

Perceiving pervasive covert racial discrimination in *The Book of Not*¹.

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Abstract

The article aims at showing the ongoing institutionalization of white racism through hidden but efficient methods, and its effects on the victims. The white establishment strived to maintain racism in the country using no conventional methods in place, a missionary school, where one is not supposed to find divisions. Covert racism manifests through divisions at the dormitories, through language and bad treatments that black girls underwent from the part of white girls and some members of the school administration. Tsitsi Dangarembga portrays her society with its sad realities among which racism and the trauma it provoking a real disorder on the victims. Racism is an ideology of domination designed to better exploit peoples. A Book of Not is a work that denounces a system of domination and racial devaluation maintained despite its official ban. This article presents how the author denounces insidious racism in a society that is supposed to treat all its citizens equally. It is not only about racism, but above all about the trauma it creates within discriminated communities. Tambudzai experiences this trauma within his community, at school and in the workplace.

Key words: Domination, Racism, Trauma, Victims

Résumé

Cet article vise à montrer l'institutionnalisation continue du racisme blanc à travers des méthodes cachées mais efficaces, ainsi que ses effets sur les victimes. Le pouvoir blanc s'est efforcé de maintenir le racisme dans le pays

¹ Tsitsi, Dangarembga. (2006). *The Book of Not*. Banbury, Ayeibia Clarke Publishing Limited. (All the subsequent quotations in this article refer to that edition). Among the critical literature on Tsitsi Dangarembga, there is almost no critical work found on *The Book of Not* since it is a recent publication.

en utilisant des méthodes non conventionnelles dans un lieu, une école missionnaire, où l'on n'est pas censé trouver de divisions. Le racisme caché se manifeste par des divisions dans les dortoirs, par le langage et les mauvais traitements que les filles noires subissaient de la part des filles blanches et de certains membres de l'administration scolaire. Tsitsi Dangarembga dépeint sa société avec ses tristes réalités, parmi lesquelles le racisme et le traumatisme qu'il cause, provoquant un véritable désordre chez les victimes. Le racisme est une idéologie de domination conçue pour mieux exploiter les peuples. A Book of Not est une œuvre qui dénonce un système de domination et de dévalorisation raciale maintenu malgré son interdiction officielle. Cet article présente la manière dont l'auteur dénonce le racisme insidieux dans une société censée traiter tous ses citoyens de manière égale. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de racisme, mais surtout du traumatisme qu'il crée au sein des communautés discriminées. Tambudzai vit ce traumatisme au sein de sa communauté, à l'école et sur son lieu de travail.

Mots clés : *Domination, Racisme, Traumatisme, Victimes -*

Introduction

The Book of Not is a novel by Tsitsi Dangarembga. It depicts and unveils the bleak realities of covert racism in newly independent Rhodesia in general, and particularly in a missionary-led institution. The story takes part in the Young Ladies School of the Sacred Heart, led by Christian nuns. It narrates the story of Tambudzai, also referred to in the novel as Tambu, the main protagonist, who lives with the trauma of an endless racial conflict which, insidiously, is still tearing her society. The laws of the country officially punish racialism, but some institutions are still governed under the model of the segregated society that used to rule the country. Despite the horror of the situation, Tambu never gives up. She commits herself to succeed at school in order to change her condition and that of her likes. Indeed, being a very brilliant student, Tambu's is used by the writer as the token witness of the manifestations of racism in the country and the trauma it causes to victims. The face of trauma becomes more serious when racial considerations are vivid in a religious institution. The reality in that institution

is that some black students are accepted in the school to justify their social conformism and their being charitable while at the same time they are not really treated equally.

With the mastery she displayed in her previous novel, *The Nervous Condition*, in *The Book of Not*, the author denounces an established system and the disorders it causes in the individuals who endure it. The author uses education as a site of betrayal. This article is developed around two main questions. First, in what ways does the missionary school's Christian framework weaponize faith to enforce racial trauma while maintaining a facade of charity? The second question is why the author positions formal education—typically framed as liberation—as a mechanism for reinforcing internalized oppression among Black students?

