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## The Other Women's Guide to English Cultures

Tsitsi Dangarembga and Buchi Emecheta

Those Englishmen who think about the multicultural metropolis in terms of English culture versus black culture presuppose that both these cultures are coherent and mutually exclusive. Conservative Englishmen tend to regard nations as "cultural homogeneous 'communities of sentiment'"<sup>1</sup> and multiculturalism as a threat to English culture. Liberal Englishmen consider other cultures as basically equal under the premise of a universal humanity, which subordinates the difference of the other to anthropological sameness. If liberal Englishmen accept the coexistence of diverse cultures within their country, they may merely indulge in a "semblance of pluralism,"<sup>2</sup> which reduces minority cultures to exotic commodities and ignores any challenge on the part of the dominant culture. In response to the English denigration and assimilation of others, some ethnic minority groups assert their different homogeneous cultures.<sup>3</sup> Because of their marginalization, black women seem to be privileged to meet Paul Gilroy's demand: "What must be challenged is the way that these apparently unique customs and practices are understood as expressions of a pure and homogeneous nationality."<sup>4</sup>

Not only Englishmen, but also Africans, West Indians, and even some white feminists conceive of black women as sites of racial and sexual difference but not as subjects who make a difference.<sup>5</sup> Carol Boyce Davies suggests that the African diaspora turned

- 1 Paul Gilroy, "'The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays': 'Race', Nation and Ethnic Absolutism," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (1991; London: Arnold, 1996): 262.
- 2 Abdul JanMohamed & David Lloyd, "Toward a Theory of Minority Discourse: What is to be Done?" in *Postcolonial Criticism*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton & Willy Maley (1990; London & New York: Longman, 1997): 241.
- 3 Gilroy, "' 'The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays'," 266-68.
- 4 "'The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays'," 270.
- 5 According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Western feminists may succumb to the "hegemonic humanistic problematic"; "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (1991; London: Arnold,

black women into migratory subjects with complex identities, which transgress cultural norms and boundaries.<sup>6</sup> The writers Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga as well as their female protagonists could be described as migratory subjects (of more or less their own choice). These women deconstruct the view of English culture and of black culture as being homogeneous. Their realization of heterogeneity within cultures and potential compatibilities between cultures challenges cultural puritans.<sup>7</sup>

For Emecheta and Dangarembga, multiculturalism means a great deal more than the juxtaposition of antagonistic cultures or the erasure of the other culture through assimilation. These writers are intermediaries, who provide not only Africans with insights into English culture, and English readers with views on African cultures. Multiculturalism provides "us" (Europeans) with other views of ourselves. Katherine Fishburn writes: "Africans know more of us than we do of them,"<sup>8</sup> and I would add: they may even know more of us than we know or like to know. Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga represent different English cultures in England and in African countries. I will discuss, first, the immigrants' encounter with English cultures in the "moder kontry," and second, the importing of English cultures by "been-to's" into their mother countries.

### "Moder kontry" England

The alienating "moder kontry" England is an important topic in Buchi Emecheta's works, such as her novels *Second-Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch*, published as *Adah 's Story*, *Gwendolen*, *Kehinde*, and in her autobiography *Head Above Water*. The outsider's preconception of the "moder kontry Englan'" is very different from the English mother country. Emecheta destroys the immigrants' and the Englishmen's illusions about England as a tolerant land of opportunity with a model culture. To the immi-

1996): 191, as they reduce Third-World cultures to patriarchal domination and female victimization on the basis of an assumed universal cross-cultural gender difference. If they regard other women as victims and treat them as objects of their analyses, they neglect that these women also take part in interactions that form relationships; Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 174-79.

