

**Being and Nothingness: Trauma, loss and alienation in Tsitsi Dangarembga's
*The Book of Not***

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Abstract

In this article, I reveal how Dangarembga's narrative echoes Fanon's "black skin, white masks" psychology. The protagonist's internalisation of a Eurocentric view of her race and culture culminates in a profound belief in her own inferiority and that of her people. I use Laing and Fanon's psychoanalytic theories to portray the protagonist's struggle with her sense of identity and ontological security. I argue that the subsequent fractured sense of self she experiences affects her to such an extent that shame, guilt and self-negation dominate her mental make-up. What emerges is that the destabilising effect of the trauma of blackness results in a nullification of subjectivity - a total sense of not-being - that causes the protagonist to plummet into the depths of depression.

Colonialism's onslaught on the African continent's supposed primitiveness and lack of culture - its "heart of darkness" - has left behind a bequest of historical, religious, emotional and cultural scars on its people. None of these have been more profound than the lacerations to the psyche of black Africans, leaving them traumatised, with some carrying this legacy even in the postcolonial era. In *The Book of Not* Tsitsi Dangarembga captures the psychological violence that was part of the transformation of the country from colonial Rhodesia to independent Zimbabwe. Through her depiction of her protagonist's traumatised condition, she validates the categorisation of her narrative as trauma literature. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1967, p. 52) poignantly describes the traumatic dimension of colonialism in Africa when he refers to the black man surviving in "a state of permanent tension"; a state of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996, p. 61) explains trauma as "a break in the mind's experience of time". For Fanon, severe psychological trauma ultimately becomes the end product of the violence of colonial oppression. This trauma is experienced at both an individual and collective level and this harrowing colonial historical encounter continues to shape postcolonial identities and contemporary African discourses. David Lloyd (2000) reiterates this when he describes how the violent intrusion of trauma causes a feeling of annihilation and objectification such that the psychological effects of trauma can be mapped onto the cultures that suffer colonisation. Similarly,

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Marianne Hirsch (2012, p. 5) describes this personal, collective and cultural trauma that postcolonial subjects experience as “postmemory”, which she explains as a “structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience”. These arguments all signify that the trauma caused by colonialism ultimately impacts on an individual’s sense of identity. In this article, I expose the devastating effects of this trauma of blackness on the protagonist, Tambu, in *The Book of Not*. Tambu is a contracted version of the Shona name Tambudzai, which means “to give trouble”; her name signifies the troubled identity that inhabits her. I highlight how she suffers from what Fanon describes as a “massive psycho existential complex” (1986, p.14), which strips her of her subjectivity. As a black female she is “other” not only to the black male, but also to her white female counterparts at Sacred Heart, the boarding school that she attends.

Dangarembga’s narrative in *The Book of Not* gives literary life to Ngugi’s (1982, p. 3) warning that colonialism may succeed in making many black people “see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement”. This is the case with Tambu who fails to get past her negativity and does not succeed in appropriately placing herself within the white space of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, a prestigious boarding school, by letting her past “speak” to her (Hall, 1990, p. 226), yet the past is crucial in the formation of cultural identity. This leads to her suffering from depression as her mind submerges under the pressure of assimilation. Cognitively, depression is defined as “an abnormal state of the organism manifested by signs and symptoms such as low subjective moods, pessimistic and nihilistic attitudes, loss of spontaneity and specific vegetative signs” (Beck, 1967, pp. 2001-202). This depression is, to a large extent, a consequence of her battle to achieve subjectivity. Stuart Hall’s (1990) discussion of cultural identity is pertinent to my examination of Tambu’s struggle with identity. He considers cultural identity as:

... a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ ... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by , and position ourselves within the narrative of the past ... It is only from this second position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of the ‘colonial experience’. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

My analysis shows how it is this positioning of self within the “nervous conditions” of colonialism that Dangarembga reveals through Tambu.

The Book of Not, which is a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, is a narrative directed by Tambu as an adult narrator who looks back at the thoughts and experiences of the younger Tambu. It continues the story of the protagonist that was begun in its predecessor. Dangarembga’s follow-up to *Nervous*

Conditions is set against the backdrop of the liberation war and the first years of Independence in Zimbabwe. The narrative spans her high school days at the cusp of Independence when the liberation war was at its peak. Tambu is one of the few black girls selected to attend Sacred Heart. The narrative proceeds to depict her struggle to achieve a productive and independent life in the period immediately following Zimbabwe's independence and depicts her as an individual obsessed with recognition and self-achievement. As she begins her education there, she believes that she "had to be one of the best. Average simply did not apply; I had to be absolutely outstanding or nothing" (p. 25).

