

# Writing Nature From the Feminine: An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Gardens in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

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## Summary

This article will examine the connectedness between black women and the different types of gardens in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*. It also argues that an analysis of Maiguru's garden, the Harare gardens, the Sacred Heart gardens and the gardens of domesticity from an ecofeminist perspective, allows nuanced observations of the interconnectivity between black women in the narrative, the racial colonial setting and nature. By linking feminist and environmental ideas, this article is part of the surging debate concerning the connection between literary works and natural resources in literature written by black female authors in Africa. It draws on Dangarembga's narrative in order to open debates about the connections between the oppression of women and nature. This gives an opportunity to discuss the overlooked relationship between women, war violence and environmental degradation in *The Book of Not*. Premised on this argument, I will utilise the garden landscapes metaphorically to understand and explore the connections of women and nature and to deconstruct the nature/culture dichotomy. It is also premised on the notion that continuity of social, religious and economic aspects of life can be sustained by living in harmony with the environment itself. Thus it draws upon sources from environmentalist criticism and literary studies to investigate the ways in which *The Book of Not* characterises the natural world and the relationship between women and nature, and how this relationship might influence readers' attitudes toward the environment.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die verbintenis tussen swart vroue en die verskillende tuine in Tsitsi Dangarembga se *The Book of Not*. Die artikel voer aan dat 'n ontleding van Maiguru se tuin, die Harare-tuine, die Sacred Heart-tuine en die huistuine vanuit 'n ekofeministiese perspektief genuanseerde waarnemings van die onderlinge verbintenis tussen swart vroue in die narratief, die rasse-koloniale agtergrond en die natuur moontlik maak. Feministiese en omgewingsidees word met mekaar verbind, dus word die artikel deel van die groeiende debat oor die verbintenis tussen literêre werke en natuurlike hulpbronne in die literatuur wat deur swart vroue-outeurs in Afrika geskryf word. Dit maak gebruik van Dangarembga se narratief om debat uit te lok oor die verbintenis tussen die onderdrukking van vroue en die natuur. Dit skep die geleentheid om die geïgnoreerde verhouding tussen vrou, oorlogsgeweld en omgewingsagteruitgang in *The Book of Not* te bespreek. Op grond van hierdie

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argument gebruik ek die tuinlandskappe metafores om die verbintenis tussen vroue en die natuur te verstaan en te ondersoek, en om die natuur/kultuur-digotomie te dekonstrueer. Die veronderstelling is dat die kontinuïteit van sosiale, godsdienstige en ekonomiese aspekte van die lewe in stand gehou kan word deur in harmonie met die omgewing self te leef. Dit benut 'n wye reeks bronne, insluitende omgewingskritiek en literêre studies, om ondersoek in te stel na die wyses waarop *The Book of Not* die natuur, en die verhouding tussen vroue en die natuur, uitbeeld. Dit stel ook ondersoek in na die invloed van hierdie verhouding op lesers se houdings teenoor die omgewing.

## Introduction

*The Book of Not* (2006) is a sequel to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions*. Set in the 1970s, towards the end of the liberation struggle, *The Book of Not* explores Tambudzai's Sigauke's trajectory; the colonial education system and her attempt to redefine herself through the new environment at the young ladies' college of The Sacred Heart and the philosophy of *unhu*. Through a feminist gaze, the book explores the plight of Shona women/girl-children as they try to locate themselves in a seemingly patriarchal and multi-racial environment. In her struggle against oppression and domination, the protagonist Tambudzai Sigauke, exudes how the black girl-child suffers in the stifling and constraining political and cultural environment. Growing up in a racial social milieu, she is displaced and engulfed by this environment, which subsequently denies her personal growth and self-actualisation. Using an ecofeminist lens, it is the intention of this paper to explore this displacement by analysing the different types of gardens in *The Book of Not*.

