

**STIGMATISATION, PROTEANISM AND THE ADOLESCENT FEMALE IN
TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND JAMAICA
KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN*.**

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Abstract

Stigmatisation and proteanism are concepts that seem to be like polar opposites but they share a fascinating, often defensive relationship and overlap as adolescent girls negotiate a space for themselves in the postcolonial society. Adolescent girls are archetypically raised to consider others, to consider contexts and to be self-sacrificing. For this reason, their egos may have different developmental needs and this leads to imprints of stigmatisation. Therefore, they experience seismic and protean shifts, as they mutate easily to transcend boundaries that are thrust upon them by the society. Being stigmatized, their "fixed" identity becomes a source of pain or exclusion. Proteanism often emerges as a counter-strategy when senior women break free from the shackles of male dominance, they want to be in a position of power. So, the power dynamics is shifted to focus on the adolescent female who becomes marginalised and stigmatised by the senior female. The paper addresses the gap between the female generations and shows how proteanism is used as a reclamation of power. By refusing to be stigmatised, the adolescent female in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* possess the ability of character shape shifting which serves as a catalyst to stigmatisation.

Keywords: proteanism, stigmatisation, adolescent, female and postcolonial.

Introduction

The relationship between male and female has taken various forms in postcolonial literature. Gender relationships have taken a different turn and it becomes very controversial when we look at the relationship among female characters in the postcolonial society. If we consider that the senior female has broken some shackles of male dominance, she has been able to find a voice and take some powers in her hands to raise the female child almost on her own terms. In the novels under study, female adolescents are labelled or marked as a group as who is socially inferior or different from the male and senior female. It often results in a "spoiled identity" which is a term coined by sociologist Goffman E (1963). This kind of identity which he describes is the person carrying the stigma who is the female adolescent in this case. They are similar to Spvak's G (1988) ideology of the subaltern who is almost muted beyond redemption. Specifically, members of ethnic, social or racial groups are likely to feel a sense of shame when another member of their group engages in behaviours that confirm a negative stereotype about their group and, as a consequence, will seek to distance themselves from the event and the stigmatized identity. The adolescent girl is a category that is hardly noticed in the society in terms of importance in the societal ranking according to Jan Mohammed's (1985) Manichean pyramid. The young girl always finds herself inferior to the male gender and the senior female.

To avoid the weight of a stigma, the adolescent female switch personas by trying to adopting different dialects, dress codes, or behaviors depending on the social environment as seen in *Nervous Conditions* and *Annie John*. These young girls yearn to create for themselves a unique identity by mutating spaces, fighting the bonds of family, school, and state in a paradoxical search for affection and/or acceptance from those very same institutions. For a stigmatized adolescent female, having a single, rigid identity can be dangerous or limiting. Proteanism which offers a way to navigate various spaces acts as a catalyst of survival mechanism. Lifton (1993) who popularized the concept of the Protean Self, argued that fluidity is a response to historical upheaval.

Grounding analysis from the postcolonial theory and deconstruction theory, this work is divided into two parts. The first part analyses stigmatisation and generational spaces and the second part looks at protean identities as a solution for stigmatisation, considering fluidity prevents the stigma from defining the entire adolescence existence.

Stigmatisation and Generational Spaces

Stigma has its roots in differences. The impact of stigmatising attitudes on the stigmatised individual can vary in form and intensity. Stigma first of emanates from the mind and awareness of being different. Group identification may play a part in influencing the effects of stigma. In both *Annie John* and *Nervous Conditions*, the mother-daughter relationship is the primary site where stigmatization is enforced and proteanism is birthed. The mothers in these novels do not just raise their daughters; they attempt to sculpt them into survivalists within a world that devalues them. The conflict arises when the daughters realize that their mothers' "love" is actually a blueprint for a life they refuse to live. In post-colonial settings, the mother often acts as the primary agent of social control. Because they have suffered under patriarchy and colonialism, they use stigmatization to "protect" their daughters from the same fate—by forcing them to conform.

As evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the adolescent girl as a category is stereotypically vulnerable and is hardly noticed in the postcolonial society in terms of importance in the societal Manichean ladder. The young girl always finds herself inferior to the male gender and the senior female. Specifically, she feels a sense of difference when relegated to the background thus confirming negative stereotypes about the adolescent female and, as a consequence, will seek to distance themselves from the stigmatized identity and to break free from it. The stigmatised individual in this case does not only experience prejudice and discrimination directly but they are exposed to representations of their differences from the other generational cohorts. Before the fact that adolescent girls suffer double if not triple oppression which leads to imprints of stigmatisation, the women in the novel try to break free from the shackles of male dominance. Just as Tambu notes below:

A victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them even heroes like Babamukuru did it [...]. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (115-116)

The above passage shows that the adolescent female finds herself inferior to the male adolescent gender where Nhamo goes to the mission school and Tambu grows maize and only has that opportunity when he dies. Their father, Jeremiah uses images of

cooking, 'can you cook and serve books to your husband? Learn to cook, clean and grow vegetable' (15), he says to Tambu. So, she only has the opportunity to attend the mission school only when Nhamo dies and there is no other male in their own branch of the family. That is why Tambu says "I was not sorry when my brother died... I was thirteen years old when my brother died... my brother went to school at the mission where my uncle was headmaster. (1) so she only had the opportunity to be educated at the mission school when her brother dies. Chido and Nhamo who are teenage boys like Nyasha and Tambu who are females go to better schools because they uphold traditional patriarchy and stigmatise and marginalise the adolescent female.

Education also plays a significant and powerful role in *Nervous Conditions*. Throughout the novel, Western Christian education is associated with emancipation and progress. For the different characters in the novel, each has a reason for education. For Tambu, her quest for education is motivated by her sense of responsibility to her family. Her purpose for education is to lift the rest of her family from the squalor in which they are trapped. She is wildly exhilarated with the idea of going to the mission school and later the convent. She later says, "going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens were light. I would take the chance. I would lighten my burdens. I would go" to the convent. (179) Education has an ambivalent status in the novel. It is Tambu's means of breaking stigmatising female adolescent gender roles and poverty but simultaneously it implies the imposition of the coloniser's culture, history and language. Tambu sees it as the only way to escape impoverished condition, which is the result of white colonisation. However, there is a challenge when that educational system is one saturated with white ideas and influences.

This study adopts O'Donnell's (1985) definition of generation as an age group or a cohort. He asserts that a generation is a form of age group comprising of all those members of a society who were born approximately at the same time, whether or not they are related by blood. From this perspective, a generation is synonymous to an age group or a cohort. Norman (1965) notes that a cohort consists of a group of persons born around the same time who share a particular set of social and historical experiences. Consequently, social and political events may have differential effects on the various generations in society depending on each generation's stage in life-cycle development and its previous experiences. Braungart and Braungart (1986) also note that when a society changes rapidly and cohorts/generations come of age under different conditions, the members of each generation are likely to develop their own perception on cultural and political establishments.

Therefore, generation as a cataloguing term that defines a person's position in familial descent or social position in respect to his/her age mates. When such perceptions are substantially different from the experiences of others, they may provoke generational conflict and notions of exclusion and stigmatisation. In the novels under study, there are three generations of women and it is alarming that the senior female also inscribes an inferiority difference to the younger generation of females. Therefore, male and female adults assume the authority to define an appropriate code of conduct that connotes a relegation to the background of the female youth, one that is based on ideals of restraint and silence. The adolescent female has no say in decision making concerning even her own life. Young women who do not conform to these ideals are considered wayward and in need of control. The senior female gains her strength by castigating the female youth to positions of marginalisation and subordination. The senior female thus transfers what she suffers

in the hands of the male to the younger female. The novels centre around flawed feminists, bossy mothers and poor female allies.

In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the generation gap between the mothers (Ma'Shingayi and Maiguru) and the daughters (Tambu and Nyasha) is not just a chronological difference; it is a profound cultural and ideological canyon created by colonialism, education, and patriarchy. While the mothers represent different ways of surviving a repressive system, the daughters represent the "nervous condition" of trying to transcend it. The relationship between Tambu and her mother is very flawed. Following their generational gap and therefore difference in ideology. Ma'Shingayi views life through the lens of "burden-bearing and illiteracy especially for the young adolescent. To her, being a woman is about enduring poverty and patriarchy without complaint. She sees Tambu's desire for education as a betrayal of her roots and a recipe for "Englishness," which she equates with rebellion. Tambu refuses to align with her mother's ideology of stigma of illiteracy and poverty. She sees her mother's life as a cautionary tale of stagnation. Her drive to go to the Mission school and eventually Young Ladies' Academy is a literal flight away from the "dirt" and "toil" her mother personifies. Ma'Shingayi resents Tambu's opportunity to escape, while Tambu resents her mother's fatalism.

Ma'Shingayi gives a direct response to colonial discourse. She rebels and breaks the chains that bound her children to "Englishes". She dares and breaks the silence that denotes colonialism and patriarchy. She can now speak her mind and highlight her firm belief that her family is a victim of colonialism. She shouts loud and clear for all to hear, "I have a mouth and it will keep on talking. It won't keep quiet" (140). Great tension exists between mother and her daughter Tambu. Tambu thinks education will free her from the stigma of blackness and poverty. While her mother hates Western education and the 'Englishness' it represents. Her mother sees education as the major insidious tool of colonialism, which takes away the culture of her children. And sees the mission as 'a place of death' and refuses Tambu from going to school there. She believes Tambu will come back home a stranger full of white ways and ideas. It will be English. English all the time. Education to her is a tool of division between her and her daughter. She manifests her resistance to colonialism through a hunger strike when Tambu goes to the mission school. Whatever she eats stays heavy on her stomach because she rejects whiteness and all it represents.