Run by nuns, Sacred Heart professes to be a humane and charitable place, yet there is still evidence of racism as evident in the fact that there are still white spaces at the school which the black girls cannot occupy, such as the whites-only toilet. Racial segregation is also evident in the fact that all the African students, regardless of form level, are confined to one dormitory. It is apparent in the daily insults the black girls endure from Bougainvillea, one of the white students. Likewise, racial prejudice is ostensible when despite Tambu achieving the best results at 'O' level, the award is given to a white student, Tracy, the justification for this bypassing being that Tracy was an "all-rounder" (p. 155). Moreover, the black girls are forbidden from using their vernacular language within the school. Ngugi (1982, p. 20) underscores the psychological wounding that the black child endures when forced to speak English when he rightfully asserts, "[i]f you punish a child for speaking his mother-tongue what are you really doing to the mentality of that child? You are really making him hate the language which was the basis of his humiliation".

More significantly, racial segregation reflects in the fact that touching between the races is strictly forbidden at the school such that when it does occur, it is considered abnormal. This explains the utter shock the black girls reveal when in Sister Catherine's attempt to comfort Tambu after her fight with Ntombi, she touches Tambu's chin and Ntombi's head: "A white hand on hair! We gaped! We had never seen it." (p. 78) It elucidates why after having touched Sister Catherine's hand Tambu feels that "I had soiled my teacher in some way" (p. 32) because of the belief in the impurity of her race. A consciousness of this racial prejudice is what makes the African girls fear touching their white counterparts in the corridors, at the assembly line and while they passed food to each other in the dining hall. Any kind of touch between the races, therefore, translated to agony and humiliation. Tambu elicits the terror the black girls felt of this constant need to watch and contain themselves in the relationships and dealing with their white counterparts: "We spent a lot of time consumed with this kind of terror. We didn't speak of it amongst ourselves. It was all too humiliating, but the horror of it gnawed within us" (p. 59).

It is within this racially hostile and demeaning context Tambu's consciousness develops. While I do not condone the "white mask" psychology that Tambu embraces, as I reveal in my discussion below, I contend that such traumatic psychological exposure to racism no doubt contributes to the peeling away of her sense of self and a subsequent desire to mimic what to her mind is a superior self. Unfortunately, this mental disorientation implodes into a sense of not-being and certainty in the inferiority of her race. When she is caught and reprimanded for using the whites-only toilet, for example, Tambu madly blames it all on the fact of blackness and transfers her self-hatred into anger at her fellow blacks:

Idiotic women! The fools who couldn't use a decent sewerage system! ... Had these people I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all. No one would have been standing here in this humiliation ... Oh, I felt yet another surge of dislike for the other girls in my dormitory! (p. 71)

Fanon's (1967a, 106) words echo this sense of guilt and terror Tambu feels of being black in a racist world, this "feeling of not existing. Sin is black as virtue is white. All those white men ... cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am not good". As my discussion makes clear she, in fact, personifies and desires the "Other" (Fanon, 1967a, p. 128), a desire that translates to a hatred of herself and anything that reminds her of her blackness - her skin, her people, her culture, her profession and her mind. Understanding this psychological warfare that she endures in her process of "unbecoming" allows the reader to sympathise with her, despite the selfish and detestable projection of the white gaze in her condescension of all the signifiers of her identity.

Having read *Nervous Conditions*, a reader may anticipate that Tambu would have entered the racist space of Sacred Heart with enough psychological armour to withstand the threat that such an environment would have on her subjectivity. Ironically, in Dangarembga's debut novel, her parting thought as she leaves her home and family and heads for Sacred Heart seems to affirm a grounding in her people and culture. As her family and friends urge her not to forget them, she pronounces: "Don't forget don't forget ... If I forgot them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself and that, of course could not happen" (p. 188). Moreover, at the end of *Nervous Conditions* Tambu declares, "something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and to refuse to be brainwashed" (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 204). This assertion suggests a determination to get a western education without losing her cultural values and sense of identity. Yet the adult narrator in *The Book of Not* reveals how the younger Tambu's existential reality has been infiltrated by a coloni-