An ecofeminist approach befits Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* as she raises concerns about the interconnection between the denigration and marginalisation of women, war and the environment. It is a feminist theory that is strongly informed by and grounded on ecology. First coined by Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974, ecofeminism is a term that is concerned with the interconnection between the oppression and degradation of women and that of nature. This implies that ecofeminism expands the philosophy of feminism to embrace the degradation of nature. Ynestra King (1989: 20), draws a distinction between feminism and ecofeminism; "Ecofeminism's challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing." By implication, nature is a feminist issue (Warren 1997). This view is also echoed by Christiansen (1997: 240); she says that one of the major tenets of ecofeminism is that "seemingly disparate and unrelated entities are in fact connected". In this case, not only is the treatment of black students at the racist institution of The Sacred Heart related to the treatment of nonhuman nature, but it is also extended to include gardens, war and animality. Thus, I posit that Dangarembga makes

efforts to reimage nature to forge a new relationship with an understanding of nature. In other words, she stresses the significance of the intimate and intricate connectivity between ecology and feminism. Precisely articulating the nature of this relationship is what ecofeminism focuses on. This provides an opportunity to discuss the overlooked relationship between women and environmental degradation in *The Book of Not*.

In *The Book of Not*, not only is Tambu oppressed and dominated by patriarchy, but she is also marginalised by the alienating and racial atmosphere at Sacred Heart. It is because of this devotion to the politics of colonialism and gender issues that critics like Slaymaker (2001) claim African literature has not contributed much to environmental literature. However, using Dangarembga's gardens in *The Book of Not*, I argue that Slaymaker's definition is rather limiting and myopic and hence my call for a more encompassing ecocritical vision that transcends this overarching Anglo-American framework. By analysing the different types of gardens in *The Book of Not*, this paper will argue that Dangarembga shows that the political and gender concerns in African literature have always taken an ecological dimension.

In addition, an analysis of the connectivity between women and the gardens in the narrative intimates a broader definition of environmentalism and environmentalist philosophy. It allows a "plurality of voices" (Cook 2008:1) and transcends the rather limiting ecocritical orthodoxy that is rooted in the West and that uses American and British literature. Thus, a more diverse and all-embracing ecofeminist and environmentalist vision is important to "consider texts by women that may not have received the attention they deserve" (Cook 2008:2). Thus, the gardens were examined in light of concerns raised by ecofeminism, and African environmental history, thus transcending the overarching Anglo-American framework of what the environment entails. An analysis of Maiguru's garden, the Sacred Heart gardens, the Harare gardens and gardens of domesticity will show how conceptions of nature writing, which are at the centre of ecofeminism and environmentalism, are constructed by the historical and political processes in the human's lived environment. I posit, through this analysis, that the reader is left in no doubt that the Zimbabwean female writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga, has explored nature writing and infused it with the country's political issues in *The Book of Not*. In addition, I also postulate that this exploration is burdened with discrimination in which the political space and eco-warfare are used to denigrate the black woman. Hence, the article will conclude that Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* embraces and celebrates the philosophies of both feminism and ecology.

### **Giving Voice to Nature: Maiguru's Garden**

From an ecofeminist perspective, Maiguru's garden is a significant part of the environment in *The Book of Not*. Given the toxic environment of the

violence of the armed struggle waged by the Zimbabwean freedom fighters, the garden is an environment that gives Maiguru and Tambu purpose and meaning. According to Rine (2011: 54), Maiguru's garden is a "place where people can breathe freely" and it also "oxygenates the soul of the community" (Rine 2011: 56). For instance, Tambu's sense of displacement is disturbed when she establishes a symbiotic relationship with Maiguru's garden. She says, "Maiguru's garden ... was like a lake with bed upon bed of iridescent flowers shining and glowing upon it. Phlox, nasturtiums, marigolds, pansies, African violets, roses, bunny snaps, dahlias and roses cascaded like a burst chest of treasure over the section of earth that was allocated to my aunt ..." (95-96). Like the river, Nyamarira, Maiguru's garden is a "lake" that rejuvenates Tambu. Not only is she able to locate herself in this garden, but also her struggle to develop a sense of completeness and wholeness is realised in this environment. Significantly, this affinity between Tambu, Maiguru and the land is established "against an intrusive violent background" (Mabura 2011: 96). Tambu is able to use the garden as shelter against the "whirlwinds whipped up by explosions" (181). She takes "refuge under the loquat trees that grew on the edge of Maiguru's garden" and she rested "under the trees, calmed by the scent of Maiguru's flowers" (183). Maiguru uses the garden to provide for the family and the community, what Mabura calls the garden of utility and Rotenberg (1995: 219) refers to as a "garden of refuge aimed at supplementing foodstuffs". Seen in this light, one concurs with Mabura that Maiguru's cultivating of this land can be viewed as signifying a "precolonial era where women had access to land and thus could contribute to the economic base of their societies and families" (Mabura 2011: 96). Encapsulated in the following passage is Maiguru's physical connection to the land:

