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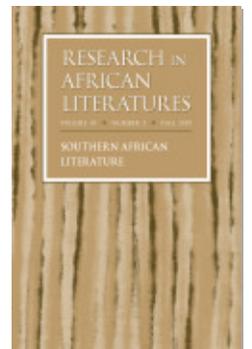
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Space Matters: Form and Narrative in Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*

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Wherever Something Stands, Something Else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. I am the truth, the way, and the life would be called blasphemous or simply absurd. . . .
—Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*

You have to keep moving. . . . Moving, all the time. Otherwise you get trapped.
—Nyasha, *Nervous Conditions*

Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is an ingeniously written novel. Its appeal goes beyond Dangaremba's arresting interest in (post)colonial, gender, and cultural politics and the fact that the novel came out at a moment in Zimbabwean history when there was little supportive space for women in that country who wished to write themselves into the public sphere and discourse by pursuing publishing careers, particularly in English language (see George and Scott). The novel's biggest strength lies in its superior crafting or, rather, in how its narrative instruments, from the obvious to the veiled, enhance effectively the work's layers of meaning. For what we find on close reading of this book is a text that exemplifies the notion that content and form complement each other and thus are inseparable. In *Nervous Conditions*, this reciprocity shows in how different narrative elements are interwoven skillfully and tightly with the umbrella motif of space, all performing as organic components that work not alone but cooperatively and hence successfully to carry the weight of Dangaremba's serious message. The novel's overarching moral against hegemony, exclusion, and stasis and its thematic support of prudence, balance, and growth are reflected variously in how the story is told and the ingredients Dangaremba, as author, assembles to make it come alive. As Derek Wright has stated, "*Nervous Conditions* is a work in the naturalist tradition, but it is remarkable for its high level of imaginative organization and contains some finely judged poetic symbolism" (111). Rosemary Gray (1995) and Gilian Gorle (1997) echo that assertion, noting that the novel is sophisticated and complex.

In reading this complicated novel, then, critics have talked about, among other things, Dangaremba's feminist leanings, her appropriations of Frantz Fanon, her manipulation of food, language, the bildungsroman, psychosis, the poetics of vocal resistance and, in this case, the matter of space. A hugely important but critically underdeveloped issue in the novel, the idea of space has to date received what seems to be its more involved treatment in Biman Basu's insightful essay, "Trapped and Troping: Allego-

ries of the Transnational Intellectual" (*ARIEL* 1997). While Basu's observations reinforce the present discussion in some ways, his focus serves nonetheless as my departure point.

"Trapped" proffers the thesis that *Nervous Conditions* could be seen alongside other postcolonial "fictional texts in which their narrators or protagonists function as surrogates for writers as transnational intellectuals" who query and reject Western intellectual structures while, paradoxically, occupying them (7). Identifying Tambu as one of those developing transnational thinkers (11), "Trapped" engages, among other things, the novel's "meticulous [. . .] attention to physical space, both geographical and bodily" (7) and also the characters' movement through "the tertiary space of the homestead, the mission, and the Convent" (11). As Basu rightly argues, "The relationship among the three spaces is fluid" and their boundaries are continually redrawn (11). "Trapped," however, does not quite deal with the other aspects of the novel's spatial configurations. It fails, specifically, to engage either the gender, character, and familial implications of the text's structural, ideological, and narrative spaces or how the characters' actions and their very movements, particularly Tambu's, tie directly to the novel's open-end plot and its journey motif and hence advance the narrative's resistance to stasis—an idea Basu recognizes as well (13). With the interplay of space and the novel's other devices not explored in "Trapped," and with some of the available criticism on the text stressing more conventionally the operations of a single narrative apparatus relative to theme while overlooking the explicatory possibilities of the story's various implements working together, a significant gap is left in our understanding of this important novel.

This essay attempts to close that gap a little more by offering a reading that conjoins toward thematic explication the focal idea of space and a number of the text's other literary elements, namely: "point of view," character, plot, action, narrative. I argue more specifically that intertwaving those resources, *Nervous Conditions* explores the following premise: It asserts that its female characters' plight is codified in various domestic and public spatial structures, ideologies, and experiences that differently impede the women's lives under (post)colonization, which itself is an unfinished tale of history and identity—a work in process, in progress, in motion. It is, in other words, an open and ongoing human-journey, sometimes tense, incoherent, and transgressive, one whose continuity makes it impossible to offer a clear narrative conclusion. The novel points out concomitantly that survival and transcendence of that colonization experience and its stresses demand that one, especially the ex-colonial, remain ideologically flexible rather than unbending and repressive. Because so many value systems (indigenous, Western, and others) now collide, and because this journey into history, identity, and growth is complicated and enduring, it behooves the ex-colonial not only to select wisely from among the rival values what is most useful but also to keep "moving" intellectually and balancing as healthily as possible the choices made. That is the new reality.

Whether played out in the experience of the Igbo of Nigeria or that of the Shona of Zimbabwe depicted in *Nervous Conditions*, this "new order"

could be summed up in the following paraphrase of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. The white man has had a cataclysmic encounter with Africa and Africans and things have fallen asunder in many ways. In the context of African experience, nothing is or can remain *stable* again, not to say, however, that anything ever was fixed, speaking culturally. How people create or amend space for and manage the realities of the new dispensation, be they cultural, ideological, or gendered, determine literally their ability to escape or at least mitigate the consequences of restrained growth, an adverse experience that Nyasha Sigauke, the novel's rebellious teenager, equates to entrapment. As evident in the Sigaukes' intrafamilial battles, one's uncompromising insistence on absolutes, that one is a/the corporeal metropolis and must be so revered, is not only absurd but also inimical to human growth, parent-child relationship, and to the *health* of that foundation of African peoplehood—the family—whether in colonial Rhodesia or elsewhere today.

Set in colonial Rhodesia from the 1950s up to the period shortly before the country's independence in 1980, *Nervous Conditions* is Tambudzai Sigauke's story. It is the adult Tambu's first-person recall of what she says are factual events that necessitate and enable both the telling in the first place and her own achievement of a private, public, intellectual, and critical voice. These events are tied principally to the death of her older brother, Nhamo (1), her femaleness in a male-centered culture, as well as her battles for education, voice, and self under the interacting forces of patriarchy and colonization. For while Nhamo's death and the occasion of her story correlate, "my story," Tambu states, "is not after all about death [read state of airlessness and physical stasis] but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about [her Anglicized cousin] Nyasha's rebellion [which] may not in the end have been successful" (1). However, as Tambu says in the actual beginning of her account, positioned strategically at the novel's textual end (204), her story is also about "our men" (204): her Anglicized uncle Babamukuru, her shiftless father Jeremiah, Chido her cousin and, of course, Nhamo.