Unveiling covert racism and trauma in Post-Colonial institutions, the article analyses narrative techniques such as fragmented chronology, somatic descriptions of events, conveying racialized trauma in *The Book of Not*. It decodes micro aggressions in daily institutional interactions such as classroom and religious settings. It finally charts Tambu's academic perseverance as a counter-hegemonic tactic. The Themes of racialism, identity and trauma are recurrent in Tsitsi Dangarembga's works, exposing the different themes she develops in her writings. Nigus and Abiye explore the colonial legacy of gender injustices through the study of *This Mournable Body*. Mukazo Mukoka and Theresa Marshal discusses the issue of identity in a racially dominated environment in *The Nervous Condition*. Lily Saint explores the remnants of colonialism through education and racial gender based segregation in *The Book of not*. Tambudzai, the main protagonist is trapped in a system which offers no real choice to black students than assimilation into white cultures if they want to succeed. Lily Kay Lynn Cook examines the issue of mental trauma in a postcolonial society with its corollaries such as racism and

oppression. Anne W. Gulick questions decolonisation in postcolonial societies still ruled by colonial institutions like education, one of the most important social institutions.

The first part of the article deals with the Christian teaching, which is officially said to be used as a means of social integration, but is actually used for social disintegration through the manifestation of covert racism. The second part deals with the manifestation of covert racism in the novel, through the illustration of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. It is namely around insidious racism as it is presented by the author. The third part discusses about trauma and the way it is manifested in the life of the young Tambudzai.

1. Christian teaching and education as a means of social integration / disintegration

The central message of Christian teaching is love; love for ourselves, love for others and love for life. That message is the one every Christian is supposed to vehicle around him/her. That message aims at giving every human being the opportunity to develop his personality. In many parts of the world where Christian missionaries set foot, they presented that teaching as a token of God's love for His children. Consequently, they had to work with local population in accordance with Christian teaching which set love as the principal value permitting people to live together in harmony and inherit the kingdom of God. Education and religious teaching then went hands in hands in order to reach those objectives.

Indeed, along with the construction of churches and missions, was the construction of schools with high value in the quality of education. *The Book of Not* is set up in the Young

Lady's Young College of Sacred Heart. It is one of the best institutions in the country. Tambu's description is unequivocal:

The Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart delivered a formidable education, and its standards were set kilometres before the school gate was arrived at. The college was located on the opposite side of Umtali, as it was called then, from the mission, occupying a tract of land that rises up to meet fragile sparkling skies between the town and our eastern border. The winds blow across that sky from the Indian Ocean, over the Mozambique mountains where the drops from the sea glide together like frightened girls (Dangarembga, 2006: 24).

The young Tambu's excitement at the Young Ladies College of the Sacred heart is so great that she never stops describing the wonderful environment that receives her. She contends:

Entering the school you passed through a great wrought iron gate as imposing as St Peter's portal. Up, you drove, along the road between the hockey fields and tennis courts to the boundary set by the cedars. Here you turned left about the broad roundabout, over whose centre the peaceful lawns lays. Pace, pace, pace. Pace, pace, pace. Six or seven steps were needed to traverse these parking spaces whose white painted boundaries accommodated the large and long vehicles of elite Rhodesians (Dangarembga, 2006: 25).

Comparatively to her previous environment in public government schools, The Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart is highly standardized, preparing children to become executives and managers. At the same time, the system was shaped so that black pupils in government institutions will not go so far. They were just enough educated for subaltern positions. Tambu recalls Babamakuru's words in receiving her school transcript:

‘Most people only take three subjects, you know! Of course. *Sisi* Tambu, you're just as good.’

‘Good for what? ’Babamakuru inquired ominously. ‘Good enough to do only what we did and become teachers, Mai! Are you saying she should become a nurse or a teacher, Mai? Didn't we become educated where our parents were not? Shouldn't a child, one who is intelligent, want to become more than her parents?’(Dangarembga, 2006:185).

Far from despising teachers and nurses, Babamakuru's statement on Tambu's results is a way for him to refuse generational professional replacement. Children from lower social positions will come to replace their parents at the same positions while those in decision making positions will remain at the top as it is the case now.

Along with love, the core of the Christian teaching is forgiveness. That ideal led those missionaries to organise life not only around religious teaching, but also introduced other activities that could help local populations cope with their existential difficulties. Education, health care, agriculture and training on administrative work were also part of the

missionaries' activities there. They built schools and hospitals. They helped people in their daily routines. That ideal was in line with the reality of actions. Indeed, the Young lady's College of the Sacred Heart was the top institution in the country with all the facilities that proposed the best conditions to learners.