This piece of earth in which Maiguru set seeds was a mystery to me and many people ... and it seemed my aunt only had to hold a seed in her palm and stroke it, to have it jumping into the earth, where it shot out green and in a short while was profusely blooming. Whether the blossoms and fruit were to be admired or eaten, they produced prodigiously for Maiguru. Sturdy mango trees towering above her dropped fragrant fruit into my aunt's hand. Papaws plopped at her feet, while leafy covo, rape and kale waved leaves as big as small umbrellas, as thick as a jungle.

(p. 181)

This connectivity gives Maiguru a sense of ownership of this plot of land. Her authority is also emphasised since Sylvester the gardener was diligent, but "he received what was handed over by Maiguru" (181). By highlighting the abundance of fruit and vegetables on "my Maiguru's piece of land", Dangarembga seems to imply that nature is a means for women to discover their potential and wholeness. Thus, she undoes the patriarchal tradition of associating women and land and challenges with the debasement that society

normally associates with this relationship. According to Schmidt (1992), in pre-colonial Shona society, this connectivity with the environment is also a means of acquiring status and social recognition.

Stated succinctly, ecofeminism articulates liberatory strategies that can be actualised in the real world, in the process transforming everyday life (Carr 2000 cited in Vakoch 2012). For instance, Maiguru's garden promotes "inclusion and offers Tambu an oasis from the struggles of school and war" (Mabura 2011: 59). Through her gardening acts, Tambu also develops a close relationship with the land. She is "calmed by the scent of Maiguru's flowers" (183) and she says the garden "perfumed the atmosphere ever more fragrantly with the scent of healing" (183). Unlike the alienating and stifling atmosphere at Sacred Heart, Maiguru's garden has a therapeutic effect. Seemingly, Tambu undergoes a healing process from the psychological wounds inflicted on her at the stifling and racist environment at Sacred Heart and the patriarchal homestead. For Tambu, the garden "buoyed her up emotionally and physically" (Mabura 2011: 100), "holding a hoe close to its neck, then with a short swing ramming the blade in, ripping a clump of broad bladed grass from the humps of Maiguru's potatoes" (183). Vakoch (2012: 3) asserts that earlier ecofeminist literary scholarship reveals the oppressiveness of patriarchal thinking. My analysis of Dangarembga's gardens in her narrative builds upon this idea to explore the oppressiveness of racist discourses and also to explore emancipatory strategies in the process. Maiguru's garden is one such strategy that gives Maiguru authority and some economic strength and gives Tambu a sense of completeness. The economic strength and contentment is shown by the lack of profit from her garden; as Tambu points out, "I lay on the *bonde*, wondering about Maiguru, the lushness she cajoled out of the earth, the eggs and vegetables she sold at prices so low ... as if she was running a charity" (183). Maiguru's garden qualifies to be a "liminal space" (Mabura 2011: 100) free of patriarchal and racist oppressive norms

In addition, Rine (2011: 13) argues that using Maiguru's garden, Dangarembga subtly criticises her patriarchal culture and the colonisers by gesturing toward an "alternative and more loving existence, evident in the close friendship between Tambu and Nyasha and Maiguru's community garden". Tambu realises the importance of nature when she is in Maiguru's garden:

Maiguru's garden stretched out to the side of the house, beyond the dining and sitting room windows, and it was like a lake with bed upon bed of iridescent flowers shining and glowing upon it. Phlox, nasturtiums, marigolds, pansies, African violets, roses, bunny snaps, dahlias and roses cascaded like a burst chest of treasure over the section of earth that was allocated to my aunt ....

