

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Background of The Research

Nowadays, discrimination is still an issue faced by many women all over the world. Regardless the women's background, most of them are always marginalized and discriminated by men. Moreover, they always become the object of violence and sexual abuses. Men tend to see women as the second priority, inferior to them. This gender discrimination happens not only within politics, economy, or education aspect, but also within a nation's tradition. Women tend to be powerless under the patriarchy. Patriarchy itself is an ideology that gives great advantages for men rather than women because of patriarchal system deals with men's power and domination, which discriminates women in the society. As Tyson states, "patriarchy is thus, sexist, which mean it promotes the belief that women are inferior to men" (2006: 85). Women show different efforts and attitudes against it. It continuously happens many years in almost every nation around the world and one of them is in Africa.

Nowadays, literary works already become one of women ways to express their feeling to fight against that patriarchal oppression. That is a remarkably way to criticize gender inequality through their writing. Furthermore, women completely have a chance and a media to express their freedom and tend to do it directly rather than in the past. According to Barry in *Beginning theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural theory: 2nd ed*, Elaine Showalter, one of the

feminist critics who is famous with her gynocriticism theory divides the three phases of women's writing tradition. The first is feminine phase (1840-1880), women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalized its assumption about female nature. The second is feminist phase (1880-1920) a condition of female writing is radical and often separatist positions are maintained. The last is female phase (1920-present), which looked particularly at female writing and experience (123).

Gender discrimination and patriarchal system are denied and criticized by people especially women because it causes unfair treatment and unhappiness for them. There are movements attempt to fight against this injustice. A movement called feminism aims to reach the equality for women in many aspects in society, for instance, within politics, economy, culture, education, etc. This feminist movement began many years ago and went through some periods. Peter Barry in his book *The Beginning Theory; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed* (2002) says that Feminist criticism in the 1970s criticized the patriarchy system and it continued to develop during the 1980s (122). Furthermore, Guerin et al on feminism in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (1999) states that "In its diversity concerns with the marginalization of all women: that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position" (196). He also states that "despite their diversity, feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to escape patriarchal premises and resulting prejudice..." (197). In other words, women's position in society is unequal to men so that feminist criticism itself appears to challenge male domination over women and authority in society where the women always become a victim of patriarchal

culture in which they are oppressed by men. Through literary works as the medium for woman writer in delivering their ideas and thought about the patriarchal system, women writers share their experience and reaction toward it. One of them is Tsitsi Dangarembga, the African woman writer who writes the influential novel; *Nervous Conditions*.

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in a small town in Zimbabwe. She lived in England from the ages of two to six while her parents attended school there. Later, she attended a private American convent school in the city of Mutare. In 1977, Dangarembga returned to England to study medicine. No longer a child living in a foreign culture, she witnessed and fully understood the often racist or racially stereotypical attitudes held by many members of English society. Returning to Zimbabwe in 1980, she began to develop in earnest as a writer. She has written some works such as short story; *The Letter* (1985), playwright; *She has No Longer Weeps* (1987), novel; *Nervous Conditions* (1988) which was reprinted several times, and novel *The Book of Not: A Sequel to Nervous Conditions* (2006). She also directs some films; *Everyone's Child* (1996) and *Kare Kare Zvako* (2004). Beside as writer and director, she also writes story for the film; *Neria* (1993).

Tsitsi Dangarembga is best known for her first novel; *Nervous Conditions*. It is set in Rhodesia in the 1960s and the story is about Tambudzai, a young Shona girl who lives in an impoverished farm. After the death of her brother, Tambu has the opportunity to live with her western-educated uncle to receive a missionary

western education. Vicki L. Whisler stated that the novel has won the African division of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989. It had been translated into twelve languages, and had become a part of the English-language university canon in gender, feminist, colonial, and postcolonial studies. On the jacket cover of the novel, it is said The African Book Club recommends *Nervous Conditions* to be “a thought-provoking novel that packs a huge number of complicated ideas into a simple and engaging story.” It has been praised within and outside of Africa as influential novel in feminism and post-colonialism. Within the diverse tradition of African and Black women’s writing, it is *Nervous Conditions* that best represents the extent to which emancipation and justice remains a constant possibility. There are commendations toward *Nervous Conditions* as mentioned in the preface of the novel, Bloomsbury Review describes it as an “absorbing page-turner”, “another example of a bold new national literature” by the African Times and “a unique and valuable book” by Booklist. Overall, it is recognized as a major literary contribution to African feminism and postcolonial literature. In the writer’s opinion, this novel is the author’s reflection and denial toward the gender oppression which is experienced by female in Africa.

