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Colonialism and its Impact on Women in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*

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Abstract: The colonial predicament enslaves many Africans who struggle against the confines imposed on them by Western colonialists. They become alienated from what had formerly demarcated their role in society and are even made to perceive themselves as outsiders on their very own land. The effect of colonialism on African women is even worse as their position is further aggravated by patriarchy. Thus, this paper reflects on how the patriarchal situation together with living under the jackboot of colonialism put the African women in a rather precarious state. It also examines Frantz Fanon's ideas about the inherent connection between colonialism and violence, while tracing the harrowing reality of African women's lives in the different fictitious characters portrayed by the contemporary African female writer Tsitsi Dangarembga (1959 -) in her novels *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not.* This paper explores how this female author depicts the socio-political and economic effects on fictionalized women and how they challenge colonial authority in their moments of agency. In so doing, Dangarembga deals with the perils of colonialism for the individual while apprehending the potential of the literary narrative to function as a means of challenging pervasive female representations.

Keywords: *Colonialism, Frantz Fanon, African women, African fiction, Tsitsi Dangarembga*

Introduction

> [C]olonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: "Who am I in reality?"
>
> *(Fanon 2004, p. 182)*

Colonisation can be regarded as a long-term, all-encompassing social and political relationship which influences a multitude of people, attitudes, actions and responsibilities. It goes without saying that the issue of colonisation implies 'a relation of structural domination, and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.' (Mohanty 1995, p. 259). Moreover, '[t]he colonial world

is a Manichean world. The colonist is not content with physically limiting the space of the colonized, i.e., with the help of his agents of law and order. As if to illustrate the totalitarian nature of colonial exploitation, the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil.' (Fanon 2004, p. 6). In his psychoanalytical examination of colonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the political theorist Frantz Fanon (2004) shows that in the process of colonisation, the coloniser finds power 'outside home' while the colonised endures 'the loss of his own home'; the 'home' in question is the one the colonised is accustomed to, and includes his native traditions and customs.

The renowned Kenyan writer Ngugĩ wa Thiong'o continues to build on what Fanon has pronounced by providing a vivid description of colonialism in Africa. As Thiong'o (2019) proclaims in an interview, '[i]n the post-independence era it was difficult for [African countries] to understand what was happening. And Fanon gave us the vocabulary that enabled us to understand'. Thiong'o categorises colonialism into three major aspects: economic, political and cultural control. As he rightly observes, during the colonial stage, imperialism 'wants primarily to control the productive forces of the people, that is, the natural resources and what their labour produces.' (1985, p. 18). These economic structures involve taking advantage of the vast majority of people for the colonialist's own ends. However, Thiong'o believes that in order to have economic control, there must be political control by the imposition of judicial institutions and military systems that control people:

> But to control the people economically, imperialism finds it necessary to have political control. That is, it imposes judicial systems, political systems, military systems and institutions designed to control people directly, particularly during the colonial stage. (Thiong'o 1985, p. 18)

He further ties these two aspects of colonialism, the economic and political control, with cultural control which regulates the values of individuals and 'how people look at themselves' in order 'to control the basis of their self-identity as a people.' (Thiong'o 1985, p. 18). Hence, economic, political and cultural control work together to alienate the colonised people from their immediate surroundings. The colonised individuals start identifying with their rulers by looking at themselves through the eyes of Europeans. As a result, Thiong'o postulates that '[i]f you look at yourself through the eyes of the person dominating you, then it means you are not really in a position to resist, or oppose him'. (1985, p. 18). Consequently, this African mental outlook comes to embrace the concept of 'otherness' due to the internalisation of negative associations with Blackness.

Fanon (2008) gives an exhaustive description of this internalisation in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* which immediately hints at the fact that the colonised black man, in imitating the lifestyle and attitudes of the white ruler, yields to his very own hatred towards the skin which he cannot change, no matter how many 'white masks' he puts on. In fact, in this work Fanon defines colonised people as 'people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been

committed to the grave.' (2008, p. 2). The colonised people start believing that they are less 'civilised' than the white man. They begin to compare themselves and their positions with the coloniser and his status and they greedily throw themselves upon Western culture in the hope of achieving the coloniser's power. Fanon goes so far as to state that '[t]he more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.' (2008, pp. 2-3). In other words, the colonial system creates an individual who loses his personal identity and originality because he limits himself to copying the white man's attitudes. Hence, while distancing himself from his native bearings, he can never be fully accepted by Europeans because he cannot become a true white man himself, no matter how hard he tries to assimilate white ways.

