In Search of Female Space: Resistance and Creation in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps

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IN SEARCH OF FEMALE SPACE: RESISTANCE AND CREATION IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND *SHE NO LONGER WEEP*S

by

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Abstract

In this paper I explore how with *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga creates alternative literary forms in her representation of architectural, bodily and narrative spaces and their relationship to female identities. These physical spaces the women characters inhabit, resist and in which they assert their voices must be cleared of patriarchal control in order for female-centered space to be produced. Moreover, the creation of a new speech paradigm, one that affirms the female voice, is crucial to the journey towards female autonomy. Inasmuch as Dangarembga explores the ways in which physical spaces work for and against the protagonists in their search for autonomous spaces, Dangarembga is also carving out a literary space for female Zimbabwean authors and playwrights to write, publish and be heard.

As opposed to the traditional manners in which setting is used (as the backdrop of the action or the time and place in which the action of narrative occurs), the physical spaces Dangarembga constructs in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* are not static; they are sites of contestation. They are not innocent or empty, nor are they representative of the female identity. The physical and narrative spaces serve as a means through which the women work to construct their own identities and create their own material and narrative spaces in colonial Rhodesia and neo-colonial Zimbabwe, all the while confronting and resisting the oppressive forces at work against them.

The first chapter, a short biography of Tsitsi Dangarembga, provides insight into how her experiences and struggles as a Zimbabwean female author illuminate the lack of literary space, in production and discourse, afforded to Zimbabwean women writers. The following chapter titled “The Gendering of National Space” explores how colonial Rhodesia, neo-colonial Zimbabwe and their national and domestic spaces are products of colonial and post-colonial notions and practices about gender. One must consider national ideologies and how the nation produces and performs its tenets on gender before he/she considers the concrete, physical spaces that are products and producers of them. The following chapter, “Resisting Allegory,” explains the dangers of reading the experiences of Dangarembga’s female characters as allegory. Too often the nation becomes feminized in discourse and women become idealized symbols of the nation. To see the experiences, struggles and journeys of the women as primarily allegorical marginalizes them from their own spaces and experiences and puts them in paternalistic terms.

In “Physical Space and Movement in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*” I identify and explore how the physical spaces the female characters encounter, resist and create along their identitarian journeys, spaces framed by the ideological discourses of colonial and neo-colonial Zimbabwe, influence the trajectories of both texts. Tambudzai, the narrator of *Nervous Conditions*, journeys far and wide through time and space in colonial Rhodesia, while Martha’s journey in *She No Longer Weeps* is relegated to the domestic sphere. Despite emancipation from colonial rule, Martha illustrates that women in neo-colonial Zimbabwe are struggling against growing forms and familiar faces of oppression.

The most effective strategy Dangarembga uses to create women’s space is by providing her protagonists with strong narrative voices. The chapter “Narration and the
Self-Determining Female Voice” explores the tense, point-of-view and tone of Tambu’s narration in *Nervous Conditions* and Martha’s speech patterns in *She No Longer Weeps*. Following discussion of how Dangarembga’s male characters attempt to maintain dominion over the ideologically charged spaces of the home, “Female Speech Paradigms in Private and Public Spaces” argues that creating a new speech paradigm is crucial to the establishment of female-centered spaces where women can speak and be heard. The chapter “Female Bodies, Resistance and the Creation of Female-Centered Space” explores how the bodies of Tambu, her cousin Nyasha, Martha and her daughter Sarah become the sites on which the battles for female autonomy and identity act themselves out; these bodies are the means through which the women communicate their most subversive acts of resistance to male hegemony. The final chapter, “Generational Support” explores how the supporting cast of female characters in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*, particularly the protagonists’ mothers, illustrate the generational struggle toward female autonomy and the visionary nature of both texts.

The ideologically constructed spaces that exist to silence women are emptied of their power by Dangarembga’s female characters. This provides for original ways to imagine the nation, its public and private spaces, and literature that has been scripted in male discourse. Not only is female-centered space emerging, but the self-determination of Tambu, Nyasha and Martha provide an alternative manner in which women can undergo the female journey toward selfhood.
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For decades, even centuries, women in Zimbabwe have had their stories told for them. Throughout the volatile history of this African nation that was once known as Nyasaland (pre-colonial Zimbabwe), then Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe) and finally independent Zimbabwe, women have been excluded from the literary sphere that has given men the dominant voice when speaking for the nation and its women. In recent decades, female authors such as Tsitsi Dangarembga have successfully begun to write and publish the stories of Zimbabwean women. Dangarembga has followed the path of female African authors like Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa and Mariama Bâ who “urged women to use their writing as a weapon that (re)inscribes African women in such ways that transgress and shatter hegemonic (male) representations” (Nfah-Abbenyi 148). By providing the alternative scripts of women’s stories, Dangarembga carves out a new literary space and inserts female-centered literature into Zimbabwe’s literary history.

Close analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and play *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) reveals the struggle of being female and African in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. While much of the discourse surrounding Dangarembga has focused on her first novel, *Nervous Conditions*, and its relationship to colonial education, Shona cultural studies, traditional and Western modes of living and female identity formation in the bildungsroman or allegorical format, in this paper I will discuss how with *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* Dangarembga creates alternative literary forms in her representation of architectural, bodily and narrative spaces and their relationship to female identities. These physical spaces the women
inhabit, resist and in which they assert their voices must be cleared of patriarchal control in order for female-centered space to be produced. Moreover, the creation of a new speech paradigm, one that affirms the female voice, is crucial to the journey towards female autonomy. Inasmuch as Dangarembga explores the ways in which physical spaces work for and against the protagonists in their search for autonomous spaces, Dangarembga is also carving out a literary space for female Zimbabwean authors and playwrights to write, publish and be heard.

As opposed to the traditional manners in which setting is used (as the backdrop of the action or the time and place in which the action of narrative occurs), the physical spaces Dangarembga constructs in Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps are not static; they are sites of contestation. They are not innocent or empty, nor are they representative of the female identity. The physical and narrative spaces serve as a means through which the women work to construct their own identities and create their own material and narrative spaces in colonial Rhodesia and neo-colonial Zimbabwe, all the while confronting and resisting the oppressive forces at work against them. French theorist Henri Lefebvre in The Production of Space shatters the traditional ways in which space has been theorized and perceived, especially in its relationship to setting, literature and, in the context of this paper, gender. Typically, space has been thought to denote emptiness or a geometric area, a mathematical idea or entity. Space often has the “illusion of transparency” and is thought to be innocent, a frame in which action occurs. However, material space is first and foremost a reflection of the ideologies and practices of a culture and a nation (Lefebvre 28). Space signifies a set of relations, not only between the inhabitants of the spaces, but between the ideologies at work in producing that space and
the inhabitants’ relationships to those ideologies. Lefebvre continues: “…any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships – and this despite the fact that a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)” (83). In Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps, Dangarembga complicates the traditional ways space and voice are used, and explores the important relationship that exists between space and the subversive female voice. The manner in which physical space, not setting, is inhabited, resisted and created delineates the identitarian journeys of Tambudzai, the narrator of Nervous Conditions, and Martha, the protagonist of She No Longer Weeps, and helps to define the trajectories of both texts.