Normally, education should intend to deliver people who take it from the evil of illiteracy and the dependency of ignorance or any other form of dependency. It should aim at freeing people from oppression in order to wake them up and lead them to the path of development. It is obviously necessary to link education to people's own culture in order to root them from a real basis. However, when education does not participate in a person's independence, that person is condemned to ignorance. Consequently, no development is possible, and on the contrary, it participates in the exploitation of those people. If education participates to the development of ideologies like racism, it is no more education.

2. The manifestations of covert racism in the novel

Racism refers to the belief in the superiority of one race over another, which often results in discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race or ethnicity.

In reading *The Book of Not*, we notice psychological disorders expressed in local people as they are quite always obliged to prove their worth in order to have a bit of consideration in society. They are considered as second-class beings. The novel is developed around a black girl's vicissitudes in a missionary college to her entering the professional world. Among the different problems she faces is covert racism. Racism has no real natural reason to be. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2010:7):

Racism is ordinary, not aberrational – “normal science“, the usual way society does business, the common, every-day’s experience, of most people in this country [...] Most would agree that our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes , both psychic and material for the dominant group.

It is then noticeable that racism is socially constructed and maintained by those who take profit of it. What is racism? For Van Dyjk, racism derives from

power abuse of one group over another and is enacted by two interrelated systems of everyday social and sociocognitive practices, that is, by various forms of discrimination, marginalization, exclusion or problematization, on the one hand, and by prejudiced and stereotypical beliefs, attitudes and ideologies, on the other hand².

That is a situation which has psychological consequences on their ego. What elements do justify the promotion of racist ideas as it is the case in the novel? Racial segregation stems from the consideration that a culture considers itself as being superior to another one. That was the case with the Western world and African people. For Graham(2005: IX),

² T., Van Dijk, Second draft, March 29, 2005. “*Elite discourse and institutional racism*”, Universidad Pompeu Fabra Barcelona. Available at: [http://www.discourses.org/ Teun.html](http://www.discourses.org/Teun.html) last visited on November 24th, 2018.

Races as objectively existing biological entities do not exist. The traditional concept of 'race' cannot be reconciled with current understanding of the genetic nature of human diversity. The concept emerged in Western thought in its modern sense around 1800 and has owed its popularity to a variety of, often ideological, cultural factors.

Racist ideologies were but means of exploitation set up by Western imperialists to better submit local people to their domination. It had no scientific or natural basis. It is clearly established that "*The existence of profound race differences was a central dogma of 19th and early 20th century eugenic and degenerationist thought and Galton himself one of the main architects of Scientific Racism*"(Graham, 2005: 187).

The expansion of church mission societies was a European desire to do evangelism among those who had not heard the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Gospel movement also extended humanistic ideas by voicing the equality of man before God. This was expressed through the teaching of the Bible and the initiation to formal education. Western exploration of African countries brought with it those values, emphasizing on the teaching of the Bible that could later on help local people enter the "modern area." In order to better illustrate this, Nathan Nunn(2010:147) contends:

Europeans came to be seen as symbols of power, and Christianity itself came to be seen as part of a larger order, comprising Western education, colonial administration, commerce and industry, with which everyone had henceforth to

reckon... The provision of education soon became the main reward used by missionaries to lure Africans into the Christian sphere

With white racists' systems that created divisions and kept them vivid, the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart tried officially to keep aside from that system. However, when analysing the facts closely, one discovers that the religious institution was but a copy of the society with that difference that they used black students as a token for the policy of equality. The need to build a society of rights for everybody necessarily demands education to be an essential actor of the process. Wilson (2022:600) contends:

The focus on racial equality gives short shrift to racial justice. Racial justice requires collective group-based liberation and the elimination of group-based racial hierarchies.⁸ While racial equality can occur at an individual level, racial justice must occur at a group level.⁹ Effectuating racial justice in education is important because it holds the key to stabilizing what is currently a nascent and fraught multiracial democracy.

The headmistress' official discourse corroborates those facts:

We want to offer more places to African girls. I have asked Miss Plato to give each of you above form two a room on the appropriate corridor shortly. You will, by the way use the bathrooms on the respective corridors (Dangarembga, 2006: 154).

