political life of women. This theory supports gender equality and thus feminists believe that men and women should be socially, politically, and economically equal. A more useful definition is provided by both Michael Kimmel and Thomas Mosmiller in their work: *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776-1990: A Documentary History* (1992). Their work generally, focuses on women and the reality in which they are treated differently and unequally to men in both private and public spheres. Hence, both of them consider Feminism as a bridge to change (Cordell and Pennington 152-153).

Moreover, a large amount of definitions about Feminism can be provided. According to Barbara Smith, feminism is considered as:

The political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, Jewish women, lesbians, old women—as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement. (qtd in Cordell and Pennington 153)

So, Feminism is not only a theoretical study, but it is also a practice of its principles which seek to guarantee to all women the state of freedom with no exception, be it a white or a colored woman, rich or poor, Muslim or Jewish or any other characteristic which makes no difference because all women are parallel, and anything different from that will not be considered as Feminism. In addition, Bell Hooks states that:

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganize society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires (Hooks 24).

So according to what Hooks provides, Feminism's major aim is to fight women's oppression and to eliminate the old attitudes of men's domination over everything and the biased patriarchal atmosphere women are living in. Besides, he seeks to re-shape the social system so that every individual would be conscious of and works to develop away from the old ideas.

In general, Feminism claims that the society always treats women and men differently and therefore, women cannot participate in all social and political activities. Also, they are prevented from participating in many professions. Consequently, this theory aims to make a change in concern the old and biased beliefs and practices against women and to eliminate the idea that men are always superior to women. In addition, this theory attempts to explain the

characteristics of gender inequality, such as, the faulty stereotyping, oppression, patriarchy, discrimination, and also biased treatment. Feminist theory scholars, also, promote women's rights and intend to show to the whole world what a woman can do if she is free and also her fundamental role in the society.

The Feminist theory has certain principals to follow and apply in real life. These principles include increasing equality through making these ideas applicable and working hard to achieve them to make a change. Besides, expanding human choice in which both man and woman are free to develop their life and choose their interests even if it contradicts with the old shared traditions. Another important principal of this theory is to eliminate gender inequality, various traditions and cultural norms which limit and control women from being free to access everything, such as, education, business... In addition, feminists seek to end the sexual violence and promote sexual freedom.

The feminist theory is a system of depicting women's experiences and situations. Hence, it studies all what is considered a threat to female peace. There are different feminist social theories which seek to provide answers to many crucial questions which turn around women's situations, women's oppression, how can a female's world change and develop? How and why differences between the two sexes are so important? In that perspective, Albert Lopp in his paper analyses four feminist theories.

First, theories of Gender Difference focus on how men's situations are different from that of women. It also attempts to explain and analyze the marginalization of women in a man-created culture, in a patriarchal society, and how women can resist and create their own culture. Second, theories of Gender Inequality stress the idea that men and women are not only different but also unequal because of social organization and structure of the society and not because of biological differences. Thus, this injustice needs to be stopped and changed to a more equal and egalitarian situations. Also, that platform of a sexist and patriarchal society



should disappear to confirm the achievement of equality.

Not far from the two previous theories, the Gender Oppression theory claims that the only source of inequality is the domination and the oppression that a man exercises over women. Consequently, a relationship of power, of oppressed and of oppressor raised between males and females. Radical Feminism is one variant in this approach, which gives women a positive value and insist that the patriarchal regime is violently oppressing women. Moreover, theories of Structural Oppression analyses the ways male domination affect the social structure and the organization of the society. Feminists of this approach see that women's life experiences of oppression are a result of class, age, race, and sexual orientation.

Although Feminism is a clear-direction movement, many still misunderstand its actual principles and goals. There are a lot of stereotypes against feminism and any feminist. In that view, a woman would be considered as the enemy of men, and if a man was a feminist, his masculinity would be questioned! This faulty perception of Feminism is may be the result of the different types or streams of Feminism. This field of study consists of many types and branches; each one differs from the other's aim and point of focus.

First, Cultural Feminism claims a difference between women and men's personalities. It also claims some biological differences. The theory aims to overcome sexism by highlighting women's characteristics. Second, Eco-feminism, which sees patriarchal philosophies as a source of harm to women. This men-women's relationship is the same between society's treatments of the environment, and as women are resisting men, eco-feminists also are resisting the destroying of the earth. The third branch is called Individualist or Libertarian Feminism. The major focus of this theory is the individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence... Feminists of this theory tend to focus on the obstacles that both men and women face because of their gender.

Moreover, Material Feminism is another branch of Feminism which focuses on improving women's material condition in order to liberate them from housework, cooking and other traditional female domestic jobs. In addition to Moderate Feminism, a branch of the feminist theory that deals most with younger women or those who did not experienced directly discrimination. They seek to make more efforts because the feminist movement alone is no longer able to achieve its aims and principals. Another influential branch is the National Organization for Women (N.O.W) Feminism, a theory based on the belief that women must be granted special privileges and men should not be the problem in feminism so that men and women would be fairly equal (Feminist). The Liberal Feminism is a mainstream which believes that change occurs at a governmental level. It is concerned with the integration of women into the power structure and gives men and women equal access to the same positions. These Liberal feminist groups depend on the protection of women from legislation against sexual discrimination, for instance, the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Act in the 1970's in Britain (Feminism).

Radical Feminism is also another branch that considers women's oppression the most important of all forms of oppression, be it because of race, culture, or economic class. They contradict the belief that women must adopt certain roles in the society in favor to men. According to activist feminists of that stream, the society, the institutions and the government are highly patriarchal which needs to be reshaped and reconstructed. They do not believe that legal means would put an end to sexual inequality or even change men's attitudes towards women. Also, it focuses on making a difference between biological behaviors so that men and women would be free to choose their roles and not being expected to take certain positions. Feminists of that stream believe that technology can help women stop their biological child birth and will allow babies to be grown outside of a woman's body, to promote more gender equality between men and women and so no exploitation against them (Feminism)

The Amazon Feminism as all the previous branches focused on gender equality. Feminists of this theory also focus on being physically equal since they view both men and women are equally, physically capable. In addition, they contradict the faulty stereotypes against women which expect women to be passive, weak, and helpless. Also, they reject the belief that there are certain inherited qualities; some as masculine while others as feminine. Finally, the Separatists are in favor of being separated from men, either a total or a partial separation. Their point here is that being separated from men enables them to grow personally and to see themselves in different contexts which they did not even imagine to be in (Feminism).

Feminism is the most progressive and long going transformation that changed the whole world. Actually, the term feminism was not used until the late 1880's. Before it was known as "women's rights". Feminism aims to establish equal rights, freedom, and legal protection for all women. According to Rebecca Walker and Magie Humm, the movement's history is divided into three major waves. The first wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's whose main concern is to grant women the right to vote. The second was in the 1960's and 1970's, it refers to more women's rights including liberty, legal and social rights. The third wave extends from the 1990's to the present; it is considered as a reaction to the failures of the second wave and was a continuation to achieve women's full liberation.

During the Era of the Enlightenment, the feminists' voices began to look for liberty, equality and gender equality. By the rise of Abolitionism during the Age of Enlightenment, the feminist activism started to emerge in the United States when female abolitionists started to fight for freedom and equality in both the social and the political life. The same actually was happening in England, and by the mid nineteenth century the issues of social change upraised in the whole Europe and North America. Moreover, the beginning of the suffrage movement took place by the first woman's rights convention in July 1848 by Elizabeth Cady

Stanton<sup>1</sup> and other feminists. She proclaimed that all men and women had been created equal, and this equality represents women's right to vote. Although the right to vote was finally granted, the issues of education and political rights remain a problem especially when there was a little contact between the feminists and the ordinary women of lower classes. Sojourner Truth, a former slave, was the only voice to be heard from a black woman. She was a bridge between those ordinary women and the elite or the upper classes. Also, she delivered her famous speech "*Ain't I a woman*"<sup>2</sup> in 1851, Akron, Ohio. Women's rights convention spread in other states. Yet it deprived from its basic interests and it was until the feminist movement rebounded, they focused again on their basic principal which is woman suffrage. (Burkett and Brunell)

In contrast, the radical feminists had different views about women's freedom. They opposed the idea that the suffrage right would grant women's liberation. They claimed that it will rather as Emma Goldman said: "women would gain their freedom by refusing the right to anyone over her body...by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler but deeper and richer". Charlotte Perkins Gilman also shares Emma's point of view. In her work *Women and Economics* 1898, Gilman claimed that women will be liberated from men once they are free from the old norms stating that women's role is to be at home take care of the family and stay men's dependent.

After the right of suffrage was successfully achieved, the post suffrage Era witnessed the end of the feminist movement in both Europe and the United States of America. Feminism, however, was divided into many different groups, such as The League of Women Voters, The Women's Trade Union League, and the Women's Joint Congressional Committee. These groups, however, were not truly feminist in nature. For instance, they called for the removal of discrimination from laws; others claimed equal rights between men and women, others to stop sex discrimination... These different goals led to infighting among feminists,

raising many questions about how woman could be freed. Another event affected the feminist movement; it is the Second World War. During the war men were absent from the employment world, which opened the door for women to benefit from their absence and get many jobs and professions. However, things changed by the end of the war. Women's positions changed and men were discharged from the army and went back for their jobs which mean women lost their jobs and stayed home again. Some of them accepted the new situation while others were angry and proposed peaceful and organized protests. The Post-War Era was totally different, a new culture and social perspectives where women's conditions changed as well as their compartments (Burkett and Brunell).

The second wave of Feminism emerged during the 1960's and 1970's. It breaks up from the old norms of life in America. As the first wave was inspired by The Abolition Movement, their great-granddaughters were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the second wave feminists who were inspired by their mothers. Generally speaking, the agenda of the President John F. Kennedy is about what women are interested in and concerned with. However, employment discrimination, rape, domestic violence are still a remaining problem in the society. Consequently, in 1960's, Women's Rights Movement took place simultaneously with The Civil Rights Movement.

While the first wave of Feminism fights to grant rights, such as, suffrage while the second wave is interested in other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination. The second wave also discusses the origins of women's oppression, the role of the family in the society and the nature of gender. Feminism, then, became a matter of competition." Anarcho-feminists"<sup>3</sup> Emma Goldman, for instance, believes that women's liberation requires woman's distance from all what restricted her. Individualist feminists believe in the government as a solution to women's problems. Also, Amazon feminists see women as a heroine with physical strength which liberates her. Another group, the Separist feminists including lesbian

feminists which believe that the separation between women and men is necessary for women's liberation (Burkett and Brunell).

The second wave of feminism was led by educated middle-class white women who drive the movement to serve their own concerns, created again a big gap between them and women of other classes and races. African American women faced many challenges. First, gender was the primary source of their problems, and they faced a double oppression of racism and sexism. They suffered from racism because they were colored and of sexism simply because they were women. These issues were highly addressed by black feminists, such as, Michele Wallace, Mary Ann Weathers, Bell Hooks, Alice Walker and many others. Moreover, tensions of interest were always raised between white feminists and black feminists. Blacks had always visualized whites as their enemy; they never considered white women as truly their sisters, but rather as much the oppressor as men. As Toni Cade Bambara, in her work, *Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), said that she did not know that their priorities were the same, and that their concerns and methods were the same. Being a black and a woman is much harder than being a black and a man (Burkett and Brunell).

By the end of the twentieth century, there was a contact between different Feminist Movements in Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Western feminists could not believe women's conditions in the third world, they recognized that women were required to wear the veil, forced to marry, no education, or health care and many badly conditions, especially in many parts of Africa which were colonized, the situation which makes things worse to African women.

In the mid-1990's, the world witnessed the rise of the third wave of feminism which was led by Generation Xers<sup>4</sup>. This movement took place in a diverse world, culturally, economically and technologically speaking. Its principals are based on what the first and the second waves of feminism achieved and what is not yet accomplished. Some feminist

activists of this new approach were daughters of the second wave's feminists, such as Rebecca Walker, the daughter of Alice Walker. In addition to Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards who were raised by second wavers. Their aim is also to fight sexism, oppression, racism, patriarchy and classicism and to spread awareness (Burkett and Brunell).

