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# *Critical Representation of Neoliberal Capitalism and Uneven Development in Tsitsi Dangarembga's This Mournable Body*

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*This article focuses on Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel This Mournable Body (2018), which completes her trilogy on Tambudzai Sigauke's life story in relation to the neoliberal political order in contemporary Zimbabwe. The country has been recently referred to as cultivating ultra-neoliberal policies, and, in such a framework, state repression becomes replaced by state negligence towards citizens' economic survival. In This Mournable Body, neoliberalism and the uneven accumulation of wealth are portrayed through the tourism industry. The novel shows deepening forms of injustice and economic discrepancies in neoliberal Zimbabwe, where impoverished groups of people, living in the cities as well as outside them, are compelled to commodify their lives for the needs of the tourism industry in order to get by. In the novel, Tambudzai emerges as an egoistic character, as she epitomises a new type of neoliberal citizen–subject who is ready to maximise her own benefits at the expense of others and whose ambitions remain only in her own career. I analyse her character with regard to the so-called sell-out mentality; however, Dangarembga depicts Tambudzai's unpatriotic behaviour as a defence mechanism, which finally gives way to full mourning at the end of the novel. Dangarembga's critical characterisation of the neoliberal forms of capitalism is juxtaposed with her representation of an alternative unhu/ubuntu business model at the end of the novel. However, even if Dangarembga proposes unhu/ubuntu business as a Zimbabwean form of balanced capitalist enterprise, I argue that neoliberal markets are taking advantage of these African forms of capitalism as well. The romanticised ending of the novel slightly undermines its otherwise astute illustration of uneven development in neoliberal Zimbabwe, which contributes to rural and urban poverty, communal rupture and drastic forms of citizen competition.*

**Keywords:** Tsitsi Dangarembga; *This Mournable Body*; tourism; neoliberalism; uneven development; Zimbabwe

This article focuses on Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *This Mournable Body* (2018), which completes her trilogy on Tambudzai Sigauke's life story in relation to the neoliberal political order in contemporary Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> The country has been recently referred to as cultivating

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was published as Chapter 5, 'Seductive Promises of Wealth: Ideological Misrecognition and Avoidance of Responsibility in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of*

ultra-neoliberal policies, and, in such a framework, state repression becomes replaced by state negligence towards citizens' economic survival.<sup>2</sup> In *This Mournable Body*, neoliberalism and the uneven accumulation of wealth are portrayed through the tourism industry. The novel shows deepening forms of injustice and economic discrepancies in neoliberal Zimbabwe, where impoverished groups of people, living in the cities as well as outside them, are compelled to commodify their lives for the needs of the tourism industry in order to get by. This creates the political and economic setting for Dangarembga's final novel in the trilogy, as *This Mournable Body* illustrates Tambudzai's continuing struggle for survival and desperate attempt to gain wealth. I claim that Dangarembga's characterisation of Tambudzai as a truly disillusioned character, full of resentment, illustrates some deep and problematic undercurrents in contemporary southern African existence such as uneven development and ongoing poverty. The novel highlights contemporary Zimbabweans' predicament as it reveals, mainly through Tambudzai's character, how communal solidarity is at risk both in the cities and in rural communities, where characters are compelled to fight for daily survival and to sell out to the tourism industry. Dangarembga's representation of the neoliberal hold on subjectivity and economy enables her to depict the ways in which new models of sociality emerge as subjects face endless competition in the field of daily survival. In the novel, the most drastic examples of such new subjectivities are Tambudzai and her competitive colleague Pedzi.

What makes Dangarembga's characterisation of Tambudzai particularly intriguing, yet also puzzling, is her critical authorial distance from the protagonist's actions. Tambudzai's neglect of responsibility toward others is condemned in the novel; Dangarembga's criticism of Tambudzai's sell-out mentality is placed against the backdrop of neoliberalism, which justifies a person's neglect towards the well-being of other members of the community. The novel thus turns Tambudzai into a dislikable character, who is willing to sell everything, including her own family, in order to gain wealth. The reader might feel puzzled and incapable of identifying with the protagonist, whose plight in life could be more readily related to in the earlier novels. Along these lines, Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro writes,

I felt angry at Tsitsi Dangarembga for writing *This Mournable Body*. It was a very difficult book for me to read ... The Tambu of *This Mournable Body* is like a wounded animal. I loved her because she was still my 'nervous' Tambu but I was horrified because she was hateful.<sup>3</sup>

The novel's second-person narrative technique further complicates the process of identifying with its protagonist, effectively problematising the reader's role as witness to Tambudzai's anger and the actions to which it leads. The novel's 'you' refers to the main character, but it simultaneously breaks the safe distance between the reader and the fictive world, which is safeguarded by the first-person narration in the trilogy's first two novels, as

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*Not and This Mournable Body*', in M. Niemi, *Complicity and Responsibility in Contemporary African Writing: The Postcolony Revisited* (London, Routledge, 2021), pp. 115–40.

2 For a discussion of neoliberal forces in Zimbabwe, see P. Bond and M. Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice* (Durban, University of Natal Press, 2003); P. Carmody, *Tearing the Social Fabric: Neoliberalism, Deindustrialization and the Crisis of Governance in Zimbabwe* (Westport, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001); D. Moore, 'Neoliberal Globalisation and the Triple Crisis of "Modernisation" in Africa: Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 22, 6 (2001), pp. 909–29; S. Moyo, 'Land Concentration and Accumulation after Redistributive Reform in Post-Settler Zimbabwe', *Review of African Political Economy*, 38, 128 (2011), pp. 257–76.

3 R. Chikafa-Chipiro, 'Tsitsi Dangarembga and the Zimbabwean Pain Body', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32, 4 (2020), p. 446.

the third novel's second-person narrative approach brings the reader closer to the aggression and violence committed by its main character. However, as I hope to show in the upcoming analysis, the portrayal of Tambudzai's anger and misery constitutes a new type of contemporary writing that offers a glimpse of the brutal pain to which people can be subjected in trying circumstances. I agree with Anne W. Gulick, who claims that *This Mournable Body* is one of the 'novels we need rather than the novels we want in the twenty-first century'.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, there are certain ideological undertones that make Dangarembga's depiction of Tambudzai's plight more problematic. While Tambudzai is under the neoliberal capitalist spell, she acts in a selfish manner; nevertheless, the ending of *This Mournable Body* suggests that she is finally freed from it, which enables her to mourn the losses that she has experienced in her life and reconnect to her community. As the final novel in a trilogy, it is understandable that Dangarembga wanted to bring some closure to Tambudzai's troubling life story; she makes this clear when she claims that 'I was determined to bring both Tambudzai and Nyasha [Tambudzai's cousin] through'.<sup>5</sup> However, in the act of bringing Tambudzai through, the novel creates an ideological division between patriots and sell-outs. Tambudzai acts as a sell-out earlier in the trilogy, but in this novel her selfish, hateful behaviour towards her community and family is highlighted until the very end. After she has crossed all the possible moral lines and humiliated herself and others, she is finally ready to listen to her female ex-combatant friends and family members who have criticised her behaviour throughout the novel. Their values are expressed as the moral backbone of the community, and Tambudzai's earlier immorality is polarised against this moral stability.

Along these lines, I will discuss in the last section of this article the ways in which the novel juxtaposes black capitalism as a form of economic enterprise that focuses on community building and regeneration with white capitalism, which is depicted as a destructive force, harming communal existence and personal well-being alike. Hence Dangarembga's novel does not renounce capitalism but rather develops a new form of it, in which female war veterans join forces against global capitalist and patriarchal pressures by embracing business models resembling *ubuntu/unhu* capitalism. Tambudzai's upwardly mobile mentality is accepted in this framework, even if the company she works for profits from the violent situation in the country, partially created by neoliberal policies. The novel creates a romanticised version of female patriotism, which becomes a counterpoint to the patriarchal society and overarching white capitalist power; however, while so doing, it fails to see that *ubuntu/unhu* capitalism also often becomes exploited by neoliberal forces.