That case illustrates the divisions based on race, existing in society. In order to hide that reality, some black girls are taken at school but are not in reality at the same level of consideration as some school staff members and other students. Bougainvillea is a white student, she feels like being superior to her black school mates and lets them know it as testified in the novel:

So bougainvillea liked everyone to know she had brought the Nesquik with her from the last family holiday in South Africa. Now above this sign of her classmate's superiority, Ntombizethu's hand hovered as though touch the icon. It was terrible to observe, Ntombizethu being on the brink like that, of touching the white girl's carton (Dangarembga, 2006: 39).

That situation systematically reveals the real nature of the relationships between white and black girls at the Young Lady's College of the Sacred Heart, even if school officials stated that they did not admit any form of violence or division as the headmistress attests,

We are not a political institution...
What we are is a Christian institution. As such an institution, we cannot condone murder. Acts of murder cannot be justified under any circumstances (Dangarembga, 2006: 129).

What was true for violence should be true for racial segregation since racism is a form of violence. Tambu contends:

Aggravations surfaced at times.
However, they were the results of events

that took place beyond the conifers and outside the college gates. Whatever its failings previously, it was clear the convent could not be held responsible for all that took place, especially not the deeds of an offensive government that conceived of people as divisible portions (Dangarembga, 2006: 152).

Together but separated even in schools, a situation similar to the established apartheid in South Africa. Tambu accounts for the situation,

The girls in my class reading science subjects were driven each day in the school bus to Umtali Boys High School for their lessons. This secondary school was a government institution, built upon government land, so that my presence there was forbidden (Dangarembga, 2006: 153).

She went on questioning the system, *“I wondered, was I a Rhodesian, if I could not sit on Rhodesian seats, read formulae from a Rhodesian blackboard and press down a Rhodesian desks (Dangarembga, 153).* The concern of the young lady was justified as she could not understand why she was deprived of freedom to enjoy her country’s facilities only because she was a black girl.

For, most white people in that society do not think of black people as human beings who deserve their absolute respect. The writer contends: *“Here the question for Bougainvillea, and all the other white girls there was, after Ntombizethu had touched it, would the chocolate be still edible?” (Dangarembga, 2006:*

9). That is to say that once a black girl has touched anything, it becomes inappropriate for white girls to use it. For those white girls, blackness carries dirt and poverty. In their eyes, blackness is contagious, for that they do not need to mix with black girls.

The writer succeeds in presenting the irony which consists in witnessing a tragedy taking place in a religious environment bringing out the debate on the correlation between Christian missionaries and white supremacy in some parts of Africa. This situation existed in countries where the separated development of races was legal. Racism was institutionalized. Despite the official end of the system, racial habits survived in a covert form since it was structured within minds. What is then structural racism?

Structural Racism lies *underneath, all around and across society*. It encompasses: (1)

history, which lies *underneath* the surface, providing the foundation for white supremacy in this country. (2) culture, which exists *all around* our everyday lives, providing the normalization and replication of racism and, (3) interconnected institutions and policies, they key relationships and rules across society providing the legitimacy and reinforcements to maintain and perpetuate racism (Keith, Lawrence. Terry, Keleher, 2009: 2).

Through the book, the author unveils covered racial discrimination created by colonial administrators and now maintained by religious nuns in the Young Lady's College of the

Sacred Heart. Why masked racism? Since racial divisions were no more officially allowed, however, some people and institutions continued to keep the system. The objective was clear in the minds of the white people in charge of the institution, namely, to maintain black people away from the education that could permit them to reach higher positions. The author writes:

For why would a man select a school for his child where the education was superior to the education given to the children of other people? A school that would not, unlike other schools in the areas where guerrillas battled for independence, be closed? A school peopled not by those who looked like us, but by Europeans? (Dangarembga 2006: 6)

The quotation above explains that the non-official policy of education that was established by white people consisted in developing a sound education system for their children while the other communities had an approximate educational system. Indeed, dealing with the issue of religious missionaries and their influence in the colonization of Africa, Andrew Roberts asserts that the role of missionary education in some ways

...often impart[ed] to many of its participants only a smattering of literacy, it was nevertheless summoning the youth, and sometimes the adults, of Africa towards a positive encounter with modernization (Andrew Roberts, 1990: 144).