In simple terms, 'colonisation' refers to the control and occupation of one nation by another. This position of 'other' and 'colonised' that has been attributed to colonised subjects is even more critical and relevant for those women who are dominated by a patriarchal society because they are '*doubly* colonised by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies'. (Ashcroft et al. 1995, p. 250). This is because African males become completely absorbed by the colonial concepts of total authority and obedience which in turn, they impose on the women in their families. Ironically, women were not always perceived as subaltern in African society since prior to the colonial impact, 'gender relations were actually flexible and women could perform male functions, achieve powerful positions, and inherit property.' (Zambakari 2019, p. 52). However, not only was women's status declined under colonial rule, but women were also reduced to mere objects. Thus, colonialism brought gender differentiation as women no longer had economic autonomy and political power. In fact, as Zambakari argues, under colonial rule 'women's legal rights were subordinated to their male counterparts' leaving them in a precarious position (2019, p. 46). Moreover, colonisation made black men feel the need to reaffirm their sense of superiority and masculinity in order to compensate for the sense of inferiority imposed on them by their white rulers. This perpetuation of internalised inferiority lends itself to gender dominance and inequality for the women. In addition, as the literary critic Eustace Palmer remarks, the African woman is sometimes also 'subject to a kind of triple jeopardy, for she is not only exploited by the colonial system and by her male counterpart, but also alienated from her roots and forced, with the connivance or at the instigation of her African male, to conform to an alien lifestyle.' (2008, p. 193).

Black female writers, such as Yvonne Vera and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, often depict Palmer's 'triple jeopardy' in their literary work by emphasizing what African women have to endure in this alienated, colonial and patriarchal society which they inhabit. One such writer is also the Zimbabwean novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga (1959 -) who makes reference to such issues in her debut novel *Nervous Conditions* and its sequel *The Book of Not*. In her narratives, she highlights African women's on-going battle against the manipulations of colonial and patriarchal inculcations.

Nervous Conditions is set in the 1960s Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. The story focuses on the characters of Tambudzai (known as Tambu) and Nyasha, who are teenage cousins. Nyasha's family returns to the homestead after the parents, Babamukuru and Beatrice, had been studying in England. As a result, Nyasha struggles with her identity; between African traditions and the Imperial culture. It is therefore a novel about identity, race, gender, and the subordination of women. Meanwhile, *The Book of Not*, set mostly at the school Tambu attends, tells her struggles in colonial Rhodesia with the backdrop of the rebel war and movement to an independent Zimbabwe. The story plots Tambu's stolen achievements and destroyed hopes as she starts rejecting her village life and becomes embarrassed of her culture. She becomes aware that she cannot change the race politics of post-colonial Rhodesia. Her attempts to enter new socio-economic standing remain unfulfilled since she cannot change the fact that she is still black.

Dangarembga's Expression of Colonial Realities

In Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions,* the character of Nyasha best exemplifies the African woman's alienation from her roots. Her estrangement is simply the result of being caught between two different cultures while her father's insistence and acceptance of the colonial concepts as being the best, deepens this alienation. The time she spent in England turns her into an Anglicised person who has lost most of her mother tongue: Shona. On her return to the homestead, Nyasha, who is seen wearing a very short skirt, does not seem to know how to smile anymore and appears out of place. She is sullen at the homestead and disrespectful at home. Maiguru, Nyasha's mother, tries to explain her children's behaviour to her niece Tambu:

> They picked up all these disrespectful ways in England […] and it's taking them time to learn how to behave at home again. It's difficult for them because things are so different. […] They didn't see these things while they were growing up in England so now they are a bit confused. (Dangarembga 1988, p. 74)

