

Halmstad University

School of Humanities

English 61-90

Kambili and Tambudzai: Inspirational Young Women from Africa

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C-essay

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## Abstract

This essay explores the living conditions of the main characters Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tambudzai in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga and their struggle to achieve personal freedom. It aims to show that colonial stereotypes are challenged through the girl's struggles.

It starts with a short exposé over post-colonial theory, here a methodological viewpoint, which is important to consider Kambili and Tambudzai from. It furthermore considers how their extensive family circumstances have impact on these two young protagonists, and finally examines how they employ formal and informal education as a tool to make changes in their lives and become inspirational young African women.

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## Introduction

An elderly African woman in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga expresses her view on women's living conditions in her culture saying "this business of womanhood is a heavy burden" (16). The elderly woman is a representative of the majority of African women, old and young, those who historically did not have the possibility to express their opinion in public. This is nowadays arguably changing, with contemporary novels written by women, as novelists increasingly highlight a female point of view on African women's life. In this paper I will look at how the lives of two young female characters, Kambili, from Nigeria, in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tambudzai, from Rhodesia, in the abovementioned *Nervous Conditions*, are depicted as examples of a struggling generation of African women, who try to escape their heavy burden and achieve personal freedom.

When the novels begin, both Kambili and Tambudzai are around 15 years old and live with their families, under different socio economic conditions and in societies affected by colonization; yet, eventually, having overcome all kinds of hardships, they arguably become inspirational figures. What unites Kambili and Tambudzai is that within their families the girls are expected to follow in their mother's footsteps becoming housewives, and thereby fit into the gender roles stipulated by society. This expectation is the same for both, even though their life conditions are dissimilar. Kambili is brought up as one of two siblings, in a wealthy family living in the town Enugu, in Nigeria. In her home there are tokens of riches, as a stereo and TV, which the family, however, never use. At the same time, Kambili also suffers a tyrannical father. She is as dominated by him, within the familial context and along with her mother and brother, as her people were dominated at large during colonization. Tambudzai, on the other hand, lives in

poverty as one of four siblings in an extensive family on the Rhodesian countryside. Her father is a weak man and her options in life are therefore limited, as she is, like the rest of her family, dependent on her uncle, who provides for them all. There is also Tambudzai's beloved mother, whom Tambudzai cares for, as she sees her doing all the domestic work more or less by herself. However, Tambudzai does not envy her mother's life, and, therefore, struggles to come as far from it that is possible. Another similarity between the girls is that both have to deal with the double set of old and new ideas and value systems that exist parallel under the British colonizers, in colonized Rhodesia and former colonized Nigeria, where they live. However, against the above backgrounds, Kambili and Tambudzai gain experience under the influence of their cousins, aunts, or uncles, who are important to them, as also through formal and informal education and they develop into modern inspirational women.

I will start by giving a short exposé over post-colonial theory. Thereafter, looking into the novels and how Adichie and Dangarembga describe Kambili and Tambudzai. I will first try to show how these two young women, struggle, yet find ways to cope and assert themselves in their respective societies. I will further discuss how their extensive family circumstances shape them as individuals and, finally, how they employ formal and informal education as a tool to overcome their victimization and make changes in their lives. Both Kambili and Tambudzai might function as inspirational figures not only to other disempowered African women, who may share similar life conditions, but also to disempowered women from other circumstances and cultures.

## 1. Post- Colonial Theory

Post-colonialism deals with the effects colonization still has on people, as well as on history, politics and economy. During colonialism new land was conquered by soldiers, settlers, businessmen, teachers, missionaries and clergymen. These were whites, primarily Europeans, who were breaking ground on new continents to benefit their nations. In *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* by Bill Ashcroft et al. it is stated that “colonialism could only exist at all by postulating that there existed a binary opposition into which the world was divided” meaning that “the idea of the savage could occur only if there was a concept of the civilized to oppose it” (36). The colonizers brought along and imposed their thinking onto the Africans; the message was that the whites came with the mission to rescue the Africans and to bring civilization to their untamed continent.

But the mission to civilize people in reality meant imposing the European ideas onto the Africans. In an imperialistic manner the Europeans enforced their cultural habits, institutions, as the school system, and ideas about anything from dressing codes to morality onto the Africans. The significance of the word imperialism itself has, according to Ashcroft et al., changed over time. I choose to limit the use of the term to one of the ways it has been used, namely “the Europeanization of the globe” (Ashcroft 124). During colonization rhetoric had a powerful role, as it was put in the service of the colonizers, who dominated and ruled the Africans and managed to make Europe a focus for life, which in time even became a model for a modern prosperous life.