Dangarembga employs alternative literary forms with her powerful narrative voices, which in the end provide readers with a new way to read and theorize Zimbabwean literature written by women. Predominant and often overlooked female-centered themes are those that evolve from the physical spaces in which the women struggle to speak and survive. The socially, juridically and economically constructed spaces through which Tambu and Martha journey become a study in how ideologically constructed spaces work to silence women. Moreover, the colonial, neo-colonial, rural, and urban spaces of Zimbabwe highlight the layers of hegemony the female characters resist. Dangarembga’s women illustrate how these male-dominated spaces must be challenged and cleared in order to make way for female centered spaces in which women can assert their voices, tell their stories and undergo journeys toward selfhood.

The male-dominated manner in which the colonial and neo-colonial history of Zimbabwe has been constructed is invoked and challenged by Dangarembga’s protagonists as they struggle to create and define their own spaces, voices and identities.
This is not meant to suggest that women were not writing throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods of Zimbabwe; however, the male authors who were writing and publishing literature were promoting the same interests as their male counterparts – to maintain the dominant voice of the nation.¹ Moreover, Western feminists and literary scholars have been speaking for African and Third World women whom they presume cannot speak for themselves or need assistance finding their voices.² Consequently, despite the consistent production of Zimbabwean female-authored literature over the past quarter century, there has been little literary space, in publishing and in critical discussion, afforded to women writers. Thus, Dangarembga as well as other female African writers have taken the charge of writing themselves into African history and African literary history simultaneously, speaking for themselves rather than being spoken for or about by African male writers and Western feminists.

Tsitsi Dangarembga

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in Rhodesia. Like Tambudzai, her central female character in Nervous Conditions, Dangarembga is a product of British and Rhodesian education. Between the ages of two and six, she lived and studied in England with her parents. Upon return to her homeland, Dangarembga enrolled in a mission

¹ Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi writes: “The study of African Literature has long been the preserve of male writers, and despite the enviable position women have occupied as oral artists African women writers were not given the attention they deserved; even after the advent of the feminist movement, the male voice continued to be the dominant one”(2). Lloyd Brown affirms: “African literature has to be understood as literature by African men, for interest in African literature has, with the very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field…The ignoring of African women writers on the continent has become a tradition…”(qtd. in Gender in African Women’s Writing 2)

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, author of the seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” problematizes the Western modes of reading and speaking for Third World women. Western theory often reinforces the language and hierarchies established by the colonizer and keeps the subaltern in a position of object and other, rather than subject.
school which was primarily responsible for educating Rhodesian children beyond the primary years, and later studied at an American convent school. Three years before Rhodesia's emancipation and before its name was changed to Zimbabwe, she returned to England in 1977 to study for a medical degree. But as a result of the racism and isolation she experienced in England as well as the apathy of fellow Rhodesians she witnessed abroad, she left England to return to her homeland and continue her studies in psychology at the University of Zimbabwe. It was there that she came into contact with socialist and feminist political ideas. In 1987, she wrote *She No Longer Weeps* for the university's theatre company; the play reveals the neo-colonial patriarchal forces that continued to dominate independent Zimbabwe. Although Dangarembga has written only a handful of other plays, directed one film and written one additional novel, *Nervous Conditions* has become one of the most highly acclaimed and studied African literary text in the realm of post-colonial and feminist literary studies.\(^3\)

Her search for a publisher for *Nervous Conditions* became a four-year journey. She eventually found a Zimbabwean publisher, and *Nervous Conditions* became the first published piece of Zimbabwean literature written in English by a woman. Dangarembga has said, “My own experiences as a young writer illuminate grotesquely the energy-depleting toll on Zimbabwean women who grapple with their country’s version of the usual sexist controls” (“This year, next year...” 43). *Nervous Conditions*, as well as the less known *She No Longer Weeps*, provide female-centered insight into the politics of gender and space that can no longer be defined in masculinist terms. Dangarembga’s

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\(^3\) For years the primary source of African literature studied in academia was Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Most recently, however, attention has been turned to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* particularly for its emphasis on female roles and its complication of recent colonialism, education, and female identify formation (Willey xv).
texts resist the all too often false representations of women in Zimbabwe, representations that often paint women in domestic, maternal and idealized terms (Nfah-Abbenyi 3). The female protagonists, their mothers and the other women who surround and support them become the voice of the educational, social, economic and judicial struggles that Zimbabwean women experience. In an interview with Rosemary Marang George, Dangarembga states, “...the one thing I was very concerned with was to leave a very real taste of life during the time that I grew up. ...it just seemed to me that, well, there were people living in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia, and nobody know about them, and if nobody set it down, then nobody would know about them” (4). Thus, Dangarembga’s literature challenges the authors and theorists who have othered or excluded the self-described Zimbabwean woman from her version of history.

*Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* provide readers with diverse representations and a rich cast of Zimbabwean women while also functioning as theoretical sites of women’s resistance. Simultaneously, Dangarembga rewrites stories of Zimbabwean women and challenges the theories that have often been the fragmented lens through which African female literature has been read, discussed and critiqued. Often theorized in Western feminist terms, African female authors resist categorizing their struggles in Manichean terms – resisting linear, hierarchical and dichotomous language while avoiding privileging particular agendas over another, like gender over race or culture over colonialism. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi writes in *Gender in African Women's Writing*:

African women writers do not separate one form of oppression from another; neither do they advocate such a separation as might only
sensationalize certain issues and sweep equally important issues under the carpet, reinforcing the general ignorance and neglect of the problems of African women. The experience of identity, be it constituted or constituting; and the experience of difference, be it racial or sexual; and the process of reconstructing subjectivity – these are all experienced and lived out simultaneously in the realm of specific sexual politics. (13-14)

These ideas are most evident in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* where Tambudzai and her cousin Nyasha (the central female characters from *Nervous Conditions*), and Martha (the protagonist of *She No Longer Weeps*), resist not layers but a conglomerate of oppressive forces that are a combination of traditional Shona and Zimbabwean customs and colonial influence. As noted by Tambudzai, however, at the heart of these experiences lay their femaleness. Nfah-Abbenyi connects the importance of femaleness to space and the objective of female African writers:

These women writers seek to create spaces for themselves. They do so by rewriting conventional literary forms, by questioning a combination of the multiple oppressive conditions both traditional and specific to their postcolonial heritage in a constantly changing post-colonial context, a context that therefore positions their challenging sometimes alongside, but mostly beyond the limits of Western feminism and within postcolonial theoretical practice. (149)

Writing stories of Zimbabwean women and providing identifiable voices through which Zimbabwean women can hear themselves speak is what makes Dangarembga’s literature so crucial to the conversation about post-colonial African feminist literature and theory.
Complicating traditional ways space and voice are used and centering Zimbabwean women within their own stories provide readers with a new way to read and theorize Zimbabwean female literature.

The Gendering of National Space

In order to delve into how Dangarembga complicates setting and space, one must first reconsider the function of setting and physical spaces and their relationship to national ideologies on sex and gender, relationships that are often overly simplified or misinterpreted. Anne McClintock, in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, contends that “All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender” (353). In order then for the nation to continue as a masculinist state, it must produce physical spaces that act out, support and perpetuate patriarchy. One must consider national ideologies and how the nation produces and performs its tenets on gender before he/she considers the concrete, physical spaces that are products and producers of them. The theorizing of how space functions within the historical and textual concepts must move from the abstract to the concrete (Lefebvre 415). For example, in *Nervous Conditions*, the setting of Rhodesia in 1968 speaks to a time a place in history. But the architectural and physical spaces through which Tambu journeys (the homestead, the mission home and school in Umtali and Sacred Heart School) and the walls that define the domestic and social spaces of Rhodesia are concrete and tangible representations of the hegemonic forces at work against the female characters. Although Lefebvre speaks sparingly about the gender politics of space, his assertion that space is never innocent and that spatial practice, the acting out of these set of relations, cannot be
discussed without first considering social practice is important to the socio-political aspects of Dangarembga’s texts.