- 6 Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 36-37.
- 7 Frantz Fanon already proposes a complex model of heterogeneous black cultures. He closely associates culture with nation, but he also maintains that national culture does not mean nationalism. Fanon stresses the interrelationship between African Negro culture and different national cultures in Africa, which share the burden of and the fight against colonialism ( *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. Constance Farrington [1963; New York: Grove, 1968]: 247). He defines national culture as a heterogeneous and dynamic unity: "culture is first the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos, and of its patterns [...] A national culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external tensions exerted over society as a whole and also at every level of that society" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 244). However, Fanon only implies gender conflicts, whereas Emecheta and Dangarembga stress the important but difficult position of women in patriarchal African cultures.
- 8 Katherine Fishburn, *Reading Buchi Emecheta: Cross-Cultural Conversations* (Westport CT & London: Greenwood, 1995): 10.

grants from Africa and the Caribbean, England appears, rather, to be a stepmother country,<sup>9</sup> in which they are less the lost and found children than unwelcome aliens. The discrepancy between the colonial image of England as the Kingdom of God and the sobering reality is most distressing to the immigrants and probably embarrassing for English readers.<sup>10</sup>

Unofficial segregation pervades external and internal spaces. Buchi Emecheta questions the myth of mutual enrichment in the multicultural metropolis: London is neither a melting-pot nor a salad bowl but, rather, an Indonesian dinner with a separate dish for each ingredient. The multicultural residential areas of the "black English" are small islands within the metropolis.<sup>11</sup> With a few exceptions of showing mild interest in others out of curiosity (HW106-108), the English attitude towards African and Caribbean residents ranges from indifference to xenophobia. The English, paradoxically, seem to expect others to assimilate but pursue a strategy of exclusion that prevents integration.

Far from idealizing the non-white multicultural communities, Emecheta shows that they, too, are pervaded by discrimination according to gender, class, and ethnicity (AS 60-61). Emecheta does not exclude her well-educated Ibo heroine Adah from active discrimination against others, such as illiterate Yoruba, who in turn belittle the Ibo (AS 34-36). Thus, she contests the homogenizing English label "black" for all non-white residents.

However, apart from their differences, Africans and West Indians may discover mutual traditions in their encounter within the "moder kontry." African immigrants, who are themselves dislocated in England, inform black West Indians about the cultures of their African mother countries which the West Indians lost in the diaspora caused by the English slave trade. On the one hand, the loss of the African heritage leads to serious misunderstandings between the West Indian Winston Brillianton and his Yoruba landlord, on the other hand, Winston's friend Mr. Ilochina informs him about the Ibo appreciation of virginity and the bride-price.<sup>12</sup> Winston's daughter Gwendolen gives her baby the Yoruba name Iyamide, establishing a positive African bond between mother and daughter to erase the biological conception through the rape by her alienated father (G 178). Emecheta suggests that the female inscription of an African name covers the biological evidence of her father in her baby's face: the shame of incest is reversed in the power of independent motherhood in Gwendolen.<sup>13</sup> Thus,

9 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 145.

10 Emecheta, *Head Above Water* (1986; Oxford: Heinemann, 1994): 104, 137-39. In the main text as HW.

11 Emecheta, *Adah 's Story* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983): 34. In the main text as AS.

12 Emecheta, *Gwendolen* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989): 99-100, 120-21. In the main text as G.

13 The ending is rather too optimistic for an incest victim, Christine W. Sizemore remarks: "The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta," in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, ed. Marie Umeh (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1996): 377. Emecheta seems to opt for a symbolic de-nouement of her novel rather than a realistic one. It is hardly credible for me as a European that Gwendolen completely 'effaced' the rape by her father, who is present in the face of her baby. Gwendolen's mother, the betrayed wife, is far more enraged at the rape than the victim herself. - It

England does not ease integration into the “moder kontry” but provides Caribbean immigrants with insight into the loss of the cultures of their native mother countries and the opportunity for a partial recovery of lost traditions.

Emecheta reverses the widely held notion of ethnic outsiders as the cause of English problems (HW109). Rather, ethnic minorities are turned into problematic cases by the English. In Emecheta’s texts, the English avoid private contacts and institutionalize the encounter with non-white citizens: the immigration authorities, schools, social security, and the police submit ethnic minorities to official and unofficial rules designed to construct and contain the Other as a problematic subject.

In England, Africans and West Indians look for education and work, which creates as many opportunities as problems for ethnic individuals and their relationships to their families and their communities.

English schools are seen as important institutions for socializing others in the sense of assimilating them.<sup>14</sup> Emecheta presents the reverse effect, because Gwendolen, from the Caribbean, is clearly socialized as the Other: her problems with British English are interpreted as stupidity, a misreading of her as a “slow” English child, which triggers her resistance and truancy (G 61, 76, 82). Instead of promoting assimilation, her English school generates alienation.