The short description above and coherent relation among the issue, the author and the novel, has motivated the writer to conduct this research. From this perspective, the writer is interested to analyze the feminist study in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel in a research titled “*Women’s Experience Under Patriarchal Oppression and Their Struggle Against It As Seen in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions.*”

## **1.2 The Identification of The Problem**

In this research, the writer analyses Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. In the novel, there are gender oppressions which are experienced by female characters; Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru and Mainini. These female characters become victims of injustice from men in their family who believe in patriarchal values. They experience different kind of oppressions, such as unequal treatment in education, difficulty in experiencing freedom, and domination of their right. This condition makes them react and struggle against the oppression. Therefore, the writer will show gender oppressions which are experienced by those female characters, their reaction in coping with it and the author's messages through the experience of those female characters.

## **1.3 The Scope of Research**

To make the analysis perfect and unequivocal, the writer has to limit the discussion by framing some interesting points and focusing the analysis on the following issues:

1. The forms of patriarchal oppressions experienced by female characters in *Nervous Conditions*
2. The female character's struggles against gender oppression in *Nervous Conditions*

## **1.4 The Objective of the Research**

This research aims to show the various gender oppressions experienced by female characters and their struggle against it, which are found in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Besides, the writer also wants to show

author's message which is depicted through experience of those female characters within the novel.

### **1.5 The Review of Previous Study**

This research is conducted through the elaboration and analysis of Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*. To analyse this novel deeply, the writer needs some critiques and references from previous studies to enrich the research. The writer employs also some experts' opinions on the novel and topics which are related to the research.

The first research on the same novel, Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, is related to postcolonial study. The research written by John Yang from Brown University is titled *Babamukuru as the Mimic Man: A Post-colonial: An Examination of Tsitsi Dangaremba's Nervous Conditions* (1999). In his research, Yang uses the term 'mimic man'. Mimic man represents a product of colonial civilization, not an entity separated from the colonial sphere. Mimic man can be a character within a novel or even the author himself. Yang described that uncle Babamukuru represents the colonial subject or the mimic man in the novel. He also found that, Babamukuru is a product of Western education although he is Shona. His family reveres him because he possesses the gift of the white man's voice and uses it to achieve success and not because his position is high on the Shona cultural ladder of respect. Yang concludes that Babamukuru cannot exist without his Western education. Without it, he will suffer as his brother Jeremiah, being useless man. Yang said, in fact, the mimic man is the only means of improvement in Tambudzai's family. Therefore, Babamukuru reinforces the

dominance of colonial institutions and disturbs it at the same time. He uses Western ideas of success to garner respect and worship from Shona people. He is indeed a paradox, belonging to both Western and indigenous culture and at the same time being forever separated from both as Tambudzai observes.

The second researcher is Mariah Oktavia , the student of Andalas University. Her thesis is titled “Woman’s Struggle Against Patriarchal Oppression As Seen in Anna Bronte’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*” (2009). In her research, Oktavia analyzes the types of oppression toward female character in marriage and the efforts against the oppression as seen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Furthermore, she tries to find out whether or not the oppression toward women which is experienced by the female character in the novel, is the reflection of women’s life in Victorian era. She finds that there were oppressions toward women as seen through Helen’s character in the story, for instance, the activities such as restriction and mistreatment by Helen’s husband. She also gets the unequal right due to her husband domination. Oktavia also finds out Helen’s struggles to escape from the patriarchal oppression. The struggles are Helen’s refusal of the oppression, for instance her effort in building the sisterhood among women, and getting away from the oppressor. Oktavia concludes that Anne Bronte begin to express the feminist issues through the depiction of female character’s action in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The action is successfully released her from confines of patriarchal oppression.