Colonial Rhodesia, neo-colonial Zimbabwe and their national and domestic spaces are products of colonial and post-colonial notions and practices about gender. Cecil Rhodes (backed by a royal British charter to promote trade in the region) and Christian missionary David Livingston pushed their way to the center of Rhodesia at the turn of the 19th century, and in defeating the native Shona, established colonial rule. Gay Scidman states, “Where pre-colonial society treated women as both reproducers and producers, colonial policymakers tended to treat them primarily as mothers, whose proper role was to care for children while their husbands supported the family”(422). The mingling together of traditional Shona customs and new Western ideologies put women at more of a disadvantage than ever. It was not until 1960 that men and women began to fight and win a guerilla war against colonists. Women joined the forces and began to gain respect as they fought alongside the men. However, following the declaration of independence from colonial rule in 1965 (ignored by the British government), many of these women were seen as unfit to be wives and were expected to go back to their traditional domestic roles with limited access to education and jobs. Neo-colonial Zimbabwe continues to produce and act out gender inequities that marginalize women,

4 In 1889, imperialist Cecil Rhodes obtained a royal British charter to promote trade and European settlement in the region named Rhodesia. Missionary David Livingston, with the intention to destroy the Arab slave trade, called for a westernizing and Christianizing of the region’s people. A push into the interior of the land was met by strong Shona and Ndebele revolts; however, their defeat cleared the way for the Rhodes Company and the British government to achieve dominion over the region which at the turn of the nineteenth century became known as Southern Rhodesia. It was not until 1965, when Nhamo, Tambu’s older brother, was attending the mission school at Umzali and Tambu was residing at the Siguake homestead, receiving a far more inferior education that would soon come to an end, that a formal declaration for independence by Rhodesia’s rebel Prime Minister, Ian Smith, was made. Great Britain, however, did not acknowledge this and the 1960s, particularly the late 60s, was a time of fierce and often violent rebellion against white rule as black Rhodesians were actively seeking independence from its colonial ruler. It is interesting to note that is little to no reference in Nervous Conditions to the violent rebellions that characterized the late 1960s. (“Rhodesia and Nyasaland”)
despite its emancipation from colonial rule and female contribution in the war for independence.

**Resisting Allegory**

Although both Dangarembga’s post-colonial texts were written in the late 1980s, *Nervous Conditions* is set in colonial Rhodesia in the 1960s, while *She No Longer Weeps* is set during the time in which it was written. While these texts will be discussed in colonial and post-colonial terms, it is important to resist speaking of these female characters in symbolic or allegorical terms. Quite often the nation becomes feminized in discourse and women become idealized symbols of the nation. To see the experiences, struggles and journeys of the women as primarily allegorical marginalizes them from their own spaces and experiences and puts them in paternalistic terms. Male authors have often written about the idealized notion of the female as mother Africa and mother Earth. But in texts such as Dangarembga’s and those of other women writers we see the limitations of allegory. Nfah-Abbenyi contends:

…it is limiting to treat [African post-colonial] texts simply as national allegories or reflections of colonial experience …[they] decisively move beyond ‘camouflage’ and beyond being ‘almost the same, but not quite.’ These texts present the cohabitation of a multiplicity of contradictions that cannot be contained only in an ‘ambivalent,’ mimetic society. Such texts can be read as representation that is much more than just ‘mimetic’ and/or oppositional, or continually producing a slippage...these texts offer
alternative scripts that subvert internal systems of power, texts whose gaze is not necessarily directed toward the colonialist text. (18)

In resisting reading these texts as allegorical, the gaze is directed back to the black African female subject. Allegorical (mis)interpretations limit reading of the post-colonial, and in this case, female-authored texts. Allegory, by definition, is emblematic, a symbolic representation, a notion of something concrete. Reading women’s stories as allegory prioritizes what allegory suggests is concrete – the nation – and idealizes a faux and idealized depiction of woman.

Anne McClintock asserts that the nation is a gendered and violent construct. She helps illuminate the dangers of re-inscribing women and the nation as one, as happens in some allegorical formulations. McClintock writes:

[Benedict] Anderson views nations, in his all too famous phrase, as ‘imagined communities’ in the sense that they are systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community. As such, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered. Yet, if the invented nature of nationalism has found wide theoretical currency, explorations of the gendering of the national imaginary have been conspicuously paltry. (353; emphasis added)
It is in this final arena of study, exploring the gendering of the nation, where Dangarembga's texts become most useful. Her work does not allegorically align the female with the nation, but rather de-marginalizes women and centers them within the constructs of their own struggles and stories.

This relationship among national, idealized and gendered space is overlooked by Lefebvre but crucial when discussing the journey toward female-centered space and female autonomy. Because nations have often been referred to in female terms, often identified for example as a “motherland” or as “giving birth” to its people and ideas, the perception of their stories as allegorical becomes an all too comfortable and complacent manner in which to discuss and theorize women and often simply re-inscribes women’s marginalized position within a masculinized sphere. Although women are often idealized when this re-inscription occurs, they are rarely prioritized. Anne McClintock aptly points out, “Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (354). This patriarchal construct informed by masculinist discourse is often re-inscribed by literature that is produced and published by those in positions of power. These allegorical renderings that glorify and align women with the nation do not identify or present women as beyond that which is a reflection or symbol. Dangarembga’s texts, however, create spaces that are not solely in opposition to male-constructed space or symbols, but space that is self-determining. If, as Christopher Okonkwo states, “subjection to impaired and constraining spaces is one of the most enduring obstacles facing Dangarembga’s female characters,” then conquering and subverting the power that created those spatial barriers is one way Dangarembga’s women redefine and remap the spatial boundaries of their identitarian journeys (70).
Physical Space and Movement in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*

The physical spaces the female characters encounter, resist and create along their identitarian journeys influence the trajectories of both texts and are framed by the ideological discourses of colonial and neo-colonial Zimbabwe. *Nervous Conditions*, set in colonial Rhodesia in 1968, is Tambudzai’s narration of her journey from a rural Shona homestead, to a mission school run by her uncle and family patriarch Babamukuru, to the Roman Catholic convent school Sacred Heart. Within the course of the novel she resides predominantly with Babamukuru and her rebellious cousin Nyasha, who becomes the most important force behind Tambu’s questioning, evolution, and identity formation. As she negotiates the indigenous and colonial systems of patriarchy present during the final years of British rule in Rhodesia, Tambudzai finds her voice. Dangarembga’s use of the self-reflexive narrator creates a narrative space for women to tell their stories. Her movement from one hegemonically constructed space to another becomes the arc of the novel that ends with Tambu’s intellectual awakening.

The practices and ideologies that control the physical spaces through which Tambu journeys cannot be discussed without first addressing the social practices of pre-colonial and colonial Rhodesia. It is important to understand the hierarchical structure of Shona familial relationships in order to better understand the male and female relationships of the Siguake family and the ideologies against which the female characters struggle in an attempt to secure autonomous female spaces.