A child whose maleness the culture privileges, Nhamo had been chosen for education at the mission school where Babamukuru, educated in South Africa and Britain, serves as headmaster. But Nhamo's sudden death from mumps compels the selection of Tambu as his replacement, a development that partly sets in motion the odyssey she narrates. This narration proper is carried by the devices that help relay and deepen it, for example, the idea of space. Our attention is directed almost immediately to this element of space when, early in the novel, Dangarembga introduces the scenario of (a) cramped, airless bus and passengers needing "relief" from it (2), therefore establishing space/spatial congestion and need for escape and expansion as a major motif in Tambu's story (see also Basu 21).

Tambu describes her odyssey in the story as a "painful [. . .] process of expansion" (204). By this "expansion" Tambu means her overall growth, a continuing maturation she achieves through her long and difficult effort to make sense of, adjust to, and carefully mediate the paradoxes of tradition and change. She attains this growth as she navigates the numerous spatial

structures in the novel, all of which shape her life and also impinge on that of the other female characters, especially. In the novel these structures not only are constituted in buildings and landscape (the homestead, the mission house, the mission school, the houses' kitchens, the village river, the farm, the Convent, and the dressmaker's shop) but also conflated and hence extended in character, gender, idea, and character experiences and, most of all, in narrative (space). Although Tambu relocates from the homestead to the mission, I start with Babamukuru's mission house because of the considerable, discursive attention Tambu gives it in the narrative.

As Tambu's extended analysis of it underscores, this spatial structure, Babamukuru's mission house, helps reveal the story. One must thus not overlook or minimize the many ramifications of Tambu's description of this big, dog-guarded white house as "Heaven" and Babamukuru himself as "God" (70). A house or any building says much about its owner and occupants, as well as their histories, identities, and conditions. In other words, without getting densely theoretical, we can discern a great deal ideologically from a building's name, history, purpose, location, design, construction materials, size, positioning, color, rooming, furnishings, security, and other features, including the land it stands on. Clare Cooper writes that the house reveals things about our "selves," about our self-images and experiences, both internal and external, inside and outside (31). An architected space, Michel Foucault argues, "is [also] fundamental in any exercise of power" (qtd. in Rabinow 252). For in a building's design and internal operations are codified a number of significant power issues such as social and economic position, gender hierarchy, authority (who has it and how is it shared, if at all), walls/boundaries, and freedom, among other things. Thus, a building can be a site of conflict. This is so when, no matter how well-meaning, its "owner" or the one who claims such ownership, in this case Babamukuru, suppresses other voices particularly those of women and delineates and polices the domestic space—the familial (house) hold—as a territory of inviolable and unnegotiable male/God-like power, both physical and ideological. For when Babamukuru tells Nyasha, in the heat of their physical fight provoked after he calls her a whore for socializing with a male friend, "We cannot have two men in this house" (115), he speaks no less of biological maleness and structural house than maleness and house as complementary and conflatable, ideological spaces. Couched in his statement above is his fear of and intent to squash the seeming unthinkable: a gendered ideological challenge in "God's" vast and sacred space.

The question is, however: how could a "heaven" so large and furnished, reflecting a man wealthy and "educated beyond books" (64), not flexibly accommodate dissent and alternative voices as does Tambu, its human antithesis? Why is it that, with all this space available, there still is an insufficient, unfettered area for the woman's voice and presence? How, the novel asks, could spacious "heaven" not have enough room for everybody but instead be such a *narrow*-minded, congesting, threatening, and saddening place?

Dangaremba explores within those important questions the tension between Babamukuru's restraining and hence problematic ideological space—his inflexible stances which contradict the notion of "enough

accommodation” implied in his house’s size—and the women characters’ agitation that he yield their voices “room” to breathe and expand, to grow and make the most of their humanity in that limiting enclosure. Following Nyasha’s nervous breakdown, Tambu reflects on the family’s tragedy: “If you had asked me before it all began, I would have said it was impossible. I would have said it was impossible for people who had everything to suffer so extremely” (202). How could heaven imprison instead of free?

As does the slave plantation called, ironically, “Sweet Home” in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (a home that indeed is anything but sweet to the slaves quartered there), Babamukuru’s heaven contests its theological praise name. The adversarial discourse couched in the binaries, *having everything and suffering* and *heaven and sadness*, reaches back to earlier in the story, specifically in how the novel (re)presents the mission house. In consonance with the novel’s “plot [which] is structured on parallels and oppositions” (Bardolph 41), we are shown the house from what amounts to two points of view. On the one hand is Nhamo’s portrayal and, on the other, Tambu’s contrasting but corrective perspective. Both intersect in what Obioma Nnaemeka would call the inevitable collision of insider’s/outsider’s views of reality (85).

Nhamo’s budding elitism and the enormous privileges Shona culture grants him as a male child condition his view of the house. Babamukuru’s house has such a powerful grip on Nhamo it induces him to revoke sooner than later his sense of obligation to help uplift his family’s homestead squalor (7), the foremost reason he is sent to be educated at the mission. His rather positive description of the house emphasizes its elegance, exteriorities, and spaciousness. Tambu says that Nhamo “had had a refrain with which he had punctuated his enthusiastic and reverent descriptions of the luxury and comfort of Babamukuru’s house. ‘Not even the Whites,’ he had used to carol in an impressionistic descant, ‘not even the Whites themselves could afford it!’” (61). Nhamo’s fairly uncritical rendition neglects the house’s female inhabitants and their overall mental (interior) and physical (exterior) health. Narrowed by his gender privileges and class aspirations, Nhamo’s perspective overlooks or cannot articulate fully and empathically how the women respond to the internal strictures posed by the kingdom’s resident dictator and the house’s structural defects.

In amending Nhamo’s presentation, which she also pities, Tambu, as one who has encountered the house from both outside and inside, re-reads the structure from the position of a participant-observer or a narrator whom critic Pauline Ada Uwakweh calls “interpreter” (75). As Uwakwe contends, this interpreter position offers Tambu a discursive angle that enhances our understanding of the fresh insights she attains on her and her fellow women’s victimization under the interlocking systems of patriarchy and colonization (75). Furthermore, it “allows Dangaremgbā to protest [what are posited as] official versions of history” (Aegeter 232). Dangaremgbā therefore builds Tambu’s (re)vision of Babamukuru and his “Heaven” on irony and sarcasm, both of which pervade the text.