Gwendolen’s problems at school are compounded because she has to help her working mother with the household chores and child-care. Her mother, still adhering to the traditions of the Caribbean, does not consider the education of girls as important, and the domestic work does not give Gwendolen enough time to catch up with her peers. Emecheta’s representation reflects not only the economic difference between underpaid black working parents and white employees, but also a cultural difference concerning the role of the mother, which the English limited to the domestic sphere. In contrast to this, the Nigerian Kehinde in Emecheta’s eponymous novel looks down on dependent English wives: “For an Igbo woman, her capacity for work is her greatest asset.”<sup>15</sup> The African mother’s desire to study and to work goes beyond the restricted concepts for and of English mothers in the 1960s, according to Emecheta’s autobiography (HW 52). In these respects, the ‘backward’ African women seem to have preceded the expansion of the ‘modern’ mother’s roles in England, be it for better or for worse.<sup>16</sup>

would be inadequate to attribute, as Sizemore does, Winston’s rape to the loss of Ibo culture, which places a great value on the daughter’s virginity (“The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta,” 376), because incest is also an important taboo in Christian cultures, as the preacher Winston must know.

14 Gilroy, “The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays,” 263.

15 Emecheta, *Kehinde* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994): 52. In the main text as K.

16 Whereas Emecheta’s African women expand their potential in combining traditional African and modern English cultures, her male African characters use cultures to enhance their own position at the cost of their wives. In *Kehinde*, ‘modern’ culture conflicts with both Roman Catholic and Nigerian norms as the Nigerian husband Albert makes his wife abort their baby for economic reasons (*Kehinde*, 15; Sizemore, “The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta,” 379). Paradoxically, her ‘modern’ sacrifice is meant to pay for his return to traditional Nigeria, where he has more children with a younger wife.

Even if blacks succeed in higher education and hold university degrees, they will not necessarily find adequate jobs in England; due to ethnic discrimination, prestigious and well-paid jobs would go to English applicants only. "But if the job is degrading, with marginal reward, your colour becomes an asset," Emecheta ironically remarks (HW 125). The English impede the "social and economic mobility" of minorities (HW 125). The English expect members of ethnic minorities to work far below their level of qualification. Towards the close of Emecheta's novel *Kehinde*, the academically qualified heroine is working as a cleaner in a hotel (K 122, 125). If the black English do white-collar work, they do not become middle-class black but, rather, black middle-class (HW 133): Apparently, racism leads to the establishment of a class system among ethnic minorities, which runs both parallel and subordinate to the English one. To be a second-class citizen means to be second in any of the English classes which members of ethnic minorities might lay claim to because of their professional and economic status.

Coloured applicants may be 'privileged' in the case of badly paid jobs as social workers, who might be used to mediate between ethnic cultures. However, working in the social services on behalf of ethnic minorities does not serve mediation, as Emecheta, who holds a doctorate in sociology, knows from experience. She discovered that a centre for African teenagers did them no good; it merely wasted their time. Emecheta realized that she had become complicit in the attempt to contain possible unrest and to prevent the black teenagers' participation in the British economy and society. Instead of bridging the social and cultural gap between ethnic groups, social work serves, rather, as a means to reinforce the segregation and the surveillance of the "hated and scapegoatable group" (HW 125). The social services are likely to reassert English superiority over minorities, because they keep them dependent on condescending welfare instead of helping them to act on their own.

Both failure and success in education and at work may disrupt relationships between ethnic husbands and wives, parents and children. Emecheta writes how the discrepancy between men's poor and women's good economic performance and academic proficiency creates conflicts because it undermines the traditional hierarchy of gender. She describes how English attitudes towards individual freedom and the legal equality between the sexes support ethnic women's resistance to abusive husbands. The welfare system enables women who separated from husbands to survive - at the cost of their dignity. Adah's fall from the middle class into the working class and finally to the bottom of English society provides readers with a fresh insight into diverse English cultures.