The Shona follow a patrilineal descent system that is traced through the father’s lineage. When a man pays a bride-price to a woman’s father, the bride leaves her home
to live with the husband’s family. A wife, at the time of marriage, is no longer considered part of her father’s lineage, but now legally belongs to her husband, as will their children (this is an important point that will be discussed later with respect to Martha and Freddy’s daughter in She No Longer Weeps). Fathers and the family’s male members are owed respect and obedience as the representatives of the lineage clan. These men are the central authorities of the wives, daughters, children and other members of the family. In pre-colonial Rhodesia, women did much of the agricultural labor, and under the practice of polygamy additional wives were seen as an economic asset and a sign of wealth. When the British established colonial rule of Rhodesia in the late 19th century, they brought with them Western gender ideology and economic pressures. Despite the perceived advantages a Western education offered, a mingling together of traditional Shona customs and new Western ideologies created a variety of oppressive forces and patriarchal ideologies against which the women struggled (Seidman).

Predicated on loss and faced with the opportunity few Rhodesian children had, enrolling and attending school, Tambu feels she has been emancipated from the traditional Shona fate of living a subservient and domestic life women such as her mother, Mainini, has endured. She is disillusioned not long after she moves in with Babamukuru, his college-educated wife Maiguru, and their English-educated children Nyasha and Chido. Babamukuru’s home on the mission grounds has varied effects on Nyasha and Tambu. For Nyasha, who began rebellious, it becomes a place that breaks her physically and emotionally. By the end of the story, when Tambu is off to the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, Nyasha is outwardly compliant, but her bulimia is raging, nearly destroying her, and she is taken away to a psychiatric clinic, her survival
uncertain. For Tambu, the experiences in Babamukuru’s home become the means through which she most significantly questions and asserts her female identity. Her arrival at Sacred Heart may be a physical step backward in that she is deepening her submersion in the colonized education system, but it is an intellectual step forward, where her “seed of suspicion about the effects of Englishness,” as her mother calls it, grows (*Nervous Conditions* 203). Her physical and narrative movements are joined together at the novel’s end, where Tambu reflects on her intellectual growth and how the act of writing becomes for her the means through which she can tell her story and those of her female relatives.

Space, movement and time work together in *Nervous Conditions* to emphasize Tambu’s shifting consciousness. Exploring the importance of space and movement in the novel, Christopher Okonkwo notes, “It asserts that its female characters’ plight is codified in various domestic and public spatial structures, ideologies, and experiences that differently impede the women’s lives under (post) colonization, which itself is an unfinished tale of history and identity – a work in process, in progress, in motion” (54). Variations of time and space relations exist in *Nervous Conditions* on several levels. First, the novel is framed by the adult Tambu speaking from an unknown space in the future, a space and time which brings her to the moment when she “can set this story down” (*Nervous Conditions* 204). The time period during which the Tambu’s “process of expansion” unfolds is the middle to late 1960s (*Nervous Conditions* 204). And then there is the time and space from which Dangarembga had written then published *Nervous Conditions*, which as stated earlier, spanned four years. There is little that is linear in *Nervous Conditions*. Nyasha emphasizes the importance of movement to women who
must keep moving to resist entrapment in a system that punishes Rhodesians for their blackness and women for their femaleness. The novel resists stasis in every form that it takes and continually redraws the boundaries in and through which the women move, as well as the spaces and times from which they speak.

Unlike Tambu whose journey spreads far and wide in time and through spaces, Martha’s journey in *She No Longer Weeps* is relegated to the domestic sphere; the structure of the play mirrors her journey from one hegemonically constructed space to another, then in the last act, finally to her own home. Written in 1987, *She No Longer Weeps* was scribed seven years following political emancipation from colonial rule and the change from what was known as Rhodesia to the newly named Zimbabwe. What becomes evident from the opening of the play, however, is that patriarchal oppression continues to dominate national and domestic spaces. Despite the emancipation of Zimbabwe from British colonial rule, Martha illustrates that women in neo-colonial Zimbabwe are struggling against growing forms and familiar faces of oppression.

While *Nervous Conditions* is a story told in retrospect, *She No Longer Weeps* begins in *medias res*, in the middle of Martha’s story. In three acts, the play follows Martha through the first two trimesters of her pregnancy during which she was the victim of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her boyfriend Freddy and her father, and then to her own home where is she is an economically independent single mother. The final action of the play is Martha’s violent act of resistance against Freddy and all he represents in neo-colonial Zimbabwe – the Black male struggling to hold on to power in a nation whose feminist consciousness has been raised. But at the play’s onset, Martha is five months pregnant and knitting in her bedroom in her parents’ home. She has just
returned home from boarding with Freddy, the abusive father of her unborn child. As demonstrated by the suitcase lying open on the floor and her feeble attempt to unpack, it is evident that she is not planning on staying very long. She fears (and her fears are later realized) that her parents will not allow her, a pregnant and unmarried young woman, to remain in their house, a condition that will surely disgrace herself and parents because she is not married nor has plans to be. From the start, the reader understands that Martha has no safe, stable place; she is a woman maneuvering through the domestic spaces that have traditionally relegated women like Martha to domestic duties. In each of the play’s three acts, as Martha travels from Freddy’s home, to her parents’ home, to her uncle’s home and finally to her own home, she is positioned in and against domestic spaces.

As opposed to Tambu, who leaves the homestead and whose journey in Nervous Conditions is from the rural to the urban and larger colonial spaces of Rhodesia, the claustrophobic structure of She No Longer Weeps emphasizes the domestic places which seem to define and control Martha’s journey and which, as Dangarembga criticizes, continue to impede women’s progress in Zimbabwe. Written after Zimbabwe achieved its independence, the characterization of Martha’s journey primarily in domestic terms suggests that one can move endlessly within hegemonically constructed spaces, but that certainly does not change the ideologies of space itself. Dangarembga continues to emphasize the need for female-constructed, female-centered space. With respect to domestic space, Henri Lefebvre writes:

Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom,
house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space. Nor can such spaces be considered empty ‘mediums’, in the sense of containers distinct from their contents. (87)

The private then, as Lefebvre suggests, is never really private. Walls of a home or any other physical structure do little to separate the patriarchal ideologies and hegemonic practices from the home’s inhabitants; in fact, they assist in producing them. Evident in both *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*, physical structures and boundaries are a means through which the patriarchal ideologies of colonial Rhodesia and neo-colonial Zimbabwe assert themselves. Throughout the three acts of the play, Martha is working against several ideologies that are a reflection of neo-colonial Zimbabwe and the ambivalent changes in the nation’s social, political and judicial gender reforms. These struggles illustrate that Zimbabwe, although undergoing significant national and political changes culminating in its achieved independence, had made only moderate progress in the social, economic and judicial rights of its women.