The book of Not is littered with images of treatments based on racial considerations, so revealing a difficult colonial past which still influences the relationships among people in that society. That division persisted even at school with some teachers and students who used to look at black students as coming from a different galaxy. Tambu explains the way she felt during classes,

On this particular day, weeks after school recommenced, I tried once more to concentrate. I particularly wished to as it was Latin class. This subject was taken by Sister Catherine who was my favourite teacher. I just felt something about her, not knowing what. In Sister Catherine's hour there was a special edge to my cramming and recitations of conjugations and declensions. I wanted to do well to make both of us happy, rather than because of my perception of my situation. Sister Catherine never displayed any of the unbearable, prejudged attitudes towards Ntombizethu and me that emanated from some of the other teachers (Dangarembga, 2006: 28-29).

Tambu clearly states the situation of the reject of black people from part of some members of the school teaching staff. She also accounts for the same situation at her workplace,

The white girls, who were in the majority, took the tables at the top and front of the room, away from the door and under the windows. This left pair of tables, awkward as afterthoughts, as the hall filled up, unoccupied in the draughts of the

entrance. Here the handful of us took our seats with chairs positioned as far from the door as possible. We were, practically to a person, young Zimbabweans who had no parental backing but who had acquired the means through some sort of tenacity, however dubious, to lodge at the respectable hostel (Dangarembga, 2006: 223).

The objective of that positioning was to hide black people behind so that only white people could be visible. The signs of divisions based on race, established by the rulers of the country, are stated when the author, through the main character's questioning, asserts:

I spent my holidays at the mission, using as an excuse the intensifying of war, when in reality I did not have the heart to return three times a year to fetching water from the river, the juddering paraffin lamp light and *sandza* with only one, extremely small, portion of relish (Dangarembga, 2006: 7).

The extract above reveals real disparities in people's living conditions. In one side are the black people, living in extreme conditions as described by Tambu. They lack basic living conditions, they fetch water away from home, light their houses with paraffin lamps and hardly eat good food. On the other side was the white community, represented by the mission where people could enjoy facilities for a better life and success at school.

Tambu was conscious of the difficulty of the task since the environment was organized in such a way that white girls could succeed easily while black girls had to face some difficulties. She describes the segregated methods that existed in their school environment:

The Young Lady's College of the Sacred Heart delivered a formidable education, and its standards were set kilometres before the school gate was arrived at [...] Then come government schools and a choice of the post office or fast food outlet depending on which avenue is turned into. But there was not much to choose from between the routes then, because the post office ordered segregated queues, and the fast food place sold you cool drinks and dry buns from the back window only, but not hamburgers (Dangaremba, 2006: 22-23).

The whole society was divided according to race. One would be tempted to think that the missions led by Christian nuns would not be concerned about such inhumane system. Unfortunately, the paradox of the situation was actually to witness segregation within a Christian institution. The policy was designed by white people aided by certain missionaries. On that situation, Mbity's words can be contended with Tsitsi's vision of the situation in the novel when he asserts:

The image that Africans received, and to a great extent still hold, of Christianity, is much colored by colonial rule and all that was involved in it. We are still too close to that

period to dissociate one from the other (Mbiti, 1969: 231).

When witnessing racial segregation, one is coming to the conclusion of that correlation between colonial supremacists and religious missionaries. That is the case in the Young Lady's College of the Sacred Heart.

Reading *The Book of Not* leads to question the objective of the policy which was no more to refuse black students in schools, but to set up for them limited ambitions while feigning to grant them equal opportunities. In fact, black students were programmed to the roles of auxiliaries in the administration. It consisted in opening a limited education for them, enough to become primary school teachers or nurses, but not medical doctors and engineers. The concern was shared by Babamakuru, Tambu's uncle when he got her results. His disappointment was not because she had failed, but because she had missed some subjects. She had not to, since her ethnic origin had only one requirement, to be the best. He had been victim of the system and so, did not want his daughter to undergo the same situation. When his wife congratulates Tambu on her success, he replies that it was not enough:

Most people only take three subjects, you know! Of course, Sisi Tambu, you're just as good! [Said his wife].

Good for what? Babamukuru inquired ominously. Good enough to do what we did and become teachers, Mai! Are you saying she should become a nurse or a teacher, Mai? (Dangarembga, 2006: 185)

In the eyes of Babamukuru, teachers and nurses are not under estimated jobs. He only wants to avoid his daughter a generational replacement between parents and children. There are no jobs reserved for a category of people as it seems to be the situation in the country. All those events had had an influence in Tambu's life. They shaped her personality and her decisions.

