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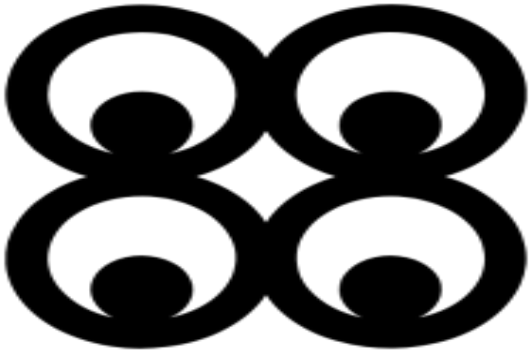

ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of African women in their gender relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe, focusing on their experiences, struggles, and challenges. It examines the oppressive and traumatic experiences of female characters in the Zimbabwean setting of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018). I choose Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* because it is a narrative text that somewhat captures the reality of trauma at the psychological and physical levels in women's lives during the colonial and postcolonial eras. This article, therefore, is rooted in how traumatic encounters have permeated the narrative texture of the novel. It is this traumatic encounter in gender relations that constitutes women's experiences in Zimbabwe. The argument is that trauma constitutes Dangarembga's particular mode of self-apprehension and the representation of women's lived realities in the novel. In evidence of this, the lives of female characters in *This Mournable Body* are often depicted as profoundly affected by trauma, which, however, leads them to make choices that enable them to thrive and lead meaningful lives both personally and socially. As such, this article examines how the primary text operates in accordance with the poetics of trauma theory, particularly drawing on Cathy Caruth's framework. A key intention of the paper is to explain the traumatic contextualisation of the novel and to portray how the victims in gender relations constantly manage to negotiate their survival and existence through agency.

KEYWORDS

Agency, gender, postcolonial, trauma, Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Zimbabwe, according to a UNDP report, is under constant strain from socio-economic, political, historical, and traumatic factors. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*, the final work in her trilogy, which started with *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, examines the complexity and ramifications of this situation. In this text, Zimbabweans' experiences of psychological and physical trauma are embodied, depicting acts of brutality against women and the country's struggle for independence. *This Mournable Body* (hereafter *TMB*) portrays the needless suffering and agony in Zimbabwe because it is a narrative about violence and war. Aligning with the concept of 'historical trauma' as defined by Dominick LaCapras, *TMB* presents unsettling remnants of the past and demonstrates how unabated violence has left a great deal of trauma, anxiety, suffering, and wounds (80). The gravity of such a representation of trauma in the text drives me to critically reevaluate the historical events that engender the socio-cultural issues surrounding the characters' lives in the novel. In my examination, I focus on the impact of violence on the female body as depicted twice: first as fighters for war, and second, as being constrained by repressive socio-political ideologies such as oppressive patriarchy and the denigration by colonialism and its legacies.

In this regard, I argue that it is a just and equitable act for the African female body to tell her story and support the potential of rebellion throughout the post-independence era. I refer to the female character primarily as 'body' to emphasise the imagery of suffering through objectification, as captured in Dangarembga's title. The way that women's sufferings and troubles are portrayed in the trauma narrative highlights how Dangarembga's text reveals the racial, national, and cultural structures that impede the advancement of women in the Zimbabwean society. The 'mournable body' testimony in the novel's title alludes to this discovery. In my reading of *TMB*, I observe and point out that the use of the second person simultaneously narrates the story of the physical and psychological anguish inflicted on the female body, as well as a story of the suffering body of collective forces, such as the nation and femininity in general. Through plot development, the narrator carries out introspection through the image of the mirror, where the female characters, represented mainly by Christine and Tambudzai, narrate their bodies and identities at the front line of battles, both physical and psychological, where they witness and "mourn" their bodies as they are subjected to abuse and violence. As the text reveals, it proves difficult for the nation and its characters to heal from the painful circumstances of their experiences, as their pain "heaves beneath [their] breath, gripping [their] throat so that [they] cannot speak" (Dangarembga 70) due to war. This gripping pain is evidenced by the deaths of numerous people, including Aunt Lucia's son, and also by the maiming of others, such as Tambu's sister, Netsai, who lost her limb in the conflict. Other forms of pain are experienced by female characters like Mainini, Gertrude, and Nyasha, who suffer varied abuse as a result of patriarchy and male aggression. Drawing on the comments of Ignatius Chukwumah and Cassandra Nebeife on a parallel situation in Nigeria, I affirm that "the scars of … war on the psyche are as indelible as they are still evident in the contemporary body politic" of the Zimbabwean society described in Dangarembga's text (242). In this regard, *TMB* reflects the traumatising effects of violence on the female characters in the narrative. To support my argument, I examine aspects of trauma theory that are relevant to my analysis of *TMB*.

The Trauma Theory and *TMB*

Trauma theory is among the most well-recognised psychological and physiological concepts in literary studies. Some scholars consider Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922) as the foundational book on current trauma theory. The term "psychoanalysis," defined as the "recurrence, the return of memory (***repetition compulsion***)" (qtd. in Oahn 99), is linked to Freud's trauma. According to Vera Camden, "psychoanalysis" is a therapeutic tool that can be used to describe a person's darkest mental experiences (1-3). Furthermore, Camden asserts that literature remains the foundation of psychoanalytic thought (1-3). Through the creation of narratives, Freud honed his storytelling skills and made the psychological and creative ramifications of crafting stories from horrifying experiences widely known to the general audience. Through her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* 1996, Cathy Caruth became well-known in trauma studies. Drawing influence from Freud's psychoanalytic term, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "a wound inflicted not upon the body, but upon the mind." (3). According to Caruth's theory, trauma is not a physical wound that can heal with time but rather a wound on a person's psyche. Caruth says that literature is the only means by which traumatic reliving, recapturing of the past, and registering the force of an utterly unacceptable event may occur. Drawing on Caruth and the earlier cited scholars, I assert that trauma, as depicted in *TMB,* is not in the mind or body. Even though the term "Body" is used, it denotes a metaphorical body of existence, practice, and resistance to mental and psychological wounds inflicted on women.