(pp. 95-96)

In the garden, Tambu experiences a sense of complicity. Despite the raging and destructive war, “the garden was still there” and she is glad that “it was the kind of war where the mortars didn’t tear up beautiful things like Maiguru’s garden” (96). Tambu also imagines the jeep drivers stopping sometimes to admire Maiguru’s garden (96). Seemingly, the garden proves to be a suitable refuge site for Tambu, Maiguru and Sylvester, the gardener, and even the soldiers. It is a space that allows constant interaction among the human and non-human community; a bond that is crucial for societal growth and renewal. According to Rine (2011: 61), when Tambu provides assistance to Sylvester and converses with the people who visit to buy produce, the gestures enable her to “contribute positively to a cooperative effort, symbolising her re-initiation into a community from which she is distanced at Sacred Heart”. As such, Maiguru’s garden is perceived as a “liminal space where identities are reconstituted and reconstructed” and symbolically, it is a “conceptual [space] for the renegotiation” (Rwafa 2013: 321) of Tambu and Maiguru’s identities. Of significance is Tambu’s retreat into nature, which shows her effort to escape the stifling Sacred Heart racist environment and the oppressive patriarchal home environment at Babamkuru’s homestead.

However, Tambu’s re-initiation into this environment does not last. The relief she gets from the garden and her quest for refuge is very shaky and not very convincing. Firstly, Tambu, Netsai and Babamkuru are all “hemmed in and severely damaged by their environment” (Hlongwane 2009: 449). Hlongwane also adds that the wholeness that Tambu yearns for eludes her and this sense of incompleteness is a dominant trope in the narrative (Hlongwane 2009). For instance, at Gaza where she works as a temporary teacher, Tambu experiences a sense of incomplicity again. However, when her students show signs of improving, Tambu compares them to “Maiguru’s perennials during the rainy season” (196). The garden and the “rainy season” symbolise hope and life in an environment where she feels lifeless, depressed and disinterested in her teaching. This lethargic attitude stops when she visualises Maiguru’s garden: “I began to feel I taught the children well. Just as they now had hope of passing, my own hope in life’s potential returned ...” (196). Thus, despite the fact that the garden is imbued with meanings that reflect the “dynamics of ... identity (re)formations and constructions”, Tambu’s self-development and identity reformation process remains incomplete.

### **Racial Difference in Ecofeminism: The Sacred Heart Landscape**

In sharp contrast to Maiguru’s garden is the garden at Sacred Heart. As they enter the mission gates, Tambu’s first impression of the grounds is a sharp

contrast of the squashed African dormitory. While “The grounds were majestically spacious” (Dangarembga 1988: 196), the African dormitory was barely large enough to accommodate the six beds, which were “arranged that there was barely space to walk between them” (198). Despite the fields’ “tranquil green lawns” (25) and the roundabout’s centre of “peaceful lawns” (24), Tambu does not re-affirm an environmental connection. The divide between the black girls and the white girls is quite clear.

In the Sacred Heart gardens, people are constantly in touch with the green environment of the lawns, shrubs and trees. Tambu observes that:

The roundabout itself was serenely green with a lavish, permanently moist lawn, the latter relieved in places carefully selected so that the green would not be too monotonous, by flowering shrubs. Delicate mimosa fluffed puffs of yellow and slivery white, robust poinsettia splashed patches of crimson and peach against the green. Two swans cruised elegantly across a pond in the middle of the lawn and later I found there shoals of goldfish, goldfish which were not a pale imitation but definitely gold. Their rich, ruddy glow flitted in and out of water weeds in the company of more exotic species that shot flashes of red and blue and silver through the gold.