Third wave feminists are influenced by Postmodernism, they work hard to reshape and redefine the faulty understanding that was shared and transmitted about womanhood, femininity, gender, sexuality and masculinity. They believe in the need to change the old ideas and perceptions so that the mentality that links some characteristics to men and others to women would change. Although third wavers take advantage of the inherited institutions and organizations created by the second wavers, they do not give gender identity and sexuality much importance as their ancestors did. In contrast, third wavers express their concerns actively and ironically in their works through the use of language, slangs...For instance, Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues* discusses how women feel about sexuality that includes topics such as orgasm, birth, rape, and the subversion of the Guerrilla Girls who fight against female artists' discrimination (Burkett and Brunell).

In that view, this wave includes much more colored women and girls than the two previous waves. Their works are characterized by stressing the real image of woman. They react against the stereotypical images said about women, considering her as weak, passive, afraid and emasculating. Hence, they correct these images and redefine women as powerful and self-assessing through their works not only in literature but many other fields. The change also reach Television programs for children which depicted a new sort of powerful, educated, independent girls such as *Dora The Explorer* (1999-2006). The Internet also, helped a lot in achieving third wave's principals as a tool to publish novels, articles, magazines, debates, videos, pictures on different social media programs. It is ultimately clear that the internet democratized the feminist movement and made it universal (Burkett and Brunell).

The "grrrls" movement<sup>5</sup> is another form of the third wave which proved to be strong and powerful, they define feminine beauty as a pleasure to themselves and not as an object to men. The grrrl-feminism tends to be global and multi-cultural to break gender boundaries by providing answers of identity, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, third wavers are criticized and questioned either to be successful or not. Besides, feminists of the older generations also criticize them and claim that they do not achieve any change to the old issues that ever existed. In 2000, it was claimed that the wave had broken. Another question is newly raised about whether sexual liberation and gender equality are really represented and achieved or no. At this point, the three waves of feminism are criticized and face disagreements yet they achieved a lot of success.

Feminism changes the world. As Robert Fulford said, "Feminism has altered a whole culture's ideal version of sexual roles. It has changed the professions, most strikingly medicine and law. It has affected how children are raised, how the law deals with domestic life, how corporations and public institutions are staffed". First, feminists drive the civil rights movement and fought segregation and sexual discrimination. Second, they succeed to establish laws which grant equal rights under the constitution protection. Now days, women can vote and participate in politics and be presidents. They can be out of the household if they choose to work. Although some women are still silenced because of culture, many of them speak and complain their rape and sexual discrimination. Therefore, women have established many associations, organizations and factories. Through time, the percentage of women's illiteracy is decreasing and girls now can have access to education. Although feminists achieve a lot of success, still many women in this world are subjugated and oppressed as Fulford says, "The world still needs the feminist spirit. It should shine a consistent light on the many millions of women who are caged by misogynistic religions and male-made dictatorship. Freeing them should become the central feminist project".



The feminist theory is a universal theory. Feminist writers all around the world participate in it through their pens and literature. One of the most feminist figures who powerfully affect this theory is Betty Friedan<sup>6</sup> one of the pioneers of the second wave of Feminism and the women's rights movement. She is one of the founders of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She contributed effectively in the feminist theory through her famous work, entitled: *The Feminine Mystique (1963)* which broke up the old traditional roles of women.

## **I.2. Feminism in African Literature**

In his article African feminism: the African woman's struggle for identity, Ruvimbo Goredema said:

African feminism is a feminist epistemology and a way of rhetoric that has provided arguments, which validate the experience of women of Africa and of African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse. It is a justice that aims to create a discernible difference between women who were colonized and those who were deemed the colonizers, and a social movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathizes with African women's histories, present realities and future expectations  
.(34)

Hence, African feminism is a theory which aims to establish justice and equality not only in the African continent but to make the whole world aware of what African women experienced in the past, what they are living, and how they want their life become in the future.

She also said,

African feminism concerns itself not only with the rights of women from Africa but also inclusive of those living in the Diaspora as many of the contributors to the literature have often lived “abroad”. Therefore, let our inquiring minds not be limited by a geographical location as the name would imply. However, the debated, the practices and implementation are most credibly pursued on the African continent. (34)

From these quotes, one can understand that African Feminism deals with different issues which affect not only African women but women in the whole world and discusses their roles in the patriarchal societies and the necessity to re-adjust the picture of women not as sexual beings but rather as human being. This movement also aims to achieve gender equality between the two sexes to establish a social balance and the same rights for both men and women.

Before the emergence of African Feminism, Western feminists portrayed African women as weak and ignorant and declared that their writings were published to enlighten these women and help them. Hence, Nnaemeka defiantly proclaimed:

The arrogance that declares African women ‘problems’ objectifies us and undercuts the agency necessary for forging true global sisterhood. African women are not problems to be solved. Like women everywhere, African women have problems. More important, they have provided solutions to these problems. We are the only ones who can set our priorities and agenda. Anyone who wishes to participate in our struggles must do so in the context of our agenda. (57)

From that view, African Feminism became necessary to speak for African women from the same context and define them so not to be defined by others who share stereotypical images about these women. Therefore, in the African literature woman’s traditional picture changed to a more modern and powerful that reveals her transformation and resistance. In

their works, feminist writers such as Buchi Emecheta<sup>7</sup>, Nuruddin Farah, Wole Soyinka, Assia Djebar<sup>8</sup>, Tsitsi Dangarembga<sup>9</sup>, Chinwa Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Mariamma Ba<sup>10</sup>, and many others discuss many themes, among them: social discrimination that women fight against. Also, they deal with the practice of polygamy and girls' marriage under eighteen years old which represents an emotional oppression and a violation against childhood. Besides, they interpret women's double oppression in colonial societies, being forcibly married or raped. It can be traced also that their works encourage female bonding, solidarity and sisterhood as forms of fighting back and resistance the oppression.

In addition to Tsitsi Dangarembga and Assia Djebar, there are many feminist writers who are proud of being feminists and used their pens to strengthen the feminist literary movement in Africa through their works. Their participation was through revealing women's life in African societies and interpreting their sufferance and oppression. Hence, their use of novels was a different way of rebellion to free and reflect the true picture of women,

New, alternative images were created by women to comfort and possibly discredit the traditional images created of them, aiming to expand women's consciousness of themselves instead of narrowing it down to what the culture says or imposes on them. It is in this context that the novel became useful as an effective tool of creating awareness alongside other mass communication media. Most writers henceforth, used the novel form to wage war against the negative impressions created about women. (Ogen 4)

Mariamma Ba, for example, is one of the most known African writers who strongly interfered in the issue of women and the patriarchal life style they were living in. In her famous novel *Une Si Longue Lettre* 1981 translated *So Long a Letter* in which she describes the conditions of women in Western Africa and discusses their roles in postcolonial Africa. She revealed how men in general were enslaving women and abusing them once they got married, she said, "a woman gives up her personality, her identity, becoming a thing in the

service of the man who has married her”(4). Her strong feminist orientation is powerfully depicted in her novel which fights the male domination society that encapsulates Senegalese culture and gender role. Ba called for equity between genders, the right of education for women: “We have a right, just as you have, to education, which we ought to be able to pursue to the furthest limits of our intellectual capacities. We have a right to equal well-paid employment, to equal opportunities; the right to vote is an important weapon” (63).

In addition, Flora Nwapa<sup>11</sup> is among the feminist writers who strongly contributed to the feminist literary movement. Nwapa’s life logo is “Anticipating positive picture of Ladies” which depicts her feminine objective to empower women and reflect them in a powerful image to the whole world. According to Dr Uttam B. Sonkamble: “Nwapa is a recognized for re-creating the Igbo (Ibo) life through her work. She believes that women possess strong belief, strength and ability and she wants to strengthen them by making the women positive; she languishes for a whole new world of women as in the Ibo, in woman's viewpoint” (1). Nwapa’s works are of a great importance due to the strong effect they had on women. She always lauds women and their abilities, she says, “When I do write about women in Nigeria in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very, very positive in their thinking, who are very, very independent and very , very industrious” (qtd. in Dr Uttam B. Sonkamble 1).

### **I.2.1. The Differences between Female Black Feminism and Female Western Feminism**

According to Goredema, Female African feminism can be differentiated from female Western feminism in different aspects. She claims that sexuality and sexual pressure is a point of difference in which Western feminism sees that women are oppressed because of their sex. Consequently, they suggested birth roles in which men should also take the full responsibility of a child; they also want women to marry even more as they wish. However,

African feminists seek the issues like poverty as the major problem and they accept their roles like women such as motherhood.

In addition, the Conceptualization of the patriarchal system is also a point of contradiction in which Western feminists identify patriarchy as the major enemy of women. For them, patriarchy is the worse system that needs to be re-arranged because there would be no equality in male's institution but Africa feminism is not opponent to African man, they do not see him as their enemy but rather they aim to challenge him to be also included in social, political and economical issues like equal employment. African feminists do not see their oppression as solely rooted in patriarchal structure but in many other sources.

Furthermore, she analyzes how differently Western and African feminism conceptualize women as the subject of struggles. For Western feminists the centre of this struggle is to demand equality between men and women while African feminists stressed satisfaction of basic material needs such as education, health care, better social and economic material conditions. Additionally, Female Western feminism always portrays African women as weak, powerless, passive, confused and unable to determine their lives. In these sense Female Western feminists act as superior and civilized who seek to assist and enlighten African women who are considered as inferiors (34-40).

Some African Writers refuse to be called "Feminists", and this perception is different to Western feminists who accept the label and call themselves as Feminists. Although they write about women and their works are considered to be highly feminist, some African writers do not accept the label, and Flora Nwapa is among them. Although her works are considered feminists and she as a writer had a crucial effect on the movement in general, she did not accept the name and said, "I don't think I am a radical feminist. I don't even accept that I am a feminist. I accept that I am an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows."(qtd. in Sadia Zulfiqar 45). In addition, Buchi Emecheta is among these writers. In her article

“Feminism with a small ‘f’”, Emecheta said: “I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f” (qtd. in Sadia Zulfiqar 45).

### **I.3. Female Oppression in African Fiction**

Women’s oppression is a focal issue that African Literature deals with, in which women’s experiences are recounted by the feminist writers to depict the world that women are being marginalized and exploited in. Feminists tend to use their pen to voice the unvoiced, to protest against the injustice and the oppression African women or the “other sex” suffers from. In spite of the harsh circumstances of women in Africa, they powerfully resisted against all the different forms of their oppression. Because the African society has a patriarchal social framework, men have the total dominant power and are considered as the superior sex while women are supposed to be the subordinate or the inferior. For instance, African women were not supposed to be educated but rather only cook, do the housework, and learn how to be a good wife! Also, women were neither allowed to seat and eat nor to share with them men the meal. Besides, they should stay home and never go out alone and should not say no to their “masters” because they were considered slaves to be submissive to all what men say, in addition to a non-ending list of how women are oppressed and silenced.

The different forms of fighting back women’s oppression is the theme which I tend to discuss in my work in the two chosen African novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *Children of the New World*. To begin with, in the first novel, the five female characters suffer from men’s domination and oppression. Tambudzai for instance, the major character of the story was not allowed to complete her studies because of her family’s poverty and the patriarchal social framework that sees women only as wives and not necessary to be educated. Therefore, she

suffers from the existence of males in the family that eliminated all her chances to be considered or valued.

Nyasha, was a rebellious girl whom suffered from her father's way of ruling the house and making orders to be never discussed but only obeyed. Although she was born in a rich family which supported her education, Nyasha could not accept to be ruled by a man. Because she was raised in two different countries (England and Zimbabwe), she could not cope and integrate within the second one and that was what makes her suffer more since she was obliged to adopt different life style. In addition to Maiguru who used to pretend happiness to satisfy her husband orders. She was very submissive to what he used to say because her husband was the patriarch who did not tolerate a refusal to his demands.