Regardless of its ending and its ideologically prone criticism of the sell-out mentality, though, *This Mournable Body* represents contemporary economic and societal ruptures and desperate subjects and communities in a truly haunting manner. The net of deepening forms of inequality, the desire for success, new forms of consumer subjectivity and capital accumulation through dispossession continue to plague the southern African world, even if Tambudzai is finally saved from the evil claws of neoliberalism. In the following analysis, I will first concentrate on *This Mournable Body* as a novel that completes Dangarembga's trilogy about Tambudzai's life. I will briefly contextualise her character in the earlier novels, as it is crucial to see how her values and wishes concerning economic success are developed and focused on throughout the trilogy, and how they are portrayed with regard to white capitalism, which ultimately turns her away from her own roots. Then I will move on to

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4 A.W. Gulick, 'Oppressive Sameness and the Novels We Need: Tsitsi Dangarembga's Challenge to Postcolonial Readerly Desires in the Twenty-First Century', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32, 4 (2020), p. 465.

5 T. Dangarembga, 'Writing as Witnessing: The Tambudzai and Nyasha Trilogy', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32, 4 (2020), p. 468.

discuss Tambudzai's plight in turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe as the country struggled in the economic crisis partially introduced by the World Bank's and IMF's neoliberal economic policies, which have contributed to both inner-city and rural crises in the country.

### ***This Mournable Body in Dangarembga's Trilogy***

Tambudzai's earlier life is portrayed in the two first novels, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), and the last novel cannot be fully comprehended without the framework that they provide. In Tambudzai, Dangarembga has deliberately created a main character who becomes more and more complicit in a system that reproduces structural injustice, first in fictional Rhodesia (in *Nervous Conditions*) and later in Zimbabwe in *The Book of Not* and *This Mournable Body*. Dangarembga shows the main character's development over several decades as the story begins in Rhodesia, continues through the independence war and Robert Mugabe's accession and ends in Zimbabwe in the early 21st century. Dangarembga boldly touches upon questions of female agency in such trying conditions as Tambudzai's. For instance, in *Nervous Conditions*, the protagonist becomes determined to find her way out of rural poverty and also refuses to be silenced by patriarchal structures. In fact, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* has gained status as an important feminist representation of overlapping patriarchal, national and colonial power structures in Rhodesia.<sup>6</sup> Tambudzai's need to prioritise her own well-being, however, is shown to lead to alienation rather than fulfilment, particularly in *The Book of Not* and *This Mournable Body*. In the story of Tambudzai, we thus follow the trajectory of alienation from older cultural values and national independence struggles and movement toward a prioritisation of self-interest.

Dangarembga's Tambudzai is a complex character throughout the trilogy, but her choices in life are more critically examined in the last two novels. Tambudzai's refusal to acknowledge communal responsibility is first developed in *The Book of Not*, where she is depicted as distancing herself from the independence war in order to study at Sacred Heart, the privileged white college to which she was accepted at the end of the first novel. She drifts further away from the group effort and becomes more interested in the colonial culture instead, as her interests remain only in her own education and future career: 'I was ... being transformed into a young woman with a future. What I was most interested in was myself and what I would become'.<sup>7</sup> The novel enacts a slightly problematic move towards re-emphasising a division between patriots and sell-outs in independent Zimbabwe, as Tambudzai deliberately distances herself from the country's heroic political period associated with the liberation war or the Second Chimurenga. The novel's overemphasis on Tambudzai's troubled character as a sell-out suggests a patriotic undertone. In other words, in patriotic history, as Ranka Primorac puts it, 'all the actors within the nation's political sphere may be described as either "patriots" or "sellouts"'.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Dangarembga has

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6 Many critics have emphasised the need to study overlapping vectors of patriarchal and colonial power structures in the novel. See, for example, S. Nair, 'Melancholic Women: The Intellectual Hysteric(s) in "Nervous Conditions"', *Research in African Literatures*, 26, 2 (1995), p. 137; C.M. Shaw, "'You had a daughter, but I am becoming a woman': Sexuality, Feminism and Postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*", *Research in African Literatures*, 38, 4 (2007), p. 9; C. Sugnet, '*Nervous Conditions*: Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon', in O. Nnaemeka (ed.), *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (Abingdon, Routledge, 1997), p. 33; H. Ahmad, *Postnational Feminisms: Postcolonial Identities and Cosmopolitanism in the Works of Kamala Markandaya, Tsitsi Dangaembga, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Anita Desai* (New York, Peter Lang, 2009), p. 54; D. Bahri, 'Disembodying the Corpus: Postcolonial Pathology in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions"', *Postmodern Culture*, 5, 1 (1994), para. 17.

7 T. Dangarembga, *The Book of Not* (Oxford, Ayebia Clarke, 2006), p. 11.

8 R. Primorac, *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* (London, Tauris, 2006), p. 10.

discussed Tambudzai's character in connection with the sell-out mentality that she epitomises in *The Book of Not*: '[i]n the war situation described in *The Book of Not*, there is obvious complicity from people who were called "sell outs" and there was the psychological complicity that is so typical of oppressed people, as demonstrated by Tambudzai'.<sup>9</sup> Dangarembga further refers to the character's 'mental slavery', as she becomes complicit in unjust social structures that are also expected to help her to advance her situation in a racist, patriarchal society, although they always fail to do so, as the school, for instance, remains a deeply segregated institution. On the one hand, then, the novel repeatedly depicts Tambudzai as a victim of racist structures that she refuses to confront as such and, on the other hand, it emphasises her sell-out mentality.

I argue that Dangarembga is interested in examining the psychology of this complicity but, at the same time, she seems to hold on to the division between patriots and sell-outs. In other words, she does not challenge these positions as too simplistic or ideologically problematic, even if they might suggest certain political ramifications, particularly in the context of independent Zimbabwe. *The Book of Not* is set in the liberation struggle and the period of early independence, and it focuses on Tambudzai's sell-out mentality and her exploitation in white institutions. This is, no doubt, an extremely important story to tell, but the way it is told might put into parenthesis other violent political questions of the early 1980s, a period when Zimbabwe was haunted not only by long-lasting colonial discourses but also by new, violent political ideologies targeting minorities. As Anne W. Gulick notes, 'it is difficult to attribute the novel's silencing of gukurahundi *entirely* to characters' ignorance, given the crucial function that ignorance – willed and otherwise – played in Zimbabwe's political economy in the early 1980s'.<sup>10</sup> In *The Book of Not*, there is a touch of nativist aesthetics as the novel risks emphasising racial discrimination at the expense of other political and violent complexities in independent Zimbabwe.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the novel is based on a certain ideological simplification of the matters represented.<sup>12</sup>

That being said, I am not suggesting that Dangarembga's depiction of the liberation war or independent Zimbabwe follows Mugabe's or Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa's political lines in any way. In fact, in July 2020, the novelist was arrested for protesting against the repressive and corrupt politics of the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU[PF]) in contemporary Zimbabwe. In addition, even if she has not made political violence against minorities an explicit theme in her fiction, her overall portrayal of independent Zimbabwe suggests no romanticised party-line ideological representation of the country. Instead, Dangarembga emerges as a very critical thinker in a recent article in which she criticises the contemporary predatory cultural situation.

While the nature of personhood extant in Zimbabwe today is different from the abjection of capitulation to oppression that was the norm in pre-independence society, other abjections of greed, lust, dishonesty, bloodthirstiness and corruption have taken hold, leading to a different

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9 'An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga', *Makewana's Daughters*, 23 (November 2015), available at <https://makewana.org/2015/11/an-interview-with-tsitsi-dangarembga/>, retrieved 8 July 2021.

10 A.W. Gulick, 'Decolonial Temporalities in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*', *Research in African Literatures*, 50, 4 (2020), p. 47. The questions of political silencing of Gukurahundi are addressed by Jocelyn Alexander and by Novuyo Rosa Tshuma elsewhere in this issue.