Social and spatial segregation go hand in hand. In extreme cases, council houses form a ghetto that becomes a "problem place" (AS 157), which seems to create rather than solve social problems. Segregation rules the ghetto itself, as the working class discriminates against the very poor, such as old-age pensioners and single mothers (AS 159,181). Adah, who is separated from her husband, learns that her polite middle-class behaviour fails with the lower classes. Polished manners, excuses, even pretending to be stupid, which evoked middle-class condescension, are met with foul language and aggression on the part of prejudiced members of the working class (AS 158-59; HW 54). When Adah has to give up her job in order to take care of her children, she lacks the "code for daily living" of the working class (AS 167) and is reduced to helpless

dependency by and on the welfare system. Adah regrets the loss of pride occasioned by her being regarded as a lazy parasite by society (AS 167). The virtual prohibition of beneficiary's work tends to perpetuate unemployment and dependency (HW 53-54).

The social system fosters segregation of the sexes among the poor. Single mothers are better off if they receive unemployment benefit than if they are married to poor working men (AS 176-77, 227). Single mothers are made to shun men because possible support by male friends is deducted from unemployment benefit (AS 185-86). To the surprise of Adah and the reader, however, the female pariahs form a subculture that is superior to the established class cultures in terms of cooperation, solidarity, and humanity. The community the black single mother finds among her white equals recalls women's communal life in Africa: Emecheta reveals the compatibility and the superiority of the 'primitive' cultures in Africa and in England.<sup>17</sup> "Differences in culture, colour, background and God knows what else had all been submerged in the face of greater enemies - poverty and helplessness" (AS 193). The marginalized single mothers transcend cultural boundaries, forming a community that would literally merit the name of a multicultural 'mother country': a promise England holds but does not fulfil.

Emecheta's representation of her "moder kontry" England and the immigrants alike is bound to disillusion both her African and her English readers, because she subverts clichés of gender and national cultures. Emecheta clearly portrays the "moder kontry" as a place of alienation pervaded by racial and social discrimination and bound to frustrate hopeful immigrants, who desire to improve their lot by education and work. If ethnic minorities succeed, it is as much in spite of as because of English circumstances. Emecheta stresses the ambivalent function of the welfare system, which alleviates but also perpetuates economic and social problems because it helps people to survive but not to regain work, a decent living, and social esteem. The welfare system provides needy single mothers with rooms of their own and freedom from male domination and sexual harassment in their families (AS 156), but at a certain cost. Despite the inadequate support welfare gives to single mothers and the restrictions imposed upon them, Emecheta's coloured female protagonists are able to prepare for a professional career. Cross-cultural solidarity seems to be limited to female outsiders who neglect ethnic differences. In spite of the positive communal life experienced among the down-and-out Londoners in the ghetto, Emecheta's class-conscious female protagonists aspire to independent lives. In London, Emecheta's Caribbean and African women Gwendolen and Kehinde are able to combine their need for personal and economic independence with a network of multicultural friends, their desire for Western education, and links to African cultures.<sup>18</sup>

17 Sizemore, "The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta," 373.

18 Sizemore, "The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta," 382; Jana Gohrisch, "Crossing the Boundaries of Cultures: Buchi Emecheta's Novels," in (Sub)Versions of Realism: Recent Women's Fiction in Britain, ed. Irmgard Maassen & Anna Maria Stuby (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1997): 138-139.

## Return to the mother countries

Emecheta and Dangarembga depict the return of African families from England to their mother countries in *Kehinde* and in *Nervous Conditions*.<sup>19</sup> Their repatriation inevitably produces transcultural conflicts within the families between the been-to's and the stay-homes, husbands and wives, parents and children. In *Kehinde*, the husband's return to Nigerian polygamy antagonizes his wife, who had to give up her job in England and is now sandwiched between her husband's sister and his new young bride. Back in his mother country, he retrieves the traditionally respected position, which he felt was impaired by his wife's "white" middle-class woman's role and her superior income in England (35). In Nigeria, the husband seems to have reduced his use of English culture to driving an old Jaguar. For the wife, the situation is reversed. Disappointed by her "homecoming" (96) to Nigeria, where she is not respected but marginalized, she feels nostalgia for England in spite of the fact that she does not feel welcome there. Being westernized, she prefers her independence to integration in the Nigerian extended family, which does not respect her personal needs. The frustrated and unemployed wife emigrates again to England in order to start a new life with a home of her own, a new job and a new lover.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the Nigerian husband returns to African traditions in Emecheta's *Kehinde*, the patriarch Sigauke heralds English culture in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. However, the return to Zimbabwe results in serious setbacks for his wife and his daughter.