3. Trauma as a psychological effect of racism on Tambudzai

Trauma is defined as a '*severe emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience*³'. "*Traumatic experience can produce as sometimes indelible effect on the human psyche that can change the nature of an individual's memory self-recognition and relational life*" (Vickroy, 2002: 22). The book unveils two forms of trauma: physical and psychological. The issues of trauma, colonialism, and self-annihilation during the violent transformation from white-minority rule to a so called independent country are addressed with brutality and sometimes with an ironic tone in the novel.

From the analysis of the discourse in the novel and the reactions of characters, mainly Tambu, it is possible to analyse the writer's mind set and objectives. As Bressler, (1994: 95) states,

Psychoanalytical criticism provides a stimulating approach to literary analysis that decrees that we humans are complex yet somewhat understandable creatures

³ Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary. (2003). Cambridge University Press. P. 1360

who often fail to note the influence of the unconscious on both our motivations and our everyday actions.

It appears that the lexical field of violence and traumatic experiences derive from racial issues and a war going on in the country. They are at the core of the writer's narration of the plot. Tambu, the main character, goes through different traumatic experiences related to her racial origin. The book opens with a shocking passage as the writer says:

“Up, up, up, the leg spun. A piece of person, up there in the sky. Earth and acrid vapour coated my tongue.” (Dangarembga, 2006: 3). That extract is symptomatic of what Tambu's life is in the novel.

A traumatic event may be physical or psychological. A black girl like Tambu is under traumatic memories. In one side she lives in a violent society devastated by a long war for independence in all forms. She is trapped in a racially-based dominating system. Van Dijk (1999:147) explains:

The system of racism consists of a social and a cognitive subsystem. The social subsystem is constituted by social practices of discrimination at the local (micro) level, and relationships of power abuse by dominant groups, organizations, and institutions at a global (macro) level of analysis

Those acts of annihilation of humanism are racist-oriented ones with the intention to show black girls that they are supposed to be inferior to white girls only because of their racial origin.

In my case, I was a teenager, an intelligent one, who had been given a scholarship by the nuns of the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart. I was thereby being transformed into a young woman with a future (Dangarembga, 2006:11).

That war which made victims mainly among the black local community to which she belongs, had a serious impact on her life. Local people had to organize guerrillas in order to keep their lands spoiled by what they termed as 'oppressors.' The writer accounts for the situation:

This fighting, and the limbs and the fluids and the exetera that it scattered over the land, intoxicated the men and women and youth and children who had come to be told we were all, together with the guerrillas, the sacrifice of whose blood justice was purchased (Dangarembga, 2006: 12).

Besides, she is in a racial segregated society in which black people are not really seen as first class citizens. Entering the school for white girls is a promise for a bright future. The analysis of that discourse reveals that the education system as it is conceived, does not give equal opportunities to all. Tambu's believing in a bright future at the nun's college shows that the system where she is coming from could not guarantee her that future. Tambu is trapped between her racial origins that were a real handicap in that milieu and her sister's commitment to the fight against the white oppressor. That was a situation that she had to hide if she wanted to stay long in that white school. In normal situations, people could be discouraged. On the contrary,

Tambu did not see these events as obstacles, but as incentives to succeed. She explains:

My desires in that initial year were positive: to achieve, achieve, achieve some more, and I knew how to realise them. I was going to learn until I had more learning than anymore about me, first in the classroom, then in the school and finally in the community (Dangarembga, 2006: 21).

The analysis of the discourse reveals a strong desire to succeed in Tambu's repetition of the verbs 'achieve' and 'learn'. Since she knew where she came from, she decided not to disappoint her uncle Babamakuru, her family and her community as a whole. For that, she decided to wipe the complex of black girls who had never been first in the white girls' school as she notices: "*I did not succeed in coming first in either the first year or the second. That position was held by a girl called Seema Patel.*" (Dangarembga, 2006: 26).

She would work to be the first in the school as she asserts: "*I set myself a goal. I then set my sights, as a sort of landmark for my progress.*" (Dangarembga, 26). Then she goes on: "*No, I could not tolerate the idea of failure. So I went on planning my life while life was planning an insurgency.*" (Dangarembga, 27). Tambu does not seem to minimize the obstacles that she has to face in that institution. Because she is aware of them, she commits herself to work hard.