(pp. 196-197)

The gardens are colonised such that the black girls are not accommodated and the gardens remain inaccessible spaces to them. The result is that the black girls are disadvantaged. For example, Tambu cannot attend lessons at Umtali Boys High School when her school suffers from a shortage of teachers and has to rely on notes from one of the white students. The African dormitory is positioned close to the sewer system. Hence, Mabura (2010: 91) argues that the British Empire’s improvement on Zimbabwe’s physical landscape was based on a Western framework that “alienated black women from their traditional liminal and rejuvenating spaces, like rivers, where they could position themselves to effectively resist or overcome what were often predominantly patriarchal and racist societies”. Clearly, the beautiful and healthy gardens reveal the significance of nature as a source of power. According to Rotenberg (1995), political views shaped the gardens in which Tambu’s philosophy of *unhu* cannot thrive. Samkange (1980: 39) defines the *unhu* philosophy as the “attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, attitude to other people and to life”. Tambu and the other black girls at Sacred Heart do not get this attention from Sister Emmanuel or the white students. Instead they live in fear of accidentally touching the white girls (59) and when Tracey gets the O-Level Best Student trophy, which Tambu deserved, she (Tambu) cannot fight this injustice.

The Sacred Heart’s peaceful and harmonious garden proves to be a racist environment that engulfs her and disconnects the black students from the

white community. As Hlongwane (2009) points out, Tambu and her black peers are shunned because they are a threat to the status quo and “the possibility of black and white students learning on an equal plane clearly threatens the very premise of colonialism”. Hence, from an ecofeminist perspective, Dangarembga interrogates the racial, engulfing and oppressive Sacred Heart environment by gesturing toward alternative versions of ecofeminism.

As such, I hazard that Tambu’s privileged colonial education is not only racist and harmful, but also limited. As she sings along with the white girls, “This land is your land! This land is my land! ... This land was made for you and me!” she turns a blind eye to the glaring contrasting living conditions between black and white students living in the same environment and geographical space. By singing this song Tambu disregards her grandmother’s colonial history lessons about the coloniser’s seizure of the black man’s land, forcing him to abandon his “original home to a desolate plot of land” (Rine 2011: 22). Mbuya’s history lessons about the former land inhabited by Tambu’s family clearly show how the black man in Zimbabwe was oppressed then and at the same time, reveal that the affinity between the land and black people has always existed.

### **Animality and the Sacred Heart Gardens**

In her struggle against the oppressive and the suffocating colonial environment at the Sacred Heart academy, Tambu seeks refuge in isolated places of the convent. She associates herself with the landscape and animals. Wenner in Mabura (2010: 92) observes that “gender affects the way landscape is seen” and that “when a woman gazes, she is imagining where she fits inside the landscape and how she can position herself to be helped by it”. In a bid to accomplish her goal to be the best O-Level student, Tambu “spent most of her free time at weekends curled up in a spot behind the hall where *nothing* [my emphasis] but *chongololos*, which were silent, came” (135). She appreciates the beauty of nature, especially the peaceful and tranquil atmosphere symbolised by the millipede. One can draw parallels between Tambu and the millipede. Because it is slow and harmless, a millipede is vulnerable. When threatened, it coils its body into a tight spiral to protect itself. Similarly, one may argue that when Tambu feels threatened by the Sacred Heart racist gardens and the girls in the African dormitory, she feels vulnerable and loses her fighting spirit. She “recoils” into the secluded environment where *chongololos* are silent and do not attack her like the other girls in the African dormitory. For example, Patience says, “So you’re dashing off again? Where to? ... It makes us wonder what we are like now ... You’re making us wonder what we are like since now we aren’t the people with whom you can sit down and do anything” (135). It is in this



isolated environment that Tambu memorises education that is harmful and not Africanised (Chirikure 1994); knowledge that disempowers her and cripples her in the colonial racist environment she lives in.