Furthermore, Ma 'Shinghani was a very submissive wife; she suffered a lot because of her rude, lazy husband and his humiliation to her. Her sister, Lucia, was a rebellious woman against her society. She did not accept to be engaged into marriage to not be dominated by a man.

Similarly, the second novel depicts the sufferance of different women during the colonialism which makes them doubly oppressed. Salima was a symbol of the Algerian women who were involved in the war and were harshly tortured during their imprisonment. Cherifa, was also oppressed and raped by her husband whom she never loved and so her neighbor Amna who was submissive, silenced, and beaten by her husband. Lila's story was not different from what these women went through, first, because her patriarchal family and the whole society contradicted her education, second, due to her husband's jealousy and desire to be the controller of her life.

Through their works, both Djébar and Dangarembga tend to depict the real picture of African women. They portrayed the female characters in both novels far from the faulty

image as weak and powerless but as rebellious and powerful to bring a change in their patriarchal social framework. It was during the postcolonial period that Africans knew their human rights. Consequently, literature interpreted women's unfairness life through many written and oral works. Hence, the prominent theme in this work is the different forms of fighting back women's oppression. In spite of the oppression and the bad conditions these women went through in both novels, they powerfully and differently resisted and faced all forms of that oppression.

For Tambudzai, education was the solution to get over poverty and patriarchy to create a new and a more comfortable life far from the male authority. Lucia chose work as her safe way to be free, independent and created a world for her own. Both Maiguru and Ma' Shinghani choose to voice their pain and decide for the first time in their life to be strong and say no whenever necessary to oppose their husbands. Although Nyasha's rebellion may not seem successful, she was a good inspiration to the other characters to fight and rebel against the male reign. In addition, Salima in the second novel resisted her fear, pain and torture and did not betray her brothers in the mountain, she was the strongest to sacrifice her life for her country, and so did Lila who fought the colonial torture. She also resisted the whole society through her education and realization that life without a man was possible. Cherifa also was strong enough to leave her husband and start a new life when she will decide to act for the first time and face her society. Amna is the only character who can be seen as the sole woman who adopts silence as a way of resisting and refusing her bad life which many Algerian women during that time found silence as the only way to react.

From the two mentioned novels, readers will easily understand how the African writers depict the ruthless situations women lived. These writers also call for the necessity to resist, speak up, and break the silence of all women around the world. Besides, they aim to show to the world the real life experiences of women in patriarchal societies. Therefore,



through this analysis readers' stereotypical images about African women will change because women are not weak and do not accept being oppressed but rather they are strong to rebel and fight all the bad circumstances and barriers in their life. From these novels and many others, Feminist writers are addressing the entire world using their pens and speak for women to spread the idea that women are to share with them the world, and nowadays , they are not inferior, they will not accept to be considered as “ the second” or “ the other” sex and they will always speak up.

## **Chapter Two: Forms of Oppression and Resistance in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions***

This chapter attempts to give a general overview and a summary of the whole novel *Nervous Conditions* written by Tsitsi Dangarembga in 1988 in order to support further analysis by means of highlighting the different forms of oppression over the five female characters in the story (Tambudzai, Lucia, Ma'Shinghani, Maiguru and Nyasha). It also explores the ways these women fight and resist patriarchy. Finally, it describes the change in women's life status in the novel.

### **I.1. Summary of the novel**

*Nervous Conditions*, a novel which tells a story of many oppressed female characters through recounting their life experiences within a patriarchal society dominated by males. This novel is composed of ten chapters. The novel begins when Tambudzai, the main character of the story says "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling" (1). The death of her brother Nhamo gave her a new birth, a chance to enjoy everything he was blessed with, the chance to be valued and to get access to education. At first, the idea that Nhamo should go to school was Babamukuro's idea, their uncle, who was the headmaster of that school and the only educated man in the family whom everybody respects. Although the departure of Nhamo to study would cause more work in the homestead for all the family members, Jeremiah, their father, agreed to send his boy to develop himself academically.

Nhamo only visited occasionally once a year when the school year ended and the maize year began. His family used to plant maize, mhunga and rukweza. His sister,

Tambudzai did the whole land work while he kept reading his books, a good excuse to escape from doing the work. He became not very sociable; he detested his family's poverty, the whole homestead, actually. Nhamo's parents were expecting a lot from him, being the only male in the family, "that boy and his books! He'll make a fine teacher one of these days with all that reading!" (9). However, the year that Tambudzai began school, the family became poorer. There was no money to pay for the school fees, especially when Babamukuro left the mission for five years. He went to England to complete his studies. As a result, the father of Nhamo was obliged to provide money for his own because no help from his brother will be provided. Babamukuro was always Nhamo's idol and wanted to be educated as he was, while Tambudzai's idol was Maiguru, Babamukuro's wife, whom she was also very educated and a good wife.

The poverty of this family pushed Mainini<sup>12</sup> to work hard and sell eggs and vegetables to provide enough money to keep Nhamo in school while Tambudzai stayed home where she was supposed to learn how to be a good wife. Yet, she wanted to go back to her school, so she suggested for her parents to let her plan her own field and grow her own maize in order to obtain money for the school fees. All she asked for was some seed. Her father, however, did not take her wants seriously and refused the idea until her mother interfered and convinced her husband to let her try her best. The land which Tambu chose to plant was a plot of her grandmother's land, that woman was her truly teacher. She taught her how to be a good land worker and gave her many history lessons which were not even included in books, she was her first cultivator. When her maize became dark green, someone stole some. After she recognized that her brother was the one who stole her maize, she fought him during the Sunday school in the church, when Mr Matimba, the teacher, listened to her story carefully. It was the first time that someone encouraged and helped her to achieve her dreams and find a way to obtain money.

At first, the father refused the idea of the teacher which suggested for her to sell the maize green to the whites in town. Again, after the mother, he permitted her to go and see what she can do. Indeed, she succeeded to obtain enough money but not from selling the maize but rather from an old white woman, Doris, who donated ten pounds towards her school fees, so she went back to her school.

The five years ended, and Babamukuro was back from England where the whole family gathered to welcome him back. By his coming, Babamukuro taught of how to ensure the prosperity of each branch of the family in which he suggested that at least one of each family should have access to education. He suggested that Nhamo should stay with him at the mission to complete his studies. By this decision Nhamo became very happy and so arrogant and amuse annoying his sister. Moreover, Babamukuro's children, Chido and Nyasha, spoke only English and almost lost their mother language, the Shona<sup>13</sup>. Nhamo also was no longer the same person; he had forgotten to speak Shona as well. Unlike the mother who was unhappy for being unable to speak to her son anymore, the father was very happy for that change considering it a sign of high level of education.

One night, a car stopped in the yard. It was Babamukuro with his wife only, he was very sad when he announced the death of Nhamo. The mother went crazy; all the family members cried and were very sad except of Tambudzai, who felt sorry for the life he was blessed with and not because of his death, "I was not sorry that he had died, but I was sorry for him because, according to his standards, his life had been thoroughly worth living" (56). The death of Nhamo made Babamukuro decide to send Tambudzai to the mission to finish her studies there in order to help the family "Tambudzai –must –be given the opportunity to do what she can for the family before she goes into her husband 's home" (56). Indeed, she went to the mission even though her mother rejected her leaving. Her life was going to change and form a new person out of her, she would enjoy what Nhamo used to describe to her. She

recognized what education offered him without any relative to help him. When she arrived, Nyasha welcomed her warmly; she was very happy which made Tambu astonished because her cousin had never been so good to her. From the first moments in Babamukuro's house, her education started. She noticed every single detail encountered her, and realized that she must take advantage of all the opportunities the mission offered her. In addition, she also noticed that Nyasha was not kind to her mother, she replied her rudely, anglicized habits as Maiguru called.

Days after, both Nyasha and Tambudzai became close and had long conversations with each other. Tambu learned how to seat politely in a table, how to use a fork and a spoon, how to behave in front of her uncle. Yet, Nyasha was different, she did not respect the rules her father made, and she even smoked cigarettes. Tambu's reincarnation starts by her going to school. Nyasha in the other hand helped her a lot; she showed her what books were worth reading. Maiguru was Tambu's idol; she wanted be like her especially when she knew that her aunt was very educated and had a master degree and worked as a teacher. Unlike the daughter, the mother was very grateful for all the blessing they had. Thus, Tambu's expectations about the mission changed because everything in there was different, and many rules inside the house must be strictly obeyed. Moreover, she dreamed a lot to attend the Secondary School of Salisbury. However, Nyasha did not want to attend that school at all, she always behave differently, and took advantage of her father's position as the headmaster of their current school.

By the school vacation, Chido , Nyasha and Tambudzai attended a Christmas party at the Beit Hall, the party which turned to be dramatic on Nyasha; going home late with a boy made things worst. Babamukuro was very angry at her and beat her seriously. Although the fight ended, tensions kept high and none of them talked to the other. Days after, all of them went to the Tambu's home for Christmas. Once they arrived, no one was there to welcome

them, except for the little sisters of Tambu. Her mother was not feeling good because she was pregnant and Jeremiah, the father, went to the shops with Takesure, as Lucia said, the woman which Babamukuro ignored and felt angry when he saw her. Lucia was the sister of Tambu's mother, a very wild and beautiful woman. She had many relations with men but was never pregnant which made her cursed by the whole village. Takesure was a distant cousin of the family who came home to help Jeremiah on the land work. Even though he had two wives, Lucia got pregnant from him. So, Jeremiah taught to marry Lucia as a solution to what happened, also he taught that maybe she will give birth to a boy which will be something good for him since Nhamo passed away. Babamukuro was very angry and ordered his brother to tell both of them to leave as soon as possible.

In that holiday, the four families gathered for two weeks in the homestead. One evening, there had been a "family dare"<sup>14</sup>, included only the three brothers and their sister, Tete<sup>15</sup>, to discuss the family issues. Lucia was very angry because she knew that they were discussing her issue with Takesure, she did not like being spoken about in her absence. Consequently, she went to their room and was about to beat Takesure because of his lies and cowardice. The debates and the arguments continued between the family members. As a result, Babamukuro taught to prepare for a wedding in the Church for both Jeremiah and Mainini. According to him, the evil spirit that made them live in problems must be solved this way. Although, Tambudzai was very angry "This plot which made such a joke of my parents, my home and myself" (149) she decided to forget about her anger and accept the matter.

It was school time and Tambu went to the mission to continue her education. Her mother gave birth to a boy at the hospital in the mission and both Lucia and Maiguro took good care of her. Babamukuro helped Lucia and find her a job as she asked. She will help prepare the food at the girls' hostel, besides, she began her grade one evening classes. Babamukuro punished Tambudzai because she showed her opposition to her parents'

wedding. Moreover, the school term began and Tambu had a chance to go and study in The Young Ladies College of The Sacred Heart, a multiracial convent and a prestigious private school where she can finally achieve her dream and receive a very advanced level of education while Nyasha suffered from anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

## **I.2. Different Forms of Oppression over the Female Characters of the Novel**

Tsitsi Dangarmbga portrayed the life of five female characters who were struggling to find themselves, and were searching for a way to escape from a world ruled by an outsider (the colonizer) and turned to be ruled by an insider (a man). “The Siguake family”<sup>16</sup> or patriarchy was the social ruling system which gave man the total right to be the ruler or ironically speaking the legal dictator who decided everything about everyone. This is depicted when “Babamukuru reacts in a heavy-handed authoritarian way when he thinks that Nyasha and Tambu are challenging him. Babamukuru feels that he has to enforce his patriarchal authority within his family circle; otherwise he feels his masculinity will be impaired” (Nyanhongo 127).

Rhodesia’s (nowadays Zimbabwe) tradition of Patriarchy was natural, in which any woman would follow the same process, a process which says that a woman ought to be under her father’s control, and once married under her husband’s, “this is indicative of the oppressive nature of cultural norms, which perpetuate women’s relegation to inferior positions” (Mbatha 17). Consequently, women would have no control of their own lives; instead they are born to be directed. Thus, they are culturally conditioned by a tradition which must not question the power of men, a social system in which a man is the controller, the dominator or simply the head of the family.