The focus on Europe resulted in that people from the colonized countries emigrated, making use of the opportunity to live in the diaspora and adapt to a new life abroad. In the two

novels both Kambili and Tambudzai have relatives who made use of this opportunity to study, or live, abroad. Some of these people emigrated permanently, whereas others simply took advantage of living abroad to utilize foreign educational possibilities and then return to their home countries. This meant that relatives returning might bring useful experiences other members of their families could profit from. Tambudzai's uncle Babamukuru is one example of those who took the chance to find prosperity through studies abroad, while Kambili's aunt Ifeoma and her cousins are permitted to emigrate to the United States without knowing if they will ever return.

At the same time, the Africans had to always consider themselves as being the different ones and in need of correction and were thus forced to shape their identity in opposition to the norm (Ashcroft 11). This resulted in that the individual developed a negative self-esteem, as they always longed for belonging to the group of privileged persons, who were most often non Africans. To describe this state of existence one could use the concept "hybridity", which means the employment of elements from two or more cultures. Ashcroft et al. point out that "the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of syncreticity, cultural synergy and transculturation" (119). In the novels, it could be argued that Kambili and Tambudzai exemplify states of hybridity in the sense that they materialise as products of both the old African culture, as they originate from traditional African families, and the new ideas, as they partake in the formal education the colonizers introduced, and which they use as key for change. Hybridity as a concept is, however, not accepted by everyone, as it is "a term so rooted in a previous set of racist assumptions" (Ashcroft 120). There are namely other, similar terms to employ, which are free from associations to racism, as for example assimilation. Part of the criticism is also that one aim during colonization was to get the Africans to mimic, to copy, the

colonizer's values and manners. The Africans were actively encouraged to leave behind their own orally transformed traditions, languages and behaviours. Instead, they were assumed to employ the foreign ways, and thereby become copies of the whites. However, the term hybridity is widely used to stress the outcome of the process through which individuals in countries with a colonial history form their identity.

Post-colonialism has a lot of similarities with feminism, as they both explore the double discrimination of women, due to race and gender. The two theories focus on how women are excluded from privilege for various reasons. Ashcroft's et al. state that there have been debates "over whether gender or colonialism oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives" (102). They also claim that both imperialism and patriarchy dominate and limit women's options to develop as individuals.

## 2. Colonial Setting

The two young women, Kambili and Tambudzai, are raised under different circumstances in two African countries, one independent in the western part of the continent, and one colonized country, in the south eastern part of Africa. Kambili and Tambudzai experience also different economic situations. Still, the fictional accounts of their rather different lives bring to light the living reality for women in independent Nigeria and colonized Rhodesia during the 1960s.

In Kambili's case, Nigeria's military coup against the colonizers, which her family gets information about through the local radio, and the country's suspension from the Commonwealth mean that she experiences a tense civic situation, which finally leads to her country's independence. The severe political situation, in general, and for her father's business in particular, results in Kambili's awareness of the need for better conditions to arise in poor

Nigeria, generally, and for her family's safety more specifically. Kambili comprehends from her father's reaction when the editor at his newspaper is assassinated that something serious is happening in the country. Moreover, that the frequent riots against shortages of water, light, and unpaid wages is a threat to her comfortable life.

Kambili lives the wealthy life some educated Africans manage to enjoy and provide for their children, embracing the colonizer's ideas, enforced by her exceptionally strict father, who is even called a colonial product by her aunt Ifeoma (Adichie 13). The reason that her father is characterised as strict is that he in the name of righteousness does not hesitate to employ harsh punishments, for example, when he is convinced about Kambili's sinfulness for lying, he punishes her by pouring boiling water on her feet. Kambili then has to live with a father who accepts and enforces the imperial stereotypes, that the Colonizers are superior to Africans. He frequently says "you would never see white people doing that," when, for example, referring to the system of bribery when passing the numerous military roadblocks during a drive (Adichie 104). Kambili is moreover forced to copy the Colonizers' way of life by speaking English, even at home, as part of her father's agenda to abolish the use of their native language, Igbo. Similarly, she is forced to embrace Christianity, since her father wants them all to become cultivated persons, like the whites are in his view. In fact, Kambili learns to envy the whites and to look down on her own people.