Thus this paper argues that Dangarembga describes Tambu's interaction with the *chongololos* on equal ground in a forest space, in which both appear to be vulnerable and powerless against the forces that threaten them. Tambu says she feels "cracked and defective, as though indispensable parts leaked, and [she] could not gather energy" (28). The only animals she associates with are the silent *chongololos* that are not defined in masculine terms because they are at the bottom of the food chain. Similarly, Dangarembga articulates the animalness of Ma'Shingayi's humanness when she describes her after Netsai's leg was blown off by a landmine. She writes, Ma'Shingayi "clawed at the ground, slithering forward like a snake" (4). Tambu's mother – who has the will-power, strength and skill to influence others and empower her situation – is also equated to an animal, "the snake".

By implication, Dangarembga equates women and animals in a derogatory manner. According to Adams (1993: 204) cited in McFarland (2008:43), "The traditional feminist response to the equation of femaleness with animalness has been to break that association." Ecofeminists on the other hand, transcend this patriarchal version and subvert the "more standard conception of nonhuman animals" with "otherness" (Adams 1993 cited in McFarland 2008: 48). The metaphorical negation of the *chongololo* and the snake in this instance reinforces the othering of animals. Thus Dangarembga articulates the traditional relationship of the female with animals by reinforcing their denigrated nature. While Tambu's otherness is located in the racial Sacred Heart forest, the *chongololo*'s is located in the natural physical forest. Dangarembga connects Tambu's invisibility and vulnerability in the colonial racist environment to that of the *chongololo*. Thus the equation of animals with animals in this case does not disturb the "metaphor's othering effect" (McFarland 2008: 48) and does not help us to "recognise the subjectivity of animals and the agency of women in traditionally exclusionary spaces" (ibid). One may conclude that both the metaphorical animals and the black girls are "victims of forces outside their own power to combat" (McFarland 2008: 49). Thus, central to Dangarembga's re-envisioning of human connectivity with nature and animals, I argue that although she challenges the myth of a "womanless wilderness" (McFarland 2008: 42), she does not successfully redefine how women and animals are perceived in the African forest and how they are conceived in African literary texts. In addition, I also suggest that even though Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* engages in "liberation politics and by extension the ordering and reconstruction of the African identity" (Okolo 2013: 17), she also celebrates environmental concerns which qualifies her as an ecofeminist writer.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Tambu's association with the tiny and vulnerable animals shows that she knows the environment intimately. Mabura (2010: 92) explains that she is "endowed with an eye for aesthetic landscape contemplation and an awareness of how landscape can help her as well". In the process of her self-development journey, she understands that she has to relate to nature, hence she retreats to the spot with the quiet *chongololos*. According to Zwinger, cited in McFarland (2008), for one to develop a relationship with the environment, one has to "know the landscape intimately, and not just pass through ..." [and] must develop the "vibrissae of a vole, the nose of a fox, the ears of an owl, the chemical-sensing mycelia of a truffle, the echolocation of a bat, the directional sense of an arctic tern, and the eyes of a bald eagle" (McFarland 2008: 42). In other words, "humans have to be willing to change their sensory relationship with the land in order to better understand its multifaceted ways" (McFarland 2008: 42). This re-envisioning of the human/nature relationship is the central concern of the analysis of Tambu's relationship with nature and animals. However, despite this intimate relationship between Tambu and nature, I argue that Dangarembga fails to subvert the traditional nature-woman domination relationship. The metaphors of the cow, snake, black ants and *chongololos* do not reflect the subjectivity of nature. The animals remain invisible and do not attain an authorial position other than that of sentient animals. In many respects, Warren's (1993) claim that "the interconnections among the conceptualisations and treatment of women, animals and nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response" is relevant to the discussion in this section. It is therefore the contention of this discussion that the animality of women brings about a realisation that both nature and women are the objects of domination.

### **Gardens of Domesticity**

In a review of Rotenberg's (1995) study of the city's green spaces, Barry Selders (1995: 1) explains that "landscapers from the Baroque Era to the present have designed Vienna's parks and gardens to represent particular world views and to legitimise or criticise given power relations". His argument is premised on the fact that political views shaped the gardens and parks in each great period in Viennese life (Selders 1995). It is not the intention of this paper to discuss the different types and shapes of gardens described by Rotenberg in his book, *Landscape and Power in Vienna*; rather, I will examine the "gardens of domesticity", which I find relevant to my argument in this article.