The novel’s story was set in 1968 during the second wave of Feminism. According to Green and Kahn in their book *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (1985)

The oppression of women is both a material reality, originating in material conditions, and a psychological phenomenon, a function of the way women and men perceive one another and themselves. But it is generally true that gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interest of male supremacy. Radical feminists argue that the construction of gender is grounded in male attempts to control female sexuality. (25)

This theory contradicts patriarchy and the male dominance that organizes the society. It sees patriarchy as a source of women's oppression and the reason behind gender role that associates women to certain subordinate roles and grants for men the controlling positions. Tsitsi Dangarembga, a radical feminist wrote this novel to depict the reality that men are the major cause of women's oppression. Brewis said that "Radical Feminism focuses on the issue of women's oppression more than any other issue; also it tends to make a social change, a change that offers both men and women equal freedom, besides, it contradicts the belief of gender-role" (Brewis 7).

This idea is seen in the novel in which men are the ones, who can be educated while women are supposed to stay at home and learn how to be good wives exactly when Jeremiah sarcastically said to his daughter "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (15). In addition, this movement questions why the biological sex determines which roles are feminine or masculine and why the society believes and adopts such a system. In the novel, what the Father Jeremiah did is that "he socialized Tambu into her gender role using the ideology he knows best to oppress her" (Mayana 8). This idea is also depicted in the novel, in which not only the male characters control the females but also the society does. Lucia's story for example, depicts this idea, in which she was cursed by her society and called a witch; Maiguru also suffers from such pre-judgment by her society just because of her education, in this regard she expressed:



Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose. It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race at the time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. (184)

Moreover, it is said that Radical Feminism tends to highlight the huge difference between a cultural determined behavior and a biological determined one (Brewis 7). As seen in the novel, Nyasha's resistance and fight against Babamukuro shows clearly that all women are born free and equal to men and are not submissive naturally but rather they are brainwashed to believe in the shared cultural values which make them, as the case of Ma' Shingayi, inferior and obedient to men. In addition, this theory contradicts the image given to women as "the other" and fights the belief that being a male means having the right to oppress women, which is symbolized in the novel's male characters. This inequality of sexes is not only present in Zimbabwe but in different African countries in general, and this novel is only a case which depicts how women are oppressed. As Rosemary Mayana said that Tambu, Lucia, and Nyasha's life story is not just a narrative of their socialization and submission to social norms. It is a story in which they have a say in how that life is to be lived and shaped; a story that catapults them beyond the kitchen and into a world of their own (6).

Being a female in a patriarchal society is hard and being a daughter in a patriarchal family is even harder: "It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began" (204). This was the case of Tambudzai, a young girl who grew up in rural Rhodesia. Her life was always ruled by the men who encountered her, the father, the brother or her uncle Babamukuru. Her life was supposed to be like all the female members

not only in her family but in her society in general. Tambu's brother was always arrogant of his education, because his sister was not allowed to finish her studies or even asked what she wanted, "The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (12). While he was reading his books, she was either cooking, cleaning or working in the field and even her little sisters were not excused from doing the work, it was all about Nhamo's comfort.

The year that Tambu was at the age of going to school her family's conditions were very bad, so she was not allowed to be in school. However, the mother preferred to boil eggs and sell vegetables so that Nhamo would not be out of his school. In addition, every time the uncle or the son was home to visit she was the one to prepare a special dinner, to do special tasks even if she disliked doing them. For instance, to carry the water-dish in which all men would wash their hands and of course Nhamo and her cousin Chido would take advantage of that and annoy her purposely. Although all women were to prepare the food, they were not allowed to join men, they were to stay in the kitchen and eat what remains! Women are always seen as the other or as the second sex in which no priority is given to them no matter how good they do to their men, and this actually affects them as Tambudzai expressed "Thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother: my father...in fact everybody" (12).

Additionally, when Babamukuru taught about the prosperity of the family, Nhamo was chosen to complete his studies in the mission. Tambu's existence was not seen at all. Nobody thought to educate a woman as he used to tell his sister, and this is mainly how she got to hate her brother and not feel sorry for his death. Although the death of Nhamo made a change in her life and gave her the opportunity to replace him and go to mission's school, Babamukuru now is to decide about her newly life. Men were meant to dominate her life no matter the condition was. Consequently, she will do everything that was asked from her, obey the orders

and never question what was told to her. Tambudzai's life was always ruled by men and the birth of her new brother threatened her future especially when her uncle started to think about the baby's future which nearly affected Tambu's education when she wanted to study in the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart.

Similarly, Lucia was oppressed, not only by men in her own family but by the whole society which cursed her and called her a witch. She had no place to go to for nineteen years in which she was a pleasure for men, enjoying her body and femininity. From her early ages, she gained a bad reputation because of her sister whom got pregnant not out of marriage. This incident made the entire village think they were loose girls. Ma'Shingayi and Lucia's father wished to benefit from his daughters; he taught that once they marry, he and his sons will get rich from the bride-price they will demand. Unfortunately, they did not. In addition, by Lucia's departure to her sister's home she got pregnant from Takesure, the lazy cousin who used to invite her to his room whenever he wanted. The selfishness of men was symbolized by Takesure who depicted that they only cared about their desires and women were their source of pleasure. Not only Takesure but also Jeremiah slept with Lucia, making a sin without any consideration that she was his wife's sister. Babamukuro used to consider Lucia as a fool because she never kept silent to what men do, she always speak for herself and defend the other women.

Unlike Lucia, her sister Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother, was totally silent. "Women in the Shona society tend to be left to suffer from the unilateral decisions that are made by men. The only way that women can express their feelings is through succumbing to nervous conditions by further withdrawing into themselves or allowing sickness to take the best out of them" (Nyanhongo 129). Hence, Ma'Shingayi suffered from her husband, from poverty and some health issues; she got depressed, refused to eat or to take care of herself and her new baby out of the oppression she lived. She was brainwashed to accept the life she was living,

and her inferiority in front of men. Her husband was lazy and irresponsible, so she worked hard to feed her children. Also, she worked in the land and went back home very tired to work again and took care of her family. She never decided for herself, neither her marriage to Jeremiah nineteen years ago nor her pregnancy was of her choice. Additionally, the idea of the renewal of their marriage in the church in front of God was Babamukuro's decision.

Moreover, Maiguru, the well educated woman who suffered a lot. She suffered because she was a mother, a wife and most importantly an educated woman. Everybody used to think that she was happy, yet her silence did not mean satisfaction. Her daughter Nyasha disrespected her, because she saw how her mother accepted being an instrument of her husband's orders. Besides, she never gave her opinion in any family's issues, simply because Babamukuro never asked what she thinks. Although she was a teacher, she never delivered her salary because her husband used to take it. He was not only dominating his wife's thoughts and actions but also what she earned. Maiguru was always living the shadow and her existence did not reach the light because even when they went to England to both complete their education and get the Master degree no body mentioned that, all what had been said was that she was a good wife who went to take good care of her husband. Her education also made her society pre-judge her, "I don't know what people mean by a loose woman- sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful" (181).

Additionally, Nyasha the secondary major character in the story and Tambu's cousin. Although she lived in a decent house and been raised in a wealthy family, Nyasha suffered a lot. "Nyasha is oppressed not only by the sexism so entrenched in her community but also by her status as a postcolonial young woman thrust back into a colonial situation in which she is both daughter and student of the ruling patriarchal school principal" (Smith 249). From the beginning of the novel Nyasha was different and the way she saw things made her

more oppressed, “This is the way Nyasha was, persistently seeing and drawing attention to things you would rather not talk about” (98). She lived in a house where dictatorship was the ruling system and in which you either accept or accept the established rules and no other option was available.

Not only Babamukuro’s dominance was what oppressed her but also having an obedient, voiceless mother made her more oppressed. She was neither free to wear, eat, or even read the books she wanted, “Babamukuru condemned Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness” (118) as if being a woman is men’s problem, they have a problem dealing or watching an independent woman, “all conflicts came back to this question of femaleness... as opposed to and inferior to maleness” (118). Her father who could not hear or accept anything his daughter said or taught about, “What’s the matter with you girl? Why can’t you behave like a young woman from a decent home?” (116). her refusal to conform to what her father said and wanted made him violently obliging her to do. His oppressive structure reached the point of insulting and beating her just because she spoke to a boy, “cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore” (116).

Babamukuro’s threats always dominated Nyasha, he wanted her to have no voice in his house and he always reminds her that he was the only man in that house and even her brother was not considered one. Many fights happened during the lunch or the dinner time, “You will eat that food. Your mother and I are not killing ourselves working just for you to waste your time playing with boys and then come back and turn up your nose at what we offer. Sit and eat that food. I am telling you. Eat it!” (192). In response to his threat, Nyasha gobbled down the food on her plate and went to her bathroom and vomited. This oppression was the beginning of her bulimia.

### **I.3.The Way Female Characters Fight and Face their Oppression**

“My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia’s; about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion- Nyasha, far- minded and isolated, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful” (1). From this quote, it is clear that although the female characters of this novel suffered a lot, they powerfully resisted. The oppression from their fathers, husbands or the society they belong to pushed them towards freedom, to escape and rebel against the patriarchal world they lived in.

“Through her representation of Tambu and Nyasha, the adolescent girls, who, in their defiance of the patriarchy, however ultimately successful or unsuccessful, actively refuse that ‘long sad slide’ into the oppressed adult femininity of their respective mothers, Dangarembga anticipates contemporary notions of ‘girlpower’” (Smith 250). The young girls showed a huge resistance to defend their selves from the oppression they lived. Thus, obliging Tambudzai to stay home was not enough to prevent her from achieving her dream. When she was not able to attend school because of her family’s poverty, she did not just accept her parents’ poverty, but rather she asked for their authorization to let her plant her own maize in her grandmother’s land. This grandmother who was the first teacher of Tambu, she taught her how to be a land hard-worker and told her the history of women’s oppression in Zimbabwe. These lessons were the basis for Tambu’s resistance and new identity. The plan was to harvest the maize and sell them to obtain the money. Indeed, she worked very hard because she knew that it was the only way to go to school.

Although her father objected at first, of course as a man, he could not believe the success of his daughter. Due to her teacher’s help, Mr Matimba, the only man that supported her, and was the reason for that success. Tambu was able to gather money for her school fees, because of a white old woman who donated enough money to make her in

school again. This feminine incorporation was her first hope and light in a dark patriarchal world. So, education was what Tambu worked for, in which she said: “Consciously I thought my direction was clear: I was being educated. When I had been educated, I would find a job and settle down to it, carrying on, in the time that was available before I was married into a new home, Babamukuru’s great work of developing the family” (151).

In addition to that, the death of Tambu’s brother was also her starting point of strength and resistance in a journey to escape and build her identity. She benefited from Nhamo’s death and started studying in the mission school when her uncle gave her the chance. Her life in the mission along with Nyasha helped her a lot and pushed her into development. Her rebellious cousin had a great effect on her resistance also. Moreover, when Tambu expressed her feeling loudly to Babamukuro: “I’m sorry, Babamukuru, but I do not want to go to the wedding” (169). these words marked the first time that Tambudzai stand up for what she wanted. Because she told him what she wanted, and was harshly criticized and punished by fifteen lashes and two weeks of house work. But, she was proud of herself and feels free. Her decision not to attend her parents wedding was because of her anger at Babamukuru for blaming her father and mother by being sinners and the cause of the family's bad luck, she said: “To me that punishment was the price of my newly acquired identity. Nyasha was not impressed when I let her into this secret” (169).

Lucia also never accepted being dominated. Her strong personality was clear for everybody from the beginning of the story. Thus, she suffered less and did not get married. She had many relations with men but never in one’s borders. She escaped from the oppression that had been upon her body, and her whole life and she started her education in the same time that she worked in the girls’ hotel. It was seen that search for freedom was her aim when she escaped from her family’s patriarchy for nineteen years before she returned to her sister’s home. Although Lucia was pregnant from Takesure she did not want or wait to marry him,

and she was about to beat him because he called her a witch and said many lies about her when she used to be absent. “Lucia exhibits the qualities of a female aggressor when she ‘manhandles’ Takesure in the presence of the clan’s elders” (Mbatha 19). She was strong enough to think about leaving and taking her poor sister with her. Unlike her sister, Lucia always dares to speak for herself and say everything that comes into her mind. The day that she visited Babamukuro’s home, she was angry because Tambu was punished. Consequently, she waited for him and defended her sister’s daughter, “Well, Babamukuru, said Lucia, preparing to leave, may be when you marry a woman; she is obliged to obey you. But some of us aren’t married, so we don’t know how to do it. This is why I have been able to tell you frankly what is in my heart” (171).