On the other hand, Tambudzai belongs to a poor family and lives in the still colonized Rhodesia. In fact, due to conflicts with the white ruling minority the country did not become independent until the 1980s (when it also changed name to Zimbabwe) and was then "considered to be the bread basket of the African continent" (Nyikadzino). In spite of her country's wealth,

Tambudzai (together with her mother and three siblings) experiences poverty in her father's household in the east of the capital Salisbury, in the poor countryside. Her family are poor country people, with limited economic possibilities, as the Colonizers did not care to develop the rural areas. Tambudzai's father in particular is deprived in a larger sense, as he is described as an inferior and irresponsible person. This characterization corresponds to the imperialistic stereotypes that Tambudzai learns: that the whites are "human and beautiful" and the opposite of the "bestial and ugly" inferior Africans (Ashcroft 25).

Tambudzai could possibly reason that there is a cause for the imperialistic stereotypes, as her father obviously expects his brother to contribute to his family's survival. She is also aware that she cannot expect any help from her father; instead it is her uncle Babamukuru who supports her welfare and who makes it possible for her to break with the oppressive traditional gender roles she risks being subjected to, by giving her the chance to get a formal education at the mission school where he is the headmaster.

Both Kambili and Tambudzai are affected by the fact that during the colonization of the African continent the Church played a large role in imposing demeaning stereotypes on African people. The missionaries and clergymen were among the colonizers, all driven by the same imperialistic idea of a naturally divided world of "colonizer : colonized, white : black, civilized : primitive... good : evil... doctor : patient" (Ashcroft 24). As mentioned above, the imperialist ideological perspectives are grounded on perceptions of sets of opposites. However, neither of the qualities in every set is based on scientific investigation, but is instead derived from just ideas of how to explain differences between people (Ashcroft 24). In general, it can be said that the Whites were thought of in positive terms, whereas the Africans in negative or inferior terms.

Africans were in everything the colonizer's opposite, and consequently had to be corrected. In addition, the colonizers were driven by the idea of a mission that they should "bring the margin [the Africans] into the sphere of influence of the enlightened centre, [which] became the principal justification for the economic and political exploitation of colonialism" (Ashcroft 37). So, in spite of the original message, inspired by Apostle John who said that "all people are equal subjects of a loving God" (The New International Version of the Holy Bible, 1 John 4:8), the church, as a voice of the colonizers, came to preach that the whites are good whereas Africans are incompetent.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's Papa Eugene, and others, embraces the colonizer's Christianity, which they think is a more sophisticated religion than the traditional African religions. So, by becoming a strict practising Christian, Papa Eugene wants to improve himself, aspiring to become like the superior whites, who are however also the suppressors. What Kambili does not understand at first, is that by becoming a Christian her father also opposes his own father, who keeps on to the traditional faith. Consequently, Kambili thinks that everything connected with the traditional African faith system is bad, or sinful. Not until she is outside the influence of her father does she realise that his views are questionable and it is then she can feel empowered enough to move beyond passive acceptance of his ideas.

However, Kambili has the chance to see a different face of the church and of the African religion of her people. Living in aunt Ifeoma's home she gets in contact with a friend of her aunt, a young Catholic priest, Father Amadi, who has inspiring Christian views and encourages Kambili to be the person she is. Father Amadi is very different from the priest in Enugu, who seems to be tied to Kambili's father and only acts according to his instructions. For example,

Kambili had reasons to doubt that the question he asks her, during confession were his own. When it comes to traditional African beliefs, her grandfather's sincerity while praying is new to her, as it shows honesty and religious frankness which she never experienced in her father's prayers.

Tambudzai is not directly involved in the church, other than going to mission school, but she, too, is influenced by the stereotypes of African inferiority it imposes. In school and society one talks positively about the whites and their abilities, at the same time rejecting African skills. Tambudzai comments on how clever the Colonizers are, constructing tarmac roads in the mountains. She is, however, brusquely corrected by her African uncle, who points out to her, "we [the Africans] did the building" (Dangarembga 26). The origin of Tambudzai's beliefs is that she repeatedly heard well about the colonizer's abilities which results in self-hatred, as being an African. Therefore, Tambudzai longs to become superior as the whites in order to be entitled to their possibilities.