The relationship between the educated senior female Maiguru and her adolescent daughter is very problematic and flawed. Even though Maiguru is a mother who has been able to break certain glass ceilings somehow by being educated abroad there's a generational gap between she and her daughter Nyasha because Nyasha rebels not only against the man but also against being ordered around by her mother. Despite all Maiguru's exposure to Westernisation and her level of education, she still believes like her husband that Western ways are not the best. Whereas, Nyasha finds everything about the western lifestyle as her ideal way to shape her identity. Nyasha is a complicated character in the novel and her portrayal of identity issues is contradictory. Sometimes she speaks for the colonial authority and adopts white ways in almost all she does. Yet she counters this same authority even though her friends mock her, 'she thinks she is white throughout the novel, Maiguru tries to caution her daughter to no avail. She laments about Nyasha's loss of Shona values and the Dangarembga notes:

It really was very sad that Maiguru, who was the embodiment of courtesy and good breeding, should have such a rumbustious daughter. It was so embarrassing, the way Nyasha thought she could say anything to her mother. I did not know where to look.

They are too Anglicised, explained Maiguru [...]. They picked up all these disrespectful ways in England, she continued conversationally, and it's taking them time to learn how to behave at home again. It's difficult for them because things are so different [...]. We keep trying to teach her the right manners, always telling her Nyasha, do this; Nyasha, why didn't you do that. But it's taking time. Her head is full of loose connections that are always sparkling. Nyasha! Ha, Nyasha! (74)

From the above quotation, the Anglicanised Nyasha who is brought up in England is trapped in a Westernised adolescence and she even goes to the extent of smoking cigarettes and wearing miniskirts. But her Westernised ways do not fit into the society which she now belongs. She is not interested in values that her mother wants to instil in her. And in the course of the novels she is even described as having whore-like tendencies despite her having a decent mother like Maiguru. In the Caribbean frame work in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Annie John's the transition from childhood to adolescence is not just a protean shift; it is a violent collision between stigmatization(imposed by generational maternal structures Set in post-colonial Antigua, the novel tracks how Annie's world shrinks as she is groomed for "proper" womanhood, and how she uses her shifting identity to survive. As Annie enters puberty, her mother—once her source of total unity—becomes her primary stigmatizer. The intimacy they shared is replaced by a rigid set of colonial-Victorian social codes. We are exposed to the Stigma of the "Slut" when Annie is seen talking to boys, her mother calls her a "slut." This is a crushing stigmatization that labels Annie's natural development as moral decay. Annie is stigmatized for any behavior that deviates from the "young lady" ideal. Her education is a tool of colonial stigmatization, teaching her that her Caribbean heritage is "primitive" compared to British history. Then comes her menstrual Stigma: the onset of her period is treated not as a milestone of growth, but as a "shameful" secret that requires her to be physically and socially restricted.

The generational space begins as a site of total maternal-daughter unity, which Kincaid describes in almost erotic, fluid terms. In the early chapters detail a "pre-Oedipal" space where Annie and her mother bathe together and share a trunk of clothes. It is a world without men. In the course of time, as Annie reaches adolescence, the mother introduces stigmatization. The space is no longer for "them"; it is a training ground for "The Young Lady." The mother uses the domestic space to enforce Victorian standards, turning the home into a site of surveillance. Therefore, the adolescent girl Annie John rebels against her mother throughout the novel to be able to assert her identity and break free from stigmatization. The stigma is moral and physical. The early domestic space is a "paradise" of shared baths and herbal medicines. However, once Annie hits puberty, the mother turns the home into a space of surveillance. She sees Annie as a "loose" girl. Every move Annie makes is scrutinized for signs of "impropriety." Her mother begins to view Annie's developing body as a source of potential "sluttishness." The once-unified bond is severed, and Annie is stigmatized for her natural curiosities and her refusal to become a "lady." The ways in which Annie's mother's ambitions for her daughter drives her to try to inscribe the young girl's personal identity. Annie John feels stigmatised and at the bottom of the Manichean ladder and doesn't intend to remain there. Mrs John who is Annie's mother sees a rebellious girl that she has to dominate, but one that is, in many ways, a mirror image of her former self. Mrs John tries to repress Annie's individuation and her identity by imposing colonial values, traditions, and customs Annie just like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* thwarts her mother's attempts through acts of rebellion, which

include: lying, stealing money, behaving badly at school, playing marbles, and finally exile, which removes her from the mother's sphere of influence altogether. Annie goes against all set of societal standards as far as ethics in relation to the female body is concerned. Since Annie lives in an oppressive society—a British imperial one in Antigua, one of the many acts of rebellion that is performed by Annie is against the repressive norms and ethics that surround notions of physicality, sexuality, gender and adolescence.