Although her family’s house on the homestead, against which she weighs Babamukuru’s house, is sizable and “had been obviously, definitely, a fine refined [red brick] home” (62), Tambu notes that it is in many ways

incomparable to the kingdom numbered “14, HEADMASTER’S HOUSE” (62). This *kingdom* was built by the missionaries and is painted, metonymically, a “clinical, antiseptic white” (62). Those early missionaries believed, tellingly, that *only* houses painted white made the most comfortable dwellings. When Tambu arrives at Babamukuru’s, missionaries live not in red brick homes, but in white and pale painted houses. Babamukuru is “the only African living in a white house,” Tambu reveals (63). The above passage alludes to the colonizers’ attempt to impose, standardize, and induce whiteness among the Shona—an effort that seems to be succeeding in that some of the village girls now use skin-lightening cream, which has left them looking like “Fanta and Cola-Cola” (125). The passage shows also that Babamukuru, through his inherited house and Anglicization, is in part occupant, custodian, and carrier of (the) colonial spirit of religion, education, and material progress. The lone white color is hegemonic, a monochromatic presence not complemented or complimented by *the Other* colors excluded from it.

Unlike Nhamo’s colorful narrative, Tambu’s critique of the house engages its physical and interior peculiarities. Her analysis foregrounds why such a social (construct)ion and its equally socially constructed deity would be incapable of guarding and promoting the physical and mental health of its women residents, particularly. While Tambu details the house’s material trappings and notes that Babamukuru has “made himself plenty of power. Plenty of power. Plenty of money. A lot of education. Plenty of everything” (50), she in retrospect recognizes that this house lacks in a number of ways and thus could benefit from some (structural/ideological) *repair*. First, the house’s interior is so opulently decorated it is almost stuffy. In addition, as does its exterior, *lone* white paint, the house’s layout speaks of dominance and arrogance. Like the deity who rules in it and sometimes from its intimidating dining table (throne), the house is an imposing presence to which everything else is tangential. “The grounds were very large [. . .],” Tambu reports, “In them stood a *single* building, Babamukuru’s house, if you did not count the outlying constructions, which turned out to be a shed, a garage and the servants’ quarters” (61; emphasis added).

While the smaller size of the shed, garage, and the servants’ quarters serves to bolster the house’s physical stature among its peers, the same way the small, voiceless, female-earthlings in Babamukuru’s life become mere appendages that amplify his providential position, the kitchen reveals its aesthetic, structural and, by extension, ideological blemishes. The kitchen had earlier appeared sophisticated to Tambu. On closer scrutiny, however, it looks the opposite. As is the homestead kitchen which is so run down “it would be difficult to find a dry spot [some safe space] when it rains” (128), “Maiguru’s kitchen,” Wright notes as well, “is, symbolically, in a state of dilapidation” (10). Tambu’s re-description of the kitchen discloses the sense of incompleteness, chaos and gender inequity that mar the interior of Babamukuru’s whitened kingdom. Through the image of the missing pane, for instance, Dangaremba shows the heaven’s imperfection. She moreover points to the atmosphere of vulnerability which Babamukuru, as officer-in-charge, has allowed to afflict the kitchen—a creative space, gendered

generally in Shona (Holleman 204)—as a result of the kingdom’s inability to rectify a structural or *gender-related* problem. It is interesting, perhaps not accidental, that this pane is missing from a section of the house which the novel associates with women mainly, whether they are, unlike the family’s “unattached young men” (133), congestedly sleeping in it (62, 132), cooking *for everybody* (133–135), or negotiating a “fierce, sisterly solidarity” during a male-dominated, family jurisprudence regarding Lucia’s pregnancy (137, 139). The kitchen is, also, a place where women could wield authority and use food as leverage in marital politics (Holleman 219). But its pane is missing. “It surprises me!” Maiguru says concerning the damaged and hence vulnerable kitchen. “You’d think that people would find time to fix windows in their homes. Yet they don’t. Ts! It surprises me” (67).

Tambu says, “The broken window, the draught and its consequences were particularly annoying to Maiguru” (67). But the fact that Maiguru does not fix the windows herself, or demand that they get repaired, that the oppressive male/patriarchal ideology and attitude coded in that *damage* be changed, is a major authorial commentary on gender self-(dis)empowerment. Maiguru’s troubling inaction, shown also in her apathy on the Lucia situation, insinuates her acquiescence to Babamukuru’s culture-supported male leadership and dominion and, hence, signifies her indirect complicity in her subordination. As Sue Thomas observes correctly, Maiguru’s “submissiveness and want of autonomy” inflate Babamukuru’s divinity (29). Although Dangaremba indirectly condemns Maiguru’s passivity in this case, she hints even more on the complexity, rootedness, strength and undisrupted normalcy of her novel’s patriarchal structure. Dangaremba comments on how a woman so educated, stable financially, and exposed culturally could still be made to feel like “nothing” in a family that she, as head wife, works “[her]self sick to support” (172). She suggests then, that, until the Maigurus out there become more proactive in demanding and effecting change, until they initiate moves to have their impaired “kitchens” fixed, as Tambu and Lucia do when they personally repair the homestead kitchen (154), their aspirations would keep getting thwarted. The cakes and buns they bake would never be quite light as desired (67), speaking figuratively. However, that the kitchen remains clean in spite of its structural and aesthetic flaws could be read as Maiguru’s intent to remain sane, to make peace with the condition, with what amounts to the invasion, through male/societal negligence and sabotage, of her woman creative space.

Tambu in fact alludes early in the novel and at other times to this problem of manifold assault on and impairment of woman space, a disruption of women’s freedom and ability to own, control and enjoy even the very marginal spaces to which they have been relegated, undeservedly. In some cases this violation becomes a path to socioeconomic and male progress. This spatial infringement is evident, for instance, in what happens when the colonial administration decides to build its District Council Houses close to the women’s washing section in the village’s river, Nyamarira. This development not only upsets the native landscape (Basu 16), but also the entrepreneurial, commercial, and recreational activities it generates

among the villagers lead to “[the women’s] washing places [becoming] thoroughfares for people going to magrosa for all sorts of reasons” (4). As thoroughfares they become, in other words, an open and vulnerable passage walked upon by those headed somewhere else. According to Tambu, “The women liked their spot because it was sensibly architected for doing laundry” (3). But this infraction forces the women out to an alternate bathing location (3–4).

The story locates more examples. Among them are Babamukuru’s inclination to barge in Tambu and Nyasha’s room without knocking (112, 166) and his attempt to invade Nyasha’s body/mind by insisting that she consume/submit to his maleness, power, and ideology served as food. Add to those the fact that Maiguru has yet to get the house she was promised (182) and, in the homestead’s spatial arrangement, Mainini sleeps on “the reed mat on the floor” while “[t]he bed and its mattress belonged to [Jeremiah]” (62). During Christmas, the homestead is so crammed with relatives and gender ideological battles weighted against females that, when the relatives finally leave, a sense of relief is achieved. As Tambu says following their departure, “A sigh escaped from us and we all felt oddly relieved” (152). We remember how, in a related manner, in his malicious bid to undermine economically Tambu’s project to grow maize and thereby raise money for her own education, Nhamo trespasses into Tambu’s “own plot,” stealing her harvest, and giving them away to her friends, Nyari and Chitsva, at Rutivi School (17–23). Tambu ultimately overcomes both Nhamo’s economic sabotage and other impediments to her quest for education and secures a place at the elite white school, Sacred Heart.