The stereotypes regarding the white colonisers versus the Africans are questioned and challenged by contemporary novelists like Adichie. In a speech at the international conference "3th Debate in the Narratives for Europe – Stories that Matter" (18 Apr. 2011), Adichie claimed that she writes about ordinary people and that her purpose is to show that the colonial stereotypes are invalid, as there are, for example, both poor and wealthy Nigerians. In her writing about Kambili, who comes from a wealthy family, Adichie purposely brings to light the gaps between the rich and the poor within Nigeria. Kambili's own aunt does not live under the same circumstances as she, as the university does not pay her salary frequently and she therefore cannot afford either food or petrol. Adichie also stated that there is a gap of knowledge about the

living conditions of Nigerians among both Nigerians and foreigners. In Adichie's writing, Kambili is one example of a Nigerian person who creates her identity beyond the limits of imperialistic ideas of how she, an African young woman can develop.

In fact, in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions*, the novelists demonstrate that the colonial stereotypes are invalid and the young female characters instead become inspirational figures. Kambili's privileged life is at odds with colonial prejudices, as she lives in wealth and has the freedom to study. This kind of life is not what the imperialists thought was for Africans to live. Even Kambili's family is not stereotypical: her father is highly respected in society and her aunt is an independent university teacher working actively for changes. Therefore, Kambili questions and struggles to understand the contradiction in the life she experiences and the stereotypes conserved by, among other, newspapers. Similarly to Kambili, Tambudzai is also affected by colonial beliefs, but in a different way. Tambudzai and her family are supposed to be superstitious and uneducated people, as they speak a native language, Shona. Tambudzai herself might at a first glimpse, from a colonial perspective, appear to be a savage and a lazy African, speaking a native tongue, living with her extensive family in a homestead, and being uneducated. But, at a closer look, she does not meet preconceived ideas about inactivity and passivity, as she acts in a mature and independent way, continuously seeking the opportunity to resume her studies, and she even takes the initiative to start growing crops to make it happen. Tambudzai wants to study as, ironically, her main goal is to become a cultivated, prosperous copy of the whites.

The two novels then present a more complex and consequently a truer picture of living conditions for African women. Kambili and Tambudzai are brought up under different socio

economic circumstances and they construct their identities from their respective social positions. But both girls come from African families who expected them to obey their parents' will without objections, but for different reasons. Kambili follows her dominating father's plan for her education. The demand is rooted in her father's conviction that western education is the route to a superior status. In Tambudzai's case, she is simply supposed to obey blindly as she comes from a traditional family, where obedience to the parents is a norm.

At the same time, Kambili and Tambudzai are examples of colonized Africans developing into free individuals and in the process becoming aware of the differences between traditional African knowledge and imperialistic ideas. A society with double set of values, where one is accepted more than the other, results in ambiguous states for the individuals who inhabit it, who in turn need to employ hybridity to survive. This is a strategy which involves that the individuals begin choosing elements from their two cultures and implementing them into their identity (Ashcroft 120). In the novels, this is what Kambili and Tambudzai do, they start choosing between elements from the two cultures, employing hybridity. For example, Kambili becomes aware that her father's choice of religion and rejection of his own father is not positively seen by everyone. She realizes that everything around her may be understood in different ways, depending on who makes the judgement and that she has to make her own decisions. As for Tambudzai, she is not alone in her family struggling to choose between the old African ideas and new colonial ones. She sees that even her educated uncle, Babamukuru, struggles to find a balance in his life. However, while Babamukuru has gained his experiences from living abroad, Tambudzai gets her knowledge from what she meets in school, from reading, and from her family.

Neither of these two young African women, then, proves the colonial stereotypes to be correct; instead both Kambili and Tambudzai are active in their own ways and thus may be viewed as inspirational examples of young African women forming their individual identities.

### 3. Familial Context

One important force that shapes the perceptions of one person's identity is the family and its ideas about an individual's role within society. Margret Hron states that in African countries an individual has a "social status" from an early age (29). She claims that the individual starts shaping their identity using the traditional knowledge, from what they learn from relations and taking part in the family activities. Due to the belief that a young person does not yet have a fully shaped identity, he or she has a kind of in-between position which allows them to ask questions about how things are, or could be (Hron 29).