As an adolescent girl she does not only face stigma through the challenges between mother and daughter relationship but also with her teachers who are mostly white. The conflict begins with the end of the “paradise” of childhood. Annie's mother, once her literal mirror, suddenly turns into a critic. Mrs. John begins to view Annie's puberty with suspicion. She uses the word “slut” to label Annie's independence. The Victorian “Lady”: Mrs. John enforces British colonial standards of “proper” behavior (manners, dress, etiquette). She stigmatizes Annie's natural, fluid Caribbean self to replace it with a rigid, colonial “ideal.” That is one of the reasons she ensures Annie has a good education to learn more manners.

Early in the novel *Annie John*, Annie comes into conflict with her manners and piano teachers because she resents the fact that they are British and she rebels against what she (Annie) perceives as her mother's desire for her to know “all about manners and how to meet and greet important people in the world” (27-28). She says this about her piano teacher: “The piano teacher, a shriveled-up old spinster from Lancashire, England, soon asked me not to come back, since I seemed unable to resist eating from the bowl of plums, she had placed on the piano purely for decoration” (28). The rebellious against her mother is translated to her teachers because they want to enforce some rules that Mrs John believes in. education in this case plays an ambiguous role because even though Annie wants to use it as a tool for liberation, it is used to reinforce more ideologies of stigma which she wants to break free from.

Generation conflicts enhance the possibilities of strengthening modern spaces in the novels Kincaid foregrounds traditional and modern differences through generational conflict between mother and daughter. One of the greatest examples of generational conflict in *Annie John* in the the love-hate relationship between mother and daughter. In *Annie John*, Antiguan tradition holds that a female must be descent in all her ways even in the modern society but Annie does not think it necessary to uphold this tradition much to her mother's chagrin as seen in the quotation below:

Once when I didn't wash, my mother had given me a long scolding about it, and she ended by saying that it was the only thing she didn't like about English people; they didn't wash often enough, or wash properly when they finally did. My mother had said, Have you ever noticed how they smell as if they had been bottled up in a fish? (36)

Kincaid uses a great deal of sarcasm as a narrative technique. She castigates the white man. It is ironical that the English man who thought the blacks were dirty and smelling in colonial discourse becomes the victim here. This is counter discursive as well as deconstructive on the well-structured discourse of colonialism. In *Nervous Conditions* and *Annie John*, female generational spaces are depicted as complex sites of both cultural preservation and patriarchal enforcement. While these spaces (the kitchen, the garden, the “trunk,” or the washroom) should theoretically provide sanctuary, they often become the primary locations where mothers pass down the stigmas of womanhood to their daughters. For both Annie and Tambu, the generational space begins as a site of intimate learning but shifts into a space of rigid discipline. In both works, it crucial to see that the mothers aren't “villains.” They are victims of the same

nervous conditions. Mrs. John was also separated from her home at a young age; she enforces rules because she knows how cruel the world is to “unruly” women. Ma’Shingayi is exhausted by poverty and patriarchy; she views Tambu’s proteanism as a personal abandonment. Maiguru is frustrated being a humble woman despite her level of education so she ascribes her frustrations on Nyasha. The conflict is essentially a battle between two generations: the mothers who believe identity is a fixed cage for survival, and the daughters who believe identity is a fluid tool for liberation. The generational space often collapses because the mothers themselves are suffering from the stigmas they are trying to pass down. Ma’Shingayi becomes “spiritually thin,” eventually collapsing into a depression that she calls “the weight of womanhood.” Mrs. John becomes increasingly bitter as Annie pulls away, seeing her daughter’s proteanism as a personal betrayal of the “proper” life she worked so hard to build. The generational space in these novels is a reproduction chamber. The mothers try to reproduce their own (limited) identities in their daughters. The daughters’ proteanism—their ability to change, lie, study, and eventually leave—is the only thing that breaks the cycle. Female adolescence stigma is a concealable one because it is not as glaring as other more visible cases. Whatever the case, to deconstruct the male and senior female dominance, an adolescent female requires to question the popular prejudices and to reinvent their identity. Good enough, adolescence is a stage of growth and metamorphosis. That ushers us to part two of the work.