Martha’s experiences illustrate this all too well. First, she is prohibited from continuing her education at university because she is pregnant – women who become pregnant in Zimbabwe are forced to leave their educational institution. In addition, Martha resists the payment of a *lobola*, or bride-price (a pre-colonial tradition), to the father of a woman whom a man chooses to marry (Freddy offers a significantly low *lobola* to Martha’s father but she refuses marry him). Moreover, Martha’s resentment toward her pregnancy is one that strongly contradicts the idealized notions of women and
motherhood particularly associated with African women. These ideologies are so organically related to the physical spaces that although Martha is literally moving from one space to the next, she is making little to no progress – she is seemingly moving in circles. Martha’s search for a space is her search for self-actualization and to a certain degree, her attempt to secure a space completely free from hegemonic forces fails, for no such space presently exists in Zimbabwe. Thus the play raises an important question: Is it ever possible to have a space completely free from male hegemony in Zimbabwe? Lefebvre would suggest the answer is no; however, Dangarembga’s text suggest something far more powerful. Martha’s journey is not in vain. Although there is little change in the physical aspects of the spaces she inhabits in Acts One and Two, several important moments in the play suggest there is a future space being created for women. First, Martha’s professional and economic journey is a successful one – she is a lawyer and is presented as being both economically and emotionally self-sufficient. In addition, Martha’s mother in Act Two says of her daughter: “…if she is remembered by our grandchildren’s children, I think they will remember her as someone who saw further than most of us are prepared to look” (She No Longer Weeps 38). Although Martha’s journey is an individual and often lonely one, one her mother even struggles grasping, Dangarembga uses her journey to illuminate the potential future space women in Zimbabwe can create through their resistance to staying in the spaces to which they have been traditionally relegated, a future space that Martha and her mother see as a possibility.

As Tambu, Martha and the other women inhabit and resist hegemonic spaces, they subvert systems of power and find voices through which to assert newly constructed
female identities in spaces that are female-centered. This autonomous female space is not only a possibility, as the women in the works suggest, but the publication and performance of Dangarembga’s works create a literary space for women to write and publish their stories. For without the creation of these female-centered spaces there is no place for women to speak, and most importantly, be heard.

**Narration and the Self-Determining Female Voice**

The most effective strategy Dangarembga uses to create women’s space is by providing her protagonists with strong narrative voices. This device positions her female characters and the readers within spaces that give rise to subversive ideologies. Martha and Tambu have much in common in how they speak about their situations and their stories, and the assertive tones in which both stories begin are quite alike. The self-determining voices evident in the openings immediately reject any notion that these characters will be aligning themselves with the male-constructed ideology of woman as nation.

A variety of voices, at times contradictory, is evident in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*. *Nervous Conditions* is framed by Tambudzai’s narration that allows her to reflect back on the time period in which the action of the narrative occurs. The mature narrator is quite different from the young naïve Tambu seen in much of the novel – the younger is largely complicit in her subjugation while the more mature is resistant. Tambu’s narration reveals the slow shifting of her consciousness. Martha’s voice in *She No Longer Weeps* similarly shifts throughout the play; initially Martha begs to remain in her inferior position with Freddy but later her resistant voice gives rise to resistant acts.
Moreover, as a play, *She No Longer Weeps* begins as a literal performance of Martha’s story. Within that story, Martha initially struggles with vocalizing her resistant thoughts. In Act Three, once she finds her subversive voice, she refuses to use it to speak for other women. This contradictory stance illustrates Martha’s continuous struggle to find her position and her voice within the masculinized sphere, a struggle undertaken by Tambu and Nyasha alike.

The opening line of *Nervous Conditions* establishes the sharp, assertive tone of the novel and illustrates the power and importance of the self-reflexive female narrator. The voice is that of an adult Tambu, speaking in the first person about her younger self. “I was not sorry when my brother died,” utters Tambudzai brusquely, in voice that both jars the reader and makes him/her question what would affect such a cold response to the death of a sibling (*Nervous Conditions* 1). Tambu follows with, “Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all”(*Nervous Conditions* 1). The reader soon learns that as a result of Nhamo’s death, Tambu is now provided opportunities to advance her education that otherwise would not have been afforded to her as a woman. The invocation of the reader and the challenge to redefine and reconsider the judgments he/she is inclined to make based on this tone is crucial to establishing the perspective from which this story is told. Speaking in the past tense, Tambu invokes her history in a manner which allows her retrospective insight and agency over her own story. Her first-person narration of *Nervous Conditions* inserts a new and complicated character into literature, a young woman whose personal story is significantly and continually altering in a country whose identity is also shifting; however, Tambu’s story cannot be aligned with the colonial story of Zimbabwe – if
anything, it charges the colonial history of Zimbabwe with constructing a flat, singular representation of women or excluding the women from its story altogether. Theorists like Keith Booker, who argue that Tambu’s “innermost being is determined by object forces at work in society” (190), fail to see the female as independent from the nation. Perceiving female characters like Tambu in allegorical terms disconnects the woman from herself; she becomes an other, a constructed identity, spoken of in terms that privilege patriarchal ideologies. The strong, first-person female narration through which Tambu speaks for herself and for the men and women she loves provides an original script that does not replicate, but rather creates a strong narrative stance from which the female story can be told.

As she negotiates the indigenous and colonial systems of patriarchy present during the final years of British rule in Rhodesia, Tambudzai is finding her voice. In writing Tambu’s story, Dangarembga is simultaneously creating a literal space for women in Rhodesia. Through authorship, the textual space Dangarembga creates allows the narrative space Tambu needs to tell her story to take shape. Lindsay Aegerter helps illuminate the significance of the tense, point-of-view and tone of Tambudzai’s opening narration of *Nervous Conditions*. Aegerter states:

> The retrospective narrative voice, acting in a dialogic tandem and tension with the naïve Tambu, creates a narrative friction as it rubs against the all-too-easy bildungsroman genre in which the younger Tambu chooses to tell her story. Through the ironic interplay of narrative voices, Dangarembga’s dialogia creates a critical, ironic playfulness that itself interrogates ‘African Woman’s’ identity as singular and signal. (236)
The “narrative entrance” of the mature Tambu into the consciousness of the young Tambu creates multiple subjects in *Nervous Conditions* (Okonkwo 71). The mature Tambu, whose resistant voice frames the novel, interrogates the naïve Tambu whose consciousness slowly begins to shift as she leaves the homestead and spends time with her rebellious cousin Nyasha. Moreover, the narrative voice of the mature Tambu, as it inserts itself into the larger narrative of the novel, is entering the discourse on post-colonial feminist literature and identity formation. By claiming agency over the narrative spaces of the story, Tambu is able to be agent of her own identity formation. In reflecting on and questioning her younger self’s thoughts and actions, Tambu is able to maintain ownership and authorship of her own story.

Tambu’s journey toward agency and selfhood does not have a clearly defined end or answer; on the contrary, the attainment of a coherent sense of self is an elusive and complicated journey (McWilliams 105). As much as Tambu’s journey is one of physical movement, her journey is also one into the space of the self. Trinh Minh-ha, author of the seminal work *Woman Native Other*, examines the complicated nature of selfhood for women of color: “‘I’ is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. ‘I’ is, itself infinite layers…. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain and mend categories [of self] always leak” (94). This is most evident in the closing paragraph of Dangarembga’s novel, where Tambu speaks:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and
painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began. (Nervous Conditions 204)

Time becomes spatialized in this closing narration. The “long and painful process” of Tambu’s expansion puts in temporal terms the process of her identity formation – one that stretches over many years and one that will continue to stretch into future personal and national space as well as literary space that will fill volumes of text. Reaffirmation in the closing line, that the story is Tambu’s and that of the women and men whom she loved, solidifies the narration as a self-determining one, not a mimetic or allegorical one, and one that Tambu needs the time and retrospect to examine. The manner in which this speech connects time and space, identity and narration, reaffirms the importance of the personal voice in the telling of women’s stories and the formation of female identities.