Kambili is brought up in a nuclear family and tries to survive the pressure from her tyrannical father, which shapes her personality. Notably, she is not a typical African young girl at all in the sense that she, is not raised with access to traditional knowledge, but is banned from it. She is one of two siblings and she lives in one of the major Nigerian cities, Enugu. Her father, a wealthy and highly respected member of the Church and the larger society, could be compared with a colonizer ruling over his family, as he dominates his wife and children. Therefore, Kambili lives in her father's shadow, she must accept his influence, and accordingly she becomes a hardly visible person. Her life is full of difficulties as she lives in constant fear and she is frequently maltreated (Mabura 205). As a result of these experiences, Kambili comes to recognize her own helplessness and vulnerability in the lives of other people, with whom she identifies. She identifies with her mother, who suffers domestic violence, but also with a woman

she witnesses being beaten at the market, and with whom she directly empathizes “a woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed” (Adichie 44). The woman’s vulnerability corresponds to Kambili’s feeling of being ruled by her father and forced to become a subordinate person. She thereby builds up a self-hatred for her inferior African identity.

Even at home Kambili seems to initially accept her situation and how she must treat her father. In fact, at first Kambili does not complain about that she has to foresee her tyrannical father’s wishes to keep him calm, it rather seems like a strategy she employs. In this sense Kambili never sees to her own needs. But this results in that the young Kambili lacks the skill to interact socially.

Still, eventually, Kambili is pushed to react and become free from her father’s influence, but this does not happen until after she stays at her aunt’s place in Nsukka, where she gets the chance to view herself from a new perspective. Together with her pleasant and open-minded aunt, and her cousins, Kambili starts reflecting over her situation and making her own judgements. One shocking reality she is confronted with is that her aunt and cousins show her grandfather Papa-Nnukwu great respect. She is amazed, as she is brought up with her father saying that her grandfather is an unworthy heathen. But when she hears the grandfather praying “Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity” (Adichie 168), she admits “I was surprised that he prayed a short prayer in favour of Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma” (168). Kambili is genuinely astonished that he cares so about his son who has rejected him. Another thing that surprises her is her grandfather’s manner of praying, which is done with a few positive words, in contrast to how Papa prays, in

many words and spells directed against people and things. This becomes like a starting point for Kambili towards making personal decisions. After that, she begins to make her own assessments of her circumstances, and thereby takes control of the shaping of her identity.

During her stay in Nsukka, Kambili even starts to feel things, which is new to her as it had never happened before in her closed home. Now her eyes open and she learns new things by meeting people: “[Nsukka] could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as freedom song” (Adichie 299). Access to her feelings makes Kambili change and she becomes a freer and more independent individual. Eventually, she realizes that she is not the same person anymore; she has become someone with “a freedom to be, to do” (16).

Tambudzai too, struggles to reach a state with freedom to choose and that she thinks will come through education. But her father puts into words what is common belief in their culture and valid for her as well; that women are supposed to take care of the household within the frame of marriage, and accordingly there are no funds for their studies (Chukwuma 73). Even Tambudzai’s mother is not pleased with her daughter’s dream of education, and her justification is that she fears “the killing Englishness” (Dangarembga 207). The mother expresses her dread for losing another of her children, as she already has experienced how her son Nhamo died after he went to the mission school. She is a traditional woman, who fears the imperialistic ideas and wants to preserve the various customs of their African culture, which make her feel secure. Tambudzai is aware that her wish to be educated is not accepted in her family, yet she nourishes her dream to study and to create changes in life.

Tambudzai’s way of reasoning is influenced by her cousin Nyasha, as they are of the same age and sex and they share bedroom during her stay at the mission school, where they

exchange ideas. As the two live together, there are many opportunities for talking about how they feel about the lack of recognition of women's needs, the neglectful way they are met with and the struggle to find ways to change their respective situations, for example, through obtaining an education. Tambudzai realizes that to survive, and create her personal identity in spite of her family's resistance, she has to integrate parts from both sets of values, the traditional African one and the colonizer's, which exist in their world.

Tambudzai's resistance to fulfil expectations from her traditional family and the larger society is an example of a desire to break away from the traditional African norms and to shape something new. African women's desire to leave the traditional behind, to break with the norm that women will stay working within the household, and to go their own way, is confirmed by the Nigerian feminist scholar and first female to be made a Professor at the University of Port Harcourt Nigeria in 1993, Helen Chukwuma. She claims that among African women exists a "latent volcano of the soul (...) which can erupt suddenly and determinably," changing present living conditions. Chukwuma argues that African women recently have raised the same demands as women around the world, in "their quest for rights, for opportunity, relevance and recognition" (71). Their reaction could be interpreted as reaction to their burdens she further states (71). Still, Tambudzai does not express herself in terms of being driven by an inner force. Instead, she says that her desire is to leave behind the dirtiness, and to eventually become a modern, free and independent woman, without a husband who decides over her, as she sees how her aunt "could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do" (Dangarembga 103). Her aim is to become a successful, satisfied, and happy individual, a model she sees in the whites, and is, therefore,