11 In addition to that, the notion of patriotism and the polarisations between black and white population can bear troubling connotations with the official ZANU(PF) ideology, as Mugabe's nativist discourse also produced an image of Zimbabwe as a homogeneous Shona culture. G. Neube, 'Of Dirt, Disinfection and Purgation: Discursive Construction of State Violence in Selected Contemporary Zimbabwean Literature', *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 55, 1 (2018), p. 45.

12 Ranka Primorac has criticised *The Book of Not*, 'as a feminised version of the Mugabeist nationalist narrative', R. Primorac, 'Southern States: New Literature from and about Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 1 (2010), p. 250.



kind of extraction, an internal one that is comparable to a cancer. It seems that Zimbabwe has internalised the failure that was bequeathed to it by a colonial system bent on wrenching out all that was of value.<sup>13</sup>

As this clearly indicates, Dangarembga is thoroughly disappointed with the current situation in the country, and her protagonist Tambudzai seems to embody most of the questionable qualities that she mentions here. In fact, Dangarembga's frustration with the low morale in the country is epitomised in the character of Tambudzai, who is full of hatred and greed in *This Mournable Body*.

However, I still maintain that in *This Mournable Body*, as in *The Book of Not*, there are certain ideological simplifications at play when Tambudzai's negative personality is portrayed. These troubling characteristics, including greed and dishonesty, seem to be personality traits that can be traced back to colonial power and its manipulation of black Zimbabweans in the novel. Tambudzai is a clear example of this as, in the previous two novels, Tambudzai's development of questionable behaviour patterns is represented first in the framework of colonial schooling and later in white capitalist companies. Tambudzai seems to act selfishly because she is alienated from her roots. She suffers from mental slavery and acts against other black women, and the novel suggests that this happens at least partly because she is still mentally colonised, and thus aspires to western affluence. Nevertheless, there is also an indication that this is not the real Tambudzai but an emotionally frozen one, and, once the real Tambudzai wakes up from her bad dream, she can go home again and reconnect to feminist patriotic values, which are beyond criticism.

I agree with Dangarembga's criticism of the cruel capitalist endgame, but I am not sure that there are any easy solutions to these problems in the contemporary neoliberal world order in general or in Zimbabwe more particularly. Instead, disruptive economic and communal changes have redrawn the picture of the everyday survival game. Along these lines, Chikafa-Chipiro notes, 'I walk the streets of Harare and meet many other Tambus. Having a job and not having one are easily interchangeable conditions. Tambu's jealousies, her tears, and her madness are not ngozi [avenging spirit]'.<sup>14</sup> The new type of citizen-consumer is forced to adapt to the structure of daily economic competition, and it is precisely the frustration created by the failure to succeed under such circumstances that Dangarembga's novel so carefully discerns.

## **The Representation of Uneven Development in Neoliberal Zimbabwe**

In the novel, neoliberal conditions are made the theme in three particular ways: first of all, neoliberal political changes have created a major economic crisis in the country, and Tambudzai's drastic disappointments and unlucky decisions need to be interpreted in these poverty-stricken circumstances of the turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe. Secondly, the novel also represents, although unwittingly so, neoliberal promises of success, which mislead people struggling in poverty. Thirdly, Dangarembga's portrayal of neoliberal ideology in the novel is also connected to her criticism of Tambudzai's sell-out mentality, which becomes evident through her neglect of the well-being of others: she is a sell-out because she deliberately turns against other members of the black community in order to find a way to succeed in the white capitalist world. According to neoliberal moral codes, everyone is expected to focus on their own well-being at the expense of others, which, as a phenomenon, leads to major ruptures in community building in both urban and rural settings. Before

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<sup>13</sup> Dangarembga, 'Writing as Witnessing', p. 469.

<sup>14</sup> Chikafa-Chipiro, 'Tsitsi Dangarembga', p. 447.

moving on to my analysis of the novel, a brief overview of neoliberal policies in Zimbabwe is needed.

David Harvey defines neoliberalism as ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’.<sup>15</sup> In a neoliberal arena, state regulations are dismantled in order to serve the needs of capitalist enterprises.<sup>16</sup> In the context of African economies, neoliberalism is infamously related to ‘the radical economic policies forced upon the South, on countries like Zimbabwe, by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF)’.<sup>17</sup> Via these monetary institutions, wealthy western countries can put pressure on African states to deregulate their economies.<sup>18</sup> In Zimbabwe, the implementation of the structural adjustment policies created by the World Bank/IMF marked a decisive moment in the country’s economic independence, because, at the beginning of Mugabe’s era, between 1980 and 1989, economic regulation practices were still in place. However, as E.A. Brett notes, Zimbabwe ‘then adopted a classical ESAP [Economic Structural Adjustment Programme] involving the removal of many restrictions on trade, credit, foreign exchange, investments, and labour’.<sup>19</sup> The ESAP introduced by the World Bank/IMF expired in 1995, but, regardless of this, Padraig Carmody and Scott Taylor argue, it was the most significant factor, along with ‘the absence of a competitive electoral system’, in contributing to ‘the economic and political crisis engulfing the country from the mid-1990s onwards’.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 2011, before Mugabe’s regime came to its end, Munyaradzi Hwami argues that ‘from 1991 to the present, the population of Zimbabwe has been under siege by the neoliberal agenda, at the behest of the ZANU PF government’.<sup>21</sup> Questions concerning Zimbabwe’s relationship with neoliberal economic policies remain too intricate for me to do justice to them fully here. What remains important with reference to my analysis of Dangarembga’s novel is the economic crisis that the ESAP partially initiated in turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe, where, Carmody and Taylor write, ‘[t]he budget deficit for 2002 was estimated to be 17.7% of gross domestic income (GDP) ... [and i]nflation has skyrocketed and social indicators are deteriorating. Real incomes per head have fallen 23% in the last five years’.<sup>22</sup> These are more or less the conditions that create the framework for Tambudzai’s desperate life in the novel, and so it is important to locate Tambudzai’s fight for self-improvement and her resentment in Zimbabwean society *circa* 2000.

The beginning of the novel represents Tambudzai as a person struggling in urban poverty. As Carmody and Taylor indicate, the urban industrial sector was the one that was initially hit, owing to the economic adjustment policies designed by the World Bank and IMF. They write that ‘it was workers who were most affected by increasing unemployment and declining real wages under ESAP’.<sup>23</sup> Along these lines, Tambudzai is also desperately trying

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15 D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

16 See W. Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 42.

17 M. Hwami, ‘Understanding the Crisis in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: Critical Explorations’, in D. Kapoor (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Neoliberal Globalization, Development and Education in Africa and Asia* (Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2011), p. 103.

18 See J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), p. 83.

19 E.A. Brett, ‘From Corporatism to Liberalization in Zimbabwe: Economic Policy Regimes and Political Crisis, 1980–97’, *International Political Science Review*, 26, 1 (2005), p. 93.

20 P. Carmody and S. Taylor, ‘Industry and the Urban Sector in Zimbabwe’s Political Economy’, *African Studies Quarterly*, 7, 2 (2003), p. 54.