Tsitsi Dangarembga unravels the complex transcultural conflicts in a remarkable way by the clever choice of the female teenage character and narrator Tambudzai, who is torn between her affiliation to her traditional Shona family and the anglicized been-to's, who are themselves riven by conflicts between English cultures and their lost Shona heritage. Dangarembga's book inverts the unofficial segregation between ethnic groups in the multicultural metropolis in England: English 'minority' culture thrives in isolated missionary compounds between rural villages in Zimbabwe.<sup>21</sup> In opposition to

19 Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (London: The Women's Press, 1988; Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988; Seattle WA: Seal, 1988). The page references are the same in all three editions.

20 In *Gwendolen*, the mother Sonia returns to Jamaica in order to take care of her grandmother, who, however, has died in the meantime. At first, Sonia is tempted to lead an independent and convenient life on the money she saved in England, free from responsibilities towards her family, but soon she finds that her "Home is where the people she loved lived" (118), which is in London.

21 Dangarembga selects the countryside in order to mark the impact of English cultures on rural traditions. In the capital Harare, international modern influences may already have diminished both the positions of conservative English and traditional African cultures. Biman Basu correctly maintains that modern culture encroaches upon rural places, as the government builds Council houses for administration and a beer-hall, which sells American soft-drinks: "Trapped and Troping: Allegories of the Transnational Intellectual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'Nervous Conditions'," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 28.3 (1997): 16. Maybe it is irony that English culture is largely restricted to educating the (un)happy few at the mission and the Sacred Heart convent, whereas American culture seems to serve immediate economic interests and appeals to every consumer.

the English indifference towards other cultures, the been-to's and the other members of the family vividly negotiate the value and the use of English cultures. The husband and headmaster Babamukuru Sigauke tries to disseminate with missionary zeal his version of puritan English culture in his nuclear and his extended family in Zimbabwe. He clearly disparages Shona culture, proposing as he does "full immersion" to educate selected children among the family not only at school but also on the mission compound: "A child must also be provided with the correct atmosphere which will encourage his mind to develop even when he is not in the classroom" (46).

In the beginning, Tambudzai is strongly attracted to Babamukuru's conservative and Christian English culture. His submission to English culture leads to greater power, "as an early educated African, as headmaster, as husband and father, as provider to many - in positions that enabled him to organize his immediated world and its contents as he wished" (87). Against the resistance of her Shona parents, who believe that a Western education is too expensive and unnecessary for their daughter, the teenage girl Tambudzai opts for an education at her uncle's mission school. The uncle maintains that her mental emancipation will lead to her material emancipation, which is to serve her family. He stresses that Tambudzai should become an educated but good woman her parents could be proud of (88). Babamukuru implies that the girl's English education should not lead to her personal emancipation from patriarchal ethics.

In opposition to her brother, who dislikes speaking Shona and coming back to the village, Tambudzai initially seems to be able to combine her loyalty to Shona and to English culture, which is expressed by her voluntary alternating stays with her parents in the homestead and her uncle's family at the mission.<sup>22</sup> But later it shows that Tambudzai also takes to her brother's English attitude, which prefers hygiene, the colonization of the body, and the cultivation of reason to native dirt and smelly bodily labour (1-2, 92-93).<sup>23</sup> In the end, Elleke Boehmer maintains, Tambudzai inhabits "border-lines"<sup>24</sup> between the cultures.

Tsitsi Dangarembga uses the perspective of the traditional country girl who enters her uncle's English middle-class home at the mission in order to convey the striking difference between the rural Shona culture and the 'refined' English culture. The first- person narrator Tambudzai depicts, not without irony, her initial amazement at "the heavy gold curtains flowing voluptuously to the floor, the four-piece lounge suite upholstered in glowing brown velvet, the lamps with their tasselled shades, the sleek

22 Basu calls the mission a hybridized space ("Trapped and Troping: Allegories of the Transnational Intellectual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'Nervous Conditions,'" 15), but, except for Babamukuru's claim to eat before the rest of the family, hardly anything at the mission recalls Shona culture; see Derek Wright, "More than Just a Plateful of Food": Regurgitating Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 17.2 (1995): 17-18.

23 Flora Veit-Wild, "Borderlines of the Body in African Women's Writing," in *Borderlands. Negotiating Boundaries in Post-Colonial Writing*, ed. Monika Reif-Hiilser (Cross/Cultures 40 & ASNEL Papers 4; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1999): 131.