Moreover, Ma’Shingayi, the silenced mother, finally spoke up for herself. It was the first time that the mother expressed her anger. She was angry because of her life, of her poverty, her marriage to Jeremiah, the death of her son, the laziness and humiliation of her husband to his brother. Also, she was angry because of Maiguru’s personality and everybody’s respect to her. These hidden feelings of anger and jealousy made her explode, “But me, I’m not educated, am i? I’m just poor and ignorant, so you want me keep quiet, you say I mustn’t talk. Ehe! I am poor and ignorant, that’s me, but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won’t keep quiet” (140) she finally broke her silence wall and decided to use her voice whatever the condition was.

Furthermore, Maiguru also broke the silence; she was no longer pretending happiness and satisfaction. She was no more that wife whom obeyed and did everything to please her husband and his family. She said: “let me tell you, Babawa Chido, I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself stick to support ...I am sick of it Babawa Chido. Let me tell you, I have had enough!” (172).



After many years of sacrifices that Maiguru lived, she finally expressed her feelings to make Babamukuru sensible and aware of her existence. When she defended Tambu and told her husband that his punishment to her took too much and must be ended, he showed no attention to what she said. Thus, a serious confrontation between Maiguru and Babamukuru took place for the first time. Consequently she leaved her home for five days to show her husband that she can survive without him. It may seem a short period but it was her first step into freedom that will change her life.

Unlike her mother, Nyasha was a rebellious daughter. From the beginning of the story she was different. She never accepted or believed in the cultural traditions and values that were set to limit women's freedom. However, she believed that there was nothing logical in gender-role and that women can do everything. Her conversations with her father Babamukuro always end up into fights; it was their only way to communicate. Her beliefs and the way she saw things made her always in troubles because she would never accept to be told what to do, "You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do" (117). Nyasha referred to patriarchy as "they" not to repeat what both she and Tambu already know. Her fight against her father created a serious rupture in their relationship as he could not accept her disrespect. This incident also revealed Nyasha's disappointment with her mother, Maiguru, for being her husband's "underdog" who never objected to his orders.

Consequently, Nyasha's rebellion was not only against her father but also against her society, because being in England for five years and coming back again was very difficult to her, since neither the father nor the society were tolerant with her, none took into consideration that it was hard for her to cope and accept being dominated and directed after

the freedom she had been living in England. Her clothes and the way she spoke, taught, and behaved reflected her objection, her resistance and refusal to her father's rules. Even when she used to be obliged to eat a certain food, she eats it and goes to the bathroom and vomit. "Although Dangarembga has Nyasha, through her anorexia and bulimia, fade from the text as she fades from vigorous protest against the strictures imposed by male hegemonic control in her family and social life, this is a function of her attempt to wrest control over her own life back from her father" (Smith 252). Because of Babamukuru's attempt to control his daughter; her eating disorder represented a way to gain control over her life which she knew her father won't let her. It was Nyasha's way not to be submissive to what her father said.

In addition, another form of Nyasha's rebel was her smoking the cigarettes or studying fourteen hours a day whenever she got mad and angry from her father. She always forbids Tambu from humiliating herself in front of men or even Babamukuro, she taught her everything, and the necessity to not accept everything that have been said, but rather the need to question everything. Nyasha was aware that her fights and confrontations with her father were beneficial to her; she said that it was the only way to make him recognize how his daughter sees things. Even in school, Nyasha was different; sometimes she beat boys, and has only few friends, she could not feel her belonging to them, "They think that I am a snob, that I think am superior to them because I do not feel that I am inferior to men" (196).

#### **I.4. Change of Women's Life Status**

"Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when i can set down this story" (204). These final words said by Tambudzai, the narrator of this novel depict her new developed identity. She turned to become a more independent woman, free minded and educated. Also, she became a very successful student and got a scholarship to complete her studies in a very prestigious college "The Sacred Heart". She had grown much quieter and

more self-effacing than she was usually. Besides, she hardly ever talk unless spoken to and answer respectfully to any question she had been asked. She is no longer brainwashed by the social norms and behaviors but rather ready to question everything. She also achieved her goal of education and continued her long path into it through “The Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on my horizon” (203) and she became careful, as her mother advised her to be, “The problem is the Englishness, so you be careful!” (207). The same englishness that killed Nhamo and harmed both Chido and Nyasha.

Lucia also became more independent than she used to be and more powerful. She gave birth to a baby boy and settled down by herself. Now, she had a good job to make her independent from men. Additionally, she achieved a remarkable achievement in her studies and passed her exams well. Lucia helped her sister; she was a good support to her to overcome her extreme depression. Ma’Shingayi was healed thanks to her sister’s efforts, she overcome her anger and became healthier and more confident of herself. The mother kept advising Tambu to complete her studies yet warning her from the Englishness and its bad effects on her. That was because the mother realized how much education was important for her daughter to achieve miracles, “My mother came hurrying with her own shrill ululations: That is why they say education is life” (159).

Maiguro’s last confrontation with Babamukuro made a good change of her and her life in general. She became happy, smiled more and not mechanically. Maiguru became less judgmental towards her daughter, Nyasha, and accepted speaking to her daughter about some sensible matters. Now, her husband shows more respect to her and always demands her point of view in the family issues.

Nevertheless, her daughter’s rebellion may not seem to be successful. Nyasha ended up in a mental hospital because of all what she had been through. According to Flora

Veil-Wild (1993:51, 52) “Nyasha’s Schizophrenia arising from the confrontation of traditional and Christian beliefs of a profound personality split which resulted from an extreme degree of westernization on one hand and colonial oppression on the other”. From that quote, it is clear how Nyasha’s decline was because of the double world she lived in with, one of the colonial and the other of the western one when she lived five years away in England. This switch of social attitudes harmed her a lot. Also, she was the victim of her father, of the patriarch in her home. She was victimized and the result was the anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Sue Thomas (1992:17) also said that “ Nyasha’s disorder as the hysteric...which is a product of precariously repressed rage at patriarchal and colonial domination” ( Qtd by Cloete 42).

Consequently, her resistance and rebellious actions, such as, smoking, refusing to eat and disobeying her father’s orders were her first steps into her decline. Also, the father’s domination and his lack of understanding of what his daughter needed harmed her and led her into health and mental issues. Finally speaking, Nyasha was a necessary character to remind us, the readers of the novel, of many issues that were not noticed by Tambudzai herself. Thus, her breakdown pushed Tambu to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, also awakened her to be conscious for the future journey.

## **Chapter Three: Forms of Oppression and Women's Solidarity in Assia Djébar's**

### ***Children of the New World***

This chapter attempts to give a general overview and a summary of the whole novel *Children of The New World* written by Assia Djébar in 1962, translated from the French version *Les enfants Du Nouveau Monde* by Marjolijn De Jager in 2005, to provide an overall synopsis that supports further analysis by means of highlighting the different forms of oppression over the major female characters of the novel (Cherifa, Lila, and Salima) and their life's conditions in rural Algeria. Also, it sheds light on how these women's solidarity empowered each other to resist. Finally, it describes the change in these women's life status in the novel.

#### **III.1. An overview and a Summary of the novel**

*Children of the New World*, a novel of the Algerian war written by Assia Djébar, translated from the French version *Les Enfants Du Nouvau Monde* by Marjolijn de Jager. This novel tells a story of many Algerian families during the French Colonialism. It is composed of nine entitled chapters named after the story's characters, ( Cherifa, Leila, Salima, Touma, Hakim, Hassiba, Khaled, Bob, Ali) and an afterward. This novel is a detailed description of the Algerians' life during the revolution war and the resistance. Also, it is a reflection of the fear and the panic these families are living in, and how men and fighters are working hard to fight back the enemy to have their liberation. In addition to men, this novel describes also the participation of women, students, and even children to set Algeria free again. These people hated the French, the officers that used to search and suspect in anybody being involved in the resistance. Besides, this novel is a description of the daily fear, destruction of villages, death and torture which the Algerians witnessed and of how in turn they mobilized themselves to volunteer and join the brothers in the mountains.

The novel consisted of many interrelated stories. To begin with, Cherifa was Youssef's wife. He was her second husband after she got divorced from her first husband whom Cherifa did not love and was been married to him for three years but had no children. She was the most beautiful woman in the village, she was remarried to Youssef, a political leader, and in his daily life he was a modest carpenter who had a small shop in the market. Cherifa had no children from Youssef too, but she used to take care of Hassan and Hussein, Amna's children, her friend and neighbor. Amna's husband, Hakim, was a police inspector which became a traitor to his own country and work in favor of the French to arrest the Algerian political leaders. Even though he was Youssef's neighbor, he never spoke to him, According to the villagers and the neighbors, and from the day he worked as an inspector, Hakim was not their brother anymore.

When Amna told Cherifa that her husband was interrogating her to know about Youssef's moves, Cherifa decided to go down town and warn her husband. She was afraid because many looks were directed to her as she moved rapidly to reach her husband's shop. Some silly villagers were commenting, saying bad words about her; they wished to know who that woman was. These looks and murmurs made her more afraid and panic of being lost in the city because she did not know where her husband's shop was located. When she reached the shop, she informed him of what happened and that he was in danger and must hide and leave the city. Youssef was worried more about the other fighters who must be alerted as well.

The story of Lila, an educated woman yet did not complete her studies. Her husband Ali, Cherifa's brother, also was a medical student whom later joined the resistance in the mountains and abandoned both his wife and studies. Lila and Ali lived a very strong love story which did not last the day he decided to join the resistance. Rachid Selha, Lila's father, an educated man who was also obliged to stop his studies in the foreign school to help in the

family business. He was different; he loved his wife so much, and loved his daughter maybe more. He was the only one who wanted her to be educated, and been raised in his way and not as his father and the patriarch wanted. Although he left Algeria, he kept sending letters to his daughter. After many years abroad, he came to Algeria again to visit his daughter; he was glad and proud to see his daughter strong and well educated. The day before his leaving, he met Ali, the man whom his daughter was in love with, he felt happy to leave her with a real man. Lila and Ali's relationship was different; they were married two years before the war of liberation started. She loved him a lot and Ali loved her more and was passionate to her and her glamour. The day she lost her baby, Lila became very sick and kept a long time in her bed. Consequently, her husband Ali never let her alone, he stayed by her side day and night. Meanwhile, he kept doing his activities because it was a period of war, a lot of death, assassinations, fear, destruction; his country needed him too. Consequently, both of them did not attend their courses and dropped their studies. Thus, not after a long period, the mountain took Ali from her; he was a real man which the country demanded.

Furthermore, Salima was the only Muslim girl in town to continue her studies. She was a teacher at the girl's school and a distant cousin of Mahmoud, a political leader in the resistance in the mountain. The day she was caught by the police, she was buying flowers to visit her cousin, Mahmoud's wife. While she was in the prison, she recognized that Touma was the one who betrayed her and told the police about her visits to Mahmoud's house. In the prison, Salima was asked about Mahmoud, his activities, his relation to her. Many hours of interrogation, torture, sleepless nights the poor Salima went through to oblige her to speak, but she was strong enough to handle any pain and never spoke a word.

Touma, Tawfik's sister. She was a young lady who worked as a secretary and a traitor. She worked with the French police captain Martinez to bring him information about the political leaders and their activities. She was always in the coffee to chase men. She was a

bad girl cursed by her family and the whole villagers. Moreover, hakim, Amna's husband was a police inspector and had no relationship to his neighbors especially Youssef. He was ordered to give his report concerning Youssef and interrogate "Saidi", the manager of the Baghdad Café. His bosses ordered him to figure out who was the political leader that came down from the mountain to make contact. The poor Saidi stayed strong and faithful to his country and did not say a word. After a successive harsh torture, Saidi died.