Like Caruth and others, Ruth Leys describes it as "The wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock" (4). Moreover, according to Michael Humphrey, "Trauma is not just a bodily experience; it refers to an underlying traumatic event" (38). A close analysis of Caruth's, Leys', and Humphrey's definitions and accounts of trauma reveals that trauma occurs subconsciously to the victim or survivor. Thus, the argument goes that trauma is the result of an incredible and unexpected fact coming to light after the event has passed. Furthermore, it is the state of mind that follows an accident, discomfort, or suffering. Nevertheless, in Caruth's instance, it appears to be an effort to recreate or relive a previously unacknowledged event. Additionally, cases of "underlying traumatic events" are highlighted by Rolf J. Kleber. The first says that "[t]raumatic events involve the confrontation with war, violence, disasters, sudden loss, serious illness, and other overwhelming and disturbing events" (n.p.). The leading causes of trauma are unexpected injuries, deadly illnesses, violent attacks, wars, accidents, and horrific experiences. Each of these is remembered. In Freud's words, these circumstances or states produce "unpleasurable tension" (1). However, in due course, "mental events is (SIC) automatically regulated by the pleasure principle... [that is] set in motion by [the] un pleasurable tension ..., its final outcome coincides with a lowering of such tension..., with an avoidance of pleasure or a production of pleasure." Dangarembga's narrative reveals how contemporary literary studies bring trauma to light, assisting victims in realising they are suffering and highlighting her characters as victims. This is acknowledged by Leys' use of the term "mimesis," which she employs to highlight how trauma has developed into a recurrent pattern in contemporary African literature (8). Traumatic critique examines, clarifies, and assesses painful narrative issues related to gender, nationality, and sexual violence from the perspective of trauma as a discourse. This serves as the foundation for this analysis and evaluation of trauma theory, which maintains that trauma heals from injuries, suffering, and violence on both a physical and psychological level. Additionally, the text describes and discusses how the aforementioned traumatic events derail society's

consciousness and inflict bodily and psychological harm to individuals. Through the author's accounts, the hardships, suffering, and scars from combat battles, as well as the atrocities of domestic abuse, to mention a few, create space for others to empathise with the tragedies of war victims and victims of domestic abuse. The article “Unmournable Bodies” by Teju Cole 2015 inspired the title, *This Mournable Body*. Cole’s work examines international politics, exploring the concept of a distinct global response to cruelty. He states that “the world has seen noble violent deaths [and sufferings] that call for remembrance” (5). Consequently, these experiences of violence provoke a Freudian "return of memory" (Freud) due to the trauma associated with them.

In light of this, readers of Dangarembga's *TMB* can allude to the notions of traumatic violence evoked by Cole’s metaphor of mourning to imagine and appreciate the prevalent, disgusting condition of the "mournable body" in the titular novel. Extending this metaphor of mourning, Dangarembga emphasizes the gravity of suffering and violence imposed on the female body. In her metonym's use of the female body to signify violence against abuse of women, she believes in the need to resist such abuse and violence in the fight to liberate women from all forms of patriarchal oppression in a post-independent society. The story of hurt found in Dangarembga's *TMB* attests to the mental and physical torment endured by women in patriarchal Zimbabwe, where they are mostly invisible. By extension, the terror of experiencing conflicts brought on by unequal treatment based on gender, as shown in the novel, is also included in the concept of trauma. Therefore, I examine the psychological effects of Zimbabwe's independence war on the nation and its people, with a particular emphasis on the families of those who died in the war. I also examine the denigrating treatment of women based on their gender. For this analysis, I employ Cole’s previously stated notions (5), further abduced by Dominick LaCapra, who explains that "losses [and/or certain deaths] may be traumatic while others are not and there are variations in the intensity or devastating impact of trauma" (64). To corroborate this idea, I agree with the view that trauma includes both "physical" and "psychological injury," irrespective of how upsetting and unsettling the events surrounding a loss may be (Freud 34). As a result, trauma in *TMB* is seen pertinently as shattering the identity of the sufferer as well as the nation, which makes the African bodies and their living conditions dreadful. Expanding this notion from scholars and theorists such as Freud and Caruth, I contend that trauma is a sickness that ruins people's psyches and casts doubt on the psychology of whole countries. A nation is a collection of people who share a common destiny, culture, language, and physical location and reside in a certain geographic area. For this reason, a nation is bound together by a common psychological and physical relatedness. In *TMB*, the people of Zimbabwe are considered to constitute a country. Generally, African literary writers appear to focus more on physical trauma brought on by conflict than on psychological trauma. However, Dangarembga’s narrative of choice tackles the issue of gender violence together with the psychological harm imposed on the Zimbabwean people during their liberation struggle. Based on this, Dangarembga's narrative highlights the catastrophic impact, both psychologically and emotionally, of Zimbabwe's past events on the resilience of the people who lived there. The author's major characters, most of whom are women, endure psychological pain as a result of the physical impact of war on them and the many uncertainties they face in its aftermath. For instance, Christine fought in Zimbabwe's independence war but was left unfulfilled as her contribution to the war was not recognised. Rather, she finds that everyone around her is driven by materialism and greed, and to counter her disillusionment, she chronicles the horrific events and outcomes of the liberation struggle. As Dang Hoang Oanh confirms, trauma is particularly terrible because it "is not fully experienced at the moment of occurrence but anchors in the unconscious, returns to