Very often, Nyasha challenges the authority of her parents and, as the academic Andrade suggests, she pays the price for this 'with her mental and physical health' (2002, p. 29). Her eating disorder could be read as a response to the authority presented by her father. In fact, the seminal work of Hilde Bruch highlights the role of control in the development of eating disorders and even defines anorexia nervosa as a 'struggle for control, for a sense of identity, competence and effectiveness.' (1978, p. 251). Thus, the control over eating becomes one's main focus in the context of lack of power and effectiveness in one's life. This is exactly what Nyasha does since in the absence of power in all other areas of her life, she attempts to regain

some kind of self-control through her refusal of food. Various critics of *Nervous Conditions* have argued that Nyasha's father stands in for both patriarchal and colonial authority. In fact, Zwicker concedes that 'Nyasha's anorexia is a response to the collusion of patriarchal and colonial domination' (2002, p. 14). During the scene that precedes Nyasha's final, wild and uncontrollable emotions, when she starts tearing history books with her teeth because she is critical of the colonisers' purposes and education, she starts lamenting:

> "They've done it to me," she accused, whispering still. "Really, they have." And then she became stern. "It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did," she whispered. "To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good." […] "Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. […] They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other." (Dangarembga 1988, p. 200)

She exhibits physical violence in the breaking of mirrors and clay pots, and in the self-embedding of clay fragments into her own flesh. This kind of physical violence, together with the mental violence that she voices, echoes Fanon's (2004) disputations of colonial and anti-colonial violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon argues that colonialism is immanently violent, and that '[t]he colonized […] have been prepared for violence from time immemorial. As soon as they are born it is obvious to them that their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence' (2004, p. 3). Dangarembga seems to hold a similar opinion to Fanon's idea about the inherent connection between colonialism and violence. In fact, she embodies this notion of violence through Nyasha's actions, described above. The girl's eating disorder however, implies that there is also an element of compliance with the colonists. As Zwicker cogently puts it, '[s]ince eating disorders require a high degree of self-regulation, Nyasha's anorexia suggests a degree of agency in the form of consent (she chooses, after all, what she consumes and what she rejects)' (2002, pp. 17-18). Consequently, Nyasha seems to allegorise Fanon's line of reasoning as read by Sartre.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), argues that while the Colonialists placed certain excessive conditions on the Africans, such as having to distance themselves from their native history and traditions, the locals were accomplices in the implementation of such conditions. In this preface, Sartre states that '[t]he status of "native" is a neurosis introduced and maintained by the colonist in the colonized *with their consent*.' (2004, p. liv, emphasis in original). Hence, what is most telling about Sartre's statement is that it points out the participation of the colonised in his own colonisation and in fact, Nyasha's violent response to domination can be seen, according to Zwicker, as a 'willed act that is excruciatingly self-destructive' (2002, p. 18). Dangarembga herself, however, is totally against the aspect of self-destruction as pronounced by Zwicker.

Diagnoses of self-destruction are difficult as Dangarembga says in an interview with Rosemary Marangoly George and Helen Scott:

> Western literary analysts always call Nyasha self-destructive, but I'm not sure whether she is self-destructive. […] I believe this comes from this cyclical process between your construction of yourself and what's out there. And so I think one has to be very careful in putting all the blame on Nyasha or Tambudzai for what happens to their selves. And this blaming the individual is something that comes to me very strongly in the analysis that I've read, and I don't believe it. (George and Scott 1993, p. 314)

Thus, it can be argued that Nyasha is not self-destructive but clearly uses her own body in an attempt to re-construct her very own self by showing resistance to the condition of African people under colonialism, especially Shona women. She ends up 'retching and gagging' all the food that her father forces her to eat (Dangarembga 1988, p. 198). What is significant is that she does it herself, with her own toothbrush (Dangarembga 1988, p. 190). Charles Sugnet argues that when Nyasha vomits all the food she eats, she 'is puking up colonialism itself' (1997, p. 46). However, as Sugnet perceptively notes, while Nyasha deeply resists colonial oppression, she still makes use of colonial products like cigarettes and tampons (1997, p. 46). She also favours a Western projection of femininity where women are depicted as having a curve-less figure. This clearly comes out when Tambu is admiring her own reflection in the mirror, and Nyasha expresses approval of her cousin's looks, but at the same time criticises her curves: 'Not bad at all. You've got a waist. One of these days you'll have a bust. Pity about the backside […] It's rather large.' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 91). This shows that Nyasha has internalised Western concepts of female beauty and does not want to end up with 'heavy, strong hips' which are esteemed in Shona culture (Dangarembga 1988, p. 18). She prefers 'bones to bounce', a non-curvaceous form, which is so unlike the typical African female image (Dangarembga 1988, p. 197).