Tambu’s admission to Sacred Heart allows Dangaremba to extend the motif of space and spatial congestion and to continue to denounce women’s relegation to and their occupation of limited and restrictive spaces under patriarchy and colonization. Admission to this elitist institution is nothing short of a remarkable personal achievement for Tambu, when viewed in the contexts of how she makes it there, colonization, and white intellectual elitism. However, Dangaremba points out that just as the expansive mission *heaven* congests in its massive interior furnishings and similarly limits female voices on account of Babamukuru’s excessive impulse to control, Sacred Heart also confines in its provision of inadequate space for its female African students (170). Even with its exterior grounds, which Tambu describes as “majestically spacious” (192), this school, where a few Africans are assimilated into honorary and *civilizing* white spaces and required to know “[their] little place” (179), does not offer for its African students enough *room*. In Tambu’s dormitory room, six beds are squeezed into a space originally meant for four girls. To Babamukuru’s questioning of this stifling arrangement, the beatifical white nun replies proudly, “Ah, yes [. . .]. We have more Africans here than usual this year and so *we had to put them all in here*” (194; emphasis added). Neither benefactive nor prohibitive, this colonial administrative judgment and congestive spatial arrangement subtext powerfully the colonizer-colonized power relationship, which markedly favors the colonizer at the colonized’s expense and, most of all, underscores hegemony’s arrogance and power to confine, define, and exclude others.

The dynamic is extended interestingly also in Dangaremba's sarcastic employment of theological imagery in characterizing the human-impedances Babamukuru and, indirectly, colonization and the white missionaries themselves as selfless providence.

Tambu sarcastically characterizes her uncle as a man of wealth and consequence, a man whose position, privilege, and power make him "the closest thing a human being could get to God" (199), the creator of all things and ultimate arbiter of good and evil. In his characteristic obsession with unilateral power and control, and in his assumption of an exclusive and excluding creator-status, Babamukuru believes that he creates things—alone! He makes that claim known in his memorable warning to Tambu: "I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying *what I have made*" (167; emphasis added). Dangaremba raises here the important issue of how women's and, speaking more broadly, *Other* people's indispensable contributions to spaces of male/hegemony's power are exploited and sometimes erased from male-centered and/or a supremacist historiography. In other words, and as demonstrated vividly in Jeremiah's claiming the honor for the repair of homestead kitchen done by Lucia and Tambu, women are sometimes denied credit for their work. Comparable to how European "opulence," its "well-being" and "progress [. . .] have been built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of [blacks], Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races" (Fanon 96) whose humanity and resources Europe exploited, demeans, and effaces, Babamukuru hardly acknowledges Maiguru's part in his own "opulence" (69) and supposed creations. The truth is, he relies much on her sacrifices and support to him personally and the Sigauke family as a whole. Maiguru herself knows this, telling Tambu that her uncle Babamukuru in fact "wouldn't be able to do half the things he does if I didn't work as well!" (101). In addition, one cannot forget the house's *domestic*, the young girl Anna, who is always *kneeling* and *disappearing* "as inconspicuously as she had arrived" (79). Babamukuru's house cannot operate efficiently without Anna's significant though narratively subordinated role as maid and family courier and Sylvester's labor as house gardener. Nor can extortionist Jeremiah survive without Ma'Shingayi's long, tiring labor and sacrifices, her bearing of the "heavy burden" of womanhood (16), a burden Tambu intends desperately to escape through her strive for colonial education—the purported shaper of the native. Relative to their encounter with the native whose destiny they claim to make, imperialism/colonization and the missionaries thus occupy a "God" space in the story, as does Babamukuru.

Dangaremba's interest in space and her parody of Babamukuru as deity implicate and also query the status of both Western European imperialism and Europeans themselves as providence. The novel veils this dialectic: that Babamukuru, as "God," makes things—or so he claims. He himself, a *blank native space*, is educated/*civilized* and hence *made* or "cultivat[ed] in the way that land is" (19) by the trinitarian agencies of Western European imperialism, namely, education, religion, and material progress. Western European imperialism, then, and Europeans for that matter are God-like or, in Tambu's mockery, "minor deities" (103). European imperialists scam-

bled for Africa because they “pictured most of the continent as ‘vacant’ [space]: legally *res nullius*, a no-man’s-land” (Pakenham xxi). For them, as Marimba Ani puts it, “This place [Africa] was nothing before we came here” (508). All by ourselves, *we made* Africa from void, from the heart and nothingness of its Conradian *darkness*. So, the narrative implies, what manner of “God” are Babamukuru for the women in his house and life and imperialism/colonization for the Shona? Is *He* really a bad man, considering the good things Babamukuru made for his Sigauke family and Europe for the African continent?

Nervous Conditions responds deconstructively. It articulates that the historiography of Shona/African/women’s encounter with colonization, both European and indigenous types, and as posited by outsiders who come from positions of unfamiliarity, inexperience, and assumed authority must be challenged thoroughly, as Tambu does Nhamo’s. By sharing similar temporal and mental spaces with the other victims of Babamukuru’s colonization, by sharing their unifying condition of femaleness, as Tambu does with Nyasha, Maiguru, Lucia, and Mainini, the (re)presenter corrects falsities sold as facts by operating from within. S/he understands through eye-witnessing, personal encounter, and intellectual interrogation that men and imperialism which play providence in and from historically protected spaces of power and privilege make untrue and ludicrous claims. When weighed, imperialism/colonization, with the missionaries’ purported altruism (103) and Babamukuru’s benefaction, turns out to be overall a perversion of virtuousness. European colonization unravels then as a problematic father whose gift to the colonized is an imperfect and corrupting civilization. As does the *white* potato whose taste “made everything else [in Maiguru’s cooking] taste funny” (82), this civilization diffuses what Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls a “cultural bomb” that shatters the “mental universe of the colonized” (16). In line with the same issue, Walter Rodney contends that providential-colonialism also handed Africa a gift/legacy of oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment as it pertains, especially, to a life-sustaining cornerstone of African/Shona society: women (227, 251).

