

Title: Home is Where Fulfilment is: The Effects of Multiple Homes on the Protagonist's  
Identity in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions*

Gareth Brinn

This project looks at postcolonial African Literature which focuses on multiple locations as home. The central literary texts for the project are *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), By TsiTsi Dangarembga. These texts are put into conversation with the theoretical texts: *Home* (2005), by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme" (1997), by Iris Marion Young, *Transnational Women's Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008), by Susan Strehle and "Rediscovery of The Ordinary: Some New writings in South Africa" (1986), by Njabulo Ndebele. The project is completed using a comparative analysis in which I argue that various usage of multiple locations as home has different effects on the protagonists' self-fulfilment.

The project's introduction outlines the context and the importance of this undertaking such as the need to show home as a complex concept and not a singular location. Following this, a chapter establishes the project's theoretical framework. Robyn and Dowling, Young and Strehle focus on the home's formation, women's relationship with the home and the home's relationship with the wider public sphere. Ndebele's work shows the importance of literary texts which situate themselves within micro settings such as the home, instead of focusing on grand events and settings.

The analysis of the literary texts is narrowed to the themes of wealth, religion and education. The themes are used to pinpoint moments that either aid or harm a protagonist's self-fulfilment. The project also looks at the imagery surrounding the physical abode which is considered home in the texts. Both authors' use of imagery showcases their beliefs on the

elements needed for self-fulfilment. Both chapters which focus on the literary texts end by focusing on the novels' conclusion and where the protagonists are situated on their self-fulfilment journey. The final chapter maps the similarities and the differences between the literary texts and what this comparison voices about the relationship between the home and self-fulfilment.

A central finding is that both authors show that wealth does not equal self-fulfilment. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the protagonist (Kambili) came from a wealthy home which in theory, could provide any element of self-fulfilment. Unfortunately, her father's abuse takes away the loving aspects of the family, therefore restricting Kambili's self-fulfilment. When Kambili moves to her aunt's home, she discovers a happier and more loving home in contrast to her father's home. There is a similar message in *Nervous Conditions*; the protagonist (Tambu) comes from a poorer family but when she is at the homestead, Tambu is a strong and independent feminist who believes that education is the key to self-fulfilment. Thus, Tambu does everything to achieve educational fulfilment. But, when Tambu moves to her uncle's considerably wealthier home, Tambu conforms to a harsh patriarchal environment which robs her of her feminist voice as her education is reliant on her uncle's generosity. Therefore, it is seen that wealth offers material items and a multitude of opportunities, but it does not offer the internal elements needed for self-fulfilment such as a loving family and independence.

Another key finding is the challenge of patriarchal households through the establishment of matriarchal households. The patriarchy encourages restriction and division whereas the matriarchy encourages freedom and community. *Nervous Conditions* begins with a challenge of the patriarchal system as seen in Tambu and her mother. Although, when Tambu's mother completes a rebellious act, it is for the benefit of her son and not Tambu. Even though this is the case, Tambu's mother is still a dominant voice in Tambu's life and thus her conformity invigorates Tambu to find her educational path. When Tambu progresses

to her uncle's home, readers see her uncle use his wealth as a tool of patriarchal domination. Tambu allows this because she has associated educational attainment with wealth rather than personal progression unlike Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, who dissociates wealth and fulfilment.

The imagery of the abode's also generates interest. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the childhood home is painted white which is a symbol for the family's colonial conformity. *Nervous Conditions* did not apply the same imagery to the home, but the uncle's home is situated in a mission populated with white missionaries. The implication in both literary texts is that colonial conformity offers greater material and societal benefits but not the internal elements needed for self-fulfilment. Both texts reinforce this idea using negative imagery of the abode's which provide more for the protagonists' self-fulfilment. *Purple Hibiscus* uses imagery associated with a prison for the aunt's home. *Nervous Conditions* represent the homestead as an undesirable location but, these abodes are where the protagonists are closest to self-fulfilment.

A final finding is the overall purpose of domestic situated texts. Adichie's and Dangarembga's use of the domestic space forces readers to look at every small detail to establish meaning, such as the family dinner with Father Amandi in *Purple Hibiscus* or the act of Tambu's father entering Tambu's bedroom to discipline her. The dinner in *Purple Hibiscus* represents Kambili's introduction to a functional family and a loving father figure. The uncle's invasion of the bedroom represents that even Tambu's bedroom is dominated by her uncle. This forces her to retreat to her body as this is the last space which Tambu has autonomy over.

This project shows readers the importance of not looking at the home as a singular entity that decides self-fulfilment. Home is a concept which can take form of multiple

locations which all contribute to an individual's journey. Women's relationship with the home is interesting because contemporary society is starting to view women as equals. This means that women no longer anchor themselves within the home which in turn, creates a new definition of home which deserves attention. The domestic space shows that there are commonalities between the Nigerian home and homes situated elsewhere in the world. Subsequently, analysing the home in all its forms, locations and periods will show the world that it is connected in ways previously unnoticed.