In fact, the Afro-American author Alice Walker, who coined the term 'womanism', writes that a womanist, 'loves roundedness […] loves herself' (1982, p. ix). Meanwhile, the Nigerian writer, Catherine Acholonu, also proposes that a 'motherist' 'loves roundedness' (1997, p. 63). Despite not having a specific definition of 'roundedness' as used by these two writers, it can be taken to convey some kind of glorification of feminine physicality. In fact, the Shona cultural concept of roundedness can be perceived as a symbol of femininity since a voluptuous woman often represents fertility while a thin woman is generally regarded as undesirable.

When writing about Nyasha's eating disorder, Charles Sugnet also suggests that her 'anorexia is a way of refusing her femaleness' because, as he argues, this stops her menstruation due to starvation (1997, p. 43). However, it could be said that contrary to what Sugnet proposes, her vomiting could be read as a rejection of African femaleness rather than as a rejection of femaleness in general. What is certain,

however, is that her refusal of food is a way of biologically resisting submission to authority. This is because through her self-starvation, Nyasha tries to gain control over both cultural and colonial systems of oppression but instead, she 'was losing weight steadily, constantly, rapidly. It dropped off her body almost hourly and what was left of her was *grotesquely unhealthy* from the vital juices she flushed down the toilet' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 199, emphasis added). By referring to anorexia in her text, Dangarembga draws attention to this eating disorder which was commonly believed to be a Western condition. However, Dangarembga herself, who studied psychology at the University of Zimbabwe, believes that this might not be so since, as she remarks, Hollywood films are watched in Zimbabwe just like everywhere else around the globe and thus, even certain African 'women are becoming conscious of their weight.' (Peterson 1994, p. 346). In a conversation with Kirsten Holst Peterson, the author tries to portray a better understanding of this eating disorder when she states that '[c]ases of anorexia have been reported in Zimbabwe. The diagnosis of anorexia is something difficult. If a woman in Zimbabwe, rural or urban, is depressed, loses weight etc. who is to say that is anorexia or not?' (1994, pp. 345-6).

While Nyasha has unconsciously assimilated Western notions of femininity, preferring the thin Western figure to the voluptuous cultural ideal, she still has a strong emotional longing to feel part of her native Shona society. Hence, while she rejects the African curvaceous figure, she longs to have a better insight of her native culture and becomes obsessed with her 'craze of making clay pots' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 149). This mixture of the internalisation of Western notions and an outward longing to feel part of Shona culture manifests a sense of distress in the person who ends up with a hybrid identity that is neither British nor native Shona. Nyasha becomes alienated at multiple levels: from her Shona roots, from the British culture which she experienced during her childhood years and from the colonial state which she finds on her return to Rhodesia. Hence, she continuously identifies with the cultural values and experiences found in both societies while rejecting them at the same time. When discussing her feelings with her cousin Tambu, Nyasha says, 'I know […] It's not England anymore, and I ought to adjust. But when you've seen different things you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 117).

When she reaches a point where she is not being able to assimilate any further cultural anxieties, she suffers a mental breakdown and has to be admitted to hospital. The reaction of the white psychiatrist, as described by Tambu, is that 'Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene. We should take her home and be firm with her' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 201). Thus, Dangarembga's fictitious psychiatrist echoes the Western belief that African women do not suffer from mental disorders. In fact, psychiatry in Africa is often coloured by colonial and gender preconceptions. This is confirmed by the work of Dr. Megan Vaughan who cautions that, '[i]t was men who […] found themselves defined as schizophrenic and confined to a colonial lunatic asylum' while 'African women,

on the contrary, were said not to have reached the level of self-awareness required to go mad' (1991, p. 22). This shows that even the psychological organisation of the colony exerted some kind of a racist and sexist system in distinguishing between male and female mental health. In reality, nervous breakdowns can actually be more common in African women than men as women are doubly affected because 'their position within the traditional African patriarchy duplicates their inferior status as colonized subjects' (Lund 2002, p. 171). Hence, Dangarembga's depiction of Nyasha's mental state acts as an attempt to redefine the dogma of mental illness by including the psychological experience of women living under colonial rule.