haunt, torment people through fragments of memories, (...) repeatedly" (99). For Christine, the war events that shaped Zimbabwe's past, bringing historical representativeness into the present, are made relevant by her recollection of her war experiences. To deal with the psychological and emotional trauma of having lost herself and a possibly different life by throwing herself into the war, she constantly relives her experiences to validate the importance of her decision to be so involved in the war. This is how she deals with her inequitable shift of wealth to her male counterparts while she remains disregarded and unacknowledged. In light of this, I assert that for female characters like Christine, the portrayal of recollection of the war constitutes not only physical and psychological trauma but also historical trauma for how it distorts and upends their very lives. Thus, in *TMB*, attention is drawn to the psychological trauma and the historical and physical destruction caused by war and the impact of these on gender inequities. Such war-impacted gendered inequalities are revealed by the gender violence and devastating psychological wounds suffered by the female characters in the text. These are illustrated by the portrayal of discriminatory treatments of women and negative tendencies which alienate women from pursuing progressive lifestyles. I further discuss these issues under the sub-themes – Traumatic war for Zimbabwe's independence, trauma and violence against women, and trauma and alienation.

Traumatic War for Zimbabwe's Independence

The text, *This Mournable Body,* narrates the gratuitous pain of the Zimbabwean nation during the war of liberation from July 1964 to December 1979. This was a long and dreadful guerrilla war that lasted over 15 years between the white Rhodesian army and the native black nationalists[1]. Even though this war is implicitly portrayed in the text, the reader hears Christine's reflections and is presented with evidence of its devastating consequences. Thus, Netsai, Tambudzai's sister, lost a leg; Tambudzai succumbed to staying longer than she wished in education; Mainini's son and Mabel's husband were killed, and the elite class clamoured for wealth as a benefit from independence. Based on the examination of Dangarembga's *TMB*, I argue that it focuses on the emotional, physical, and psychological trauma inflicted on the people, especially the women's bodies. The author recognises that the war is a wound that has ruptured many people, as Christine, Mabel, and Mainini flash back to the experiences of the guerrilla scene that devastated Zimbabwean citizens, particularly their close relatives. The recollection is to initiate a positive reappraisal of the political rationale of the war. Also, as portrayed in the novel, Zimbabwe represents a country attempting to heal and plunge on.

As earlier indicated, the war is a wound that shatters Tambudzai and her relations (Netsai, her mother, Mai) as Christine, an ex-combatant in the war for independence, reminisces the events of the excruciating scene, especially of the former's sister, Netsai, "this being where the body is and not being there, in your sister Netsai, who went to war, who lost a leg, … I'm still out there wandering through the grass and sand, looking for my leg" (Dangarembga 58). Besides, during the war, Netsai was raped, resulting in her having twins in Mozambique. What Netsai suffers from is a type of crack that cannot be amended. For one thing, her body bears the violence of sexual abuse, of which her twin children are constant reminders. For another, that same body carries the stark reminder of physical aggression, resulting in her lost leg. With her body having suffered

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/rhodesian_bush_war#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKriger1988304-19

such physical and emotional abuse, she becomes psychologically traumatized, persistently "wandering" and "looking" for her "lost leg," which is irretrievable. This aspect of irretrievability is an exceptional experience repeatedly enacted in her conscious awareness of her lost leg and the subconscious grievance of her defiled body. She cannot seem to bring herself to understand the extent of the trauma she is experiencing. Her physical lameness is an extension of the traumatic "wandering" of her mind. Her distressed existence of a "lost leg" reflects the psychological distress of her traumatised mind. Symbolising, in some ways, an embodiment of her country, her physically traumatised state reflects the historical amputation of the country. Thus, through the female character, Netsai, the violence of the war was meted out on the country by the colonial army. This dominant masculine system inflicts physical, emotional, and psychological injury on its victims. Coming to a full realisation of her victimhood, Netsai asked: "Did I pull this leg off myself? This leg was blasted off because I was fighting for what is mine" (Dangarembga 274). Thus, her role fighting at the forefront of a national war inflicts upon her trauma, horror, and suffering depicted through her disability that threatens the rest of her existence. For her to assert that her involvement constituted fighting for what is hers sets her as a synecdochic representation of the nation suffering distress, trauma, and horror that "threaten the very existence of a people" (Nwanhunanya 102). Her suffering, depicted through her disability, threatens the rest of her existence. To reiterate her state of suffering, the narrator states, "Netsai, … hopping around, going hoopla hoopla on her one leg, … talking loudly about the fight she is engaged in with ruling party officials to obtain a place on the party list that will result in a dark-brown leg being imported for her from Mozambique" (Dangarembga 274). Having suffered from the war's predicament, Netsai expected to be rewarded for gaining respite from her injury. However, the government officials do not empathise with her situation. So, she perilously lives her life "hopping" and "going hoopla hoopla on her one leg". To make Netsai's experience worse, her present poverty-stricken living condition subtly afflicts her daughters, so much so that Mai bemoans, "it has been practically impossible for the now lame Netsai to provide for her daughters" (Dangarembga 45). This statement depicts Mai's distress regarding Netsai's conditions. Netsai's experiences create a hole in Mai's soul when she cries. It can, therefore, be established that Netsai's trauma negatively impacts her close associates, especially her twin daughters.