21 Hwami, ‘Understanding the Crisis’, p. 110.

22 Carmody and Taylor, ‘Industry and the Urban Sector’, p. 53.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 54.



to find a job: '[e]very time you send off an application you command yourself neither to wait for nor to expect a response. Of course you do precisely this, spending many hours looking through the window for the postman'.<sup>24</sup> The novel further refers to massive inflation and to the educated population leaving the country: 'you ... pore with growing alarm over the reports appearing in the media more and more frequently of people with degrees like yours, obtained more recently, leaving the country for work in South Africa, Namibia, and even Mozambique and Zambia'.<sup>25</sup> Tambudzai contemplates the complexities of her current situation when she thinks to herself: '[y]ou with your worthless education intensifying your beggary, making it all the more ludicrous'.<sup>26</sup> Her high level of education, which she so desperately sought in the earlier novels, further boosts her experience of frustration and disappointment, as chances for self-improvement remain scarce. In many ways, then, Tambudzai's puzzling character in the last novel can be read in connection with the contemporary Zimbabwean economic struggles. Tambudzai is shown to struggle precisely in this crisis, and her existence exemplifies inner-city poverty, as she struggles to buy food for herself:

[l]eaving the yard, you force a spring into your step in order to walk like a woman with lots of dollar bills lying in the bottom of the bag ... Completing your purchases [at the store], you do not want to go out again, because your bag bulges with budget-pack plastic bottles, smallest-size sachets, and minute boxes ... everything broadcasts your poverty.<sup>27</sup>

Trying to make ends meet, she creates a new principle: 'less eating is less spending', and, in order to survive, she steals vegetables from her landlady's garden.<sup>28</sup>

Another aspect of neoliberal political ideology that is represented in the novel concerns its false promises of success, which lead to failure and resentment. The neoliberal promises 'based on a belief that *anyone* can succeed in a free market economy given hard work and dedication' can be misleading in any situation.<sup>29</sup> However, Brad Weiss brings up a key issue concerning the uneven accumulation of wealth, which creates a particularly dangerous and beguiling context for the seductive promises of success in African countries, where economic discrepancies are particularly pronounced:

Africans today find themselves seduced by the promise of compelling forms of identification and affiliation, which are facilitated by the presence of commodities and electronically disseminated images ... At the same time, the means required to participate in these modes of interconnection seem to be available to an ever-narrowing range of people.<sup>30</sup>

Such promises, inviting identification, are everywhere; however, the possibility of enjoying their benefits is more elusive than ever.

Along these lines, Tambudzai is stubbornly devoted to the idea of upward mobility, which drives her every decision and reveals her self-centredness, and Dangarembga's criticism of her character's egoism becomes clear through these many puzzling examples of Tambudzai's arrogance. In order to move ahead in her life, she, for instance, takes advantage of her cousin Nyasha's hospitality: 'your cousin is your crossing place, your stepping-stone to becoming the remarkable, well-to-do person you wish

24 T. Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body* (Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2018), p. 84.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–5.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

28 *Ibid.*

29 W. Gent, 'Tokenism and Cultural (Mis)Recognition in the "Man with the Golden Voice"', *Howard Journal of Communications*, 28, 3 (2017), p. 219 (emphasis added).

30 B. Weiss, 'Introduction: Contentious Futures: Past and Present', in B. Weiss (ed.), *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age* (Leiden, Brill, 2004), p. 8.

to be'.<sup>31</sup> It is crucial that she sees Nyasha only as a stepping-stone, rather than as a caring family member who, in fact, at some point, gives shelter to Tambudzai when she returns from a mental hospital. The question of upward mobility interferes with her growing relationship with Christine, her landlady's niece, as well: after Christine has criticised 'people [like Tambudzai] who harbor the ... intense cravings for advancement',<sup>32</sup> Tambudzai concludes: 'Christine has shown she cannot contribute to any progress in your life ... [and you decide] to keep your distance from the ex-combatant as your next step toward advancement'.<sup>33</sup> The need for material self-sufficiency, as well as the ambition to accumulate personal wealth and to polish her social status, drives Tambudzai ahead in her life. Not only does Tambudzai want to become wealthy, but '[y]ou vow to succeed more than anyone in your family has managed'.<sup>34</sup> Rather than caring for her family and people around her, she wants to show off her success. This is Tambudzai's mindset throughout the novel: whenever she starts bouncing back from her latest setback, she starts calculating her next move on her path to success. Only wealth and status count; everything else – including political issues and women's right for safety – are erased from her mind: '[y]ou understand that people like you, who are clawing their way forward, do not have time for [politics]'.<sup>35</sup> Tambudzai refuses to acknowledge any form of social responsibility in a society marked by racism, sexism and extreme economic discrepancies, and this mindset turns her into a lonely character. She is depicted almost as a victim of this capitalist thinking, to which she has been exposed in the earlier novels as well.

Uneven development, as a process 'marked by persistent differences in levels and rates of economic development between different sectors of the economy',<sup>36</sup> remains markedly grim in southern Africa, where resources and wealth are particularly unevenly distributed.<sup>37</sup> Hans Müller *et al.*, for instance, state that 'Africa's most important challenge is the uneven development within and between countries and the pressing issues relating to poverty in Southern Africa and the continent as a whole'.<sup>38</sup> This phenomenon is experienced directly by Tambudzai, who has internalised narratives of upward mobility but struggles in poverty, along with many others and, as a result, is desperate and full of resentment. In such conditions of constant competition over daily survival, communal and personal well-being are at stake. At the same time, the novel also shows Tambudzai's reliance on neoliberal ideology, which introduces a new notion of responsibility. In this novel mode of thinking, as Emelie Hache puts it, 'responsible behavior consists of becoming individually responsible for one's own well-being'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, neoliberal forces rewrite the notion of social responsibility as a concept that would otherwise connect the conscientious individual to the well-being of other members of her community; people are not morally bound to think about others' suffering, because everyone is responsible for his or her survival only. This is Tambudzai's mindset: not only does she neglect others' well-being, but she also turns against them, particularly young black women. In addition, through Tambudzai's and others'

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31 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, pp. 133–4.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

36 D. Harris, 'Uneven Development', in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), no page.

37 See C. Nengomasha and H. Magidimisha, 'Uneven Development and Conflict in Southern Africa: Interrogating the Patterns and Accumulation Processes', in H. Magidimisha *et al.* (eds), *Crisis, Identity and Migration in Post-Colonial Southern Africa* (New York, Springer, 2018), p. 39.

38 H. Müller *et al.*, 'Introduction', in H. Müller, P. Mekgwe and M. Mhloyi (eds), *Values and Development in Southern Africa* (Dakar, CODESRIA, 2013), p. 3.

39 E. Hache, 'Is Responsibility a Tool of Neo-Liberal Governmentality?', *Raisons politiques*, 28, 4 (2007), pp. 61–2.

actions, the novel reveals how this phenomenon drastically alters both urban and rural communities.

Dangarembga's novel poignantly portrays dire urban depression, violence and hopelessness in a scene in which bus travellers, including Tambudzai, attack her young hostel-mate Gertrude. Gertrude's clumsy arrival at the bus and her appearance, collectively thought to be out of place, lights the fire and brings the everyday sufferers together to drag down the girl who is unanimously assumed to think that she is of a higher status than they are. This scene constitutes one of Tambudzai's moments of violence against other black women or girls in the novel, which further highlight her mental coldness as a defence mechanism. Gertrude asks for Tambudzai's help when the mob of violent bus passengers attacks her, as Tambudzai is the only person on the bus who knows her. Yet Tambudzai joins in and is stopped only by a man who intervenes and rescues the young woman. The bus passengers are deprived, impoverished and disillusioned themselves. Their anger against Gertrude is further strengthened when young, impoverished boys, sniffing glue on the pavement, where 'little dams of used condoms and cigarette butts build thick puddles of charcoal-coloured water', join in.<sup>40</sup> Gertrude, who presumably thinks too much of herself, has to take the position of external blame in this passage:

[t]he sight of your beautiful hostelmate fills you with an emptiness that hurts. You do not shrink back as one mind in your head wishes. Instead you obey the other, push forward. You want to see the shape of pain, to trace out its arteries and veins, to rip out to the pattern of its capillaries from the body. The mass of people moves forward. You reach for a stone. It is in your hand. Your arm rises in slow motion.<sup>41</sup>

Tambudzai joins in this violent action that provides curious enjoyment and relief to the crowd: '[i]t is a miracle that has brought everyone together'<sup>42</sup> and 'the crowd pushes forward in its unexpected new freedom'.<sup>43</sup> This reads as a mob mentality, but it also furnishes us with an example of what Wendy Brown calls 'the triumph of the weak as weak',<sup>44</sup> a phenomenon that occurs in situations in which poor turn against poor, leading to what Brown further describes, following Nietzsche, as *ressentiment*, in which subjects become full of 'moralizing revenge' and search for 'a site of external blame upon which to avenge ... [their] hurt and redistribute ... [their] pain'.<sup>45</sup> According to Nietzsche, a subject caught in suffering and *ressentiment* 'instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering[,] ... some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects'.<sup>46</sup> The bus travellers are deprived of hope in their grim daily existence and hence they are ready to target their anger at others. Here, it is Gertrude who becomes a convenient target as her attackers seek to stifle (at least momentarily) the pain inside themselves. For a moment, the possibility of punishing Gertrude anaesthetises Tambudzai's own pain, as she wants 'to see the shape of pain', and thinks, 'if you return to solitude, you will fall back inside yourself where there is no place to hide'.<sup>47</sup> This brutal anger against Gertrude, portrayed early in the novel, can be connected to cruel ideological promises that push subjects into failure as self-made success becomes a quickly evaporating dream in the context of the uneven accumulation of wealth. In this passage, it is not only Tambudzai who is full of resentment;

40 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 17.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

44 W. Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 67.

45 *Ibid.*

46 F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York, Random House, 1967), p. 127.

47 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 21.

it seems to be the general attitude of the people trying to survive in difficult everyday conditions in the urban setting.