However, Nyasha is not the only fictional character that ends up suffering from a nervous condition. Andrade (2002) corroborates this when she argues that the plural form of the book's title, *Nervous Conditions*, not only announces the complexity of Nyasha's illness but also implies that more than one person in the narrative suffers from some kind of a nervous condition. She states that although Nyasha 'is the narrative's central and most tragic casualty of colonial violence, all of the colonized Africans around her suffer different forms of its consequences – and in a similar mode' (2002, p. 51). A perfect example of this is Babamukuru, Nyasha's father himself, who, ironically enough, is the one with whom Nyasha continuously argues. Just like Nyasha, he 'also experiences stress, poor eating habits, and "bad nerves"' (Andrade 2002, p. 51). Babamukuru is constantly trying to reprimand his own daughter's choice of clothes, the books she reads, and the people she talks to, while he even makes her eat all the food which is placed in front of her. He is submissive in the presence of the white ruler and then he compensates for his own humiliation by tyrannising his own family members, expecting unquestioning obedience from them. Hence, in her narrative Dangarembga clearly depicts Palmer's (2008) 'triple jeopardy' as Babamukuru even oppresses the weak ones around him and degrades people like Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's parents, by imposing Western conventions on them through the enforcement of a Christian marriage. Thus, although Babamukuru has patriarchal authority within his family, his abusive actions could be read as a response to his lack of power within the colonial state: he in turn plays the role of a coloniser in an attempt to free himself from his own inferiority complex. Andrade corroborates this when she states that the fact that 'a colonized adult would seek to control what bodily practices he can through benevolent tyranny serves to underscore his own powerlessness in a system in which he is ostensibly a star product and emblem of power' (2002, p. 51).

Babamukuru is described as 'the perfect product of the British colonial system' (Palmer 2008, p. 183). Rendered fatherless at a very tender age, he realised that the only way to move forward and help his widowed mother was to be diligent and hard working. Babamukuru's mother, 'being sagacious and having foresight, had begged [the holy wizards] to prepare him for life in their world' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 19). Soon after, Babamukuru becomes 'a good boy, cultivatable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 19).

As Palmer points out, this 'probably meant total loyalty to the colonial machinery' (2008, p. 185). Hence, the white man's system and culture serve as a model for Babamukuru. He is later chosen from amongst the natives to be sent to the West so he would be 'trained to become useful to their people', the white man's people (Dangarembga 1988, 14). He is educated in the West and then propagates his embracement of European attitudes to fellow indigenous people upon his return to Africa. These 'chosen' ones become brainwashed into thinking that the white rulers are benevolent men who should be taken as models of civilisation. Such blind compliance with the white rulers is exactly what Nyasha tries to warn Tambu about: 'It's bad enough […] when a country gets colonised, but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 147).