al mentality to such an extent that she believes that the white people's ways are better than her own. Once at Sacred Heart, she does forget the essence of her being; her roots. She becomes, in all essence, a good assimilated "native", a typical "Uncle Tom" character. The "Uncle Tom" epithet commonly appeared in Afro-American Literature on slavery to describe a black person who was excessively obedient to the white master and was complicit in the oppression of his/her race. What stirs in my memory at this juncture is her mother's warning in *Nervous Conditions* about the problem Tambu's anglicised cousins, Nyasha and Chido, face: "It's the Englishness ... it will kill them all if they are not careful" (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 204). Contrary to her declaration, in *The Book of Not*, Tambu undeniably fails to resist the negative impacts of her expansion and there is evidence in the narrative to suggest that her western education has succeeded in "killing" her by brainwashing her into believing in the inferiority of her race, her people and her culture; a belief that dents her own sense of self-worth and subjectivity, leading to an ontological insecurity.

Tambu's behaviour when she goes back to her village during the school holidays reiterates her alienation from her people and her culture. She dreads returning to the rural home that she grew up in, which she does only three times in the year. She cannot stand the poverty and the drudgery of "fetching water from the river, the juddering paraffin lamp light and *sadza* [thick porridge] with only one, extremely small portion of relish" (p. 7). Her mother acknowledges that Tambu has, indeed, grown beyond her and has become firmly entrenched in a Eurocentric worldview when she describes her as "*wekuchirungu* ... you white people" (*ibid.*). Her emotional outburst in *Nervous Conditions* where she accuses Tambu as being influenced by Maiguru's white ways: "You think that I am dirty now, me, your mother" (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 140) somehow rings true in *The Book of Not*. As Tambu matures, these negative feelings toward her mother do not change. This becomes evident later on in the narrative when she attempts to visit Tambu in Harare. As Tambu contemplates the possibility of her mother's stay with her, she reflects that, "[a]s usual in my dealings with Mai [mother], shame welled up. Was there any misfortune in the world as bad as being the daughter of this woman?" (p. 228) Not only does Tambu despise her mother; she also considers her past rural life as "my unmentionable origin" (p. 231).

Normally, the maternal figure and "home" signify an individual's core sense of identity, of belonging. This failure to relate to her mother and the village she grew up in is indicative of a definite "absence of anchoring" (p. 9). Within her second year at Sacred Heart, she experiences dissociation from her past that translates to a disintegration of her identity, a fragmented sense of self. She becomes what Gugu Hlongwane (2009, p. 449) identifies as a "piece of person". As someone who was "being trans-

formed into a young woman with a future” (p. 11), she deplores what she considers the non-achievement of her rural mother who she believes has caved in to the weight of African womanhood. Tambu is affected by “the awful covetous emptiness in her eyes, and ... the nothingness upon which she stood as upon the summit of her life” (p. 9). She begs God to make her not end up like her mother. Paradoxically though, this same sense of not being engulfs Tambu throughout the narrative in her attempt to “become more of a person” (*ibid.*), pursuing her till the narrative’s end. As she has a similar abhorrence for her father, Tambu adopts her aunt and uncle (Maiguru and Babamukuru) as her parents. In her mind, because of their education and social standing, they are more the kind of parents she would want to identify with.

The determination to detach herself from her cultural past and familial bonds, however, places her in an “emotional diaspora” (Wurtzel, 1999, p. 168) that manifests in her continued feelings of emptiness and in her nihilistic delusions. These illusions are evident in her false belief that she can identify more with the white students rather than her black counterparts from the African dormitory. She actually knits balaclavas for the Rhodesian soldiers, an act which she mistakenly perceives as a means of ensuring “our common security” (p. 148). Ironically, this act of complicity shows her misguided allegiance with the colonial regime that perpetuates a supremacist ideology that objectifies her and relegates her to the status of a second class citizen. Her delusions are also obvious when on her return to school from a holiday spent at her village, Tambu forces herself into an emptiness; a state of “nothingness”. She notes how even the “[s]chool too seemed empty because now, after these holidays, it was impossible to relate to anything” (p. 20). Through the articulation of these feelings, Tambu underscores her negation of reality and subsequent negation of self. Thomas Ogden (2012, p. 20) explains this state of being when he asserts that “the melancholic is doomed to experience a sense of lifelessness that comes as a consequence of disconnecting oneself from large portions of external reality”.