24 Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1995): 228.

bookcases filli of leather-bound and hard-covered volumes of erudition" (68), the ritual of taking tea in delicate china cups with biscuits, and the bland English food served for dinner by her aunt Maiguru. The literally and metaphorically 'white' home, which ostentatiously conveys luxury and class, compares favourably with the miserable, dirty hut Tambudzai used to live in. But the introduction into the anglicized family life has consequences the patriarchal uncle has not anticipated.

Tambudzai's trust in the usefulness of English education is qualified by her growing insight into her aunt Maiguru's and her cousin Nyasha's positions. At first, Tambudzai seems to share her uncle's attitude that requires women to be educated but good. She admires her submissive aunt and despises her obstinate cousin. Then she learns that her aunt does not profit from her English education and her work. Maiguru has a higher degree than her husband and works as a teacher, but as an obedient Shona wife hands over all of her earnings to her husband. Tambudzai realizes that her uncle's admirable generosity is based on his wife's unacknowledged work (101). She plays the perfect wife and mother, albeit with a grudge that surfaces only intermittently. Her English education seems to be of use only for her husband.

Nyasha becomes Tambu's other guide to English culture. Nyasha suffers from the clash between her two different English educations, in addition to her loss of Shona culture.<sup>25</sup> In England, Nyasha received her official and unofficial education in the Swinging Sixties. The mission school inculcates conservative Christian values and an obsolete colonial ideology that might have been current from the Victorian age until the 1950s. Nyasha's modern English ways meet with resistance from her African peers, including Tambudzai, and from her conservative parents, who consider her to be "too Anglicized" (74). Since it does not seem to bother the couple that the uncle and his son are almost completely anglicized, the parents' problem is the girl's appropriation of another English culture which undermines their authority. At this point, the gendered question is less whether to identify with English culture or African culture but who is entitled to which English culture.<sup>26</sup>

First, Nyasha's progressive English views make her claim the right to develop, to control, and to enjoy her body and her mind on her own terms (96, 119).<sup>27</sup> In opposition to her parents and to her peers, Nyasha uses Englishness for personal emancipation. Her Shona peers resent that she speaks English with an English accent and accuse her of thinking that she is white (94). The teenager smokes cigarettes, uses tampons

25 If Pauline Ada Uwakweh focuses on the conflict between two cultures - meaning the Shona and the English one - she reduces Nyasha's problem; "Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* Research in African Literatures 26.1 (1995): 82.

26 Derek Wright accurately perceives that the conflict between father and daughter results from "rival modes and manners of Englishness"; "More than Just a Plateful of Food: Regurgitating Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*" 18.

27 Johannes Lorentzen, "Black Teenage Girls in Search for [s/c] Identity: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Buchi Emecheta's *Gwendolen*" (M.A. thesis, Bamberg University, 1999): 33.

(96), wears mini-skirts (109), and even flirts with white boys (94). She claims the right to stay at home by herself and to read whatever she likes (83,121).

Secondly, Nyasha's education in England makes her criticize the colonization of her native country and its minds.<sup>28</sup> She applies her knowledge about oppression and discrimination (63) to colonial history and present rule in Rhodesia, which she compares to South Africa, to the dismay of her mother (93). Nyasha criticizes the distinction between masters and servants in her own home - an import of the English class system.<sup>29</sup> She rebels against her patriarchal father and the conservative English culture he represents. She defies her father's authority in intellectual and physical ways: she criticizes his colonized mind, refuses food and text books, and finally strikes back.

Her bulimia expresses her cultural (in)digestion as she devours but then vomits British food and knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Rosemary Gray defines her illness as of Western origin.<sup>31</sup> I would stress that this female individual embodies Fanon's metaphoric description of decolonization under her father's (neo)colonial rule:

In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up.<sup>32</sup>

Fanon advocates violence as a liberating force,<sup>33</sup> but Dangarembga links decolonizing violence with gender, which is largely absent in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*?<sup>34</sup> When Nyasha hits back, her father accuses her of fighting like a man, and reduces Nyasha's problem to her debunking his authority as a man and a father (115). But Nyasha correctly perceives the link between patriarchal and neocolonial rule, because her father's power is based on the dissemination of his paternalist version of English culture. Nyasha sees that Babamukuru is a product of colonization, a "historical artifact" (160). But so is Nyasha, who faces the problem that there is hardly an escape