The novel thus depicts the situation in which Tambudzai, along with many others, is struggling for daily survival in grim economic circumstances. Dangarembga discerns the depths of collective anger that builds up in the most unfair circumstances, as the novel effectively refuses to romanticise poverty. Instead, the novel shows how poverty can lead to desperation, anger and resentment, as it captures Tambudzai's reactionary mindset in her urban predicament, in which her options are truly truncated. Tambudzai's unfair experiences within the system make her harder against other black women, and her complicity in maintaining and reinforcing unequal power structures becomes painfully evident at many points in the novel. Tambudzai's years of disappointment in life have turned her into a bitter character. She lives in acute misery, hating almost everything around her: '[c]ontempt for everything floods you'.<sup>48</sup> It is, of course, not altogether surprising that we would find a thoroughly embittered and resentful character in the last novel of the trilogy, which has focused on the main character's dream of success against all odds. At the same time, it illustrates Tambudzai's frustrating stubbornness, as she seems to be quite unable to learn from her mistakes but instead relies on reactionary coping mechanisms. However, Tambudzai is fully aware of her unlikable personality. When she is interviewed by her future landlord, she thinks to herself: '[y]ou are growing suspicious at being liked by this woman, knowing there is nothing about yourself that counts as amiable'.<sup>49</sup> All in all, Tambudzai comes across as a truly miserable, lonely character.

The novel depicts Zimbabwe's deep turn-of-the-century economic crisis and its effects on the urban poor, in whom it generates strong feelings of pessimism and anger as individuals try to cope in highly demanding circumstances. Tambudzai's neglect of the well-being of others is presented in a critical light; at the same time, however, its sources are also aptly presented in the novel. The world of desperation that the novel portrays uncannily echoes James Ferguson's words as he contemplates the results of neoliberal adjustment policies in Africa: '[f]or much of Africa, such a new political order has meant not "less state interference and inefficiency," as Western neoliberal reformers imagined, but simply less order, less peace, and less security'.<sup>50</sup>

## **Critiquing the Neoliberal Tourist Industry and Uneven Development**

Through Tracey Stevenson's character, the neoliberal tourism business is also brought into a troubling dialogue with contemporary Zimbabwe and its deep structures of uneven development. In the novel, Tracey's company exemplifies how '[t]ourism development in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa is not an indigenous enterprise. It is part of the colonial, unequal power relations reproduced by neoliberal globalization'.<sup>51</sup> Tracey convinces Tambudzai that "[c]limate tourism is the next big thing. There'll be dozens of ventures like ours in five years' time, but we'll have this country, and if things go the way I intend, even all of southern Africa, covered".<sup>52</sup> In truly capitalist fashion, Tracey is commodifying African cultures and selling them in neat packages to western tourists. Along these lines, Dangarembga's novel features two ethically highly questionable forms of neoliberal tourism: inner city 'poor tourism' and romanticised, authentic 'African village' tourism. These

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48 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, p. 39.

51 F. Adu-Febiri, 'Globalization, Indigenization, and Tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa', in J. Mensah (ed.), *Neoliberalism and Globalization in Africa: Contestations from the Embattled Continent* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 94.

52 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, pp. 187–8.

projects are led by Tracey's two employees, Pedzi and Tambudzai, respectively, who have everything at stake as they are both escaping their own impoverished backgrounds. In Tracey's company, they become rivals, as they have to compete for Tracey's acceptance: the survival game turns citizens, including Pedzi and Tambudzai, into each other's enemies in contemporary fictional Zimbabwe.

Tracey Stevenson's character embodies Whitney Gent's argument that 'rather than representing a universal personhood, neoliberal subjectivities disclose class and race positions, conferring privilege on some people, while disadvantaging others'.<sup>53</sup> While Tracey, the successful neoliberal subject, can have 'ideas' and can even choose between business plans, people struggling in poverty have to be willing to do whatever it takes to survive. Dangarembga effectively contrasts Tracey's Harare with the impoverished one: Tracey's plans for 'ethical' ecotourism are shaped in her stylish office, featuring 'post-colonial Zimbo-chic design', but Tambudzai

catch[es] sight through the other window of another Zimbabwe, whose heart is the Fourth Street Bus Terminus ... The migration is swelling the terminus ... A pall of decaying leaves, pods, plastic wrappers, and peels is heaped at every corner ... Turning your back to the view, you admire the dining suite.<sup>54</sup>

Dangarembga balances the view between the haves and have nots in this contemporary fictional Harare, where Tracey, a block away from abject poverty, creates her 'ethical' business plans concerning ecotourism and feels like a do-gooder. Tracey does not need to think about her survival, whereas Tambudzai and others struggling in poverty have everything at stake. While promises of success are made to everyone, some people, like Tracey, are 'meant' to succeed, while others are not.

Tambudzai's desperate attempts to succeed on the competitive market for scarce jobs finally pay off when she once again meets her long-time rival, this white farmgirl, Tracey. It is interesting that Dangarembga decided to reintroduce this character in the last novel of the trilogy, because it is exactly Tracey's character that epitomises white racism, both in the school and later in Tambudzai's workplace in *The Book of Not*. In that novel, Tambudzai is supposed to receive an award associated with the best O-level test results; however, the segregated institution decides to award it to Tracey instead. The school's betrayal crushes Tambudzai's spirit, but she refuses to accept it as racism. Tracey also betrays her when she is Tambudzai's boss in an advertising company, where, instead of commending Tambudzai for her good work, she gives an award to a white man, who falsely claims credit for the work. This incident has catapulted Tambudzai to her current misery, as, early in *This Mournable Body*, she has given up her work at the company. Tambudzai is full of resentment towards Tracey, and, at an early point in the novel, even attacks a woman who happens to look like Tracey. However, when their paths cross again, Tambudzai realises that Tracey is her ticket to success: '[o]nce more you refuse to harbor anything like resentment or jealousy concerning Tracey's diverse advantages, such as the salary ... that was many times yours ... You swallow the past of your common school days ... you cannot indulge yourself in any discontent'.<sup>55</sup> Instead, she is determined to use this card that life has dealt her and make sure that Tracey will enable her own success: '[a]fter your period of troubles, events are finally conspiring for you and not against you. This development that you desired so strongly is due, of all things, to your meeting with Tracey Stevenson'.<sup>56</sup> When Tambudzai starts working for Tracey, she can finally rely on the dream of upward mobility

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53 Gent, 'Tokenism', p. 218.

54 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 188.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

to come true: 'you will garner recognition for work well done, and with this acknowledgement will finally come the upward mobility you are so hungry for'.<sup>57</sup> She is convinced that Tracey represents her best chance of pulling herself out of poverty. However, there is something almost masochistic about Tambudzai's decision to work for Tracey because of everything she has suffered due to her. It is in her relationship with Tracey that her mental slavery is most pronounced. Bringing Tracey's character into the last novel suggests a repetition of the same move: once again, Tambudzai will be at the mercy of this white woman who has all the power over Tambudzai's career, and again Tambudzai will be disappointed.