According to Selders (1995), gardens of domesticity were built after the Napoleonic Wars, which drove the middle class from public life into the home and enclosed backyard. They were enclosed, fenced and they guaran-

teed safety for the middle class from the agents of repression. Thus, their designs were political and symbolised their anti-aristocratic republicanism (Rotenberg 1995: 108). Given the colonial set up in the former Rhodesia in the 1970s, I concur with Mabura (2010: 107) that the garden and architecture at Twiss Hostels is a garden of domesticity. It represented a “fortified enclosure shutting out perceived colonial day insecurities such as violence stemming from the black liberation war, and, after independence, guarded its female occupants from the male visitors who were unwelcome guests at the exclusive residence”. In other words, Twiss Hostel’s enclosed architecture was political and, unbeknown to Tambu, she is one of the “agents of repression” because of her identity as a black woman even in the new Zimbabwe. She fails to locate herself in this garden of domesticity whose structures are a continual reminder of “Otherness”. For instance, the elderly matron could not remember her name as she always called her “Isabel” and the folded napkins on the “heavy wooden tables” were like “sentinels to ensure [the girls] did not eat too much, thus maintaining both [their] figures and the hostel fees within manageable proportions” (202). On one occasion Tambu carries her plate to a table only to be told somebody had booked it and she is forced to “sit alone at the end of the table” (223) and yet “the other resident did not come” (223) and the seat remained vacant. Clearly, as a garden of domesticity, the Twiss Hostel guarded its white female residents from the black residents who were not welcome. Tambu observes that Twiss Hostel “incorporated in its design some of the serene grace of the grounds of the college in Umtali” (202), a college which could not accommodate her when she was doing her A-Levels and resulted in her poor performance.

I also concur with Mabura (2010: 107) that the colonial construction of Twiss Hostel resonates with Rotenberg’s definition of the construction of gardens of domesticity:

Because threat from the outside world defined the place, its [the garden’s] boundaries were concrete and impermeable .... Its walls were high and offered no hint of the activities within .... The gardens of domesticity shut out the predatory political world. They created a fantasy world in which life was solely within the joys of the family circle.

(Rotenberg 1995: 109)

Tambu is unfortunately not a member of this white family and she remains alienated. Unlike Maiguru’s garden which is inclusive, the Twiss Hostel garden is not accommodative of all and remains an exclusive residence. Even the “wide and generous structure, the reception desk ... [suggesting] straight away people leaning out and, with courteous enquiries, beckoning” (202) is designed as such to represent the views of those in power. Additionally, Mabura (2010) notes the colonial structure of the courtyard “open to a sky too blue in one season, swollen grey with water about to burst in another” (202), which resemble Rotenberg’s description of gardens of

domesticity. The walls were high and “impermeable” and when Tambu tries to cross these Rhodesian rigid lines of racial segregation, she pays a heavy price.

In addition, there are no trees in the courtyard but one could read “on stone benches” (202), which I also believe are impermeable. Though Tambu was able to read in this garden, I argue that she gains no pleasure from her reading and that the sense of wholeness and complicity eludes her. Furthermore, the presence of the bougainvillea bushes in this garden signal the gap between her and the family at Steers, D’Arcy and MacPedi Advertising agency. Mabura (2010: 107) also asserts that the presence of the bougainvillea bushes is reminiscent of the white school girl at Sacred Heart who claimed that blacks had “eyes like a cow’s” (46). Through this analogy bougainvillea reveals a hierarchically ordered world that perceives “reality through the world dominant Western cultural paradigm” (Schmah 1998: 10), in this case, colonial Rhodesia. By so doing she demonstrates how both nature and women are objectified and negated in similar ways by the colonial racist system. This analogy reveals the hierarchically ordered world of binarisms of nature/culture, woman/man, feminine/masculine, black/white, emotion/reason etc., which early ecofeminists such as Susan Griffin (1978) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) have tried to deconstruct. Hence, bougainvillea’s racist tendencies astutely suggest the double oppression suffered by the black woman, thus leading to her sense of powerlessness.