To further question Babamukuru’s deital exaltation and his spatial dogmas, Tambu relays various incidents calculated narratively to undermine his authority and thereby humanize him by exposing the sheer absurdity of his hegemonic claims. Besides uncovering the structural and aesthetic impairment of Babamukuru’s house, Tambu reveals why “the anti-septic sterility which her aunt and uncle strove for” in their house “could not be attained beyond a cursory level” (71). Tambu knows full well, going by her homestead experience, that a dirtless house/space—with its implications of power, exclusion, control, order, and innocence—is unachievable because “living [is] dirty” (70). As Toni Morrison also dramatizes compellingly in *Sula*, life is full of the good, the bad, and everything in between and beyond them, all of which coexist inextricably. Things are too complicated and interactive to be so sterilized. Tambu makes that case in her argument against Maiguru’s idea that “tea strainer” and by extension tea-straining are vital to tea-making; that “tea wouldn’t be drinkable without it. It would all be tea-leaves” (72). Wright, commenting on this scene, writes that Dan-

garengba uses the tea strainer as a symbolic instrument “that filters out Africa to produce a more authentic [one-sided] English flavor” (10).

Authenticating indirectly Tambu’s case against human purification, “the buses that passed through the mission, according to an almost regular schedule, rolled up a storm of fine red dust which perversely settled in corners and on surfaces of rooms and armchairs and bookshelves . . . reminding you,” Tambu says, “that this was not heaven” (71). As does the mammy wagon named cynically “God’s Case No Appeal” in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, the buses in *Nervous Conditions* become “talking” characters of sorts. They figure, one might say, as the collective voice of the dispossessed, lower-class, and struggling Shonans, some of whom we meet *journeying* early in the novel (1–2). Using red dust as symbolic expression of mass contrariness, this speakerly bus and its passengers mockingly defile the sacredness and authority of whiteness and the idea of flawless heaven. They indict as well Western education, the affectations of middle-class existence, and Babamukuru’s position as the white man’s mimic. To invoke Homi Bhabha, he is “*almost the same* [as the white man] *but not quite*” (89; emphasis in original).

In addition to the derisive public voice, the unexpected insurgencies of the novel’s disenchanting women, from Nyasha’s and Maiguru’s to Tambu’s and Lucia’s, would also disrupt in varying degrees Babamukuru’s authority. Nyasha’s unceasing defiance of Babamukuru’s power for which, expectedly, she pays a physical and emotional price and her mother’s brief and public abandonment of him are emphatic statements of African womanist resistance. They are sacrileges aimed at unmasking further Babamukuru’s socially constructed divinity and all it means. Babamukuru never believes his daughter would hit him back when he beats her; she does! (114–15). He never imagines his exploited and effaced wife Maiguru would leave him—leave him even if briefly, in daylight and by public bus, the textual agency of mass discontent! She does (172–75). She does this in a Shona society that views such a public disagreement with or desertion of husband as “a serious act of insubordination” to the man (Holleman 207). In like manner, Babamukuru never assumes that Tambu whom he is *civilizing* would defy his commandment that she attend her parents’ forced remarriage; she too does and accepts her punishment as payment for her selfhood and voice (167–69). Worse still, Lucia, Tambu’s aunt, whom Deepika Bahri calls “an unmanageable free spirit” (9), transgresses the Sigauke family patriarchy (142–145). And the added fact that whites at Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart carelessly mispronounce Babamukuru’s family name as “See-ga-ookkey” reduces him racially to “a generic black-skinned male” (McWilliams 105).

Nervous Conditions points out that where (African) women’s lives are confined in suffocating social or familial spheres or their own rightful and affirmative spaces are assaulted, it would be hard for society at large and the dominating males, particularly, to have restful mind or maintain a spotless home, no matter its size and beauty. This is why Tambu, who refuses to be seduced by it, demystifies Babamukuru’s house from “palace,” “mansion,” “castle,” and “heaven” to simply that—a house! (62). He himself is

no more than a man, in fact a delimiting, distant, and destructive divinity. This destructiveness is reinforced in his house's damaged and damaging attributes and in his severance of his household's familial, spiritual, and gender bond. In his capacity as "God" in "Heaven" or *up there*, Babamukuru is not close to the pulse of females in his household *down here*. He operates from an "other-worldly" space different and distant from the earthly realities of female experience. While he shares physically the same domestic space with the women—we are told that he could "detect alcohol on your breath at five yards in a strong wind" (41)—he is not in touch emotionally and spiritually with their inner plight and life. Little wonder, then, Babamukuru "feel[s] out of place in [a] feminine [sp]ace," the dressmaker's shop in Sakubva Township, again a "very small" space where the multi-tasking woman dressmaker, as does Maiguru with the mission house kitchen, manages to "keep the clothes clean, the patterns together" even with the shop's spatial and other constraints (161). Little wonder he, the *omniscient*, fails to "know" and to "see" his daughter Nyasha's rapidly worsening health (199), but instead misjudges it as "not so serious. What she needs," he concludes, "is to rest" (199).

Babamukuru's persistent steeliness as his daughter's health declines deepens his human and ideological flaws; however, in tandem with the novel's disinterest in narrowness and one-dimensionality, he is depicted not as a total monster but rather a pitiable confluence of competing historical inheritances. If it is any indication Nyasha's anguished comment that it is not altogether her father's fault in that "They [England] did it [. . .] especially to him. They put him through it all," turning him into "a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir" (200), then it makes sense the argument that he is as much a victimizer as he is a victim of warring cultural institutions (Begum 25). He is the product of his time, consistent with how Nhamo, before his death, was acting "in the expected manner" (12). Babamukuru is a man "overwhelmed by the responsibilities his success entails" (Bardolph 41). Sue Thomas says it best: Babamukuru's "position is a difficult one: he is placed within and has to negotiate two systems of economic, political, and family regulation—the English and the Shona" (29). Dangaremba worries nonetheless that false yet despotic male divinities and spaces could emerge at the fortuitous convergence of the complications of one's position as family benefactor and the other elements that transform some of Africa's postcolonial elite into power-houses and spaces. The elements include: order of birth, privileged gender, pioneering education, professional hierarchy, marital position, parental rights, and economic benefaction (87). When those forces interact unchecked, especially in a patriarchal culture, men become Providence: the omnipotent, revered, feared, and incontrovertible shaper of human destiny—a "God" status that colonization assumed in its encounter with the native. This is an encounter that has left the latter, whose world is now permanently disrupted, with enduring tensions.

So could anything be done about all this? In other words, how can the ex-colonial handle healthily the lingering tensions from that imperial

disruption? If we accede to the contributory influence of colonization and indigenous sexism to Babamukuru's autocracy, then how can he possibly begin to change, to be a better person, to disallow both forces from ruling and ruining his life and that of the women around him? How can the old ways of being, seeing and doing, which Babamukuru inherited, meet and interact constructively and positively with the realities of the new order—whether these realities are the African woman's growing and irreversible refusal to be subalternized in marginal and marginalizing spaces or the continuing intrusion of Western cultural and other values—without either side overwhelming the other? How can both and other value systems work together without African peoples, specifically, imploding the superstructure of their peoplehood: family? Does the novel really see colonization and the malaise it brings as totally unsurvivable? Is it really the case, as Wright suggests, that “If there is a way out of the neocolonial elite's terminal Englishness, no directions are given in Tambu's narrative”? (18).