Tracey's first business plan concentrates on traditional farm tourism: her Green Jacaranda Safaris are an eco-friendly form of farm tourism located on an 'exotic' Zimbabwean farm, owned by Tracey's brother and managed by Tracey herself. Tambudzai enjoys her job at the farm, where it 'is immensely beautiful ... There is exquisite delight in the ripple of pale gold grass over the plain. Immeasurable peace abides in a giraffe's neck curving brown and deep gold against the sky that shines too blue to look at, as in the animal's velvet plucking of foliage'.<sup>58</sup> Tambudzai's impression uncannily reproduces the image that the tourism industry in Zimbabwe has created for western tourists, as it has focused on reproducing a romanticising and exoticising view of the primitive, rural, magical African landscape and fauna. Not only has Tambudzai enjoyed her time at the farm, but she has liked working with the western tourists, who find her pleasing as well, because, as

a tour supervisor at Green Jacaranda, you are still Zimbabwean enough, which is to say African enough, to be interesting to tourists, but not so strange as to be threatening. They communicate comfortably with your anglicized accent, and you reproduce it assiduously, although you still mutilate some of the diphthongs.<sup>59</sup>

Tambudzai knows how to play her part as a tour guide by adding a touch of exoticism to the already existing 'African mystique' at the farm.

However, due to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, or the Third Chimurenga, starting in 2000, white farms became less secure places for tourists.<sup>60</sup> This change is also brought up in the novel: the farm is not 'safe' anymore, and Tambudzai merely disregards the Third Chimurenga as a nuisance hampering her role as a tour guide working at Green Jacaranda. She is cold to the crisis unfolding around her except for how it affects her:

[e]verybody has heard about ex-combatants setting themselves up as custodians of the nation's development, in spite of displaying no understanding of business that is not related in one way or another to combat. Yes, it was their very ignorance concerning how to move the country forward that stopped the tours on Nils Stevenson's farm. If not for those very veterans, you would be earning your living up in the northwestern gamelands.<sup>61</sup>

Tambudzai does not care about this political dispute but rather mourns the loss of her job.

Dangarembga's novel importantly enlarges the fictional scope on critical questions concerning the tourism industry in Zimbabwe by bringing such questions into the context of the Third Chimurenga. In fact, *This Mournable Body* shows how the tourism industry's insidious attempts at seeking profit flourish in neoliberal Zimbabwe, regardless of the

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57 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

60 T. Chibaya and P. Matura, 'The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and Tourism Development in Zimbabwe during Mugabe's Reign', in M. Mawere, M. Marongwe and F.P.T. Duri (eds), *The End of an Era? Robert Mugabe and a Conflicting Legacy* (Bamenda, Langaa RPCIG, 2018), pp. 385–6.

61 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 264.



question of landownership, as businesses learn to accommodate themselves to new settings that enable profiting from poverty. Tracey considers the claims regarding land justice preposterous and wants to continue her business in an altered form. She explains to Tambudzai:

[w]ell, there's been trouble. Some of those ... thugs ... skellems who call themselves ex-combatants, or war vets ... they've occupied the rondavels. They're hunting the game. And they're camping in our tourists' village! It's not like we're the only ones. There's a whole lot of these ... these invasions. I've been thinking how we can go on. Just the other day I realized, we're safest in a real village. If we can get one.<sup>62</sup>

Tracey is primarily concerned with profits, and, if she cannot continue her business at a farm, she will turn elsewhere. After losing the farm as a safe tourist attraction for white visitors, Tracey suggests that Tambudzai's home village could be turned into an 'authentic' eco-village. This, as well as her other new business plan, particularly profits from poverty, which Tracey does not see as a problem.

Along these lines, the novel portrays how new forms of tourism take advantage of poor people living both in the cities and in the countryside. Tracey's tourism plan for the high-density area, branded 'the Green Jacaranda Ghetto Getaway', constitutes a form of slum tourism.<sup>63</sup> This idea is proposed by Pedzi, who herself comes from a poor background; nevertheless, she is now turning her childhood neighbourhood into a fashionable destination for western tourists willing to try something new. The project is described by Pedzi and Tracey as 'Postmodern Neo-Urban High-Density Networking in Climatically Vulnerable Digitally Disadvantaged Sectors'.<sup>64</sup> This description attempts to turn poverty into an appealing form of contemporary experience, and Tambudzai is astonished at how Pedzi, a former receptionist, 'has created a fine potential out of nothing'.<sup>65</sup> She bitterly admits that 'Pedzi is proof that a girl from the high-density areas can become a successful businesswoman'.<sup>66</sup> When Tracey starts looking into inner-city tourism, she downloads 'several files from the Internet that show there is competition from several countries in the area of high-density suburb tourism'.<sup>67</sup> Regardless of existing competition, 'Tracey concludes that the receptionist's [Pedzi's] proposal is nevertheless sound and marketable. Since it is a novelty in the country, she and Pedzi will prepare it for pitching to potential investors'.<sup>68</sup> Since high-density suburb tourism is a new thing in Zimbabwe, it becomes clear how this might be appealing to western tourists, who have not yet tried this form of tourism in this particular country.

This echoes Ranjan Solomon's reading of tourism, which 'is largely an avenue and instrument for the rich and affluent whose wealth has been accumulated in the context of unjust structures and systems of society'.<sup>69</sup> Wealthy tourists can choose according to their appetites, and economically disadvantaged people have little choice but to serve them. In the process, economic discrepancies might be further deepened.<sup>70</sup> This is also a highly calculated capitalist game, as Tracey and Pedzi have to win the investors to their side. This

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62 *Ibid.*, pp. 225–6.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

68 *Ibid.*

69 R. Solomon, 'Tourism: A Challenger for the 21st century', *eTurboNews* (25 September 2005), available at <http://travelwirenews.com/eTN/27SEPT2005.htm>, retrieved 15 February 2010.

70 M. Hall, 'Editorial Pro-Poor Tourism: Do "Tourism Exchanges Benefit Primarily the Countries of the South"?' in M. Hall (ed.), *Pro-Poor Tourism: Who Benefits?: Perspectives on Tourism and Poverty Reduction* (Bristol, Channel View Publications, 2007), pp. 1–8.

aspect of their project also resonates with Solomon's ideas, as he claims that '[f]or as long as the rich and powerful are going to draw up the parameters and architecture of tourism policy, nothing will change – not much, in any case. How can it? For after all, the investor is there to make profits'.<sup>71</sup> This is also represented in the novel, which shows that, despite the rhetoric that Tracey likes to use, there is hardly anything ethical about these new business plans. In fact, 'Pedzi's sister, in preparation [for western tourists], evicts half a dozen lodgers from her backyard shacks'.<sup>72</sup> When space needs to be cleared for western tourists, the poorest people living in this area have to make the biggest sacrifices.

Tambudzai's home village, which she has avoided like the plague, partly because it would associate her with poverty, is to be turned into another hip destination for western tourists. Again, Tracey is excited about the novelty of this plan, which she explains to Tambudzai:

'We're talking, in principle, real eco values, authenticity, like millet and thatch, milk from the udder. We haven't done that before, that's unlocked value. They're [European business partners] talking the rest of it, you know, all those things they say go with villages on ... uh, on our landmass, like dancing authentically ... minimal, like agh, loincloths, naked ... torsos'.<sup>73</sup>

Tracey is smartly planning on profiting from authentic 'unlocked values' – including exposed bodies – in the 'African village'. Tracey's ethically questionable plans are sold to Tambudzai, however, as they come with a promise of career development. Again, for Tambudzai, everything is for sale if need be, including her own family. Indeed, when her impoverished mother – whom Tambudzai has not visited for years, and who, along her family, has 'nearly died of hunger' while waiting for Tambudzai to remember them – first hesitates but later agrees to the plan of creating the village, Tambudzai is triumphant: her heart is 'beating as you see the distance to your next promotion rapidly decrease'.<sup>74</sup> For Tambudzai, family is hence brought into business calculations. Here morality is equated with rational calculation about cost and gain.