Tambu’s identity crisis is further evident when, frustrated at not being able to attend the “A” level science subjects lessons at Umtali Boys High (a neighbouring government school because blacks were not allowed on its premises) she questions: “Am I a Rhodesian” (p. 153)? This query no doubt implies that Tambu identified with colonial Rhodesia, white culture and white ideology. From a Fanonian perspective, this is symptomatic of “nervous conditions” syndrome of a “white mask” psychology which expresses itself in the “wretchedness and anxiety” (*ibid.*) that continually dogs her. Significantly, towards the end of the narrative, when her mother calls to inform Tambu of her intention to visit Harare, sensing her daughter’s reluctance to see her she reminds Tambu of her origins and her

past: "I want to ask are you aware who gave birth to you? Can you tell me which stomach you came out of! Or do you think you dropped from a tree big and ripe like that! Or sprang from a well" (p. 226).

Not only does Tambu fail to identify with her familial bonds and "home", she also refuses to identify with the historical fact of her blackness, as evident in the sense of alienation she feels from the violence of the war and its consequences to her people. As she recalls the incident of her sister's leg being blown off - a traumatic event that opens *The Book of Not* - she expresses that, "I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at the primitive scene" (p. 28). Instead of the anticipated anger and pain, there is an element of self-blame and a sense of humiliation here for having been privy to this scene. Another traumatic event she experiences is depicted in the novel when, petrified, she is forced to witness the liberation fighters beating her uncle for being "one of those souls hankering to be one with the occupying Rhodesian forces, *Mutengesi* [sell-out]" (p. 6). She is expected to watch the violent act in order to instil loyalty in her. Although such violence is, from a Fanonian perspective, meant to be creative "in order to produce a sense of nationalism and collective history" (Fanon, 1967, p. 93) it is, nonetheless, destructive in terms of the psychological scarring that inevitably results from the witnessing of this brutality. These multiple traumatic experiences contribute significantly to Tambu's depression. Her dejection is evident when she states, "[h]ow miserable I was, for nothing lay in my power" (p. 3). This mentally unstable state is intensified by her negativity and sense of loss of identity from being caught between two differing cultures within a changing socio-political landscape. Even when Babamukuru exposes his scars from the violent beating by the guerrilla fighters, a beating she was witness to, she:

... resorted to the usual way out of not feeling anything, of concentrating on every inch of skin, on the opening of every pore until I could feel nothing else and the sensation of me filled the entire universe. But as I was not, I could feel nothing. (p. 187)

I argue that this self-blame and refusal to "feel" is, in fact, a denial of her trauma. Lenore Terr (1990, p. 8) states that psychic trauma is quickly internalised in the victims mind immediately after the traumatic event/s. Therefore, this witnessing of her sister's dismembering and uncle's brutal beating overpowers her mind and scars her psyche. Much as she may deny any effect on her of these incidents of violence, it is apparent that throughout the narrative she suffers belatedly the pain of her trauma. This supposition is based on Caruth's (1995) definition of trauma in which she emphasises that is the belated re-remembering of an event/s that have been repressed in the mind that actually constitutes trauma. Tambu, therefore, cannot suppress the flashbacks of, for example, images of Netsai's dismembered leg spinning in the sky that repetitively emerge in her mind, indicative of her

belated mental stress and reaction to these traumatic events. Here, Dangarembga uses repetition as a literary strategy to underscore Tambu's trauma because, as Whitehead (2004, p. 86) writes: "[r]epetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression". These images appear, for example, as her class translates images of war in a Latin lesson (p. 31); when her African students accuse her of betraying the black race by knitting items for the Rhodesian soldiers (p. 130); and when she learns about how Ntombi's aunt and other family members are massacred by the very Rhodesian forces that she knits for (p. 173).