In pondering the above, to which the narrative explores answers, it is important that we not misconstrue the severity of Nyasha's malaise, Maiguru's and Ma'Shingayi's entrapment, or Babamukuru's perverse rigidity as unequivocal evidence that the novel is pessimistic. Quite to the contrary, the narrative sees hope. In fact, regardless of the spatial constraints and other injustices confronting the novel's female characters, *Nervous Conditions* qualifies as “a text of possibilities for survival, agency, and re-creation” (Bahri 4). Certainly, “Tambu's changing consciousness [conveys] this hopefulness” (Bahri 13), as does Lucia's escape. Tambu's escape, her telling her own story, and, by extension, Dangarembga's successful publication of the novel itself against many odds resonate promise. One could also see a ray of hope in Babamukuru's recognition that he did not exactly *make* Tambu, conveyed in his refusal to take credit for her scholarship to Sacred Heart.

Most significant, the novel points out that one possible, pragmatic answer to some of the crises of colonization lies in attitude and philosophy adjustment, in insistence on needed change. It lies, to use Sally McWilliams's phrasing, in a careful reshaping of colonization “into productive material *for* the post-colonial subject's society” (105, emphasis in original). Carole Boyce Davies clarifies such a process of reshaping, especially as it relates to the synergy of mainstream and African feminist letters. She calls it a “balancing act,” a “refinement” of adversaries customized to the “concrete and literary realities of African women's lives” (12–13). In other words, forced, voluntary, or unconscious assimilation of the colonizer's values demands, as a practical corrective, both a voluntary but critical creation of more “room” in the ex-colonial's cultural and ideological spaces and an equally willing *repair* of damaged indigenous spaces to accommodate the incongruities he or she now must deal with. The inescapable conflict for the inflexible ex-colonial, for instance Babamukuru, becomes, then, whether to continue to hold on steadfastly to indigenous values and sometimes problematic customs, mores, and practices when the world is changing and he sees, feels, and unquestionably participates in that change, in ways big and small. Or, if still in his liminality, should he reject extremes, expand his

world, and also balance as healthily as possible the pressures which ex-colonials face, as challenging as this alternative might be (78). The novel advises the latter direction and exemplifies it in character, action, and narrative.

Dangaremba has used Babamukuru, Ma'Shingayi's wisdom and action, Nyasha's fragmentation, as well as narrative, or what I am calling the complementary duality of narrative mode, to explore and suggest possible ways of rectifying the space issues and of surviving and transcending the experience of colonization. Take Babamukuru's case first. It is important, the novel suggests, that Babamukuru and those like him refrain from extremes. They should pay attention to their houses' cramped and damaged "spaces" and also to make their world more inclusive. In not expanding his ideological space to match both his house's big size and his big-heart as family provider (65), in refusing to harmonize with femaleness, Babamukuru is imbalanced. The novel attributes his bad nerves to his rigid work ethic by which he also gets to prove his worthiness to occupy the token position assigned him, a "good" African, under colonial control. That he works hard and always did is clear. However, if it is true, as an Igbo proverb states, that *Onye ji mmadu n'ala ji onwe ya* (He who holds another down stays down with him—or her), Babamukuru's reported restlessness results also from his unhealthy propensity to subordinate rather than yield the women in his life the unfettered space to which they are entitled. Unless he de-centers authority, he would continue to battle (female) intransigence—a revolt and insomnia the British colonial administration also suffered in the hands of Zimbabwe's freedom fighters. For the other ex-colonials, prudence must be a mantra, as Ma'Shingayi's cautioned action shows.

The reader may remember Ma'Shingayi cautioning against extremes: that one cannot afford to internalize too much Englishness which she divines as the cause of Nyasha and Chido's mental and cultural crisis and, indirectly, of Nhamo's untimely death (203). Her insistence that Tambu be careful with assimilation does not imply a call for complete and uncompromising renunciation of Western cultural values, *when* and *where* they could be useful to one's specific needs, but an imperative destabilization and rejection of their predominance, as well as a judicious fusion of those acquired values and one's ancestral and cultural heritage. Her prudent response to Babamukuru's generosity/gift clearly demonstrates that logic. We are told that Babamukuru gives Tambu's parents a house as wedding present (168). The house comes with a symbol of Western civilization, technology, and material progress: a Dover Stove. But while Ma'Shingayi is "very proud of her house and Dover Stove," she "preferred her old hearth [*choto*]. She said she felt more comfortable beside it" (182–83). Ma'Shingayi refuses wisely to appropriate from the "gift" package an alien material and ideological construct that, on the one hand, she is not yet conditioned by experience to use both *safely* and efficiently and, on the other, could upset her comfort/balance, as in Babamukuru's connotative lack of sleep (84) or Nyasha's bicultural impasse.

Nyasha's mental crisis further exemplifies the narrative's thematic insistence on balance. Nyasha suffers a nervous breakdown because, among other things, she loses her psychic balance when, for instance, Tambu

goes to Sacred Heart. Tambu, who sees her fondness for her cousin as her first “love affair” (78), had been Nyasha’s buffer, distraction, room/space mate, confidant, and character foil, the person with whom she juggled and balanced her radical idealism and teenage grievances. Nyasha admits to Tambu in a letter: “In many ways you are very essential to me *bridging* some of the *gaps* in my life, and now that you are away, I feel them again” (196; emphasis added). Tambu herself confesses that Nyasha is “something unique and necessary for me” (151). Reminiscent of the interdependent characters Sula and Nel in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, Nyasha and Tambu may differ in idea and personality, but they need and mutually reinforce each other in various ways, as the narrative details.

Reinforced beyond what Wright sees as Dangaremba’s use of “culinary details and matter of cuisine” (10), various narrative moments yield additional cues of choice, caution, and the collective that buttress the novel’s stress of the productiveness of mediation. They include, for instance, the adult Tambu’s reflection on the *maininis’* disharmony over Lucia’s pregnancy. Brenda Bosman notes that for Ma’Shingayi “the concept of sisterly solidarity is vitiated by the polarization of poor/rich, ignorant/educated, powerless/privileged” (98). But a reconciliation of those socially constructed and erected *poles* could augur well for the women’s effort to challenge and overcome their divide-and-conquer foe, patriarchy, if, as Tambu argues, “Maiguru’s *detachment* and Lucia’s *direction*” are combined or balanced productively (138; emphasis added). Other instances include Tambu’s noting how she and Babamukuru “co-existed in peaceful detachment” even at a time their actions and goals collide (34), her interest in “proportion” (71), her eating her biscuit *slowly without cream* in the middle (73), her eating her food in Babamukuru’s house without letting it down her throat in “large quantities” (82), and her recognition of the importance of “tact” (116) and of prudence and balance (132).