Tambudzai's ecotourism village plan shows how neoliberalism affects not only a person's relationship to the state but also, to quote Carol Greenhouse, 'the lateral relationship among individuals – even intimate relationships, as well as communities'.<sup>75</sup> When Tambudzai's impoverished mother agrees to the plan, her daughter does not really feel shame or worry about the ways in which this might affect her mother and the larger village community; instead, she is excited about her career moving ahead. In these conditions in turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe, neoliberal forces are not only drastically leading to increasingly uneven levels of development, but they are also rewriting the notion of social responsibility as a concept that would connect the conscientious individual to the well-being of other members of her community. As mentioned earlier this new notion of responsibility, in neoliberal ideology, erases the need to think about others' suffering, as everyone is responsible for his or her survival only. Here again, Tambudzai's actions towards her family and home village reveal this attitude in its brutal nakedness.

The part of the novel that represents tourism in the context of the eco-village asks these questions of uneven development and capital accumulation in the framework of rural Zimbabwe. Both Tambudzai and Tracey are also profiting from rural poverty, while

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71 Solomon, 'Tourism'.

72 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 221.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 258.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 235, 249.

75 C. Greenhouse, 'Introduction', in C. Greenhouse (ed.), *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 3.

Tambudzai's impoverished family members and neighbours are compelled to sell out. Tambudzai can also narcissistically enjoy the idea of being the wealthy person arriving in front of her impoverished relatives and their fellow villagers. While driving to the village, the narrator comments: '[y]ou admire yourself in the rearview mirror, looking forward to the splendid entrance you will make in the village'.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, in order to get by, people in the village are forced to exoticise and commodify their own lifestyle (and finally also their own bodies). Tambudzai emerges first as a good omen in the village because she is promising economic growth. However, the novel clearly suggests that she goes too far, as for her there is no other moral rule than economic success. While Tracey knows how to play the neoliberal business games smoothly by emphasising her role as an ethical ecotourism agent, in the case of Tambudzai, it all turns vulgar because her stakes are much more personal than Tracey's, as Tambudzai is expected to exoticise her own family and home village for western tourists. Women, including Tambudzai's mother, are asked to perform an 'authentic African' dance when the western tourists arrive. However, according to Tracey, exotic beads are not enough to create an atmosphere of 'truly African experience'; instead, she pushes Tambudzai to request women to uncover their breasts at the end of the dance, which they do. Nevertheless, this creates an alarming outrage among the villagers and family members, and the highly developed plan for village tourism ends in catastrophe when Tambudzai's mother attacks a German tourist.

In the novel, Tambudzai's actions are portrayed as highly immoral, but, at the same time, Dangarembga's novel touches upon key problems troubling many contemporary African countries. Research focusing on communities in various countries in Africa has suggested, to quote Weiss,

that the neoliberal decomposition of modernity might even call in question the very possibility of sociality. Whereas the contrast of 'the individual' and 'society' was once a crucial (if much debated) motif of modernist models of polity ... under current reforms most concerns for the collective, the community, and the social have been reduced to the calculus of markets driven (putatively) by 'individuals' recognized mainly as consumers making choices.<sup>77</sup>

This suggests that Tambudzai, with her self-centred values, in trying to turn her home village into a successful business plan, is not an anomaly but instead represents 'new models of personhood and subjection ... that envision the "citizen consumer" at the end of Africa's history'.<sup>78</sup> The novel illustrates how models of sociality are challenged in both rural and urban settings when individual gain rather than collective well-being is emphasised. In many ways, Dangarembga's novel shows these ruptures and changes quite compellingly, as it depicts 'anxiety about "modernity" in Africa, the tensions between accumulation and distribution, individuation and collective belonging, achievement and obligation', and shows how these tensions 'inform contemporary concerns to the significant shifts ushered in by the neoliberal production of value'.<sup>79</sup> Tracey, Tambudzai and Pedzi epitomise these new types of citizens, ready to maximise their own benefits at the expense of others.

### **Patriotic Female Community and *Unhu***

Dangarembga does not let neoliberal tensions have the last word in her fictional Zimbabwe in the post-2000 period. Instead, the novel juxtaposes Tambudzai's growing

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<sup>76</sup> Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 230.

<sup>77</sup> Weiss, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

individualisation with the concept of *unhu*, focusing on social responsibility, and hence posits an alternative for understanding social responsibility in contemporary Zimbabwe. In contrast to western egoism,

Ubuntu philosophy (or *Unhu* philosophy in Shona language) ... is generally a philosophy of humanness that underscores and embraces the spirit of sharing, love, oneness, and caring ... This means that the philosophy of *unhu/ubuntu* stresses the values of respect, collectivism, social cohesion, consideration for others and the respect for life and nature: it is a collectivistic approach to life as opposed to Euro-centric approaches that are largely individualistic.<sup>80</sup>

At the end of the novel, Tambudzai, having learned her hard lesson, is brought back into the female community, which consists of characters whose principles revolve around female solidarity and national reconciliation. Her Aunt Lucia and her friend Christine are ex-combatants who are given the last word: Aunt Lucia ‘delivers several lectures ... concerning the *unhu*, the quality of being human, expected of a Zimbabwean woman and a Sigauke who has many relatives who either served or fell in the war’.<sup>81</sup> Being an ex-combatant is a major factor here: Tambudzai is schooled by Aunt Lucia and Christine, who, as ex-combatants, are shown to have a better and more firm understanding of the society and citizen responsibility when compared to Tambudzai’s sell-out mentality. They criticise Tambudzai’s actions throughout the novel and become particularly angry about the ‘ecovillage’ plan, which they urge her to stop: “Do not do it, Tambudzai,” Mainini [Aunt Lucia] warns ... “This new behaviour of yours is just as bad as everything else that we have seen from you. No, it is not even as bad. It is worse, isn’t it?”<sup>82</sup> The novel suggests that Tambudzai should have listened to them and pulled back from the sketchy tourism plan; however, her greediness has pushed her further ahead. At the end of the novel, she finally listens to these women, who provide the moral backbone to the communal existence. The novel suggests that patriotism and having fought in the war of independence are closely connected, a mindset that Tambudzai has criticised earlier but is now in agreement with.

In terms of patriotism and female efforts, it becomes clear that Tambudzai’s sister Netsai, for instance, has paid heavily for Zimbabwean independence during the guerrilla war. Netsai’s difficult life creates a dark contrast to Tambudzai’s self-centredness. Unlike Christine and Lucia, Netsai doesn’t emerge as a heroic ex-combatant; she is left in the background, whereas the novel introduces her two daughters, Tambudzai’s nieces, Concept and Freedom. In Netsai’s character, however, the novel breaks a taboo concerning the independence struggle by suggesting that during the liberation war, Netsai, who, with only one leg, was reduced to a helpless situation, was raped several times by her fellow Zimbabwean combatants in Mozambique. Tambudzai and Netsai’s mother, Mai, talks to the girls: “Weren’t you born by your mother across the border?” Mai rasps on. “At the time she was meant to be fighting? But then, fighting with one leg. What kind of fighting was she meant to do?”<sup>83</sup> As Mai implies, this maimed ex-combatant, rape victim and mother of two illegitimate daughters faces accusations after the war of being a prostitute during the war.<sup>84</sup>

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80 M. Mawere and T. Mubaya, *African Philosophy and Thought Systems: A Search for a Culture and Philosophy of Belonging* (Bamenda, Langaa RPCIG, 2016), pp. 78–9.

81 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 283.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

84 On violence against women in the liberation struggle, see K. Muchemwa, ‘Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities and Fracturing Economies in Zimbabwean Literature’, *Social Dynamics*, 37, 3 (2011), p. 396; T. Lyons, *Guns and Guerilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle* (Trenton, Africa World Press, 2004), p. 268.