convinced that Englishness is a key for that aspiration. She thus wants to embrace Englishness, even though her own mother fears it (Dangarembga 2007). If Tambudzai succeeds in her wish of obtaining formal education, it will help her to escape the heavy burden of social demands on her as a woman and achieve personal freedom. So, in the end, Tambudzai functions as an example of how a young woman may succeed in finding her own lifestyle and forming a modern identity in an African country.

#### 4. Educational Opportunities

Institutional education takes place in formal educational institutions, but it must be stated that there might be risks linked to being educated within the dominating system, especially in colonial contexts, as in many African countries. Formal education generally prepares a person for a profession within the public sphere, and apart from that it is also meant to increase the individual's self esteem. Phillip Hammack warns, however, that the individual must be careful because there is a risk when a given institutional education system represents "state control," meaning that the dominant ideas within society, which might be imperialistic, have a considerable influence on the education system without being questioned (185). Accordingly, individuals need to be alert and critical, always evaluating presented information. History shows that schooling institutions, as schools and Churches, regularly imposed the colonizers' ideas of superiority and subordination onto colonised societies.

What complicates the situation is that the colonizer's schools in Africa, often mission schools, have usually been highly respected by ordinary Africans. One reason that the mission schools have been attractive is that they are viewed as offering a proper education, provide students' literature, and the teachers are trained, while the local schools are considered badly run,

while their teachers may be uneducated and working under difficult conditions. Additionally, the popular mission schools have always presented attractive ideas to people, as they focus on the single individual's development in terms of economic freedom and self esteem, which gives them the opportunities to prosper the way the whites have. From the mission schools the Africans also learn what the whites put into focus; an example is the ideological perspective regarding the equality between men and women, meaning that they are supposed to share obligations and rights within society. Therefore, in the eyes of the majority of Africans formal education within the Western system has been considered a key tool in reaching personal prosperity and independence. In the novels, as neither Kambili nor Tambudzai see any shared obligations in their own families, this prospect for equality becomes attractive and a justification for changes.

Formal education is indeed a tool that helps Kambili and Tambudzai to shape their identities and mature. While Kambili considers formal education to be given, something one obviously is offered in her privileged life, the situation is different for Tambudzai, as she has no guaranteed place in school, since she had to quit the local school when her family did not have enough money to pay for her tuition fees. Tambudzai accepts her family's inability to provide her with an education and starts growing her own maize, to sell at the market and raise the necessary funds herself. She is namely determined to re-enter the school which to her is "a world where burdens lightened with every step" (Dangarembga 195). She desires to escape a life like the one her mother lives; she wishes to leave behind the red dust by which her mother's life is impregnated and also longs for the freedom to experience a modern life she is convinced education will give her.

Tambudzai is brought up by illiterate parents; therefore her aunt's degree appeals to her and she decides to follow in her footsteps. Apart from Tambudzai's uncle, her aunt is one of few in the family with a formal education. Tambudzai is aware of the norms and knows that her aunt by obtaining an education she came at odds with the traditional ideas. In one sense, her aunt's degrees do not matter, as she would never be regarded as her husband's equal in their traditional society. However, Tambudzai still sees her aunt as a model for her to shape her ambitions after. This goes against her father's views on her prospects: "have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house? She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything," which implies that to perform domestic work she does not need any formal education (Dangarembga 30). Her wish is, therefore, considered a ridiculous wish for change. But even though Tambudzai meets a heavy resistance from her family, she is convinced that higher education will provide her with a base for necessary personal development.

Kambili lives, in many ways, a very different life than from Tambudzai, as she lives in wealth, and partakes in higher education; but she does not really get encouraged through informal education until she meets people in Nsukka. One of the important people there is Father Amadi, who shows her that the Church also represents a loving and caring God and not only the evil punishing force she is brought up with. Due to that encounter she for the first time feels that someone cares for her, and encourages her for her skills, which in turn makes her open up to new experiences and become a freer individual.