Hassiba, was a beautiful young girl. She was a very strong to join Youssef and the other fighters in the mountain. Her love to her country pushed her to learn nursing in order to participate in the resistance. Although Youssef tried to make her understand how difficult it would be for her living in the mountains and how the revolution meant death, massacres, destructions, Hassiba insisted to join them, she believed that the battle was for all of them.

In addition, Khaled was a lawyer who settled down in Algiers. He used to defend the Algerian prisoners who were suspected of being rebellious. He was Salima's lawyer after Suzane had called him to help her get out from the prison. During the revolution war many educated people participated, among them was Bachir, Si Abderahmane's son, he was a Secondary school student. Bachir felt sorry for his country, he recognized that his studies were in vain since his beloved country was colonized. Bachir believed that the revolution, the liberation struggle was all what mattered in that time. His father, however, was against his son's desire to belong and join the brothers; he wanted him to complete his studies, to become a doctor. With some other boys, Bachir did some rebellious actions and caused fear among the French. Unfortunately, Bachir was killed the day after his rebellion, and consequently Lila was suspected and was hold and taken by the guards to the new prison because she was the last person Bachir visited. After fifteen months of the war, awareness had vastly increased within the citizens and many people joined the resistance.



Bob, the French Algerian man was in love with Touma. He did everything she wanted. Spending days and nights with her, he knew that she was afraid, that something was happening to her and that she was threatened to leave the town. Bob stayed with her until the day she was killed. Touma was shouted, a bullet right in the heart. The killer was her brother Tawfik, a young man who wanted so badly to join the resistance but was not allowed because of his sister and her bad reputation. Consequently, his hatred feeling toward his bad sister pushed him to threaten her many times to go away, to leave the village, and finally to kill her.

Ali was Lila's husband, the strong man who chose to protect his country and fight for its independence. He quitted his studies, abandoned Lila, and joined the brothers in the mountain, all long with Youssef, Mahmoud, Hassiba and the other fighters in the forests to fight back who stolen their land, their freedom, and their whole life. Meanwhile, a series of bombs were dropped from many French planes which destructed a whole village. Only a woman and her daughter had survived, they were not afraid, no fear existed anymore.

### **III. 2. Different Forms of Oppression over the Female Characters of the Novel**

In his article *Revolution and Modernity: Assia Djebar's Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde*, Gordon Bigelow had said that "the novel portrays working-class and professional men and both "modern" and "traditional" women. The central characters are confronted with situations that escape the categories of their earlier lives, and each must think in synthetic critical ways to devise the best responses to desperate and often brutal events". This quote describes Djebar's use of different female characters and their life experiences during the Algerian war. A life that was full of fear, panic, destruction, and oppression.

In the afterword of the novel, Zimra said, "Djebar introduces readers to the self-sufficient, French-born lawyer-wife (Suzanne), the self-indulgent, self-centred philosophy student (Lila), the abused cloistered wife with child at the breast (Amna) and the superstitious illiterate mother, suffering and scared (Tawfik's mother)" (221).

The passage above reveals different kinds of women, a wife, a mother, an educated or an illiterate woman. In addition to Cherifa and Salima who were oppressed by men, the society and the colonizer as well. All these women are presented in this novel to offer varied female portraits that lived in a colonial and a patriarchal society. A society in which a wife was called sequestered, a wife that was addressed indirectly by her husband, “they call her sequestered, but while he speaks without addressing her directly as tradition prescribes” (4). A tradition which considers this wife “an invisible woman”. Every woman however, should be freed from men and any kind of these traditions that humiliate her (4). “She is not only a body which he embraces in the dark without speaking, without caressing, a body that gives itself without trembling” (4). The invisibility that means women should not be noticed or seen neither inside her house nor out in the streets.

“At the time, women were not photographed, to prevent even their images from leaving the house” (127). Consequently, Lila was not able to remember her mother who died when she was at an early age. All what was kept for her were few memories from her childhood. In addition, women were highly criticized in a society when a woman passes by, all men, in the Moorish Cafés located in the center of the city; turn their heads to the street with an unbelievable curiosity and wonder to see her, her veil, her ankles until they recognize this walking woman (85).

Middle-class women actually never frequent the streets in the centre of town. When a woman must go out-only to go the baths or for special ceremonies, parties, or days of mourning- the escorting spouse walks in front of her and guides her by a round-about route to the appointed place. When he has to take her to the other side of town where an area of private homes surrounded by gardens is located behind the new prison, he has her make a very wide detour along the river to avoid the center. (86)

As mentioned above, women were not expected to be seen in the roads; it was only made or dedicated to men, and once an emergency that permitted this woman to go out for a certain business, she was obviously accompanied by her man or her child, and avoiding the crowd to reach the exact area. Although covered by a veil, men keep looking and some of them insult the woman just because she was in the street for some reasons, “I know all about women like that! The first one goes arrogantly, “Her veil is made of silk, a lightweight silk. She’s just some cheap little kitchen maid!” (90).

Cherifa was the most beautiful woman in the city who felt so fragile because of her solitude since she had no children. Also, because she was experienced fear, panic and double oppression not just because of men but also because of colonialism. Cherifa was suffering because of a marriage that had lasted three years without neither love nor children. “Nothing worse than being forced to live with a man whom everything inside her had instinctively rejected” (10).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 1945, massacres had taken place in Setif, Guelma and Constantine. That day of bloodshed had also been the day of her first wedding which she also considered as “a gray dawn” (121) in her life. She did not love her first husband; a refusal came from God as she used to say. Consequently, Cherifa kept herself unapproachable, she fears her husband’s looks as he used to stare at her body to take his pleasure; she felt it “worse than rape” (10). Nothing worse than a woman being raped, obliged to surrender and give her body forcibly to a man who sees himself the master who owns a slave, the husband who all what matters for him is his satisfaction and not his wife’s love. The husband was obsessed by her and dreamed of children from her, yet she refused. She knew that her body will not handle a baby as long as she does not want to. A selfish man that all he dreamed of were a woman’s body, and some children. “You will go for treatment and that’s an order”, “No! God has not given me any children. I don’t want any!”(11). Even though he stressed her, Cherifa exposed

herself and repeated that she did not want any children, she broke her long silence, showed her refusal, and declared her rebellion. She was surrounded by a deep suffering life in a patriarchal home and a colonized country.

Her husband's harsh desire for her made her more shocked, oppressed, and not able to breathe or to speak. She was screaming and turning her back and run away from him: "He, her husband? He, who was more of a stranger to her, She refused those caresses, that accelerated breath; no, she said, no! Her entire being, her whole body, was saying no to that blinded intimacy he was trying to stir up within her with words that he meant to be tender but that she found insulting. No!" (13). Cherifa felt being raped; her husband could not understand or accept a woman's refusal. So, she ran away from him, and hid in one of the back rooms where she could stay safe, alone and lock the door. She kept repeating no, no, and not knowing why, all she knew was that from the beginning she did not love this man, her husband, who expected her to do her duty as a wife, as all the women she knew, and "to be swallowed up by the man they had to respect or fear, or even value, without ever wondering whether he might join them once, just once, inside that dark part of their being that would be the depth of their belly, their soul, and their heart, all in one" (14). Thus, Cherifa refused to be condemned by her husband, she did not consider herself to be different from the other women, but at least she faced her enemy and was able to stand up and say no to him.

Although Cherifa found love in her second marriage to Youssef, she was afraid from the society and the Colonialism. In addition to her sufferance with her first husband, colonialism was her second threat and cause of her fear. Being a female exposed her to oppression, and being an Algerian made her involved, with all women like her, in the war. Her husband was a political leader, which meant daily panic and danger. The search for him by the French police pushed her to go out and search for him. Indeed, Cherifa put on her veil and went out of her home to look for her husband. Men's look to her was another problem,

“Cherifa’s heart beats in haste and shame and she stares at the end of the street as if it were her salvation. She wishes she could walk serenely and indifferently, as she used to on holidays, but her veil is no protective for her” (86). Youssef must be alerted; that was all what she kept saying, walking and trying to forget about those people. Her aim was only to reach her husband’s shop. Cherifa was anxious to be lost or to do any attraction that would make the police suspicious about her, “Cherifa approaches, her eyes straight ahead she senses danger. The crowd is huge. She wants to cross the street, move over to the other side walk. A cart blocks her. She keeps going in her slow gait so as not to attract any further attention” (87).

Moreover, Lila, the educated woman, suffered a lot because her life was full of lost. She lost her mother, her baby, her husband, her studies and her country! She was born in a big patriarchal family and was raised in a colonial country. To begin with, Lila’s sufferance started by the death of her mother in her very early age. Lila could not remember much of her mother because women were not allowed to be photographed at that time. In addition, she suffered because of her patriarchal family. Only Rachid defended his daughter and forbidden anyone to hit her again. He also defended her when his father slapped her just because she used to describe the lovely life of her parents in front of him. “The big patriarch”, or the grandfather, refused the way Rachid Selha raised his daughter and contradicted her education. “She is a girl! She can perfectly well attend Koranic School, just like the rest. It will be quiet for her to say her prayers and understand the Koran” (129). This is how the patriarchal family shapes a girl’s life, in which they forbid her from being educated, raise her to be submissive and stay home until she became a woman to protect their honor (129).

Long ago, Algerian women were not supposed to attend schools, to educate, to go out because men did not tolerate these actions, but rather considered it a matter of protecting their honor! So, how would Lila’s life be if her father was like the other patriarchs, who abused her dreams and her human rights? Her father however, believed that going to a

Koranic School will not be enough for his daughter, because he knew that life is changing and even girls need to be highly educated and prepared to the future life of theirs. Not only Lila's grandfather objected her going to school, but even her patriarchal society as a whole was not satisfied because of her education, "That is so and so's daughter, the family that ... she goes to high school...she walks in the streets by herself..." (131).

Additionally, women were supposed to have a certain way of walking, and that of wearing clothes. "Lila was long accustomed to a family life from which the slightest allusion to the flesh was excluded, where every woman had to be careful to keep her arms above the elbow and her legs down to her ankles covered" (107). Actually, clothes will not prevent men from annoying or keeping their eyes down once a woman passes by, and this was the case of Cherifa when she went to the city; although she was veiled, men kept looking and murmuring. Moreover, growing up studying; exposed Lila to many comments and rumors. Men always looked at her, and repeated the same speech whenever they saw an educated girl: "Now our girls are dressing like Europeans, without any veil, good God! What happened to the modesty that used to protect women?" (131).

Although Lila and Ali were married after a long love story, he was also a source of her oppression. Their struggles were always because of Ali's desire to control Lila and oblige her to do what he wanted. Her love to Ali made her as a slave, "you think you have me under your thumb...you think you're my master" (156), and which Ali "persisted in wanting to shape Lila in projecting her as closely as possible onto the absolute form he had in mind" (22). He wanted her to be submissive to what he said, and gave her orders without consideration of what she thought. Even when he decided to join the resistance and leave, he ordered her to come to town and stay with his sister, Cherifa, and told her to look for a teaching position. Ali was "too virile, too authoritative, what struck her were only his arrogance and the madness of his demands" (22). Consequently, Lila was about to surrender

and be passive because of her love to her husband who was jealous and wanted her only to himself and to his orders, yet “by wanting to mold her he would also limit her” (22). Lila was very sad because she loved her husband and he loved her too but his way of controlling and criticizing her actions made her very pity for herself.

In addition to all what Lila had been through, she was oppressed by the colonial power. She was involved in the war because Bachir, who was killed after rebellious actions, was her cousin, and Ali who was a political leader was her husband, and her father was in the French files forever (195). These reasons made the police suspicious about her. Thus, Lila followed the guards to new prison to be interrogated; where they left her alone for a long time in an empty room with no single furniture. Martinez, the police captain, “Will make her confess what she knows about the town’s network; he wants to know. He’s not mistaken; he’s never mistaken. He’ll make her confess. He’ll do what it takes” (197).