Babamukuru's representation of the colonial culture is evident in the whitewashed house he owns, the very same house in which he lives with the rest of the family in the presence of an 'albino hound' (Dangarembga 1988, p. 65). When considering that the home is one's intimate place and that one identifies with the place in which one lives, then Babamukuru's home should be the place which establishes who he truly is. In fact, Dovey asserts that one's home creates a 'bonding or mergence of person and place such that the place takes its identity from the dweller and the dweller takes his or her identity from the place. There is an integrity, a connectedness between the dweller and the dwelling.' (1985, p. 39). However, Babamukuru tries to mimic the white man's type of lodging which clearly indicates that the effect of colonialism has affected his innermost core. Most of the rooms found in Babamukuru's house seem impeccable, with 'heavy gold curtains flowing voluptuously to the floor, the four-piece lounge suite upholstered in glowing brown velvet, [and] the lamps with their tasselled shades' (Dangarembga 1988*,* p. 68). Notwithstanding, other parts of the house, such as the kitchen, are not given the same attention: 'the cooker had only three plates, none of which was a ring […] [t]he kitchen window was not curtained; a pane of glass was missing. This missing pane caused many problems because through the hole a draught blew' (Dangarembga 1988*,* p. 67). Thus, some areas of the house, those parts which are not seen by 'visitors whom it was necessary to impress', are neglected (Dangarembga 1988*,* p.68). Babamukuru wants to distinguish himself from the other Africans by copying the ways of the white man even in his own lodging, yet the impression given is that he does not have the means to introduce the same sense of elegance throughout the house. Therefore, the parts which he knows would not be visited by non-family members are not given importance to. As a result, he is partially imitating, or mimicking, the white man's culture. In fact, the notion of mimicry is described by Homi Bhabha as 'a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (2004, p.86). Bhabha sees the colonised intellectual as imitating the language, behaviour and culture of the white ruler, yet unable to achieve the same kind of equality. This is because, 'the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence;* in order to be effective, mimicry

must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (Bhabha 1984, p. 126, italics in original). This difference between Babamukuru's house and that of the white man also comes across in the gleaming whiteness which Babamukuru tries to imitate in his own house, trying to give an impression of sterility which is so difficult to maintain in the dry hot weather of Africa. He ends up with appliances that 'gleamed greyly' with a 'lack of brilliance' instead (Dangarembga 1988, p. 67). Babamukuru's niece, Tambu, perceptively notes this when she remarks that:

> The antiseptic sterility that [her] aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level because the buses that passed through the mission, […] rolled up a storm of fine red dust which perversely settled in corners and on surfaces of rooms. (Dangarembga 1988, p. 71)

Nonetheless, Tambu is eager to leave her village because she starts internalising the colonial's mental picture of rural Africa as grimy and unhygienic. She ascends to a new type of self: a 'clean, well-groomed, genteel self', separated from the dirt and the flies of her rural home (Dangarembga 1988, pp. 58-59). Although Tambu cannot imagine losing touch with her African origins, she is eager to attend the mission school where her uncle is headmaster, and is even ready to succumb to colonial conventions. The colonial education that she gets there affects her personal identity and even her perception of her own community: she becomes captivated by Western culture and can no longer find confidence and comfort in her own native society.

Tambu's captivation is clearly evident in *The Book of Not* when she starts dreading going to her rural homestead during school vacations. While in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu's psychological state is not distorted, and she does not wallow in depression as Nyasha does, Tambu does wither in its sequel. This happens due to the imposition of emotionally disturbing experiences by the colonial education system and to the element of racism that it entails. As the title implies, Dangarembga's second text is 'a novel of "unbecoming" – of the loss of identity, feeling, and attachments' (Kennedy 2008, p. 89). Tambu internalises a Eurocentric perspective of her African 'otherness' and 'inferiority', which leads to her black subjectivity. Fanon postulates that '[t]he black man […] is constantly preoccupied with self-assertion and the ego ideal. So much so, that whenever he is in the presence of someone else, there is always the question of worth and merit' (2008, p. 186). This happens because, according to Fanon, colonialism withholds recognition from the colonised individual and as a result, the colonised person constantly desires to achieve acknowledgement.

When applying Fanon's insights to Dangarembga's novel, this issue of self-assertion is succinctly articulated by Tambu who constantly strives for recognition in *The Book of Not*. In her aim to reach the honour roll, she contrives to memorise all of her lessons, 'remembering every word from the teacher's mouth' because she simply wanted to be 'absolutely outstanding or nothing' (Dangarembga 2006, p. 25).

When she manages to achieve very good results, she sets herself the task of having her name carved on the Silver Cup by obtaining the best O-Level results:

> I promised myself I would have it, and my name would be inscribed on it for everyone to see: Tambudzai Sigauke. Then people would know who I was, a person to be reckoned with and respected, not a receptacle of contempt. (Dangarembga 2006, p. 114)

This incessant desire to be recognised by Europeans and Africans alike leaves her depressed and disheartened since despite achieving excellent results, she is not awarded the Silver Cup because a white student is chosen instead.