Subsequently, Tambu transfers her trauma into anger. Transposing trauma through rage is what some theorists (LaCapra, 2001; Felman & Laub, 1992) identify as the delayed effect of such a traumatic episode. The anger that Tambu is often susceptible to in the narrative, then, is symptomatic of her trauma. When she is reprimanded by the headmistress for using the whites only toilet, the headmistress' jokes that no one was to be cut in half, to which Tambu responds by thinking: "How angry I was with Sister, talking to us like that, making jokes about our flesh and how some people thought it was divisible" (p. 74). Yet she directs her fury at Sister Emmanuel towards Ntombi, a fellow black student, and they engage in a fist fight. In such moments, as she becomes consumed by anger, the intense emotional feeling, in turn, triggers a re-membering of the past traumatic events which have been internalised in her mind. It becomes a means of articulating her trauma as evidenced when, during the fight she screams: "Do you know my sister? Do you know Netsai? She is my little sister. Do you know where she's gone to" (p. 78)? The last Tambu had seen of Netsai before this incident was when she was being driven away to the hospital after her leg had been blown off by a landmine. Tambu had witnessed this horrific scene while the strings of her heart "strained and tore" (p. 3) as she watched the spinning leg "as it rotated, moving up to somewhere out of it" (*ibid.*). Not only does this event represent a brutal image of the war, it further pre-empts the resultant splintering of the psyche that Tambu suffers from witnessing the violence of it. As William Chigidi (2009, p. 47) attests in his study of Shona war fiction, "[o]ne cannot experience such horrors, either as a witness or a perpetrator, and hope to emerge out of it unscathed". In her normal mental state, however, Tambu experiences what Ronald Granofsky (1995, p. 109) identifies as "dichotomous fragmentation". She, therefore, separates the horrific incident from her existential self in order to "preserve the worldview as it was before the trauma ensued" (*ibid.*).

Tambu is not the only character in the narrative whose trauma triggers anger. When the black girls in the dormitory confront Tambu about her knitting for the Rhodesian soldiers, Ntombi lashes out in rage at Tambu's misdirected loyalty and alienation from her race when she shouts at her:

What's making you do this! As if you don't know that some things are cursed! Oh, just jump into a pot of hot oil! Just jump in, *usvuuke! Usvuuke!* (so your skin peels off). Then you will be what you want. It will make you look like them, all pink like a European!" (p. 141)

This angry outburst is prompted by the trauma Ntombi has experienced not only on the collective level of race, but on an individual one as well. Like Tambu, she too has been exposed to the atrocities of the war. As Ntombi accuses her of being a "sell-out" in this one of their numerous fights, Tambu describes how "[s]he had the look in her eyes that made me stand still for a moment and wonder what, in her own holidays, she had been brought to witness" (p. 140). In her anguished state, Ntombi rambles about "the limbs we would miss, the nature and temperature of rods that would be inserted into our various orifices" (p. 141). It later on in the narrative becomes apparent that one of the origins of her trauma occur when she is made to bear witness to her aunt's nine-month old baby's head being dipped into boiling water by the Rhodesian soldiers until it drowned, after which the dead baby's head was viciously bashed against a rock. This horrific event happens after her aunt was accused of feeding the "terrorists" (p. 172). It was a brutal act meant to get her aunt to disclose the whereabouts of "*vana mukoma*" (guerrilla fighters). The aunt subsequently committed suicide and everyone at her homestead was killed. In her traumatised state, Ntombi recites Shakespeare: "[b]lood ... and destruction shall be so in use/And dreadful objects so familiar/That mother's shall but smile when they behold/their infants quarter'd with the hands of war" (p. 173). By this telling, Ntombi has "released some fetid load" (p. 174) in an effort to unburden her psychological wounding by speaking of her trauma. I posit that Ntombi's revelation of her pain and suffering undeniably affects Tambu, despite her declaration that she particularly did not care (*ibid.*). She unconsciously sinks into a state of despair in which she exhibits "strange behaviour" and fails to make sense of the "unfamiliar seizures" and "fits of weeping" (*ibid.*) that attack her.

Through these two young women's trauma and Tambu's subsequent fragmentation, Dangarembga exposes how colonialism caused the mutilation of bodies and the dismembering of black identities. In other words, Tambu exemplifies the erosion of the subjective being that Fanon (1967) warned would accompany a colonised psyche as the black person annihilates his/her sense of self. This can

cause him/her to proceed from “humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair” (Fanon, 1967b, p. 43).