By contrast to formal education, informal education is harder to evaluate as it may take place anywhere and at anytime. Kim Stone argues that informal education could take place in a bedroom, a coffee room or through telling stories around a bonfire (117). Wherever informal

education takes place, it gives the individual a crucial understanding on how to construct their identities according to informal knowledge regarding generally accepted social norms.

In Nsukka Kambili is also surprised when she comes across her cousin's opinion about herself, that she does not seem normal, and realizes that she lacks social skills (Adichie 142). She realizes that she never learned certain skills at home. She never practiced taking part in a conversation just for fun and without a specific purpose for example (120). She understands that she wants to join a conversation, but is not used to speaking with people outside her family and she has become too shy to try.

As for Tambudzai, she actively registers information about ordinary things, for future use. She says: "my education had already begun, and it was with a pragmatic eye that I surveyed [aunt] Maiguru's sitting-room; I would own a home like this one day; I would need to know how to furnish it" (Dangarembga 68). For her, informal education also takes place during the nights when she speaks with her cousin Nyasha, in their shared bedroom, when they try to figure out how to change their life so that they find respect in society as well as how to make the best changes for their own futures.

The aim with traditional knowledge is to guide individuals through history and moral codes, and strengthen their identity. The elderly woman, quoted above is Tambudzai's grandmother, who represents traditional knowledge and claims that it is a burden being a woman. Through her words she tries to guide younger women by providing them with her wisdom, collected through her life. Kambili and Tambudzai seem to share this elderly woman's insight, as they try to find ways to form their identities. Tambudzai is raised with orally traded proverbial phrases like "endure and obey, for there is no other way," which could be interpreted as an

encouragement to conserve traditional ways as they are, and not in vain hope to change given roles (Dangarembga 19). Or the quote could be interpreted as an encouragement to the younger generations to continue doing what the older ones did not succeed in doing, namely developing their roles and their individual personalities away from the existing heavy female burden, to create something new.

But traditional knowledge has never been systematized as formal education and is instead only traded orally within the traditional African communities. This mode of transmission becomes a weakness in more contemporary societies, where people travel frequently, either to study or to work at other places, which means that they lose contact with their traditional societies and fail to maintain relations to people there. Such a risk, that traditional knowledge will get lost, exists in relation to that youths like Tambudzai, live at boarding schools within the Western educational system, which they seem to value.

But in any case, it is significant that both Kambili and Tambudzai have the chance to widen their perspective and see what other possibilities exist for them, apart from traditional knowledge, in their individual circumstances in the 1960s. The two struggle for recognition and to achieve personal freedom within their societies respectively. As they feel neglected, they widen their scope to find out what the colonizers can provide them with, thus embracing their states of hybridity. Tambudzai constantly asks herself “who am I,” and tries to find her identity combining old and new knowledge while she also aims at becoming a cultivated and independent individual, with the freedom to live a modern life (Dangarembga 118). Kambili and Tambudzai are examples of characters struggling, to question given roles and become independent individuals, which may prove encouraging to all women.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the two novels *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Tambudzai* in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga explore the idea that there always exist possibilities for women to develop their identities. I have suggested that the main characters Kambili and Tambudzai might function as inspirational figures to women, as they endure both limitations in the patriarchal societies where they live and the colonizer's imperialism, and still manage to survive their double discrimination.

Kambili's and Tambudzai's living conditions are different and they are unequally affected by colonialism. All the same, the two girls have to employ hybridity, or assimilation, to surpass their personal circumstances, achieve personal freedom, and become independent individuals. Kambili is a second generation product of the colonization, as she has to accept, or reject, the pressure from her father to embrace both the colonizer's language and faith, while Tambudzai actively breaks with her own family's traditional manners and language. They both seem satisfied with their hybrid personalities, as it serves their aim to become sophisticated persons, and to be entitled to the possibilities offered by white norms.

Also when considering their access to formal education, their situations are different, as Kambili considers higher education obvious, while Tambudzai is only lucky to receive an offer from her uncle to resume her studies, in the place of the dead brother. Within the school system the girls come in contact with the colonizer's values, which they adopt in hope to be fortunate in life. Even when it comes to informal education, there are similarities between Kambili and Tambudzai, as they both start reflecting over their lives and change when leaving their families and meeting new people who become influential to them.

To conclude, Kambili, in *Purple Hibiscus*, and Tambudzai, in *Nervous Conditions*, show that girls, though living under very different oppressive circumstances, might still be able to change their life conditions and therefore stand as examples of inspirational young women making changes.

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