28 Keith M. Booker, *The African Novel in English: An Introduction* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1998): 194

29 Booker, *The African Novel in English*, 194.

30 Veit-Wild is right when she interprets Nyasha's self-destructive illness as a claim to autonomy. But her thesis that Nyasha's use of a tampon and her wearing her mini-skirt evades norms imposed upon the female body ("Borderlines of the Body in African Women's Writing," 131) seems too general because here Nyasha follows an English model of woman.

31 Rosemary Gray, "'Unnatural Daughters': Postmodernism and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*," *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 17.2 (1995): 6.

32 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 43.

33 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 94.

34 Michelle Vizzard, "'Of Mimicry and Woman': Hysteria and Anticolonial Feminism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*," *SPAN* 36 (1993): 205; Supriya Nair, "Melancholic Women: The Intellectual Hysteric(s) in *Nervous Conditions*," *Research in African Literatures* 26.2 (1995): 133; Keith M. Booker, *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*, 191; Veit-Wild, "Borderlines of the Body in African Women's Writing," 130.

from English culture, since both her colonizing and her emancipatory education are English (63, 93,147).

She cannot and would not go back to Shona culture, either. Her dabbling in traditional pottery does not really involve her in Shona culture, which confines women more than she could bear. Her violent rage, in the end, is directed against the English and, what is often ignored, the Shona culture as much as against herself, as she shreds a history book, smashes her clay pots, and jabs the fragments into her flesh (201). Does she succumb to the colonial manichaeon dichotomy and punish herself for being "evil" (200)<sup>35</sup> and for resisting Englishness? She seems to use and refuse English and Shona cultural paradigms, living inside and outside patriarchal cultures. Instead of combatting her father, who is a victim of colonial history himself, she wants to retreat to a mental asylum (200-201), a space on the margins of her patriarchal mother country, which does not offer her a positive alternative to Englishness. Her psychosomatic, physical, and intellectual resistance to her neocolonial father and her subsequent retreat mark her "self-imposed 'otherness',"<sup>36</sup> which may be based on English culture but finally re- fuses any submission to it.<sup>37</sup>

Tambudzai's aunt, who tries to combine her English education with Shona submissiveness, and her cousin, who tries to escape any cultural restrictions, serve as negative rather than positive models to Tambu. Nyasha and Tambudzai's uneducated but critical mother warn her of the alienating assimilation to English culture as she wins a scholarship to the Sacred Heart convent school (179, 184). But Tambudzai decides on attending the school, which promises to make a "lady" out of her. The expected status and esteem are as attractive to Tambudzai as the linen costume with gloves she is to wear on Sundays (178). The convent school, which segregates black and white girls, promotes an even more obsolete form of English middle-class culture than the mission school, because it promises to elevate middle-class girls to cultural nobility. After years of English education, earlier warnings of assimilation surface and Tambudzai becomes aware of an unease with English culture: "something began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed" (NC 204). Biman Basu argues convincingly that Tambudzai's desired escape from repression by a new critical awareness results from her subjection to Western intellectual discipline, an insight prefigured by Nyasha.<sup>38</sup> Even if Tambudzai begins to realize the submission effected by her education, it is questionable whether she would or could retrieve her Shona cultural heritage.

35 Sally McWilliams, "Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions: At the Crossroads of Feminism and Post-Colonialism," *World Literature Written in English* 31.1 (1991): 108.

36 Rosemary Gray, "Unnatural Daughters: Postmodernism and Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions," 6.

37 The ambiguity of Nyasha's position between rebellion, submission, and her assertion of her independence beyond categories imposed upon her by others is enhanced by her statement: "Look what they've done to us', she said softly. 'I'm not one of them [i.e. the English] but I'm not one of you" (*Nervous Conditions*, 201).