The portraiture depicted above shows that Netsai and the twin daughters are victims of the Zimbabwean war for liberation. The memory of this event produces fright in Tambudzai. The narrator alludes to this when she states: "You want to leave Christine's truth… behind in the heart of this war-woman. … You saw the blood spurt from your sister's leg during the war, just after you had graduated from your uncle's mission, and *you fled* from then on. *You kept on fleeing from the sight all through your years* at the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart" (Dangarembga 69) (Emphasis mine). I deduce from the statements, "*you fled*", and "*You kept fleeing from the sight all through your years*" in the above quotation that in *TMB,* trauma is "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 3). Although Tambudzai's body is not harmed, she suffers "psychic trauma", which is an indicator of post-traumatic disorder and fear attacks. Her most relevant fear and or worry is not the war but her trauma-induced reticence. That is, being aware of the suffering in Netsai's life and the painful, indelible physical destruction which resulted from the war for independence, she chooses to remain quiet, though alive. Her show of reticence in Netsai's circumstance was 'fled" and "kept fleeing." She, therefore, leaves Netsai's sight to stay reserved. Her "fleeing" away and being away for long from Netsai's bodily experience emphasises Caruth's assertion that trauma involves "the recognition of the realities that most of us [Tambudzai included]

have not begun to face." (Caruth vii). In this regard, Tambudzai's apparent agoraphobia reveals her coming into the reality of her sister's odd situation that shatters her personality and, therefore, makes her want to reevaluate herself. Here, "fleeing and kept fleeing" appears to be the result of "post-traumatic stress disorder [which] is fundamentally a disorder of memory" (Caruth 2). By and large, her mind is preoccupied with the need to disassociate from the prevalent circumstances of the victim. She is haunted by the memory of "the blood spurt[ing] from her sister's leg during the war" (Dangarembga 69). I draw from Humphrey to posit that Tambudzai's leap of fear depicts that Netsai's "trauma is [not] a medical condition recognised by professionals and clinicians but an expression of our humanity; able to be recognised by the public" (39). Now, the "public" represented by Tambudzai quickly identifies a traumatised victim because the victim "is seen to embody our humanity" (Humphrey 39). In line with this, Dangarembga's account of this female character's troubled life and negative experiences allows readers to acknowledge the tragic effects of war on its victims.

Additionally, *TMB* reveals that Frank, Mabel's husband and Mainini's little boy, who were not active participants in the war for independence, were brutally massacred, causing trauma for the women, wives, and mothers. Mabel tells Tambudzai, "I'm Mabel … My Frank always called me Mabs, but … I lost him during the war … those people came and took him… They poked a gun in his ribs, just as if he was a piece of meat, and they took him away" (Dangarembga 112). Equally, Mainini narrates how her little boy was massacred. "The Rhodesian soldiers came, the young boy ran back to the kraal at the homestead … the soldiers drove bullets through the boy's back … the force of the bullets leaving his body ripped his stomach open and spread his intestines on the sand" (Dangarembga 151). Comparing the war experiences of Netsai, Mabel, and Mainini, it can be argued that the realities of war create dire circumstances for the females, disrupting structured family systems. The intensity of her pain makes Mainini pause as she remembers "her little son whom she had left to fight in the conviction that her risk was the down payment on a better life for both of them" (Dangarembga 151). Pausing and remembering her son shows her refusal to forget. Like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*: "This book is my refusal to forget" (qtd. in Ayorinde 3), *TMB* is also Dangarembga's account of a refusal to forget. It is her stark account of the nation's historical war that inflicted psychological trauma on many. In this war narrative, females are portrayed as having endured additional suffering as a result of being directly and physically involved in the liberation struggles, as well as suffering the emotional and psychological pain of losing loved ones. Through their historical narration and memorialisation, Mabel, Mainini, and others like them are depicted as victims of a war that was supposed to bring them freedom and emancipation. However, their hopes for a better life for themselves and their families are thwarted, leaving them in a state of bewilderment as they suffer forms of gendered pain strongly emphasized in the text by their exploitation and denigration.

As Mabel recounts the loss of her husband, she refers to the "Rhodesian soldiers" who have taken him away as "those people" (Dangarembga 112). This reference to the soldiers betrays her revulsion for them. Additionally, it highlights the unsavoury relationship between the soldiers (men) and other male characters, such as Frank and Mainini's son, as well as the relationship between the soldiers and the female characters (Mabel and Mainini), on the other hand. The soldiers' ability to exercise or abuse their military power places them at the top of a hierarchy which privileges powerful men to the detriment of weak men and also women. Scheff emphasizes that such hypermasculinity is expressed in cruelty and makes "men dangerous to themselves and

others." (3). Thus, the soldiers' brutal deeds of sporadic shooting and massacre depict a wild treacherousness that triggers trauma in their victims, who live with horrific memories of their violence. Mabel and Mainini, unable to shake off the trauma of such memories, persistently relive the unfortunate fates of their relations who have suffered a gory death. Furthermore, the actions of these soldiers killing Mainini's son, coupled with Mainini's wounding at the war front, for which she obtains no benefit, reveal that her experience manifests as a double wound marked by physical and psychological trauma. Mainini's physical wounding and the psychological wounding she suffers for the killing of her son demonstrate the transcendence of trauma from its bodily referent to its psychic extension.

From my analysis of Netsai's, Mabel's, and Mainini's characterisations in the previous paragraphs, I agree with Jilly Kay's assertion that Dangarembga's *TMB* endeavours to illuminate the socio-economic calamities that burden women in Africa and also reiterate what causes physical and psychological trauma (593). The illumination of calamities and the causal elements of the two kinds of trauma discussed in this study, as emanating from the war for liberation depicted in the *TMB*, are developing themes established in texts by other African women novelists, such as Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Rosina Umelo's *Felicia*.