It is also such an exercise in prudence—aided by her privilege to and firm grounding in a contrasting but alternative reality contained in both the instructive and enabling stories of her fellow Sigauke women and invigorating aspects of Shona history and culture—that allows Tambu to escape Nyasha’s tragedy. And just as Ma’Shingayi’s *choto* functions as a reference point by which she can weigh and balance the relative benefits, safety, and/or dangers of the old and the seeming new—the Dover Stove—Tambu’s personal experiences and her knowledge of the women’s stories steady her, even as she, a developing intellectual, inevitably forays deeper and deeper into the space of Englishness. Tambu is sure of herself (179), is certain that she would not forget the homestead, nor would the Convent confuse her because, as she says regarding her colonial education, “What I need[ed] I would take with me, the rest I would discard” (183). In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Dangaremba, reflecting on the intriguing question of “how [. . .] Tambudzai come[s] through” and Nyasha does not, concludes that it is because Tambu “has [a] very solid background. [Unlike Nyasha who at an early age was uprooted from her culture, Tambu] knows exactly where she’s come from. She may be leaving it, but it’s there for her” (qtd. in Wilkinson 193). That is key.

Tambu's "shocking" keynote—her suspenseful opening assertion in which she, one, refuses to feel sorry for her brother Nhamo's death; two, understates the efficacy of Nyasha's defiance; and, three, introduces the major players in the unfolding tale—does more than serve as a stylistic device that slides into the narrative space an oral element. It also extends the text's suggestion of cautioned balance as a pragmatic survival strategy for the ex-colonial. Together with Dangaremba's subsequent injection of Shona-language terms and tonality, this keynote initiates authorial placement of the story in what I have called complementary duality of narrative mode (1). By having Tambu pose that rhetorical statement immediately, Dangaremba does something striking, stylistically and thematically. She makes the narrative a collaboration or dialogue of modes: orality/"the novel," the told/the written, the resiliently African/the imported Western. Illustrating Mildred Mortimer's insight as to how, "[i]n Africa [and African literature in general], orality and literacy often inhabit the same space" (1), Dangaremba makes both modes function cooperatively under the same narrative roof.

While Dangaremba has chosen from the colonial gift-package "the novel" and its partner English language as formal framework for Tambu's story, however, she expands and subsumes that frame under and equally situates the narration proper in orality, or the resiliently African. This intentional insertion of oral elements is much more than a clever balancing act in the novel. Comparable to the insurrectionist imports of the women characters' nuanced disruptions of Babamukuru's protected spaces of authority, the linguistic interpolation serves strategically also to obstruct and technically *humble* the intratextual dominance of scriptocracy. Even though the novel is *scripted*, what we actually *hear* and *see* first—reminding one of the self-legitimizing, keynote use of "I" in African American slave narrative tradition—is not *the script* but rather the declarative, intimate, unruly, and immediate voice and humanity of Tambu, the artist-storyteller.

Tambu identifies herself as a storyteller (Bosman 91). Consistent with oral storytelling, therefore, Dangaremba technically presumes an immediate listenership or what she herself calls an "amorphous audience" (qtd. in Wilkinson 192). Most of all, by startling the audience immediately and also leaving holes in the story through suspense, she invites the audience's participation and deferred response to her storyteller's prefatory and performative comment/"call" in which is also revealed the occasion for the story. Dangaremba would like for us, as Tambu's audience and chorus—the "you" to whom she addresses the story (85, 103)—to suspend judgment until we have been fully "inside" the narrative space and have heard/read or can now juggle and balance the whole text/tale, even as "complex and delicate" as is its content (79).

Being inside the narrative space patiently and fully offers us better clarity on things and helps us decide better. Prudence and deliberation—a willingness to thread a little more slowly, thoughtfully, and carefully—is, the novel posits, a virtue capable of moderating further the tensions of postcolonization. It is therefore only when we have entered the entirety of that narrative space and heard Tambu recall, especially, her brother's

(mis)adventures can we see why she refuses to be sorry that he died. And when we have heard her relate how the four women she loves respond to the internal and external strictures of Babamukuru's patriarchal spaces and also leave on him indelible marks of unfinished woman resistance, whatever we think of Nyasha's rebellion becomes then, as is Nhamo's account of Babamukuru's house, only a matter of (audience) point of view. As connoted in her very significant narratological statement that "the story I have told here, is my own story" (204), Tambu knows full well that it is all a matter of angle. She understands and, unlike Babamukuru, seems not to desire to control or limit our voice, our discursive input, particularly our opinions on both Nyasha's revolt and the veracity and objectivity of her story, considering its interested "I" perspective. Even as she condemns Nhamo's behavior posthumously, she wants to do so carefully, knowing, one, that he is dead and so "cannot defend himself" and, two, that "blame does not come in neatly packaged parcels" (12). In other words, Tambu is not trying to present herself as a saint. Our responses, Tambu imparts, then, are open to our positioning, to *how* we are conditioned by virtue of our gender, class, culture, motivation, and experience to define *successful* and truth.

Dangaremba has masterly embedded that issue of openness to the novel's plot, collaborating plot/movement/journey and space, and addressing this rather important question: how long will decolonization, the female characters' battles against spatial limitations, and this balancing act last? Speaking broadly, how long will the ex-colonial's responses to the crises go on? The novel's plot offers some answers.

Gilian Gorle has noted correctly that the novel's plot is open and cyclical: "[T]he end of the novel provides no sense of closure: although it brings the reader full circle (with the first paragraph neatly echoing the words of the opening paragraph), it resolves nothing and secures no one. Instead Dangaremba leaves the reader in postmodernist suspense [. . .]" (180). This is true. Yet the novel's inconclusiveness is actually its "conclusion" and answer to the questions posed above. Closure/conclusion, with its meanings of *cessation, complete, stop, end, final, authority, inexpanseion, neatness* and *order* would be inconsistent with not only the chaos of decolonization but also Dangaremba's thematic "battle" against fixity and spatial congestion. As embedded in the operative terms "process" and "stretched" with which Tambu describes her growth (204), or the comparable motif of travel(ing) encrypted in the novel, the story's inconclusion, its circular plot, speaks of an open, expanding or ongoing, human-journey in time and space for both character and nation.

Had the story "closed," such a closure would, first, imply an authorial and narrative endorsement of the problematic catch-word, "post-colonial." This term is contested by the extant experiences of many African nations, including Dangaremba's homeland, Zimbabwe. Years after independence, the nations and their cousins elsewhere are in various ways still dominated by and tied to their former colonizers. They continue to battle neocolonialism, to (re)negotiate, sometimes turbulently, their ruptured and now complicated cultures, distorted histories, manufactured boundaries and their new national identities, and thus have had to keep juggling their enduring

postindependence blues or what Neil Lazarus has called, fittingly, “the Mourning After” independence (1).