Tambu’s self-negation in dealing with her traumatic memory through self-effacement, however, does also point to her fragmented sense of identity and false consciousness as a result of her internalisation of a “white mask” psychology. My discussion above no doubt indicates that Tambu has been psychologically colonised as is evident in her adoption of a Eurocentric worldview for her African reality. I argue that the collective trauma of blackness that Tambu suffers is evident in her sense of alienation from her family, her home and her culture. Her grounding in all these aspects of her life as an African has been weakened. As Kai Erikson (1991, p. 471) emphasises, collective trauma embodies “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community”. The debilitating effect of this psychological disorientation manifests in an identity crisis and is compounded by the individual trauma she has experiences as a result of being a witness to harrowing events of the war. Tambu lacks a firm sense of her own identity and is, therefore, assimilated into the white culture and values that she is exposed to at Sacred Heart. This leads to a sense of ontological insecurity. Her disorientation is a result of her ruptured familial bond and distorted sense of indigenous *Ubuntu/Unhu*, a viewpoint that is essential in the formation of any African identity and which is based on the communalist concept of “I am well if you are well to”. Her conception of the African philosophy has undeniably been shredded by the colonisation of her mind. Her western sense of individualism is evident when she declares: “What I was most interested in was myself and what I would become” (p. 11). This aspiration of individual success at the expense of the community is a characteristic that flows over from her younger days as depicted in *Nervous Conditions* when she accepts her brother Nhamo’s death as “the price of her own freedom” (Sugnet, 1997, p. 39). Furthermore, it is paradoxical given her intention to live by embracing *Ubuntu/Unhu*, yet her distorted sense of identity is apparent in her constant attempts in the narrative to marry this traditional ideal to a western value system. Significantly, this estrangement and fragmented identity plays a crucial part in evoking the constant depression and nihilism that characterise her life at Sacred Heart.

As she continues to swallow the white colonial mentality this leads to what Laing terms “engulfment”, a concept explains thus: “If a man hates himself, he may wish to lose himself in the other; then being engulfed by the other is an escape from himself” (Laing, 1990, p. 5). She becomes a divided self. Laing’s explanation is the reason why I argue here that Tambu’s disconnection from her past and self-hatred through her internalisation of the white gaze leads to a trauma of blackness.

This trauma similarly translates into a chronic depression and is evidenced by her state of not-being. Depression causes numbing and an annihilation of emotion and, ironically, a distinct intensification of anxiety (Crawford & Baker, 2009, p. 241). Elizabeth Wurtzel (1999, p. 19) characterises this mental illness so well when she describes how depression:

... involves a complete absence: absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest. The pain you feel in the course of a major clinical depression is an attempt on nature's part (nature, after all, abhors a vacuum) to fill up the empty space. But for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, waking dead.

It is this neurosis, I believe, that leads to Tambu's failure at "A" level and her poor performance at university. It shows itself in her attempts at invisibility. More significantly, it manifests in her loss of self-such that for her, it becomes "harrowing to be part of such undistinguished humanity" (p. 211). This depression, in turn, leads to her persistent negation of self. Every act of negation subsequently constitutes the disengagement of her consciousness. As a result, her depression further contributes to her disintegration of self.

Tambu is so disoriented by her state of depression that she is unable to appreciate the positive aspects of her life. She is, instead, preoccupied with those parts of it that are negative, such as her failures and the non-recognition of her achievements. So consumed is she by depression that she does not envisage any hope in her future prospects. Wurtzel (1999) succinctly explains this loss of perspective by stating that a human being is capable of surviving almost anything if there is a foreseeable end to it, but depression compounds daily such that there seems to be no end. The fog of depression is "like a cage without the key" (Wurtzel, 1999, p. 168).

Locked in this mentally debilitated state, even with the birth of Independence instead of celebrating this hard won freedom with other blacks, Tambu thinks: "I could never, after all the years at Sacred Heart and Fridays in the town hall, bring myself to believe that Rhodesians had died" (p. 198). Her skewed summation on this eve of the new dispensation reveals how she undermines the historical significance of the war that has culminated in peace talks between the warring parties. In addition, it shows the extent to which she perpetuates the good/evil and black/white dichotomies of imperial thought:

I assured myself happily that the phenomenon was due to a bigger and better motive on both sides: a desire to desist from chopping away lips, ears, noses and geni-

tals from the bodies of people's relatives by the elder siblings; a desire to develop a larger, kinder heart on the part of the Europeans. (p. 198)

Ironically, knowingly or unknowingly, Tambu's thoughts regurgitate Conrad's "heart of darkness" images of her own people as cruel and evil and the whites as unblemished and kind. Yet both sides committed unspeakable atrocities during the violence of the war, as is made apparent in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (2004) and Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat* (1997). This loss of her sense of African identity and misguided allegiance evokes Steve Biko's (1978, p. 28) contention that:

Reduced to an obliging shell [the black subject] ... looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he [sic] regards as the 'inevitable position' ... The black man has become a shadow, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave and ox, bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

As a result, Tambu's adult life in independent Zimbabwe turns out to be one marked by frustration and failure. After a mediocre pass in her university education, she is forced to teach, a profession she considers as being "much too low" (p. 199). Depressed, her self-esteem suffers another set-back because "it seems only rejects were required to shape our nations' children" (*ibid.*). Her overwhelming sense of failure at this point in her life is evident when she declares, "[o]h, how low I was falling, as though I had broken a glass fool and, hurtling through, would end up splintered once more in the mess of the homestead" (*ibid.*). Her lamentation expresses her shattered sense of self. The "wretched room" (*ibid.*) that she rents in Greendale mirrors her despondent mental state, as its "murkiness sucked [her] in, tossed [her] around and drowned [her]" (*ibid.*).

When she is able to get a better job as a copy editor at an advertising agency, in a cruel twist of fate, Tracy Stevenson, the white girl who was given the award that should have been hers for the best "O" Level results, becomes her boss. Once again, at this workplace Tambu is susceptible to racism, frustration and an overwhelming sense of non-achievement. Her deflated sense of self within her professional life at this agency is obvious in the manner in which she relates to the black receptionist (Pedzi) and the "tea boy" (Raphael, p. 219). When the black receptionist, Pedzi, greets and compliments her, the highly insecure Tambu cannot connect with her because she believes that "this girl who looked like a goddess was mocking" (p. 214). Yet when the "tea boy" rudely disrespects her over a tea mug, she thinks that she deserves such treatment.

In a meeting with Dick, a senior copy editor, to discuss a campaign for a hair product specifically designed for black hair, the reader is exposed to one of the rare moments that Tambu is happy in the narrative. She thinks, "I cannot recall when I had been happier ... For now I had moved forward and been recognised as a result of my own resources" (p. 234). Yet when Dick disappoints her by taking credit for her ideas on the product, Tambu does not confront him over this creative theft and chooses, instead, to resign from a job that she knew she was competent to handle. This inability to articulate the injustice of an act that puts Dick's name to her work is indicative of her self-negation and self-hatred. This low self-esteem makes her feel that the new nation had "no place for me" (p. 246). Psychologically lost and emotionally torn, like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu at this point epitomises the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon, 1967, p. 182). As the narrative closes, homeless and unemployed, she ponders:

What was I going to do now? ... There was no longer a place for me with my relatives at the mission. I could not go back to the homestead ... where Mai would laugh at me daily ... I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future there was for me, a new Zimbabwean. (p. 246)

Lost and alienated, with nowhere to go, her aspirations in life have been completely quashed and with an obscure future ahead of her, she continues to wallow in her state of non-being; her state of "not". Tambu's end is a pessimistic one, as she fails to free herself from the inferiority complex she has internalised as a result of the psychological wounding colonialism has meted on her psyche.

In this analysis, I have shown how Tambu's Eurocentric viewpoint in the narrative works to instil a sense of alienation within her in a manner that affirms Fanon's (1967, p. 251) contention that colonialism is "a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'". Her indoctrination of white ideology through her exposure to it at the boarding school she attends succeeds in disrupting the type of identity formation hinted at in *Nervous Conditions* that caused her wariness of western beliefs and values. Instead, Tambu develops a false consciousness as she proceeds to wholly consume these. This adoption of a white mask psychology leads to a fragmented sense of self; a dismembered identity that manifests as depression as her life is characterised by despair and nihilism. In her narrative, Dangarembga points to the need for the process of a decolonisation of the mind to enable Tambu to move away from her "nervous conditions" and achieve some sort of mental stability. I am optimistic in pre-empting that Dangarembga's third and final book in the trilogy of Tambu's life - tentatively titled *The*

River Running Dry - will reveal Tambu's attainment of this psychological growth and the subsequent negotiated reincarnation of the firm sense of identity she possessed in *Nervous Conditions*. This growth is necessary considering the fact that the distorted identity of an individual ultimately impacts on the identity of the nation at large. Within the changing socio-political and cultural Zimbabwean landscape in the postcolonial era, Dangarembga's narrative hints at the necessity for a re-formulation of identity as the nation charts its way forward, given the hybrid external reality. Like its predecessor and Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness, The Book of Not* inspires the continued struggle for an African identity in the aftermath of colonialism in order to avoid becoming a "not".

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