Proteanism as Catalyst for Stigmatisation

To combat these stigmas, the teenage girls in the novels under study adopt protean identities. They “shape-shift” to navigate different power structures. Lifton (1993) posits that:

We are becoming fluid and many sided. Without quite realising it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time. This mode of being differs from that of the past and enables us to engage in continuous exploration and personal experiment. I have named it the protean self after Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms.
(1)

This Lifton’s metaphor of fluidity is a good imagery to exemplify the proteanism. Fluidity connotes instability and kaleidoscopic tendencies. of being evolving denotes a metaphorical thinking which breaks away from traditional consistency of identity as well as stigmatising labels. Proteanism is often seen as a survival mechanism in the novels under study. When the adolescent is stigmatized they may adopt a Protean Self as catalyst to navigate a hostile world. A female adolescent shifts their persona depending on the environment to avoid the mark of stigma. Because they have been deeply stigmatized often become masters of fluid identities By being protean, they shed the old, labeled self and emerge in a new context where the stigma doesn't yet exist.

Derrida does not define the term deconstruction as a theory so he remarks, no “univocal definition” or “adequate description” for this strange event called deconstruction, and the reason for “this absence of univocal definitions” is not “obscurantist”. In this paper, the notion of deconstruction is very synonymous to this protean way of thinking because female adolescents are able to break structures and metamorphose to other spaces.

Like the Greek god Proteus, the female adolescent character takes on various forms as she grows. She assumes multiple roles and wears different masks. The term adolescent is proteus-like connoting changes. The novel of adolescence can certainly be linked to the *Bildungsroman*, in its insistence on gaining knowledge about oneself

and one's place in society and identity. In *Nervous Conditions and Annie John*, the female adolescent, just like the protean self is capable of fluid transformations. Through a process of self-exploration on multiple levels of identification including personal, family, ethnic, religious, racial etc. Characters with this protean identity have cultural behaviours that are easily interchangeable between cultures and are flexible in various social settings. Hegemonic situations open a space for resistance which can be transformed to the quest of identity. It addresses a long-standing dichotomy between binary structures. Bjornson (1991) says that in the African context, there is a time of transition between ethnically based oral cultures to literate societies. Most importantly, he posits that 'when confronted by Otherness, people are obliged to reflect upon their own identity' (8). After binarisms shaped the colonial conditions of black and white, this dominance driven behaviour was also exercised to other situations such as gender. Women have spent longer time to dismantle the heritage of patriarchal power. And younger female has fought harder to break free from generational conflicts with mother figures.

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the protagonist is a classic protean character someone who is constantly shifting, changing shape, mutating through growth, migration, education and so on, and refusing to stay in one fixed identity. Her fluidity, definitely a volatile nature of adolescence. For Annie, this isn't just about "growing up"; it's a radical, sometimes painful transformation of her soul and her world. The protean situation extends to growth and development of the protagonist just like in the novels under study which follow the traditions of an apprenticeship novel. As the female body changes, so does the imagination and the mind set as well as ideologies of stigmatisation. In this study, both protagonists are teenage girls and we watch them growing and evolving the various stages of life. This aspect of growth is very important in protean studies because it shows the various phases of Annie's life and how these changes affect her protean personality and the assertion of a selfhood identity.

Annie believes that the paradise she lives in cannot fade, the onset of puberty takes front stage. As the summer of her twelfth year progresses, Annie begins to notice physical and protean changes within her own body. Proteanism in this case become physical growth where the teenage girl Annie, metamorphoses into puberty. As Annie's body develops, her hair becomes more unruly, the smell of her body more unfamiliar, Mrs. John pushes her away from her image and forces the separation. Kincaid illustrates this separation when Mrs. John refuses to have a dress made from the same fabric as Annie. Annie's coming of age is a turning point in the plot as much as in the girl's biological development, as well as in the relationship between mother and daughter. In Annie's transition and struggles she feels as if the passion and love with her mother have diminished. Their relationship becomes strained, and uncomfortable as each become involved in battle within their home as Annie notes:

My mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other. Hence, Annie has to disguise the tension between her mother and herself in front of people and even her class. But no sooner were we alone, behind the fence, behind the closed door, than everything darkened. (87-88).

The theme of disguise in the above quotation is one of the dominant themes in protean studies. Characters can change from one space to the other as the situation requires. The notion of two faces shows different spaces that they occupy in different social

settings. However, this tension eventually leads to her permanent separation from her mother after she recovers from her illness. Annie's physical growth in this case separates mother and daughter but Annie uses protean steps to escape from stigmatisation.