Whether it is Achebe writing five different novels to track sequentially Nigeria’s voyage in space and time, Ayi Kwei Armah employing the symbolism of bus travelers to underscore the continuance of that existential journey for Ghana in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, or Ben Okri extending that motif of repetitive experiential cycle through Azaro the *abiku* narrator in *The Famished Road*, African writers have long known the disappointing truth. They know that independence means neither satisfactory fulfillment of nationalist promises and mass expectations nor a complete end to colonization. African writers know, as does Dangarembga, that while independence marks the end of imposed white rule, it remains the beginning and continuation of life’s other journeys and crises. The missionaries and colonial administrators may leave Shonaland/Zimbabwe tomorrow or soon, if we go by the novel’s historical time-line, but Babamukuru’s house—that real, archetypal, and hugely allegorical spatial structure the white man conceived, designed and built deep on Africa’s soil, a house/“structure” now occupied by a neocolonial patriarch and power, and many others like him elsewhere—still stands, unrepaired, unrepainted, unmoved!

Because the house still stands, seemingly firmly rooted, the characters’ resistance struggles against *it*, against spatial obstacles, as well as the women’s and the other ex-colonials’ exercises in prudence, also must continue. The women especially and ex-colonials in general cannot afford to get complacent; thus, as Nyasha reasons, one [they] must keep “[m]oving, all the time. Otherwise [they would] get trapped” (96)—in confining spaces! It is the intent to escape, survive, and transcend such entrapment that drives Tambu’s deliverance movement through geographic, structural, and intellectual spaces. But her triangular journey through spaces, from the homestead through the Englishness of the mission and then that of Sacred Heart (203), is actually gendered and hence says a whole lot more in the story. While it extends that important motif of movement/journey which structures the story and advances its theme, it serves, even more, as a powerful statement of gender sedition and triumph.

Mortimer has argued that in African society and fiction “the journey and its concomitant rewards of maturity and self-understanding have been primarily an option reserved for men” (11). For a long time, women, specifically Zimbabwean women aspiring to write in English language, were culturally and institutionally inhibited from entering and participating fully in the public domain and discourse. As Mortimer contends in a statement relevant to Zimbabwe, however, the women have themselves found various empowering ways, including writing and manipulation of language, to violate that prohibition and gain access to the public space (12–13) and therefore “compensate for the restrictions upon travel” (11).

If subjection to impaired and constraining spaces is one of the most enduring obstacles facing Dangarembga’s female characters, Tambu’s border-crossing movement, no matter how aided, becomes then gendered, offensive, and cleverly celebratory. It amounts to, one, a gendered defilement and conquering of imposed and obstructive spatial barriers and, two,

the storyteller's arrival in and occupation, through an introspective, maturation narrative, of a permanent spot in the public sphere which for years has generally been an exclusive and excluding male space.

This character and narrative entrance into public space, discourse, and consciousness is the novel's most telling act of female insubordination. Dwarfing yet complementing Nyasha's, Maiguru's and Lucia's respective infractions against Babamukuru's power and control, Tambu's triangular and triumphant movement is the story's most resonant statement of female war and victory. And "just as the outer journey leads the traveling hero or heroine to lucidity and self understanding, the inner journey—which includes personal thoughts, past memories, the collective experience of the family or the clan—helps the African female protagonist develop the inner strength necessary in a twofold struggle against the vestiges of colonialism and the present grip of traditional patriarchy" (Mortimer 12). Tambu experiences both outside and inside odysseys, from her problematizing of the exteriorities and interiorities of Babamukuru's house and her emancipating, geographic movements to the inner journey of narrative construction. As though in agreement with Mortimer, Tambu at one point affirms that "outward journey [. . .] was pleasant" [even if] the tasks [associated with them] were tiring" (134). Tambu's spiritual sojourn into the space of the self not only culminates in an enabling narrative but also helps shape a young African woman, wiser, caring, mentally strong, and better "educated."

Tambu is better educated because the new/Western-type education she acquires in her journeys from the mission school through the convent is complemented, extended, and hence strengthened by the informal/older and undeniably complex schooling she has received already from the homestead and by knowing the fascinating women *and* men in her family. These are women whose identities, histories, and fights against colonial invasion and its extension, indigenous sexism, are in progress, in process, in motion. This transition must continue, regardless of Tambu's entrance into the public space, her physical and emotional maturation, and her intellectual accomplishments. Babamukuru's *house* still stands. Tambu knows this. And because the women's fights and the balancing act continue and must, Tambu admits the full narration of all the characters' transitional journeys, their individual and collective "search for answers" (151), would "fill another volume" (204), if not more! Thus, the story *and* the decolonization struggles and processes continue, which explains why Dangarembga leaves the novel's end defiantly "open" and also promises us a sequel to Tambu's life and narrative (qtd. in Wilkinson 193).

Even as it exposes the serious damage done by the meeting of colonization and indigenous sexism, *Nervous Conditions* remains not just hopeful but fundamentally a novel about family, about "real" human beings, in a postcolonial setting, searching for and juggling solutions to their existential condition. It is about the overall health of African families and African children, in particular, in a spacious world that is paradoxically repressive and has become as well increasingly complicated and interactive in many ways. In tackling such important issues as male dominion, cultural hybridization, and parent-child value systems and oppositions, the novel captures

the experiences of thousands of African parents, children and families outside Shonaland, Zimbabwe, and the African continent as a whole. While *Nervous Conditions* offers such families no simplistic solutions to rather difficult and at times painful problems, it nonetheless has faith that this post-colonial experience is indeed survivable and indigenous sexism, no matter how rooted, cannot go unchallenged and unbent. It must be stressed also that regardless of how much the text associates them with it, the women's "position" is not the kitchen! In addition to its revolution trajectory, its change imperative, the novel advises perseverance, "gent[ility]" (68, 118), understanding, patience, and inclusion in response to Africa's familial matters. It also presents the characters' fortunes, especially Nyasha's and Babamukuru's own tragedy, as sites of instruction.

If Okonkwo's tragedy in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* results mostly from his intent to remain unbending when the times call for ideological and attitudinal adjustment, the consequences of Babamukuru's rigidity and exclusionism at a comparable historical moment become cautionary: we are not to emulate his troublous inflexibility and spatial domination. Maybe the larger point is that there is really more than enough space *here*, on this earth, for all of us, for all of our voices, including those of women who simply want to be able to live their lives unfettered, in both the private and public domains. Should *Nervous Conditions* become a classic as some are predicting, it may be because of how, among other things, Tsitsi Dangaremba succeeds remarkably in making that serious message and the narrative instruments that convey it work not separately but productively together.

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