Furthermore, Salima went through a different form of oppression. Maybe she was not under a man’s control, yet something worse. Colonialism was a threat, danger, panic, oppression, destruction; to all the Algerians. She was the only Muslim girl in town to continue her studies to take the responsibility of her mother and brothers, she “saw herself again at age fifteen, deciding, swearing, since she was the oldest, that she would “behave like a man”, she’d confront any difficulty so she could take care of the rest of her family as soon as possible” (64). Indeed, Salima was able to finish her studies and work as a teacher at the girl’s school. She was different, “this is how she forged a world for herself that she knew to be artificial but that connected her to the earlier years of studying, teaching, reading, making the effort: for instance, she perused every pedagogical journal, order them from France and stayed informed about new methods”(61) to teach her students and build a cultivated generation.

However, this stable position completely changed once she had been arrested by the police because of her visit to her cousin’s house, Mahmoud, another political leader. The poor

Salima was in jail for a long time, sleepless days and nights, empty and cold room with no furniture, many hours of interrogation and torture. No power left in her female body, “Salima opens her mouth to answer and realizes she has no voice left” (57). All she hears was Saidi’s and many other prisoners screaming out of harsh torture a pain. Salima was suffering and feeling pain all the time, “a bed! What a miracle after constantly sitting on a chair or standing up for the ten days of interrogation, or eleven, or twenty...she stretches on her body, her back; the pain in her lower back won’t stop” (56).

Amna’s life was also a misery which made her silent and voiceless. Her husband, Hakim used to beat and humiliate her, yet she did not respond to his actions. According to Eleanor Reeds, “Amna becomes merely “the body on the floor” in the silence that empties her of any subjectivity that is not projected onto her by her husband” (440). Hakim sees Amna’s silence as an indication to her acquiescence and submission to Hakim’s violence, but it is impossible for a reader to judge or be certain (440) because there is no much about her perspective in the novel. Hence, Amna was may be dead, and nobody would notice since all her life was passive. As Reeds said, “It is possible that Amna may be dead, but this is a silence that does not let us know: we can no longer access the enclosed domestic space that, like Saidi, has become immured in silence” (440).

### **III. 3. Sisterhood: Women’s Fight and Resistance**

*Children of the New World* is represented as a mirror that reflects women’s oppression and their life experiences during the Algerian war. This novel sheds light on their double oppression; that is because of men and the French colonizer. According to Farah Channaa, “Children of the New World gives voice to the diverse roles women played in resistance, many of which were overlooked or silenced by the dominant national resistance narratives being formulated at the time, yet each work frames women’s contribution to resistance in a different way” (Channaa 2). Nevertheless, these female characters did not give



up and fought all forms of oppression that had been practiced on them throughout their encouragement to each other and because of the sense of sisterhood and friendship that enriched their personalities and pushed them to resist.

To begin with, Cherifa's life was filled of oppression from her first husband; being a wife and from the society being a woman. She was strong enough to face her husband and say no to his desires. She knew that it was not the life she wished to live. Thus, she decided to leave, to free herself from a man she did not love. She had the energy that pushed her to realize what she wanted. Her three years of marriage were just a period of coldness, misery, the feeling of no feeling where she finally sensed the urgency to go away, "I have to leave!" (15). After that decision, "she then had to suffer her husband's cries of rage and fury; he beat her and, in a final sign of cowardice, pretended to be resigned, a turnaround he refused to translate as an admission of helplessness" (15). His pride and arrogance made him ignore her existence after his crazy anger at her. She kept in her room for many days until he repudiated her, or in a more positive way: he liberated her. However, the husband hoped that Cherifa would beg and weep to stay home; he expected a weakness, a destruction of a woman that he never imagined how strong his wife was. "Cherifa was facing him; her eyes were not lowered; a simple movement of her head shook back a lock of dark hair; her mouth opened slowly only to trace a mercilessly gentle smile, the smile of triumph" (16).

After Cherifa achieved a victory and liberated herself from the oppression she experiences during her first marriage, now she lived in happiness with her second husband. As Evelyne Accad said, "her decision to break away from him was not only her first act of rebellion but also the first manifestation of the consciousness of her own existence" (806). However, she was again in a situation that urged her to act. She decided to go out for the first time and face her society, to warn Youssef, to do something, to overcome traditions, customs, and men's look to her.

It's a new word toward which fate is pushing her ("fate, really?") and suddenly she sees it emerge, rich in promises and results: Me, act? Me?" Perhaps that's what Cherifa is telling herself; perhaps she takes herself for a person at ease with the semidarkness, accidentally thrown into the sun and then overcome by the intuition that she cannot be satisfied with the light that blinds her but must also create a new step, a new approach- a different way of seeing, being seen; of existing. (84)

Although Lila suffered a lot in her childhood because of a big patriarchal family, she was able to overcome this obstacle and finish her studies with a great gratitude to her father. "He wants...what else does he want? "Yes," Rachid says, "that's precisely it, my daughter will go to school. This time, father, I won't give in" (129). With these words Lila's father defended her and gave her a first lesson in her life to learn how to resist, to say no and fight for her dreams, happiness, and freedom. He used to say: "My daughter will be a liberated woman" (133). Rachid Selha gave her the power to live in a society he knew much better that it would be hard for her. Lila appreciated her father's way of raising her, "this gave her the chance to reject attachments and restraints" (130).

As long as Lila concentrated on her studies, her society rather, concentrated on her walk, her clothes...Their looks bothered her whenever she went to her school, "She'd keep moving, anxiety in her heart for feeling so alone and as if undressed, but then, gritting her teeth, she's raise her head and think of her father" (131) she was strong, self-confident, proud of her femininity and education. As Cherifa smiled to her husband when he divorced her, Lila did the same to the whole society; a smile was enough to show her power and challenge to whatever they would say.

Moreover, Lila was also a rebellious wife. She practiced her challenge on Ali who wanted her be only for himself, "she knew nothing any longer other than that she had really struggled stubbornly and for a long time" (24). In addition to that, Lila was much stronger to

fight for her country, to face the French colonizer. She was not afraid neither of being tortured or killed, however, with her green challenging eyes, she looked at Martinez and said: “You want me to talk and I won’t say a thing, not about what I know, not about what I don’t know. What I’m most familiar with is silence, immuring silence...refusal...challenge” (197).

In addition to Cherifa and Lila, Salima also was a female character who highly represented a feminized resistance; a character who symbolized power, strength and resistance of all the Algerian women and their participation in the Algerian war and resistance. Dr. Assia Kaced said: “In fact, Assia Djébar did not limited herself to the depiction of women in their fighting, but went beyond that to show how these ‘passive and mute’ women challenged French authority and faced torture and imprisonment without fear” (394). This is depicted in the character of Salima. The imprisoned teacher did not fear the colonizer and made the French captains wonder of her personality, “I’m not afraid. Why don’t you just torture me?” (65). This was what Salima uttered each time she was interrogated. She stayed for a long time in the prison, where Taleb, one of the guards, used to help and encourage her to keep strong, to fight for her brothers and her country, “My sister, I thank you for not talking. Don’t tell them anything. Hold on!” (58). That was the only voice of hope Salima used to hear.

Kaced added, “Salima, in *Les Enfants du nouveau monde/ Children of the New World*, implements the same deeds as the ones expected from men. She does not hesitate to enter the dangerous arena of politics and to see herself as the representative of her people” (394). She was as strong as men and resisted to protect her brothers in the mountain. It was because of her rebellious nature that she could survive after what she went through, a torture which was enough to make her crazy. “Jean, the chief, looks her up and down...he finds her to be different...she’s the stronger one” (66). It is true, Salima is very strong as Dr. Kaced added, “Through the character of Salima, Assia Djébar defines Algerian women prisoners as strong

subjects able to stoically withstand mental and physical torture as they suffer in silence in their persistence to protect their loved ones on the outside. Although physical and mental punishment is intended to break the spirit of the prisoners and bring them into submission, it serves only to strengthen their spirit as well as their belief in the national cause” (395).

In this novel, all the female characters were connected. They would not be capable to resist, act or have a voice without their friendship and love and sisterhood. They were the sound of hope and encouragement through which they survived. Cherifa was the most powerful woman in this novel, her relationship to Lila, Amna (her neighbor) and Zineb (her sister in law) was a positive inspiration and a cure that healed them.

Firstly, when Lila was broken down by the departure of her husband Ali (Cherifa’s brother), Cherifa was always supporting Lila, trying to make things easier for her. “He hasn’t abandoned you, you can be sure of that! He hasn’t abandoned you, she repeats, as though giving a lesson to this young woman who doesn’t yet know how to love” (147). These words helped Lila to overcome her sorrow and weep, to believe that she was not abandoned but rather Ali was obliged to leave. It was hard for Lila, and it would be hard for any woman, to feel abandoned by whom she loved, and that what killed Lila most. Cherifa would also say: “What about me? Cherifa, who wants to convince Lila now and upset by her sadness, picks up again. “Am I not also alone? But I’ll never think that it’s because he left me, oh no! Separations no longer count now; wherever we are, we’re still together” (150). This feminine solidarity strengthened both of them to keep hope, to live and overcome the past and the sufferance. Secondly, Cherifa was also a good support to Amna, her friend and neighbor. Both of them used to talk much and spend the whole day together cooking, listening to each other’s complains, “My sister! My little sister! Ask God to protect me!” (48) was what Lila used to say to her neighbor with a forsaken voice.

In addition, Cherifa was a protection to Zineb, Youssef's youngest sister. She was able to attend school and learn French and complete her studies in the secondary school until the age of sixteen. Zineb was different because she did not accept to be married to someone she did not know. With a rebellious tone, she was strong enough to face her big brother and declare to him her refusal for the marriage. However, Youssef and after his wife Cherifa had recounted to him her sufferance with her first husband and how miserable her life was with a man she did not love, he understood his sister's response, "In the deep waters of his wife's eyes he thought he saw the image of so many drowning women whose destiny had been taken away forever and who tried to fight back" (29).

In addition to Cherifa, Suzanne also was a sort of encouragement and help to both Lila and Salima. "Without working outside the house, Suzanne had the appearance of an active and independent woman; though she wasn't happy, she breathed harmony and serene confidence" (112). Although Suzanne was also abandoned by her husband Omar who left to France, she stayed strong and balanced. Nevertheless, she worried about Salima who was imprisoned. She hired a lawyer, Khaled, to defend and help her get out from jail. Salima, thus, felt so happy and thankful to Suzanne's help.

In addition, Lila also felt thankful to her friend Suzanne who always visited her. Their relationship was a support to Lila to defeat her solitude and embrace the world. Lila "conceives of friendship as she does love-as a mirror meant to return her own image, more real than it is in the void of loneliness. Protective as well" (71-72). Suzanne used to listen to Lila's pains, to her complains and keep silent to make her comfortable to cry, to express her sadness, to weep and let go her pain so that everything would be okay. "It feels so good to let yourself go like this, close in the care of someone who's willing to be there for you! It feels so good to give in to sleep, to sweet to let all the unremembered knots inside loosen up, to ..." (75). Suzanne was Lila's idol, she saw how strong she was, a real woman, too calm and too

serious, matured enough to control herself and challenge the world, “Lila characterized Suzanne as “strong.” “You’re an adult,” she liked to say. “A real woman, the way I’d like to be” (76).

Finally, as Reeds said in his article *Silence as Resistance in Pat Barker’s Regeneration and Assia Djébar’s Children of the New World*: “Children of the New World appears to conclude with the triumph of silence as resistance in the face of colonial aggression” (441). This was depicted in Salima and Lila’s reaction to the colonial torture and oppression, in which both of them chose silence as their strongest form of resistance.

#### **III.4. Change of Women’s Life Status**

After all forms of oppression that Cherifa, Lila, Salima and the other Algerian women went through, their lives changed. It was mainly due to their support to each other, their feminized solidarity that they could overcome life obstacle, become balanced and free. Even though by the end of the story Lila and Salima were in jail, Cherifa in her home alone, and so Suzanne and the unknown end of Amna’s life, Assia Djébar had powerfully presented to the world how women could challenge their oppression, and how Algerian women more precisely had been involved and highly participated in the Algerian war and resistance.