Kincaid depicts that identity is not only capable of relatively rapid change, but that it is fluid and malleable in its ability to adapt to physical and body changes. *Annie John* follows the norms of an apprenticeship novel or a bildungsroman just like *Nervous Conditions*. Their protagonist grows in the course of the novel and one must say that every new physical change epitomises another stage of step on the protean ladder because the change is not only physical but emotional and spatial.

In *Annie John*, Annie says that, "on the morning of the first day I started to menstruate, I felt strange in a new way- hot and cold at the same time" (51). This cold and hot way that she feels at the same time is a subtle kind of proteanism which shows the interrelationship between identity and physical image. In this case, hot and cold are spaces that make up the protean self. More so, she says:

As if that were not enough, my mother informed me that I was at the verge of becoming a young lady, so there were quite a few things I would have to do differently.... behind a closed door, I stood naked in front of a mirror and looked at myself from head to toe ... I could see the small tufts of hair under my arms.... a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize. (27)

The image of the closed door is very metaphorical in protean discourse considering it connotes disguise. Behind the door, Annie does what she wants to do. Out of the door, she becomes the way the world expects her to behave. These are both spaces that comprise her protean identity. The salient issue here is that the new physical change in her life makes her feel different but it also ushers her to a new space where everything else has to follow in the newness as seen in the quotation below:

In the middle of all these new things, I had forgotten that I was to enter a new school that September. I had then a set of things to do, preparing for school. I had to go to the seamstress to be measured for new uniforms, since my body now made a mockery of the old measurements.... in my new school. I needed a different exercise book for each subject and in addition to the usual- English, arithmetic and so on- I now had to take Latin and French and attend classes in a new science building. I had begun to look forward to my new school. I hoped that everyone would be new, that there would be no one I had ever met before. That way, I could put on a new set of airs: I could say I was something that I was not, and no one would ever know the big difference. (29)

From the above passage, Annie is expected to learn French, Latin and English. These cultures carry the connotations of various cultures and Annie carries them all in the process of learning these subjects. The last part of the quotation saying what she was not connotes disguise which is an important metaphor in protean studies. She can put on any mask and not be recognised meaning she can metamorphose into any desired space she likes.

Newness; a recurrent term in the above passage indicates change which is synonymous to metamorphosis. Annie feels new about everything around her, when she says, "on opening day, I walked into my new school alone....everything about me was new ... even the road I walked was new" (34).

This newness is extended to her love relationship with her lesbian friend Gwen whom she starts to see in a different way, "at school, I had had a great change. I was

no longer in the same class with Gwen. I was now in a class with girls two or three years older than I was” (90). And so:

Gwen and I walked home from school in the usual way and did the usual things but just the sight of her was no longer a thrill to me though I did my best not to let her know. It was as if I had grown a new skin over the old skin and the new skin had completely different set of nerve endings. But what could I say to poor Gwen? How to explain to her about the thimble that weighed worlds, and the dark cloud that was like an envelope in which my mother and I were sealed? (91)

The image of the skin is very metaphorical as it reflects different spaces. Each skin carries a certain number of norms and of course segmental component and behavioural pattern. The new skin in protean studies is very important, because it follows the norms of deconstruction when things can be interpreted as proposes that every person carries the potential of many selves, capable of being realised at different social settings. In this instance, the choice of Annie’s mask does not involve her friend Gwen:

I looked at Gwen, could this really be Gwen? It was Gwen. The same person I had always known. Everything was in place. But at the same time, something terrible had happened and I couldn’t tell what it was.

It was then that I began avoiding Gwen... I took a new way home, a way that brought me through Market Street. (93)

It is interesting to note that the protean change does not involve Gwen whom Annie claims to have a relatively stable identity. Annie’s physical and biological identity adapts her to changing perceptions and expectations even of her friend Gwen while still maintaining a comforting sense of continuity of her growth and afford an ability to cope with the constraints realised in their friendship and interactions with a shifting space. At the end, their friendship becomes turbulent as seen below:

Gwen formally the love of my life now reduced to an annoying acquaintance. Along with all that, I acquired a strange accent- at least no one had ever heard one talk that way before- and some other tricks.... I could see that everything about me aroused envy and discontent and that made me happy. (129)

Annie John’s behavioural change can be described as a process involving relationships, between her friends and family. But with a focus on the self and realisation that the trajectory of her life’s course needs to change due to her body changes she describes a profound change in her behaviour, “I was standing there surprised at this change in myself” (95). This change aligns with Walter Truett Anderson’s (1995) view “the postmodern person is a *multi-community* person, and his or her life as a social being is based on adjusting to shifting contexts and being true to divergent-and occasionally conflicting- commitments”(128).