Incidents in *TMB* show that classism against women is not inherently a disadvantage but instead becomes a predicament due to their existence in a patriarchal hegemonic society that limits their roles and expectations, worsened by the demerits of the national war for redemption. Nevertheless, ironically, these negative impacts empower women to adopt positive strategies that lead to their survival. Like Netsai from my earlier discussions, Mainini, Christine, Lucia, and Tambudzai's maternal aunt are veterans of the war for Zimbabwean liberation. However, unlike Netsai, these other female characters do not suffer any physical abuse in the war. Nonetheless, they are not given any benefits or compensation for fighting in the war. Instead, they are hated. As shown in the text, Mainini asserts "with conviction, as though she had once been ashamed of being a woman who had seen too much blood. 'Yes, sometimes we wondered why we went to war when we came back, and everyone was shocked and began to hate us. And the war has swallowed up too much" (151). From this statement, Mainini, representing all women who fought in the historical war, expresses her bitterness about the war's outcomes. For instance, their husbands and sons were killed, and they lived in abject poverty. This is because wealth and material possessions were predominantly owned by wealthier characters, including White Rhodesians and black Zimbabweans like Christine's aunt, MaManyanga, and her husband, VaManyanga, who had mainly become affluent through fortuitous business deals following the war for independence.

Drawing on the various effects of war on each female veteran character, it is established that Dangarembga's novel offers insight into the different phases and contexts in which women experience traumatic events. This resulted in them being in pain yet unable to voice their concerns. Christine observes, "[their] breathing remains shallow and difficult. Pain heaves beneath your breath, gripping [their] throat so that [they] cannot speak" (70). By implication, they fulfil the description of Ann Kaplan's notion of "quiet trauma" (2), a psychological disorder. Thus, these female characters, despite escaping physical abuse, are primarily affected by a psychological disorder of quiet trauma because of the horrors that they have witnessed. Since their trauma is not physically manifested but is somewhat suppressed as a psychological disorder, they are often overlooked in their suffering. Such suffering is silent in women as victims of silence, as similarly

portrayed in Masoud Behnoud's text *Khanoum*. In this text, Behnoud's female protagonist, Khanoum, is often silent throughout Nezhat's worries and pains. This is because she is culturally incapable of speaking about the encounters happening around her. Dangarembga, through literary language, underscores this condition of affairs by focusing on the predicament of women who suffer the "disruptive effects of war on [their] lives" (Bryce 38).

Apart from this, *TMB* is a testimony from Christine (representing all women), who has suffered from the war front, from emotional numbness, and other chronic pain syndromes. Dangarembga, therefore, prompts people to question and critically examine how national problems, as well as the emotional and psychological pain and wounds that arise from these problems, can be resolved and healed. At the end of the novel, the narrative reveals under the chapter "Arriving" that there are improving circumstances for the women as Christine and Lucia enjoy success at their job at AK Security Company. The narrator comments, "Lucia's security company, … is doing very well" (283). This success is achieved despite the continuing violence and threat of violence in postcolonial Zimbabwe society. It is as a result of such violence that even after the war, people persistently worry about their safety and well-being. A positive outcome of the effect of the war on the women in the novel is that it makes them resilient, pushing women such as Christine and Lucia to defy remembrance, oppression, marginalisation, and physical and psychological trauma in a free Zimbabwe. In the next session, I examine how trauma depicted through gender imbalance is directed against women. For this examination, I assert that although *TMB* portrays the traumatic impact of the war for independence on Zimbabwean women and society, the novel depicts how women are equally traumatised by Zimbabwean culture and tradition.

Culture and Tradition as Vectors of Trauma and Violence Against Women

In *TMB*, women are most often the targets of violence. They appear to accept male-dominated power, and the violence meted out to them results in subjugation, objectification, and suppression. As earlier discussed, the enactment of violence in *TMB* results in wounds, trauma, pain, and suffering, much of which is portrayed as being triggered by traditional and cultural practices. Gertrude, one of the female characters of *TMB*, suffers verbal, physical, and psychological attacks as a result of the so-called 'indecent clothes' she wears in public (Dangarembga 18). At a Combi station bus stop, her attire, in the words of the travellers, does not conform to society's conventions. In describing her dressing, Tambudzai says, "[s]he is elegant on sky-high heels in spite of the rubble and the cracks in the paving. She pushes out every bit of her body that can protrude – lips, hips, breasts, and buttocks – to greatest effect. … she swings her bags behind her buttocks to prevent unwanted sightings" (Dangarembga 18). This desire to turn away "unwanted sightings" points to the fact that she is aware of the male gaze and is, therefore, ready to police her behaviour accordingly. Consequently, "the crowd shifts and regroups. Men inside and outside combis exhale sharply" (Dangarembga 18), implying non-verbal disapproval of Gertrude's appearance. This general disapproval can be analysed as a form of abuse or assault on Gertrude, who is expected to conform to the cultural norms of society. One such instance of socio-cultural abuse is when "an urchin grabs a mealie cob from the rubbish in the gutter. The cob curves through the air like a scythe. Satisfaction opens up in everyone's stomachs as the missile hurtles past Gertrude's head, taking strands of her one hundred percent Brazilian hair weave with it" (Dangarembga 19). Kopano Ratele, in "Analysing Males in Africa: Certain Useful Elements in Considering Ruling