The novel highlights the need for female solidarity when official patriotic history is written from the point of view of old men, silencing stories such as Netsai's. The novel goes against male-centered patriotic history, as Flora Veit-Wild notes that "Patriotic history" in its present form ... is history written by men – more specifically, by old men. Hence the "other side" of this history is either told by women or seen through the eyes of children or younger men'.<sup>85</sup> Dangarembga's novel concentrates on this 'other side'; it does not renounce patriotism, however, but rather turns it into a revised female version of it that breaks taboos concerning the official understanding of the independence struggle. Hence Aunt Lucia's lectures 'concerning the unhu' can be understood precisely from this point of view of remembering and respecting the sacrifices others, many of them women, have made for independence.<sup>86</sup> Dangarembga complicates the matter by showing how women, particularly Tambudzai, have also participated in the victimisation of other women. But, at the end of the novel, Tambudzai's body and mind, as the title suggests, are in full mourning as well, mourning that has been plaguing the character throughout the novel but which she has been constantly pushing to the background.<sup>87</sup> Christine rounds off Aunt Lucia's lectures on *unhu* by stating that, after years of mourning and rethinking her actions, Tambudzai's 'education is not only in your head anymore: like hers, now your knowledge is now also in your body, every bit of it, including your heart'.<sup>88</sup>

Economic success has been the key value in Tambudzai's life, and the end of the novel suggests that now she can finally achieve her dream in her new circumstances, which do not create moral complexities. Her Aunt Lucia's *ubuntu/unhu* business flourishes: 'Mainini Lucia's security company ... is doing very well, as there is more war in your country's way of peace than any of you had expected'.<sup>89</sup> This is a highly ironic statement: Lucia is profiting from the violent situation of the country but is potentially also bringing some peace to Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, the text establishes a clear division between her firm and Tracey's business model, which is based on neoliberal values and commodifies all cultural values, as it advertises authentic African experiences of nature, as well as of inner-city and rural poverty. In contrast to this, Mainini Lucia's security company seems to be based on solid African values. It can be understood in relation to 'Afri-capitalism' which, according to Rita Kiki Edozie, 'defines itself as a vehicle that may protect Africans from a destabilizing and exploitative globalization'.<sup>90</sup> With regards to *ubuntu* business, which forms a particular South African version of Afri-capitalism, she states: '[t]he late Nelson Mandela once stated that Ubuntu did not mean that people should not enrich themselves, but rather if they were going to do so, they should do so in order to enable the community around them

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85 F. Veit-Wild, 'De-Silencing the Past: Challenging "Patriotic History": New Books on Zimbabwean Literature', *Research in African Literatures*, 37, 3 (2006), p. 197.

86 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 283.

87 The title of the novel is a deliberate reference to Teju Cole's article 'Unmournable Bodies', which was written in response to the terrorist attack killing the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists in France. He suggests that, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, the western audience quickly forgot the western involvement in war crimes and instead suggested 'that violence by self-proclaimed Jihadists is the only threat to liberty in Western societies'. T. Cole, 'Unmournable Bodies', *New Yorker*, 9 January 2015. The notion of unmournable bodies refers to the unknown victims who 'have been killed by U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan and elsewhere. If past strikes are anything to go by, many of these people will be innocent of wrongdoing'. Cole refers to the writers' role in these situations: '[t]hose of us who are writers will not consider our pencils broken by such killings. But that incontestability, that unmournability, just as much as the massacre in Paris, is the clear and present danger to our collective *liberté*'. As a writer focusing on less visible and less publicly mourned victims of violence, Dangarembga has focused in her novel on Zimbabwean women experiencing violence and pain in their everyday lives haunted by poverty and patriarchy.

88 Dangarembga, *This Mournable Body*, p. 284.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 283.

90 R. Edozie, *'Pan' Africa Rising: The Cultural Political Economy of Nigeria's Afri-Capitalism and South Africa's Ubuntu Business* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 1.

to be able to improve'.<sup>91</sup> Along these lines, Dangarembga establishes the *ubuntu* business model, or a Zimbabwean version of *ubuntu* business, as the most viable form of existence and self-improvement in contemporary Zimbabwe, as it enables a reinvestment in the nation's (and women's) future. It can be read in connection with Mbembe's discussion of '[n]ativist and Afro-radical discourses of the self [which] are both projects of self-regeneration, self-knowledge, and self-rule'.<sup>92</sup> In the novel, *ubuntu/unhu* capitalism, as African market industry, moves toward truly black capitalism, as it remains self-generated, self-ruled and hence removed from the white world. Aunt Lucia's security business is not morally criticised, as it represents self-ruled Afri-capitalism, unlike Tambudzai's involvement in neoliberal capitalism.

However, by distancing Aunt Lucia's security company from neoliberal market forces, the novel also creates a slightly romanticised view of *ubuntu/unhu* business as existing outside neoliberal values. *Unhu/ubuntu* is not for sale in Dangarembga's Zimbabwe, even if, in South Africa, *ubuntuism* has become yet another form of neoliberalism, and should, according to David A. McDonald, be seen within a 'larger discursive effort on the part of the South African state and capital to convince South Africans that market reforms are democratic and egalitarian, while at the same time [it is] serving to defuse opposition to underlying neoliberal change'.<sup>93</sup> In fact, 'low-income South Africans' have not yet 'benefit[ed] from the empty promises of neoliberal ubuntu-ism'.<sup>94</sup> As we can see in the South African context, the neoliberal commodification of values might insidiously utilise polarisations between white and black capitalism in order to maximise profit and smooth over the transition to the new order. Nevertheless, Dangarembga emphasises the difference between neoliberal capitalism and *unhu/ubuntu* business models. Tambudzai's white capitalist ambitions are considered almost a sickness from which she can be cured. Her immoral actions, fuelled by neoliberal rational subjectivity, seem to be a bad phase in her life, in which she behaves as a 'sellout'. As she is brought back to the circle of female patriots, she is gradually released from this mentality. The ending of the final novel of Dangarembga's trilogy emphasises this move back to black female community, whose existence is self-regenerating and ruled outside any association with the white world, which remains a problem because it contaminates African self-rule with its neoliberal business models and corrupted values. In this logic, the novel not only renounces white capitalist discourses but also rejects the misogynistic, patriarchal culture that oppresses women. In the novel, it is a new female collective that strictly condemns Tambudzai's narcissistic actions and serves as a reparative force to Tambudzai's western individualism, as her whitewashed actions are corrected by the community.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, however, economic, racial and gendered dilemmas surely complicate any simplistic reading of present-day existence. When Dangarembga offers 'realistic' truth in the form of a romanticised feminist patriotic existence outside the predatory world, it might put any complex economic and political Zimbabwean realities in parenthesis. In other words, the economic and political problems affecting independent Zimbabwe are somewhat undermined by the end of the novel. The depiction of Tambudzai's intricate mindset, consisting of denial, anger, frustration and bitterness, cannot be so neatly

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91 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

92 A. Mbembe, 'On the Power of the False', trans. J. Inggs, *Public Culture*, 14, 3 (2002), p. 635. Mbembe defines Afro-radicalism as a Marxist-oriented 'imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse'; A. Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', trans. S. Rendall, *Public Culture* 14, 1 (2002), pp. 240–41.

93 D. McDonald, 'Ubuntu Bashing: The Marketisation of "African Values" in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 37, 124 (2010), p. 140.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 150.



resolved if one keeps in mind the various complexities haunting Zimbabwe, especially in terms of its politics, economy and patriarchal structures. Despite the novel's ending, Dangarembga has nevertheless convincingly represented the neoliberal hold on subjectivity in turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe, which is plagued by poverty and a deep, uneven accumulation of wealth, leading to ruptures in communal life in both urban and rural settings. Tambudzai is saved in the novel, but neoliberal market forces continue to exert their pressures on Zimbabwean community; in fact, neoliberalism reconfigures the polarisation between patriots and sell-outs and uses this value system to its own ends. The global marketing forces behind neoliberal values might remain smart enough to exploit ecotourism as much as 'authentic' cultural values, including *unhu* and *ubuntu*, in order to make a profit.

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