In She No Longer Weeps, Martha opens the play with a monologue that contests the transcendental image of the African woman as the supreme representation of motherhood, fecundity and the nation. Examining her profile in the mirror, she mutters bitterly to herself:

...this slag heap proves it – I carry it everywhere; I shall knit forever. I’ve been knitting for the past four months, I shall knit for the next four and the four after that....if I go back to Freddy. Oh God! Knitting and looking after Freddy! I hate knitting and I hate Freddy! I hate them both. I can’t live with him....I should but when he looks at me I shiver. I get
frightened because I see those little boy eyes of his looking at me from a man’s face....And he doesn’t behave any better. I don’t think his mother ever had to put up with as much nonsense from his as I did. (*She No Longer Weeps* 5; my ellipses)

Martha’s grotesque reference to her protruding stomach as a “slag heap” is an indication of her growing resentment towards her pregnancy. Her speech reveals a sentiment many women have about pregnancy and motherhood, one which has been all too often either idealized or ignored by male authors who use women as mothers as peripheral forces to the male experience. Nfah-Abbenyi writes of the idealization of the African woman:

> Male and female writers approach this topic differently. Men have been criticized for their equation of mother with Earth, with Africa, with eternal Beauty; as eternal nurturer, and as metaphor for the creative and/or (nationalistic) revolutionary process. In short, the majority of these men have been accused of idealizing and romanticizing African women by positing an essentialist, beautiful, nurturing, marginal, and often submissive African woman. (35-36)

Martha’s pregnancy signals her entrapment in a bodily and domestic space of cooking, cleaning and knitting from which she struggles to break free. She detests that her gestation is, amongst other things, a perpetuation of that cycle. Referring to her unborn child as trash or mangled, metal garbage, “this slag heap” contests the image of the pregnant woman as naturally predetermined to nurture and welcome childbearing. In resisting this discourse, Martha creates a new way in which women can react to and define pregnancy and motherhood. Thus her struggle also becomes a linguistic one, a
struggle in rejecting the dominant discourse on pregnancy and motherhood and providing an alternative script for herself. Although Martha has yet to create a positive discourse, one that brings her pleasure, her rejection of patriarchal discourse about the female body and fecundity is an important step in her journey toward female selfhood and autonomy.

Like Tambu, however, Martha’s journey is not linear. The process of resistance and identify formation Martha undergoes is complicated by her relationship with Freddy, her unborn child, and national gender practices and expectations. As Martha continues her polemic about Freddy and her pregnancy in the opening scene, Freddy becomes the focus of much of Martha’s first and second monologue, central rather than peripheral to Martha’s experiences. Martha’s parallel reference to knitting and Freddy, “I hate knitting and I hate Freddy,” who is the infantile father of her unborn child, suggests at this point her inability to differentiate between them – they are one and the same, both objects of disdain. Shortly thereafter, Martha questions what might happen if she returns to Freddy and reminisces about the times he was gentle and kind to her. She says:

I should [go back]...it’s the right thing to do to go back there, but not, I can’t. I don’t have time to knit or look after Freddy. I haven’t got time to look after Freddy’s baby either. Oh Jesus, I don’t really even have time to have babies...I must be sensible about this. Now let me look at it objectively. The child is mine. This is fact...or it will be soon enough.

(She No Longer Weeps 6; ellipses in original)

Martha continues to complicate the ways in which women see the pregnant and the public self. She refers to her unborn child in terms of its father. It will not be until the child is born and physically detached from Martha that she will feel a sense of connection to it
and responsibility for it. Freddy and the unborn child function as one suffocating space
and force, a force that has exerted its control over her body.

Martha’s body is a contested site, a site of physical struggle between the private
and the public body as well as an intellectual struggle over the ways in which fecundity is
perceived. Physically, Martha’s body has undergone numerous, and often violent,
intrusions – first in intercourse, then in the gestation of the fetus, and finally in childbirth.
Martha’s body becomes part of the public domain in her physical expansion and
eventually in the delivery of the fetus. Once the fetus is delivered in childbirth, the way
in which she identifies with it changes. When Freddy returns in Act Three to claim
ownership over their now seven-year-old child, Martha reacts most violently. Although
she has undergone a physical purification in the delivery of the child, the intrusion of the
patriarchal ideologies Freddy represents continue to disrupt Martha’s life. In Act Two
when Martha, her mother and father discuss Martha’s radical changes in thought about
her pregnancy, her place as a woman in contemporary Zimbabwe and her independent
future, she begins to break down the connection between her unborn child and the father.
With her baby’s birth, she is free from the ideologies Freddy symbolizes in neo-colonial
Zimbabwe. At the end of the play, seven years after their child, Sarah, is born, we see
Martha exercising the most control over herself, her child and her space. At the onset on
the play however, Martha is in a constant state of questioning, the first positive step in her
journey toward autonomy. Much of Martha’s early dialogue, in contrast to her sharp and
brusque declarative statements in Act Three of the play, is in the form of questions: “So I
wonder, am I going to spend the rest of my life knitting, knitting like my mother and her
mother and all the rest of them... What do I want with a child? ... When did I love him?
When did he love me – now that’s a better question” (She No Longer Weeps 5-8; ellipsis in original). Martha is desperate for answers, answers which she yearns to give her a sense of direction. Dangarembga’s use of the interrogative emphasizes Martha’s psychological need to ask questions, challenging the roles to which she has been relegated and questioning the direction in which she is heading.

Freddy acts as the voice of the continued state of male hegemony that exists in neo-colonial Zimbabwe. As the play shifts to a flashback, where the reader/viewer will get answers to questions he/she has begun to ask about how Martha has come to this place, we gasp to hear the first words from Freddy. Martha asks, “Why are you ignoring me, Freddy?” and he retorts, “Get the hell out of here, you bitch” (She No Longer Weeps 8). In the diatribe that follows, Freddy becomes akin to the Manichean representation of evil. He verbally abuses Martha, assaults her with torrents of “bitch,” questions his paternity, calls her a “man” for wearing trousers and drinking and, ultimately, invokes the nation as a paternalistic enterprise which has no space for women when he asserts, “Women like you have no place in Zimbabwe” (She No Longer Weeps 9). If, as McClintock discusses, nationalisms are constructed via “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope,” then Freddy’s comments only reinforce that in neo-colonial Zimbabwe, the nation remains an exclusive site of masculinist privilege (353). Martha is being expelled from spaces because they are defined through these masculinized discourses and emotions. Martha has been removed from university for being pregnant. She has lost her space in school and is now being put out from Freddy’s apartment, an ironic place in which she initially seeks shelter, where she sweeps and cries simultaneously. But Martha’s journey toward selfhood has just
begun, and in the remaining acts of the play the reader is able to witness Martha act on her subversive thoughts.

For Martha in *She No Longer Weeps* and Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, reclaiming their voices and telling their stories become an empowering and subversive endeavor. When the reader is taken aback by Tambu’s unapologetic references to her brother’s death, he/she is pulled from the patriarchal spaces from which African male writers have written about such experiences. When we hear Martha in *She No Longer Weeps* speak with such disdain about her pregnancy and her domestic duties, echoing Tambu’s refusal to show remorse for her brother Nhamo’s death, we hear a story different than one that has been previously told – these are post-colonial stories of female resistance and creation.