For a happy wife, Cherifa decided to “create a new approach- a different way of seeing, being seen; of existing” (84). She thought of how to continue her life alone without Youssef by her side, she said to herself that she should pray to God and recites some verses of the Holy Koran daily to accept her destiny and be satisfied, “She is not suffering. She’s not rebelling. She says to herself, automatically, “I should pray to God, I should recite some verses of the Koran to accept my lot, to purify my soul” (189). Life was dark and hard for her but she knew that she should not give up but rather resist and wait for the coming of her husband.

In addition, Suzanne kept living a joyful life. She chose to stay in her country, raise her baby girl and not leaving with her husband. She was mature enough to not break down because of a man's departure. Thus, she confronted her husband: "I'll stay here even if it takes ten years. If I leave you one day (she had spoken without looking at him, but very calmly), I won't divorce you until it's all over, when the end has come, when the country is free" (78).

Lila also achieved a tremendous change; she got up from her life's draw falls. As she remembered how her father raised her to be an educated and a liberated woman, her father who "had attained every goal she had set for herself: independence, liberty, purity" (133). Besides, Lila recognized that life will not stop after the departure of her husband. Now, she knows the worth of having precious friends, who were by her side: "For, until that moment, she had believed indisputably that for her there was no way to know herself other than in love-and love was the cluster of links that enslaved her to Ali. After that night she told herself she was wrong: one can find oneself with the same lucidity when one is with a friend, a comrade in arms, or an equal" (182-183).

Assia Djébar also sheds light on gender roles and the equality that both men and women should share. Moreover, Djébar describes how the little girls in the Algerian society will be different in the future, and how they will change the old patriarchal framework,

The young girls beginning to be emancipated, buying magazines and reading novels that they kept hidden under their pillow-the youngest of them could hope never to wear the veil or be locked up inside the home but, on the contrary, continue school and then, one day, perhaps dare to go out to work (two or three of them had already liberated themselves this way). (9)

Finally, *Children of the New World* describes the change that the new coming generations, males and females will bring in a new liberated country after a long period of colonization, as mentioned in the afterword, “children’s final question as to what the new world and its new children may yet achieve, with powerful images that eviscerate the so-called mythically singular foundation of her country: one nation, one language, one religion” (Zimra 226).



## Conclusion

Forms of fighting back oppression against women is a focal issue that African Literature deals with. Indeed, women's experiences are recounted by the feminist writers to depict the world that women are marginalized in. Feminists use their pens to give a voice to silenced women; to protest against the injustice and the oppression African women suffer from. In spite of the harsh circumstances of women in Africa, they resist against all the different forms of their oppression. Because the African society has a patriarchal social framework, men have the total domination over the household and consider themselves as superior to any woman, who is generally the subordinate or the inferior.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) depicts the life of women and girls in Colonial Rhodesia, in which Dangarembga retells the story of Tambudzai, a young female protagonist raised in a patriarchal family. Therefore, in her work, she describes how the female characters in this novel are doubly oppressed; the impact of the ex-colonizer on their conditions in addition to the impact of patriarchy, males' dominance and traditions on women's life. In addition, Dangaremba stresses the issue of women's voice and silence and describes how the female characters challenged all the circumstances to study and use the educational system as a way to liberate them. This novel raises many other themes such as racism, social conflicts, displacement, cultural change and sexism.

Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World (Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde)* (1962), recounts the lives of Algerian women during the French colonization and their solidarity to fight and resist not only the colonizer's occupation but also men's oppression. Djebar's novel depicts the conditions during the Algerian war against the French Colonialism. Thus, the novel deals with the themes of independence, colonization, and gender inequality. Furthermore, Djebar analyses the way female characters empowered each other, young

protagonists so eager to embrace an independent life after a long period of colonial oppression. Furthermore, the female characters of this novel seek to get a political independence from the colonizer and freedom from men and the whole society.

Both novels under study reveal the patriarchal social framework and the unfair societal obstacles encountering them. In addition to many reasons, men in general are their source of sufferance. Consequently, this study describes the different forms of oppression exercised over the female characters. It also examines the way in which these women face their life obstacles and resist the oppression through education as Tambudzai did, speaking up for their rights as Maiguru and Mainini did, smoking cigarettes, studying for long hours, and refusing to eat as Nyasha's rebellion and Lucia's search for self-dependence to obtain a job. In the second novel, that was through participating in the resistance war, as Salima did, and even Amna's adoption of silence as a way of resistance. Therefore, this thesis focuses on how women's solidarity and sisterhood bring a change to women's status. Thus, the purpose of this study is to highlight the relationship between the female characters that empowers them. In other words, to show how these characters help, motivate, and encourage each other to resist and make an action. It also examines how women's resistance will cut off this oppression and creates for them a better life conditions and an equal life status.

Despite this oppression, women are finally able to achieve positive results and change in their lives. In *Nervous Conditions*, the protagonist Tambudzai had a chance to attend school and worked hard to complete her studies. Her mother Ma' Shingayi and Maiguru broke up their silence and proved their existence. Lucia finally became independent with a proper job away from men's domination. Nyasha's rebellion was dramatic on her; she suffered from health and psychological issues because of the nervous conditions she went through. Similarly, in *Children of the New World*, the sense of sisterhood and bounding among the

female characters pushed them towards a healing process. Cherifa, Lila, and Salima achieved victory against men, colonialism and the society, in general.

My research is important mainly because it studies one of the most progressive and long-going movements, Feminism to analyze two African novels. *Nervous Conditions* (1988) represents African women in general while *Children of the New World* (1962) represents us, Algerian women. The importance of my thesis stands on its influence that would create on the reader's self who will read attentively, feel attached, sensible, and interested in every story of the female characters in both novels. Hence, I guess that my choice of these novels, especially the Algerian one, is positive in a wider range to encourage other researchers to go for Algerian novels in the English version as a field of study and analysis, also, to emphasize the fact that African and Algerian women more precisely are active, rebellious, and well-educated.

For future research, it is highly recommended that African Feminism be used as a theory to work on because it is a field that requires further studies and analysis. I would suggest that both novels under this study can also be studied from psychoanalytical approach because both the different personalities of the characters. Concerning Dangarembga's novel, many themes can be discussed in future theses such as the effect of colonialism on different generations, motherhood and its influence on the family, culture and traditions in African societies, social relationships in Africa...etc. Djébar's novel can also be studied through different themes, such as silence as way of resistance, female participation in the Algerian war, marriage and family relationships, modern verses traditional women in Algeria...etc. Accordingly, I suggest silence as a way of resistance in African literature as a theme which I would like to develop more in my future doctoral research.

As feminist African writers, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Assia Djébar are among the most influential writers who powerfully contribute in the African feminist theory and describe the

internal social life of women from within the context and from a feminine perspective to reveal the real picture of these women in the entire world. African and Algerian women are powerful, active, and highly educated who seek in collaboration with men, to develop their societies, participate in its building to create a faire and balanced world in which no women would be oppressed.

## Notes

1. A prominent 19th century suffragist and civil rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) became involved in the abolitionist movement after a progressive upbringing. She helped organize the world's first women's rights convention in 1848, and formed the National Women's Loyal League with Susan B. Anthony in 1863. Seven years later, they established the National Woman Suffrage Association. With her advocacy of liberal divorce laws and reproductive self-determination, Cady Stanton became an increasingly marginalized voice among women reformers late in life. However, her efforts helped bring about the eventual passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave all citizens the right to vote. (The Reader's Companion to American History. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, Editors)
2. One of the most a unique and interesting speech of the convention was made by Sojourner's Truth, the most famous of the 19th Century black women orators. Born into slavery in New York and freed in 1827 under the state's gradual emancipation law, she dedicated her life to abolition and equal rights for women and men. (BlackPast.org v2.0)
3. A philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made laws; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary. (Emma Goldman)
4. A label attributed to people born during the 1960's and 1970's. Members of Generation X are often described as cynical or disaffected, though this reputation obviously does not apply to all people born during this era. This generation has an increased understanding of technology, having grown up during the age of computers. Sometimes it is also shortened to Gen X. (Business Dictionary)
5. An international underground feminist movement that emerged from West Coast American alternative and punk music scenes of 1990s. Initially women played a marginal part in these male dominated scenes. But the gender balance began to change in the late early 1990s through the formation of feminist, all-female and mainly-female punk and new wave bands, such as Heavens to Betsy, Bratmobile and Bikini Kill. These bands called for Revolution Girl Style confronted music scene sexism head on and upheld the anti-consumer do-it-yourself ethic of punk. (The British Library Board)
6. She was an American writer, activist, and feminist. A leading figure in the women's movement in the United States, her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with sparking the second wave of American feminism in the 20th century. In 1966, Friedan co-founded and was elected the first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which aimed to bring women "into the mainstream of American society now [in] fully equal partnership with men." In 1970, after stepping down as NOW's first president, Friedan organized the nationwide Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, the 50th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution granting women the right to vote.( Wikipedia)
7. A British-based Nigerian writer who, in "Second-Class Citizen", "The Joys of Motherhood" and other novels, gave voice to African women struggling to reconcile traditional roles with the demands of modernity, died on Jan. 25 at her home in London. She was 72. (WILLIAM GRIMES, The New York Times: FEB. 10, 2017)
8. The most distinguished woman novelist to emerge from the Arab world. She is the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayan. She was born in June 30, 1936, in Cherchell. She died in February 6, 2015, in Paris, France. She is an Algerian novelist, translator and filmmaker. She is known for her great writings on women's issues in general, and their life

obstacles and experiences in the Algerian society. Djébar was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1996. In addition, she was the recipient of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2000. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica)

9. A Zimbabwean author and a filmmaker. She was born in 1959. She wrote many plays and short stories. She won the African section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989 as the first English novel written by a black Zimbabwean woman. Dangarembga wrote the story for the highest-grossing film in the history of Zimbabwe. She founded the International Images Film Festival for women in Zimbabwe. (Postcolonial Studies @ Emory)

10. A Senegalese novelist was catapulted to international prominence with the publication of her first novel, *Un si longue lettre*, which appeared in 1980 when the author was 51 years old. At the time, the novel was a rarity in that it had been written by an African woman, and it was especially noteworthy because of Bâ's origins in the predominantly Islamic country of Senegal. Bâ was a writer who made valuable explorations of the terrain where African traditional cultures met influences brought by European colonialism. As a so-called "postcolonial" writer with a feminist orientation, Bâ gained wide attention from Western critics and students of literature, and the influence of her work increased following her death. Bâ wrote only two novels, but they stand as vivid portraits of the difficult situations faced by women in African societies, and they remain relevant beyond a purely Senegalese context. (Encyclopedia of World Biography )

11. A Nigerian novelist and publisher, the first African woman to write and publish a novel in English, who changed African literary traditions regarding the portrayal of women. Published first book (1966); received citations for Officer of the Niger (Oon, 1982); granted University of Ife merit award for authorship and publishing (1985); served on Commonwealth Writers Awards Committee, African Studies Association, Children's Literature Association of Nigeria, African Literature Association, Association of Nigerian Authors. ( Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia)

12. Literally means "Little/Young Mother" but is used for an aunt married to a younger male of the family. "Amai" (often shortened to "Mai") is the correct word for mother. (Cora Agatucci, Professor of English Humanities Department, Central Oregon Community College)

13. **It is** group of culturally similar Bantu-speaking peoples living chiefly in the eastern half of Zimbabwe, north of the Lundi River. The main groupings are the Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Tonga-Korekore, and Ndau. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica)

14. A meeting of the patriarchal family to address serious family business, recounted. (Cora Agatucci, Professor of English Humanities Department, Central Oregon Community College)

15. It is the aunt in Shona, and a relational title of respect for adult females of a family. (Cora Agatucci, Professor of English Humanities Department, Central Oregon Community College)

16. It follows a patrilineal (descent through males) kinship system , and practice patrilocality whereby, after marriage, the bride leaves her home to live with or near her husband's family. (Cora Agatucci, Professor of English Humanities Department, Central Oregon Community College)

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