About the difficulty of being black in a white dominated environment, it is clearly noted that since the dominant social structure is in the hand of white people, the dawn of segregation cannot come only with laws as the minds are still filled with

racial considerations. (Mahzarin R. et Al. 2021:7) explain that “*Although overt discrimination in housing and lending has clearly declined in response to legislation, covert discrimination continues.*” Tambu argues, “*You came to school where you frequently had to pinch yourself to see if you really existed*” (Dangarembga, 2006: 114).

As a consequence of this, they have always to challenge society in proving that they are worth existing, studying and working like white people. Their fight was not a question of hate but survival as the author reads:

Do we hate oppressors?

No! the village affirmed the righteousness of the struggle.

If a person takes your land, what is he?

An oppressor! the call and answer crescendoed.

If a person does not give you half of what you have helped him to obtain, what he could not have made without you, what is he? [...]

An oppressor! (Dangarembga, 2006: 13-14).

Tambu’s recollections of Netsai’s accident are terrific, they explain the trauma she is going through. When soldiers came to look for her uncle Babamukuru for subversive political actions, she accounts,

Is it the man? The Big Brother concealed by a jungle, demanded. ...

It’s him! The political instructor replied in an accent of the north of the country like Mai’s. ‘That’s him! The one

we were warned of.’ He swung his A-K high, like a mortar to pound down into a pestle... It was then that my sister Netsai walked forward, out of the bush where she had been waiting. Loping with a joyful stride, her gun belt rolling around her hip like a string of beads, the young woman of war moved to reach the Big Brother’s side, and the earth beneath her exploded (Dangarembga 2006: 15).

A land mine had torn the little girl’s body into pieces. Tambu was shocked and disturbed by the scene. The signs of physical trauma are found in her relationships with other students and with her family. Bloom and Farragher describe trauma theory as

A scientifically informed and complex biopsychosocial understanding of what goes wrong for human beings under conditions of overwhelming stress. Trauma Theory presupposes a cause for one’s difficulties, and that cause is not an individual character flaw, a moral weakness, or innate malevolence, but a result of injury (Bloom and Farragher, 2017: 5).

Tambu’s existence has been marked by personal, social and ethnic conflicts. She accounts for it:

Now that I was not wanted here, what would I do for accommodation? There was no longer a place for me with my relatives at the mission. I could not go back to the homestead where Netsai

hoped unspeakably on a single limb, and where Mai would laugh at me daily. I had forgotten all the promises made to myself and providence while I was young concerning carrying forward with me the goo and human (Dangarembga, 2006: 246).

Tambu has never recovered from her trauma despite efforts she produced in her life to please her uncle and to challenge white girls at the Young Lady's College of the Sacred Heart and even in the professional milieu. She has always been worth, but the system has crushed her.

Conclusion

This exploration of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* carries a lot of social and practical significances, as it brings out the persistent legacy of racism in post-independence Africa. *The Book of Not* is set in post-independent Rhodesia, known today as Zimbabwe, in a country torn by an insidious conflict opposing the white administration to the local people who claimed for justice and equality. The scene is set in the Young Ladies College of Sacred Heart, an institution led by religious missionaries. By looking closely at Tambudzai's journey at the Young Ladies School of the Sacred Heart, the study unveils the subtle but deeply rooted ways racial discrimination continued to thrive within institutions, even after racial segregation was officially dismantled.

The article aims at showing how the white establishment strived to maintain racism in the country. The author uses a Christian institution to better present the paradox of the situation, as discrimination is manifested in a place where it

should not be present. Covert racism was manifested through divisions at the dormitories where there were blocks for black girls and blocks for white girls. It was also manifested through language and bad treatments that black girls underwent on the part of white girls and some members of the school administration. Tsitsi Dangarembga portrays her society with its sad realities among which racism and the trauma it causes in the victims.

By examining Tambudzai's remarkable resilience and her effort to overcome challenges in her society, this study shares a message filled with hope and empowerment. It motivates future generations to fight against injustice and pursue a more equitable society. Tambu's whole life is made of traumatic events that finally make her fall despite her constant efforts to succeed. The analysis serves as an important reminder of the need for vigilance, objectivity and a critical look at our social system to ensure the achievement of real equality and justice. It also brings to the forefront the psychological trauma that systematic racism inflicts, highlighting the importance of understanding and addressing the effects of discrimination on mental health. The insights from this research can play an essential role in fostering inclusivity addressing prejudice, and advocating for healing in communities still facing the long-lasting effects of racial inequality.

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