Masculinities", asserts that "in several African societies, traumatic acts of violence against women and girls go on daily – such that they may be referred to as part of undeclared yet public gender wars." (515). It is in line with this assertion that I argue that Gertrude is an object of public violent attack from the crowd, who physically abuses her under the guise of 'cleansing' their society of women like her, thereby restoring that society's perception of who is a 'true woman'. Through Gertrude's characterisation, the novelist reveals that a woman's body appears as what Kathryn Pauly Morgan describes as "a primitive entity that is seen only as a potential, as a kind of raw material to be exploited in terms of appearance … as defined by the colonising culture" (173). Zimbabwean culture and tradition empower genders, particularly males, to harass, taunt, and even disable their female partners' bodies for failing to appear 'decent'. Such 'correction' through physical assault inflicts emotional pain on the woman. Gertrude's worse 'correction' is from a combi driver as he sneers: "What's the matter with you? Since when are naked people allowed to come into vehicles? My car wants to go, with self-respecting people! How can it now, if it's packed with naked women?" (Dangarembga 19-20). The driver's verbal abuse of Gertrude depicts a contrast in how women's bodies are regarded as opposed to men's bodies. For instance, the driver, a total stranger to Gertrude, feels entitled to comment about her body, an act that demonstrates male dominance over females. As Chielozona Eze states, "men enjoy certain privileges that derive solely from their gender, the most obvious of which is the unquestioned control over their bodies, especially with regard to [their] functions". (26). Women, on the other hand, cannot fully express such control over their bodies within the patriarchal system, which puts them fully under the authority of men. This is reflected in many African patriarchal traditions, as written by contemporary third-generation female writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga. In the cited example of the combi driver's sneering at Gertrude, it is evident that Gertrude suffers Caruth's notion of "psychic trauma", where she is physically hurt and shows symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes "abandonment, rejection, betrayal [and alienation]" (Kaplan 1). This is prescriptive of society according to the established codes of patriarchal consciousness concerning the female body's configuration and presentation in the public space – something that is not required of the male body. Ironically, she is alienated from society, especially when her own female colleague and hostel mate, Tambudzai, appears to be complicit in the violence perpetrated against her (Gertrude). Tambudzai fails to rescue Gertrude from the males' abuse when the latter requests help at that painful moment. As Gertrude is being assaulted, she looks towards Tambudzai and pleads, "Help me." However, the latter "drops [her] gaze but do[es] not walk off" (Dangarembga 21). Tambudzai refuses to help Gertrude while, nevertheless, silently watching as the men assault her, making her complicit in the assault of a fellow woman. These variant forms of abuse depict how "the psychological and physical devastation on [Gertrude's] psyche is [fuelled] by violent confrontations" by both genders (Nwanyanwu and Anasiudu 27). Consequently, we observe a parallel between Tambudzai and the male characters - the young driver, an urchin, a builder, a man, and another urchin - at the combi station, who all demonstrate a critical attitude towards Gertrude. *TMB*, thus, portrays the objectification of African women and documents their challenges as their bodies are wounded, marginalised and, above all, traumatised within the Zimbabwean society.

From the foregoing, Gertrude is portrayed as a renegade who does not conform to the norm. Feeling the harshness of society's rejection, she appears to regret her way of dressing. After the assault, the narrator recounts that "Gertrude stands shivering, [with] head bowed… [as] Grief mounts [her] face" (Dangarembga 22). From this portraiture, it is evident that Gertrude does not speak about her trauma. Instead, her posture depicts her as a subjugated female character who has

no agency and does not warrant any form of rights for herself. These are symptoms of psychological subjugation in her situation. So, in her post-traumatic state, she lives with the elements of metaphorical death, guilt, emptiness, unacceptability, and loss of dignity. All these make it difficult for her to forget about her past situation and, therefore, render it difficult for her to heal. All in all, Gertrude's post-traumatic experience of violence, coupled with Tambudzai's unwillingness to assist her, illustrates how the society depicted in *TMB* judges women's conduct/appearance, thereby determining their social status. Additionally, it can be argued that Gertrude's appearance signifies a deviation from societal norms, leading her to feel like a stranger in her community. In this sense, she has inflicted pain upon herself rather than being solely a victim of societal standards. Inadvertently, her suffering is due to moral transgression. Dangarembga's *TMB* resonates with Amma Darko's description of women as dependent on others, specifically men, for direction in *Beyond the Horizon*.

Another example is the relationship between a father and daughter in Dangarembga's sequel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988). In the cited text, the daughter, Nyasha, is, like Gertrude in *TMB*, traumatised and emotionally distressed as a consequence of being physically attacked by her father in her childhood. By the time she re-emerges in *TMB*, she has evolved into a woman struck with fear in the face of masculine force and brutality. In addition to this trait of timidity, she is often sentimental. Through Tambudzai, we get the benefit of a flashback that reveals Nyasha's traumatic past as "a teenager … brutally beaten by her father" (Dangarembga 171). As a result of these violent assaults, we experience her in *TMB* as a character who exhibits frequent emotional outbursts. These appear to be the way she deals with the trauma of her past abusive experience, while Tambudzai finds this distressing for Nyasha. It is an expression of the suppressed memory of her pain and, in many ways, appears to be an improvement of her psychological response to the patriarchal control over her. In *Nervous Conditions*, she tries to deal with the trauma by attempting suicide after she develops a habitual eating disorder captured as the 'nervous' sickness of bulimia – vomiting all the food she has eaten, which is a demonstration of her pain and stress. Her resort to death (through attempted suicide) reveals that the trauma pressures her to choose death over life. This creates an existential crisis for Nyasha as her relationship with her father shatters her personality and redefines her identity. Her sickness becomes the legacy of post-traumatic uneasiness, which Ruth Leys describes as "anxiety, intrusive thoughts and memories." As Leys explains, "Post-traumatic stress disorder is fundamentally a disorder of memory" (2). This existential crisis arises as a result of the mind being disconnected due to specific traumatic issues or events, which reveal, as noted by Nyasha, that Zimbabwean women have no power of their own. Coupled with this, they have no choice. Her father's physical assault leads her to develop a fearful relationship with him. As stated in the editorial of the *CODESRIA Bulletin*, African writers such as Dangarembga can draw on emergent issues affecting women by challenging "the masculinities underpinning the structures of repression that target women" (Gender Series 4). She rebels against her patriarchal head, which demonstrates her self-fulfillment and self-expression. So, as Nyasha grows in *TMB*, her bulimia metaphorically manifests domination and resistance in the text. Through the portrayal of Nyasha's antagonism (manifested as an eating disorder), the text demonstrates that to "wage war" for the rights of a woman is to show a deep psychological disturbance to overthrow the domination of men's maltreatment against women.