Not only does Tambu remain unrecognised for her achievements, but the 'tortured path she has travelled in pursuing her desire for recognition has resulted in a narrowing of attachments and a shrivelling of self' (Kennedy 2008, p. 99). She even becomes alienated from her very own society because she internalises a European image of the degraded coloured man. The psychological damaging effect of this comes across when Sister Catherine tries to comfort Tambu who in turn is 'appalled at having let [her] skin and this white person's touch' (Dangarembga 2006, pp. 31-32). Her 'first impression was I had soiled my teacher in some way. I liked her and I did not want to do that. Sister should not touch me' (Dangarembga 2006, p. 32). Thus, Tambu, like many other indigenous people, has unconsciously assimilated a sense of inferiority and failure.

This internalisation of failure continues to take place even when her schooling years are over and she moves into an old colonial building: the Twiss Hostel. This place had 'a sign which read "right of admission reserved" […] still glued above the entrance' (Dangarembga 2006, p. 203). Tambu perceives the knowledge that 'one was now included' as a positive indication of a new and different Zimbabwe (Dangarembga 2006, p. 203). However, she later realises that despite the political changes, things did not really improve. She starts suffering the same kind of humiliation she had encountered at the prestigious missionary school of the Sacred Heart because even here there is 'unofficial' enforcement of racial segregation. Moreover, the landlady constantly mixes her up with another resident and so, once again, Tambu fails to be recognised for who she truly is. She bitterly remarks that 'I had not been recognised, had not been perceived as an individual person but as a lump broken from a greater one of undifferentiated flesh!' (Dangarembga 2006, p. 207).

In Harare, she finds a job as a copy editor with an advertising agency. Here she creates an outstanding advertisement for 'Afro-Shine Hair Care' but it is her white colleague, Dick Lawson, who takes credit for her creative work and presents it to the client: 'I was not to meet the client. My copy was, but I was not good enough to merit that. […] My copy was not good enough; under someone else's name, it was' (Dangarembga 2006, p. 236). Dispirited by her lack of success in owning full recognition for her brilliant work, she resigns from her job. She simply accepts the

white man's prejudiced attitude and rejects her true identity. Hence, even in the new Zimbabwe, the same structures of colonialism that had left a negative impact on Tambu continue to infiltrate her consciousness, causing a worsening sense of inferiority. The colonial subordination which she had faced and internalised throughout her Western education continues to affect Tambu as corroborated by Fanon's argument when he stresses the endurance of colonial attitudes beyond political independence and argues that '[c]olonialism and imperialism have not settled their debt to us once they have withdrawn their flag and their police force from our territories' (2004, p. 57). The colonial influence will continue to be felt long after the colonialists themselves would have left the land which they had greedily occupied.

Conclusion

The colonial system simply contrives to change the colonised individual into an 'other' by coercing the native into mimicking a Western identity. This is highlighted by Dangarembga's accurate description of the negative effects of colonialism on native Africans when she depicts certain fictitious characters, like Babamukuru, who strive to internalise the white man's culture. Her narratives bring to light various instances and images of oppressive colonial manifestations and poignantly reveal the socio-political and economic effects of colonialism on African people, especially African women. In fact, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* highlight how colonial oppression affects women's lives, both socially and economically. This is confirmed by Tambu's mother, Ma'Shingayi, when she accurately describes the exploitation by the colonial economy as 'the poverty of blackness', a situation that turns the native, whether directly or not, into a victim (Dangarembga 1988, p. 16). Yet this author propounds the fictional women in her narratives as agents of resistance in colonial Zimbabwe. Thus, Dangarembga presents women who endure the negative effects of colonialism but also attempt to challenge colonial authority through different types of resistance, ranging from starvation to neurosis, in order to demonstrate opposition to colonial oppression. They set themselves the arduous task of retrieving some form of agency through their acts of protest in an attempt to improve their own situation or that of others. Therefore, although colonialism has led to cultural maiming and detrimental effects in the social, political and economic affairs of the country, in her narratives Dangarembga presents African women who illustrate their concerns in their various attempts of resistance.

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