Another garden of domesticity is Steers, D’Arcy and MacPedi Advertising agency. After her studying for a degree in Social Sciences, Tambu subsequently gets a lowly paying job as a copywriter at Steers, D’Arcy and MacPedi Advertising agency. The Harare gardens close to the Twiss Hostel where she lived lack the vitality, relief and sense of wholeness that she gets from Maiguru’s garden. I argue that the neglected gardens are equated to her lowly paying job, low self-esteem and the stifling racist environment at the advertising agency, which is reminiscent of the racist attitude at Sacred Heart. Tracey Stevenson, the girl who gets the trophy for the best O-Level student, is her boss. Tambu is treated as an intruder and with disrespect by most of her fellow workers including the black tea boy, Raphael. Dick Lawson, the white senior copywriter, presents the Afro-Shine advertising copywriter’s hair straightening product as his own and he wins a prize at the advertising awards. The agency’s environment with its racist tendencies is just as engulfing and stifling as the Sacred Heart environment. Tambu’s resilience and creativity is again stifled in this racially toxic environment and clearly, there are no familial ties between her and her colleagues. She resigns and at the end of the novel she finds herself homeless and jobless.

Furthermore, the structural design of Sacred Heart is reminiscent of Rotenberg’s gardens of domesticity. On entering the school, Tambu notes that “you passed through a *great wrought iron gate as imposing as St*

*Peter's portal ...*" (Dangarembga 2006: 24) [my own emphasis]. In addition, the archway that stood between the dormitories was "supported by ornate plaster pillars in the Greek style, not the Roman, and above this long archway rose the dining-room and chapel" (Dangarembga 2006: 196). Both the imposing "wrought iron gate" and the "ornate plaster pillars" that support the archway evoke ideas of Rotenberg's garden of domesticity. Thus, using the eco-critical lens, I argue that the colonial structures are meant to politicise the environment. The possibility of black and white students learning together is one that is not acceptable since it challenges the status quo. The black students are brought there to "polish their behaviour" (63) and not to get a prestigious type of education and prove their intellectual superiority.

### **The Harare Gardens**

Using the metaphor of the Harare gardens, Dangarembga engages in ecofeminist issues by exploring what relationship human beings should have with the natural world to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation and degradation. Tambu clearly notes that the city of Harare has neglected the Harare gardens. She says, "The city of Harare, busy with other tasks, forgot how the public needed the beauty of our gardens nurtured, and so I considered, as I walked by another bed of shrivelled cannas, it would be far competent to have the place run by a caring team like Maiguru and Sylvester" (202). Like the unappealing landscape with the "shrivelled cannas", Tambu feels "cracked and defective" (28). This resonates well with one of the tenets of ecofeminism that draws parallels between "man's domination of nature and the exploitation and oppression of women" (Cook 2008: 4). The equation demonstrates how nature and woman are both dominated and negated in literary representations by raising awareness of such exploitation, Dangarembga contributes to the ecofeminist movement and "enters into a dialogue about the plight of women and the environment" (ibid). However, her attempts to revise the nature/culture, woman/man, feminine/masculine, and black/white binarisms are not wholly successful. By emphasising the naturalness and victimhood of the black women in *The Book of Not*, she retains the "traditional patriarchal image of both women and nature" (McFarland in Cook 2008: 49).

### **Conclusion**

This article examined the interconnectedness of black women and nature in Tsitsi Dangaremba's narrative, *The Book of Not*. Using the ecofeminism lens, the article explored how nature, represented by the gardens, can be

embraced to transform gendered concepts that have been constructed to silence women and girl-children, as well as non-human life. It argued that women's survival struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature. Using the ecofeminism lens, I suggest that Dangarembga's gardens raise questions about the denigration of women and nature and also enter into a dialogue about the plight of both women and nature in a war environment. Thus, by reimagining human relationships with nature to include the war environment, I believe this broadens the definition of nature writing to include black African female writers who have been ignored as nature writers.

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