As I compare and contrast the character traits of Nyasha and Gertrude, it becomes evident that the former demonstrates a unique form of resistance to conflict manifested through physical

and psychological symptoms. In contrast, the latter responds to conflict through an expression of silence and remorse. From the two female characters' traumatic encounters, I posit that trauma does not always have a negative outcome, as Nyasha's experience births her strong resistance against patriarchal oppression. Through characterisation, she transcends trauma, pain, and suffering to knowledge and understanding. In this way, Dangarembga's *TMB* reveals Freud's description of memory through how Nyasha has driven her memory "out of consciousness … and saved [herself] a great amount of psychic pain, but in the unconsciousness the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active, and finally succeeds in sending into consciousness" (21). Grounded in this terrain, I argue that Dangarembga's *TMB* attempts to expose trauma while also presenting evidence and a plot to work through it. Thus, Dangarembga's text exposes Nyasha's unconscious trauma; however, it also predicates her moment of recovery. So, through the literary presentation, borrowing Fiona Tolan's words, Nyasha reviews the past encounters "not as a fear but as a temptation" (409). Indeed, this throws away the past as tempting, even freeing, but for Nyasha, as for Freud, it should "first be recovered before it can be relinquished" (Tolan 101). Based on Nyasha's "nervous" responses to African culture, Dangarembga's *TMB* reveals two relevant benchmarks regarding traumatic experiences: the first is that it places women at the centre of emancipatory discussions; the second is that it exposes the society that traumatises them. I, therefore, argue that in *TMB*, the novelist demonstrates how the female characters navigate through trauma brought on by patriarchal hegemony, resulting in nervousness, psyche, and psychological ambivalence in the females. She portrays how the anxieties and trauma of female characters are suppressed in Zimbabwean society. Nyasha, however, upends this suppression as she overthrows patriarchal authority by consciously setting herself free from it through her antagonism toward her father. Furthermore, some of the female characters, like Tambudzai, suffer an infliction of trauma, psychological pain, and emotional torture on their bodies when the patriarchal culture of Zimbabwe is violently abused. The effect is that the traumatised women alienate themselves from a life of solitude. In my further examination, the relationship between trauma and alienation is revealed through Tambudzai's characterisation.

Trauma and Alienation

In TMB, Tambudzai's situation and narrated life conditions are nothing more than an account of her burdens. Being the protagonist of the novel, her story is also, in many ways, a history of other females whose traumatised bodies trigger various forms of psychological disorders. They go through periods of mental breakdown and amnesia as victims of abuse, only to suffer perpetual trauma even after they have emerged as survivors again in a short time. In the first part of the narrative, evocatively titled "Ebbing", Tambudzai is approaching middle age, and she is primarily defeated and disappointed with the way her life has turned out, as though ebbing away: she is childless and jobless and even appears hopeless. This contradicts her optimism about the benefits of good education in *Nervous Conditions*. By *TMB*, Tambudzai sadly realises that her education has not secured her employment or improved her life prospects. Describing her situation from the detached perspective of the second person, the narrator reveals Tambudzai: "You are concerned you will start thinking of ending it all, having nothing to carry on for [:] no home, no job, no sustaining family bonds. … how, with all your education, do you come to be [more] needy than your mother? End up less than a woman so dashed down by life" (Dangarembga 37). Apart from this, she continues to bear within her the trauma she suffered at the multiracial College of the Sacred Heart, where the ambience is harsh, bedevilled with racism, and burdened with an imperial

educational legacy. This is evident when Tambudzai's award for being the best O-level student is "stolen" by her white female colleague, "Tracey Stevenson, the school's eternal favourite" (Dangarembga 78). From the preceding, Tambudzai bears the pain that comes with failure. She grows poorer to the extent that her state of beggary makes the narrator confront us with a question of ethical importance: "You wonder whether after all it is [Tambudzai's] fate to become as indigent as [her] father" (Dangarembga 56). The author sees education in her prequel, *Nervous Conditions*, and her sequel, *This Book of Not*, as the primary means by which a woman can overcome social and economic challenges. That becomes the ladder for social mobility that will rescue her from barriers that her gender and impoverished background have generated. However, Tambudzai has a glorious past that contradicts her present state, and this truth haunts her. She is traumatised because she is unable to afford basic things that would make her life better, after all the strenuous efforts she made to put herself through school. In *TMB*, she is disgraced and displeased with the image of her body as she stares at herself in the mirror and miserably reflects: "The fish stares back at you out of purplish eye sockets, its mouth gaping, cheeks drooping as though under the weight of monstrous scales. You cannot look at yourself" (Dangarembga 5). With this metaphor, Tambudzai identifies herself with a fish embodying a grotesque, rough, inferior form of life. Thus, thinking herself inferior to others, she exudes a peculiar trait of social inhibition, which manifests as her inability or refusal to connect with other females in her hostel and other women in her family circle. Due to her social reticence, she resorts to remaining distant. Tambudzai's solitary life and her passive personality provide evidence for why she fails to intervene in and prevent the physical abuse that Gertrude suffered from the crowd at the combi station. All of her experiences, culminating in her developing low self-esteem and a lack of agentic force, give an insight into the constitution of her personality, which reveals her utter displeasure with colonial Rhodesia that subjects women to abject poverty, betrayal of Western education, and unfair treatment due to racial practices.