As Annie continues to evolve into various spaces in the novel, she notices, “I had got so strange” (94), and it is remarkable to note that her language becomes strange in accent which one must say it leads to an indelible mark on her identity which is typical of the postcolonial identity. We see the effects of proteanism on Annie’s personal identity. It has changed her to an extent that it has altered her perception of selfhood in relation to their community. She feels contented with others discontent. She allows herself to be incorporated into the school system and becomes enamored by its situation and grows to scorn her relationship with Gwen just like Anderson (1995) had predicated, “much of what was once ordained by cultural tradition is now negotiated. New rules and new roles are being socially constructed-not in the abstract,

but by specific people in specific times and places. And sometimes, of course, the negotiation escalates into conflict” (128).

Migration becomes part of the growth process therefore a step on the protean ladder. Migrating to different lands even under parental canopy connotes some freedom to the adolescent female. In the light of migration as a protean response, it means moving across borders of stigmatisation. It is the identity-based flexibility required to survive in new environments. The rigid stigmatising identity pushes Tambu to stop at nothing to travel to the mission at sacred Heart to be educated. Her mother’s breakdown and Nyasha’s trauma does not interfere with her schooling. She says:

I for one was going to take any opportunity that came my way. I was quite sure about that; I was very determined. The latest opportunity was this one of going to the convent. I would go. I was sure of myself [...]. Going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens were light. I would take the chance. I would lighten my burdens. I would go. (179)

Homi Bhabha suggests that post-colonial subjects exist in a “Third Space” of hybridity. Therefore Tambu might perform different identities to navigate different power structures. She may adopt a Westernized, global persona when she goes to the mission to bypass colonial stigmas of incompetence. Whereas, in the domestic sphere: She may revert to traditional roles to maintain community ties and cultural heritage. In the creative sphere, Sse blends both, creating a new, fluid identity that defies stigmatization.

At the convent, she sheds her village identity to become the ideal colonial subject she is able to shake off some shackles of stigmatization. As her mind sharpens as she grows, with a growing critical consciousness, she begins to guard herself from the possibility of assimilation and alienation, in the white colonial education system. She tries not to forget Shona and her heritage. She is willing to think critically before articulating her decisions. As she continues to mutate even in her thought patterns, she tears herself apart by hybridising Western educational system and her Shona heritage. She says, ‘quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refused to be brainwashed’ (204).

In the Caribbean framework, the protean matrix is expanded to migrating just like in *Nervous Conditions*. Annie is exposed to other spaces in an attempt to break free from stigmatic shackles that she could not occupy in Antigua. There is an idea of proteanism as Annie the young girl’s struggle to recognise a selfhood and make a delicate balance between her loyalty to her own satisfaction and find a place for herself. Annie John passes through a cloud that metamorphoses into Belgium. She is literally travelling through a place in which physical hybridity is possible and begins to feel a “cloudiness” within herself which is a new kind of consciousness, a qualitative growth in her making of meaning away from her mother. She is drawn to Belgium in a heroic struggle in quest for change and another space to ascribe her identity. Annie begins the psychological journey toward a new environment and understanding of the development of her person as seen in the quotation below:

My most frequent daydream now involved scenes of me living alone in Belgium. A place I had picked when I read in one of my books that Charlotte Bronte the author of my favourite novel Jane Eyre had spent a year or so there.... I was walking down the street in Belgium, wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles and carrying a bag filled with books that I could not understand. (92)

The psychological migration in this excerpt exposes Annie to a new space in life. The books she possesses in Belgium are representative of the cultures she would face there that would be different from the culture she has encountered that is why understanding them becomes a problem. However, Annie's journey become real as she travels to the States. Annie's eventual departure for England at the end of the novel is the ultimate protean move. She realizes that as long as she stays in Antigua, the stigma of her mother's judgment will keep her fixed. By leaving, she chooses a blank slate—an uncertain, fluid future where she can finally define herself.

In the course of various steps on the protean ladder, Annie becomes like a fluid rebel. To counter the fixed identity her mother and school try to impose, in school, she becomes The British shadow where the school demands she be a refined British subject. Meanwhile The Antiguan reality demands her mother and the local culture demand she be a dutiful daughter and future mother. Annie realizes that to be authentic to either side is to be trapped. Her proteanism allows her to exist in the third space just like Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* but more like Nyasha even if that middle ground is marked by deep unhappiness and physical illness. The climax of Annie's protean struggle occurs during her long, mysterious illness. During the rains, she tries to wash the photographs of her family—literally trying to blur the “fixed” images of her past. Her illness is the result of the exhaustion of being protean. She has shifted shapes so many times to avoid stigmatization that her physical body begins to break down under the weight of proteanism.