**Masculinity and Ideologically Charged Spaces**

Dangarembga’s male characters are products of the post-colonial and neo-colonial predicaments in which they find themselves. The spaces and discourses they construct work to maintain the nation and its architectural spaces as sites of male privilege which continually seek to silence and control women. In his essay “Space Matters,” Christopher Okonkwo discusses how, particularly in Dangarembga’s texts, buildings are sites of gender conflict that often reinforce gender inequalities:

For in a building’s design and internal operations are codified a number of significant power issues such as social and economic position, gender hierarchy, authority, walls/boundaries, and freedom, among other things. Thus, a building can be a site of conflict. This is so when, no matter how
well-meaning its ‘owner’ or the one who claims such ownership.....[he] suppresses other voices particularly those of women and delineates and polices the domestic space – the familial (house)hold – as a territory of inviolable and unnegotiable male/God-like power, both physical and ideological. (56)

Households in both Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps are sites in which the primary male figures assert, often violently, their “God-like” power. The antagonists, Freddy from She No Longer Weeps and Babamukuru from Nervous Conditions, aggressively attempt to silence and control the women who surround them. But as each story unfolds, the women resist the oppressive forces of the authoritative male figures.

McCintock’s discussion of “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” is precisely what Babamukuru from Nervous Conditions and Freddy from She No Longer Weeps embody. A surge of female autonomy and subversive actions threatens the very manner in which the men have constructed their national identity and the direction in which they see the nation, as a masculinized entity, moving. Both men, however, as well as other male figures in the works, are incompetent. None are able to silence the women, control their bodies or cease the evolution of their female identities.

A product of Shona culture and British colonization, Babamukuru is the patriarch of the Siguake family in Nervous Conditions. He, his wife Maiguru, and children Nyasha and Chido have spent several years living and being educated in England. They return to Rhodesia and take charge of the mission school in Umtali. As a man who has been colonized, Babamukuru becomes an interesting representation of the “nervous
conditions” of the native. Straddling cultures, Babamukuru must negotiate two systems of power and regulation, the English and the Shona. Christopher Okonkwo aptly describes him “not as a total monster but rather a pitiable confluence of competing historical inheritances”(64). It is difficult to see Babamukuru as inherently evil despite the rigid and autocratic manner in which he rules “his” household. Even his daughter Nyasha says, right before her rage during which she rips apart her English textbooks, that “They [England] did it to them [her parents].....to both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it’s not his fault, he’s good. He’s a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir”(Nervous Conditions 200). With his English influence and Shona history often working against one another, Babamukuru holds on most steadfastly to the prime agent of authoritarian power, his masculinity. When Nyasha rebels against him and the rules of his home, he retorts with “We cannot have two men in this house”(Nervous Conditions 215). When Lucia, Tambu’s aunt, speaks up to defend herself at the family meeting to decide her fate, he asserts his control as patriarch of the Siguake family and attempts to silence her. His dominion over the Siguake homestead and the mission home, which he repeatedly refers to as his creation, add to the physical spaces that complicate postcolonial subjecthood and give rise to the hegemonic practices of male authoritarian power.

In She No Longer Weeps, Freddy is a rigid depiction of the effect of “masculinized humiliation” in neo-colonial Zimbabwe. Freddy is a man desperately attempting to return to pre-independence and pre-colonial ideologies about women, sexuality, domesticity and the nation. He uses women as sexual objects, literal and figurative receptacles of his maleness, and then disposes of them. Often invoking the
nation as a masculinized enterprise, Freddy’s “masculinized hope” is that women will remain in, or return to, the subservient positions they held prior to independence. Freddy says to Martha, “Women like you have no place in Zimbabwe” which reinforces the lack of space afforded to women (*She No Longer Weeps* 9). He at once calls Martha a man for wearing trousers and drinking, and then orders her to wait on him. Freddy makes constant attempts to silence Martha. He states, “If you had always kept your mouth and your legs closed you wouldn’t be in this shit now”(*She No Longer Weeps* 9). The battle for space is dependant upon Martha’s ability to be silent. Freddy’s refusal to accept Martha’s presence or voice ends with a violent beating for Martha and expulsion from his apartment. In Act Three of the play, Freddy returns in a pathetic attempt to get Martha, a successful and economically independent lawyer, to return to him. Martha’s success and her rejection of Freddy is a symbolic castration which forces him to reassert his power in space he feels must be male-dominated – the home, in a nation that too must continue to suppress the identities and voices of its women. The emasculation of Freddy when Martha refuses sparks Freddy to once again invoke the nation as the agent of his sexist ideals: “Whatever the law says,” Freddy claims, “society will remain on my side”(*She No Longer Weeps* 53). In the final act of *She No Longer Weeps*, Martha appropriates the space of her home and kills Freddy by stabbing him to death while two men hold him down and her parents watch. Martha says, “I’m going to make you suffer for the suffering you caused me”(*She No Longer Weeps* 59). Martha, who as the play suggests will willingly be taken away to jail for it, commits the most violent and subversive act in both of Dangarembga’s texts – the murder of Freddy, the embodiment of patriarchal ideologies of neo-colonial Zimbabwe.
Freddy, the least sympathetic of all of Dangarembga's male characters, Babamukuru and the other male figures in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* attempt to control the ideological and architectural spaces of the nation and the home. Martha, Tambu, Nyasha and other vocal female characters that make independent decisions about how to speak, when to speak, where to speak and about what to speak, put at risk the nation as a site of masculinized hope. As such, the men violently attempt to sustain the nation as a site of male privilege. In response, the female characters use their voices to resist and their bodies as means through which they act out their resistance.

**Female Speech Paradigms in Public and Private Spaces**

The women within *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* struggle with patriarchal paradigms of female speech in public spaces as well in the domestic realm, which is equally problematic for Zimbabwean women. Creating a new speech paradigm is crucial to the establishment of female-centered spaces where women can speak and be heard. In her introduction to *Moving Beyond Boundaries Volume 1: International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing*, Carole Boyce Davies discusses the relationship between space and the female voice:

Public spaces for speech have been generally identified with paradigms of masculinity; rational discourse, absence of emotion, developed logical arguments, media, pulpits, publishing houses, professional conferences are places of public speech. These sites of public speech have been historically barred to women. Instead, women were consigned to the
domestic space or private sphere where a certain kind of talk was tolerated if it was about domestic issues, children, the home. (4)

This paradigm is resisted by the women of Nervous Conditions, particularly Tambu and Nyasha, when they speak out in Babamukuru’s home and make autonomous decisions about when and how they will communicate. Similarly, although Martha begins as a victim of the traditional speech practices as outlined by Davies, her evolved and often erratic speech patterns reject any notion of submissive female speech and help to create alternative manners in which women can choose to use their voices. As their consciousnesses are raised so too are their voices. Yet, as they vocalize their resistant thoughts, the people, traditions and ideologies they represent work fiercely to silence them.

Although with regards to physical spaces Martha’s journey is mostly domestic while Tambu journeys beyond the domestic to the larger rural and urban colonial spaces of Rhodesia, it is in domestic space where these women struggle the most to speak and be heard. Babamukuru’s mission home is a space that exemplifies the ideology of male superiority, a space ruled by a man who will not tolerate anything that does not comply with the male version of appropriate and submissive female speech and action. A close analysis of Tambu’s discursive strategies in describing Babamukuru’s mission house in Nervous Conditions helps illuminate this relationship.