Stuck in this existential crisis, Tambudzai does not fully establish all the levels of her trauma; she finds herself in a regular fight to comprehend herself as a survivor. As part of her crisis, Tambudzai is constantly unconscious of her environment, body, and self, in that she is on a regular journey to finding her lost self. This drives her to seclusion. She sees herself lying at the combi station after she has spent the night with Christine. The alienation and physical state of her body are exposed as one gnawed by insects in her struggle to call to memory who she has become. She declares: "Ants and spiders trek over your body … I am the kind of person two cooks give a coin to. No, I am not that person. I am. I am not. Would I know it if I am that person?" (Dangarembga 82). Tambudzai's physical state, as well as her solitude, is at the core of the hysterical experiences she encounters. The recurring reflection on who she is leads her to be unaware of her capabilities, resulting in isolation and confusion about how to address her challenges. This causes a wound in her personality, which generates an expected emotional shock and disturbance. The state of her unconsciousness of her environment, unconsciousness of herself, and unconsciousness of her abilities is an assault on Tambudzai's psyche. So submersed has she been in her existential crisis that it has resulted in an unconsciousness of the psyche that leaves her shattered.

Despite her shattered state of mind, Tambudzai still scouts for employment because she remains optimistic about the future and what she hopes to achieve—a position of recognition, acceptance, and wealth: "I want to be better. I want the things that make me better" (Dangarembga

108). Fortunately, she eventually picks up a "post as a biology teacher" (Dangarembga 85) at Northlea School, even though she is "not qualified" for the position (Dangarembga 85). This causes an escalation of her frustration as she strives to survive in the system, resulting in a nervous breakdown. Her traumatised mind is unable to manage or control her physical reflexes as her deep-seated wounds have unavoidable and inexorable effects on her body. While she struggles at her teaching post in the school, a group of female students cast insinuations at her struggles and circumstances, which make her appear mean. Acting on this impression that they have of her, "they retaliate, baptizing [her] Tambudzai the Grief, TTG for short. [which] escalates to MG—Mega-Grief" (Dangarembga 89). Having to endure the jibing of the girls who also nickname her "Miss TTG" or "Miss MG", Tambudzai experiences what Robert Lifton describes as "a systematic program of terror and humiliation [that is] often a means of gradual but intentional killing" (155). As she is systematically pushed to her limits, the humiliation causes Tambudzai to lose her temper with one of the girls, Elizabeth Chinembiri, and she uses a T-square to persistently beat her, causing the girl to lose her hearing. Tambudzai's extreme mental torment causes her to abhor situations that will bring about humiliation. In her manic disposition, she cannot stand Elizabeth's mother crying when the latter reports Tambudzai's action to the headmistress's office. All these wreak havoc on her already demented form, causing her to alienate herself from others, especially women. It is from this occurrence that she finds herself in a mental home where she has to accept and face the reality of her ill mental state as part of the healing process. Analysing the foregoing, the author, through Tambudzai's traumatic confrontations, highlights how women rendered marginalised suffer harm and pain, revealed by the textual exposition of the myriad forms of self-eroding trauma depicted through memories, flashbacks, retrospections, and awful recollections.

Conclusion

To conclude, Dangarembga's *TMB* portrays traumatic representations of females constructing and appraising their identities within the context of the traumatic war for Zimbabwe's independence. Through the text, we can draw the correlation between the birthing of the nation and the coming of age of the progressive female characters who suffer violence, trauma, and alienation. In this paper, I have shown that *TMB* contextualises the reality of the traumatic experiences not only in the physical injury incurred by a character. This aligns with Caruth's notion that trauma compels us to recreate or relive previously unacknowledged events, encompassing both physical and psychological injuries. Nevertheless, as seen in *TMB*, psychological and emotional injury inflicts pain, torture, mental sickness, humiliation, alienation, and nervous breakdown on the memory. These experiences by female characters in the primary text reflect arguments regarding the varied and profound impact of trauma made by Caruth (4), LaCapra (64), Leys (8), and Freud (34) in earlier studies. Through this study, I have argued that these events destroy and fragment the characters' psyche and identity, posing a threat to their psychological stability. A further analytical twist that I present in this paper is the argument that trauma can also be positive, where it may be used to antagonise patriarchy as a form of resistance to males' physical abuse of women. It may also provoke agentic responses from victims, who may seek some form of stability by making efforts to survive, such as securing a job. My analysis depicts how trauma and its related post-traumatic interventions reveal that the female characters in *TMB* are diverse and strong and can heal from the devastations and tragedies that traumatically impact their bodies **(Freud 21**). Thus, the text culminates in an expression of hope for improving situations that cause trauma for females within the patriarchal hegemonic system.

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A Declaration Statement

The author affirms that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this work. Furthermore, the author is committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity in the research process and asserts that the findings presented in this manuscript comply with the ethical standards for publication.

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