Annie becomes protean. She refuses to be one thing, constantly shifting her persona to undermine authority. Annie is a protean student. She excels in the colonial curriculum becoming a top girl while simultaneously defacing her history books she writes about The Old Girl can go to hell under a picture of Columbus. She uses the mask of the “good student” to hide the rebel. Her relationships with Gwen and later the Red Girl represent a protean emotional life. She shifts from the proper friendship with Gwen to the wild, unwashed, and rebellious nature of the Red Girl, trying on different versions of herself like costumes. Annie becomes an expert liar. For her, a lie isn't just a deception; it's a way to keep her true self fluid and unreachable by her mother's prying eyes.

The protean shift in the novel does not favour Nyasha to break free from stigmatization. It is like the more she runs away from it, she comes back it full cycle. It is true that she is displaced to England at an early age and is subject to their fashion, food and neurosis. When she returns home, she is confused and tortured because she is not allowed to foster the ideals in England. Even after a few years of staying at home from England, she still does not adapt to African style. Tambu says:

I had not been going to school long before I realised that Nyasha did not have many friends. The girls did not like the way she spoke. They were still imitating her behind her back when I went to the mission, which was three years after Babamukuru's return. And I thought that Nyasha ought to have lost more of her accent in that time than she allowed herself to, I also thought that her classmates had had long enough to grow used to it. As it turned out, it was not Nyasha's accent they disliked, but Nyasha herself. She thinks she's white they used to sneer, and that was as bad as a curse. (94)

She is not accepted by her friends who accuse, her all the time of being a whore and a snob. Her speech and dressing are characterised as Westernised. She describes herself as a hybrid because of her British education and her loss of her language and culture. She fails to reconcile these cultural differences and says, ‘I was comfortable in England

but now I am a whore with dirty habits' (117). She is classified a whore because she does not dress like a decent African child.

Decency is one of the most important values that the Shona natives uphold. Nyasha however, does not submit to this traditional pattern. Being in England makes her subject to their fashion. Having picked up Western preference and transported to Rhodesia, her wearing of miniskirts and cigarette smoking is an attempt to assert her being Anglicanised and exert control over her body. This does not give her respect with her female folks. She becomes disrespectful and indecent in her own protean mutations. Tambu says, "The way she dresses for the Saturday night dances! And the way she was acting with George or Johnson or Mathias or Changetai)! It's obvious. It shows for everyone else to see" (94). Going against Bher mother's expectation of feminine decency, Nyasha is condemned to 'whoredom'. On the night of the rave, Tambu describes:

On the actual night she was sulking a little because by the time she had finished dressing herself up and making up and was standing impatiently outside the back door waiting for us to come out, Babamukuru did not recognize her. He thought she was someone who had come to look for a place at the school. He could not understand why, if this was the case, she insisted on being his daughter. When finally, he was convinced, he disapproved. He wanted to know where his daughter thought she was going dressed up in such an ungodly manner and told her that, whatever she thought, she was in fact going nowhere. (109)

Nyasha fails to negotiate her identity property and Dangarembga punishes or eliminates her by making her fall into a mental abyss.

Conclusion

Involved in all of these protean changes is a profound psychic struggle with the idea of change itself and the negotiation of an identity. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha fails because she is trapped in the Stigma—she cannot pass and she cannot "shape-shift" successfully. Tambu and Annie John survive because they lean into the Protean—they accept that they must be many people at once, even if it causes a "nervous" internal fracture. It is important to note that when these female adolescents continue to mutate to new spaces, it becomes very difficult to arrogate an identity for themselves. The constant inconsistency of self is the very basis of neurotic behaviour. Trauma itself becomes another step or segment of the protean ladder. Most of the adolescent characters in the novels are worth psychological investigation. When these characters become traumatic, like Nyasha and Annie, they use their bodies to inscribe their frustrations of failing to assert a place for themselves in the society. By using their bodies, some become lesbians, some prostitutes, and so on. It is greatly ironical that these young girls were protected under parental control, meanwhile the freedom of proteanism they get exposes them to juvenile delinquencies. The idea of stigmatisation becomes a vicious cycle. It is satirical that it comes right back to the young female who refuses the notion of archetypal behavioural pattern to be monitored and controlled, to females who have failed to negotiate a sense of sense of self and a place for themselves in the society.

It's an intriguing pairing. On one hand, you have stigmatization—the act of labeling and "fixing" someone to a single, often negative, identity. On the other, you have proteanism—the ability to be fluid, versatile, and ever-changing. When these two concepts collide, they create a fascinating tension between how society tries to "trap" an individual and how that individual chooses to transform. Stigmatization attempts to pin the adolescent female down to a stereotype; proteanism is her refusal to stay

pinned, turning identity into a fluid, defensive, and ultimately political act. When these two concepts collide, they create a fascinating tension between how society tries to trap an individual and how that individual chooses to transform.

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