38 Biman Basu, "Trapped and Tropic: Allegories of the Transnational Intellectual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions," 21-22. I fail to see why Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter correctly argues that these young women are alienated from themselves and their culture but then

Emecheta and Dangarembga deal with the gendered use of diverse English cultures within an African context. Their novels do not deny that English education in Africa leads to material improvement. However, they maintain that neither education nor work is meant to lead to women's individual emancipation. Educated women are expected to work for their husband's and their family's immediate benefit. The women who have first-hand experience of English cultures and who return to their African mother country face particular difficulties resulting from the patriarchal English or native culture in Africa. These women lose the singular position they held in their nuclear families in England, and have to submit to their relative positions in their extended families. They are subject to more restrictive rules concerning their behaviour. Emecheta and Dangarembga provide alternative solutions to these women's problems: Maiguru grudgingly submits to Christian patriarchal rule, Nyasha retreats into an exile of her own within the country after her futile rebellion against her neo-colonial father, and Kehinde escapes from her husband's traditional polygamy by returning to England.

Whereas Emecheta stresses the positive aspects of an English education as a means to advancement, Dangarembga focuses on the alienating neocolonial effects of English education in Africa. The African representatives of English cultures in *Nervous Conditions* seem to have lost almost all trace of their traditional Shona culture. Vicious neo-colonial circles sustain the power of the anglicized patriarch. The poor Shona pay school fees to the English mission schools, which alienate their children from their traditional culture. Their fees contribute to the wealth of the anglicized headmaster, who uses his capital to support his poor Shona relatives. The African patriarch also uses his power in order to control his family and to impose Christian English culture on them. Babamukuru interprets economic and gender conflicts within his extended Shona family as consequences of sin because his brother had no church wedding. The enforced Christian marriage encroaches upon Shona culture and solves neither material nor social problems, leaving them dependent on economic support by their anglicized patriarch.

Emecheta's and Dangarembga's narratives perform what they show: black women, being marginalized by Africans and Englishmen alike, do better to rely on other black women as guides to their particular intercultural encounter with the English.<sup>39</sup> These African writers demythologize the glorifying illusion of the mother country England without denying that English culture offers other women in particular (limited) oppor-

goes on to say that they "together symbolize the 'wholeness' and 'healing' of African womanist identity"; "A Dialectic of Autonomy and Community: Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15.2 (1996): 238. Whereas Tambudzai testifies to her doubt about English education after her mother's and Nyasha's warnings, she nevertheless overcomes her unease and returns to "the more concentrated 'Englishness' at Sacred Heart" (203), leaving Nyasha to the care of her aunts.

39 Olga Kenyon, "Buchi Emecheta and the Black Immigrant Experience in Britain," in *Writing Women: Contemporary Women Novelists* (London: Pluto, 1991): 132.

tunities to gain independence.<sup>40</sup> The two authors also address white women, as Emecheta maintains, in order to invite cross-cultural co-operation against male domination (HW I). The writers negotiate English culture and point out comparable if different intercultural patterns of patriarchal repression and women's resistance.

Emecheta's and Dangarembga's books serve as a supplement to the English versions of English culture in Homi Bhabha's sense: they add to the English constructions of their culture but they do not add up. The other women's texts do not merely present different perspectives on English culture, but point out the difference between the discursive construction of a homogeneous English culture and the contending forces of heterogeneous English cultures.<sup>41</sup> The other women's guides to English cultures contest the construction of a homogeneous English culture intended to fortify the boundaries between cultures, an act that turns the promise of a multicultural mother country into a farce. Their representations of heterogeneous English cultures in England and in Africa complement each other: They represent different kinds and changes of English cultures. Emecheta and Dangarembga tend to reveal the synchronic diversity of contemporary English cultures within England, and the diachronic diversity of coexisting historical forms of English middle-class cultures abroad. According to the novels discussed, the conservative English cultures taught in Africa tend to prolong (neo)colonial patriarchal rule at the cost of local traditions, whereas the English cultures encountered in London offer African women opportunities for emancipation from patriarchal domination - which, however, they cannot transfer to their African motherland.

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- 40 Lisa H. Iyer, "The Second Sex Three Times Oppressed: Cultural Colonization and Coll(i)u)sion in Buchi Emecheta's *Women*," in *Critical Studies: Writing the Nation*, ed. John C. Hawley (Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination 7; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1996): 131. Susheila Nasta denotes the same quality of disillusionment about the mother country in and by Caribbean women writers' literature: *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (1991; London: The Women's Press, 1992): 30.
- 41 Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Narration and Nation*, ed. Bhabha (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 148.

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