The last review is an article entitled “Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*: An Attempt in The Feminist Tradition” written by Rosemary Moyana

(1994) from University of Zimbabwe. The article discusses Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* as an attempt in the feminist tradition. It begins by examining the meanings of the words 'gender', 'female', 'feminist' and 'feminine' and then goes on to analyse the roles of the men and women in the novel. Moyana finds out that both men and women suffer at the hands of the patriarchal system in the novel and both sexes suffer from the effect of colonialism as well. However, women suffer more at the hands of the men as they are often abused and denigrated.

She concludes that it is not a question of men and women fighting each other for dominance. Rather, it is question of both sexes cooperating and working together to achieve emancipation from stifling traditions.

Although the latter review study above analyzes the same literary works with the writer, yet the research has different points to be analyzed. This research, generally applies the feminist theory specifically gynocriticism which is proposed by Elaine Showalter.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

Feminist Criticism is a literary movement that according to Guerin, et al is “a kind of feminist movement which analyzes literary works which deals with a woman as a subject” (Guerin 197). In analyzing this novel, the writer used feminist criticism because the writer deals with the female characters in order to find out the author’s thoughts about woman which is found within the novel through the female characters themselves. Guerin et al (1999) discusses about feminism in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, and states that:



In its diversity concerns with the marginalization of all women: that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. Most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal culture: that is one organized in favour of the interests of men. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts (196).

Guerin also explains that “despite their diversity, feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to escape patriarchal premises and resulting prejudice...” (197). Thus, feminist criticism is literary criticism that deals exclusively with female characters, women’s issues and how the female roles in literary text affect the plot and other characters.

Furthermore, in analysing this novel, the writer specifically focuses on the Gynocriticism. Gynocriticism is proposed by one of feminist critics, Elaine Showalter. Bressler states in *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to theory and Practice. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed*, Showalter explained that “gynocritics aims to construct a female framework for analyzing of women literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than adapt to male models and theories” (182). In addition, Bressler (1999) mentions that “Showalter’s term gynocriticism has now become synonymous with the study of women as writer and provides critics with four models concerning the nature of women’s writing that help answer some of the chief concerns of feminist criticism: the biological, linguistics, psychoanalytic and cultural” (185). In this research the writer focus on culture which related to analysis. Cultural model is to examine the culture where women

authors lived in and how the culture influenced the writing through the way women understand herself, her society, and her world (190).

Furthermore according to Barry in *Beginning theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural theory: 2nd ed* (2002), Showalter divides the three phases of women's writing tradition. The first is feminine phase (1840-1880), women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalized its assumption about female nature. The second is feminist phase (1880-1920) a condition of female writing is radical and often separatist positions are maintained. The last is female phase (1920-present), which looked particularly at female writing and experience (123). In *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory: 5<sup>th</sup> ed* (2005), it is said that the feminine phase includes Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, and is one where women writers imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic standards which required that female authors remain gentlewomen. The feminist phase includes such radical feminist writers as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner, who protest against male value and advocate separatist utopias and suffragette sisterhood. While the female phase inherited characteristics of the former periods and developed the idea of specifically female writing and female experience in a phase of selfdiscovery (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 140).

## **1.7 The Method of the Research**

- **Collecting Data**

In conducting the research, the writer followed three steps. First step is collecting the data. There are two kinds of data used in this research, the primary

data, taken from the literary work itself, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and the secondary data taken from literary theory books and articles related to this study. The data is collected by using library research methods; reading the books, articles, and journals and browsing the internet.

- **Analyzing Data**

The second step is analysing the data. In this step, the writer begins to read the novel carefully first and then tries to figure out kinds of oppression experienced by the four female characters in the novel. Then the research is conducted by analyzing the female character's reaction and action taken by those women in facing the injustice treatments. In doing the analysis, the writer applies the theory of feminism, focused on gynocriticism (women as writer) by Elaine Showalter.

- **Presenting The Result**

The last step is presenting the result of analysis. In presenting the result of analysis, the descriptive method will be applied since the research is qualitative. The data are collected in form of words, not in form of number. The research contains data such as quotations from related sources to support the result of analysis.