A significant amount of narrative and textual space is given to Tambu’s description of Babamukuru’s house, where Tambu’s odyssey and Nyasha’s rebellion are most significantly described in spatial terms. Pages are devoted to Tambu’s observations about cleanliness, colors (and lack of colors), textures and furniture, all of which
culminates in one quite powerful and telling statement: “the real situation was this: Babamukuru was God, therefore I had arrived in Heaven” (*Nervous Conditions* 70). Tambu’s “transplantation” as she calls it, to this Heaven from the Hell of the homestead is her resurrection, but not in the sense that she initially perceives it (*Nervous Conditions* 59). Nyasha, whom Tambu initially chastises for her insubordination, becomes the agent of her change and on whom the battle for space is acted out most violently. Babamukuru attempts to maintain ownership of the home by suppressing the female inhabitants’ voices. As for the comparison of Babamukuru to God, if God is undeniably male and the home is Heaven, then the ideologies that are responsible for constructing this space speak to the Christian masculinist perspective that connects man to an all knowing, all powerful being.

When Tambu and Nyasha speak out critically against the oppressive force of Babamukuru the consequences they face are severe. After settling into the mission home, Tambu says, “We hardly ever laughed when Babamukuru was within earshot....We did not talk much when he was around either” (*Nervous Conditions* 102). In one of the most violent scenes in the novel, Babamukuru beats Nyasha for speaking back to him as he chastises her for spending time after a dance with a young man. While calling her a whore, Babamukuru bellows, “We cannot have two men in this house...Your salvation lies in going away from my house” (*Nervous Conditions* 115). The narrator Tambu reflects:

> The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn’t depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even
heroes like Babamakuru did it. And that was the problem.... But what I didn’t like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (Nervous Conditions 116)

Tambu fails to find an escape from poverty, inferior education and Shona traditions because they all are rooted in male privilege, or as she puts it in “femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness.” The narrator reveals her awareness that these conflicts are rooted in sexism. Tambu is “determined to escape the sexism of her father and the poverty that is colonization’s lingering legacy to rural Africans,” but “slowly but surely learns from Nyasha’s postcolonial and feminist perspectives to hold onto her African identity, even as she revises it. Tambu comes to realize, as Nyasha has warned her, that escape from her father’s sexism into colonial racism is no escape at all” (Aegerter 234). Tambu must find a way to vocalize her resistance and re-examine her female identity while within the space of Babamukuru’s home. Although this proves difficult for the young Tambu, the self-reflexive narrator reveals that slowly her thoughts give way to physical and bodily acts of resistance. Their bodies are the means through which the women characters communicate their resistance to male hegemony.

In She No Longer Weeps, Martha in particular provides an alternative script for women when she refuses to acquiesce to traditional Shona female speech paradigms and neo-colonial ideology that perpetuates the silent female paradigm. Dangarembga’s texts provide an alternative to the traditionally limited choices African women have with regards to speech. According to Davies, “The enforced dominant options [for black women] have been: 1. Be silent, 2. Speak only privately, 3. Speak only to your own
community, 4. Speak out critically in the public arena and face the abusive consequences” (5). As the women in the texts speak and resist the patriarchal forces behind these silencing methods they provide new ways women can use their voices. Dangarembga juxtaposes Martha’s claim to freedom from her mother’s past with a contradictory claim when she refuses to speak for women who have been “unlucky” enough to fail securing a bride-price (*She No Longer Weeps* 46). Martha resists the traditional rules of female speech by giving subversive and contradictory stances on the topic of female voice and authority. In Act Two, contrary to Freddy’s claim that “Women like [Martha] have no place in Zimbabwe,” Martha asserts the opposite. She claims to her mother:

> To be a woman is no longer a crime punishable by a life-time of servitude to a man. I know that in your day there were so many pressures that prevented a woman from becoming independent...but people saw to it that women would remain dependent because that was the only way of thinking that people knew then...But the time has come for us to live differently; I don’t have to be tied by those beliefs because I can support myself and I will not sacrifice myself to a man’s eye just because society says I ought to. I’m as much a part of society as any one of you. (*She No Longer Weeps* 35)

In Act Three of the play, these words become reality. The storyline jumps ahead seven years to the time when Martha is a single mother, partner in a law firm, homeowner and independent woman. Her demeanor and her tone have shifted. She is acerbic, brusque and in control of everything around her. Her lover, Lovemore, is little more than a means
through which she achieves sexual gratification and she makes it a point to remind him of this. He has no say in how she runs her home or in how she raises her daughter.

Martha’s need for complete control of the physical space that is her home, in thought, action and speech comes at price. She, as the title suggests, no longer weeps. Martha is clearly hardened by her experiences but this is something that she deems “good.” Early in the play, Martha is seen weeping while she is vacuuming Freddy’s apartment. In Act Three, there are no tears, no weeping, and no vacuuming. She controls the material space of her home, the sexual space of her bed, and the emotional space of her mind. She has created what Henri Lefebvre refers to as her own “spatial code” which entails not only living or existing in a space, but understanding and producing it (Lefebvre 46). Martha no longer exhibits the traits society deems as feminine; her spatial code does not include crying or domestic duties. It is one where she openly asserts her sexual needs and wants, and in which she places herself above all else, even other women. In Act Three, when two women from the Women’s Association for the Protection of the Illegitimate arrive to ask Martha to speak to young women and bear witness to her life since “it’s like something out of a novel,” Martha rejects the notion (47). She tells them:

[The young women] will have to help themselves like we all do. I was abandoned once. I was forced to help myself. It has hardened me, Mrs. Mutsika. Because of that I no longer feel pain or pity or sympathy, and that is good. To the extent that I am a woman and have my personal battles to fight with the taxman, my employers and lecherers in the streets,
I am fighting for all women. But I cannot help your prostitutes. I refuse to do it. (*She No Longer Weeps* 50)

Martha’s refusal to speak on behalf of other women and her self-referential discursive strategies help reinforce that women’s stories must be self-determining ones. Martha resists the terms provided to her by the Women’s Association. It is imperative that she set the terms of her speech and action – she will decide when she will speak, how she will speak, and to what end. Martha chooses at this point to be silent, which is very different from being silenced. Martha is interested in being neither a martyr nor a symbol; she will not be put up on a pedestal nor used as an example, which would only re-inscribe the all too familiar ways women are perceived and depicted by a patriarchal society. Martha protests, “I do not want to become a public figure and I certainly don’t want to speak for women who don’t want to be spoken for. They’ll only hate me for my success as they hate you for your families and husbands. I want to be left alone to live my life; that’s all” (*She No Longer Weeps* 50). At this point, Martha has set the terms of her own speech; however, this newly achieved spatial code is problematic. Martha’s individualism sets her apart from other women and there is no joy for Martha in her new spatial code. But through Martha, Dangarembga is revealing that there are no prescribed ways in which women should act, react and speak both individually and communally. They must set the terms of their own speech and action.

Both *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* illustrate that women must resist ideologically constructed spaces and paradigms that work to silence women. These texts produce a different ideology that refuses to invoke the silenced woman paradigm. When the male characters and the women from the Women’s Association for the
Protection of the Illegitimate try to set the terms for female speech, the women make autonomous decisions about how to communicate with their voices and with their bodies. Dangarembga illustrates that in order to create space that is female-centered, the traditional paradigms that silence women in public and in private or domestic spaces must be resisted and a new manner of communication must be created.

**Female Bodies, Resistance and the Creation of Female-Centered Space**

The bodies of Tambu, Nyasha, Martha and her daughter Sarah become the sites on which the battles for female autonomy and identity act themselves out; these bodies are the means through which they communicate their most subversive acts of resistance to male hegemony. They communicate the hybridity and nervousness of the native. Dangarembga’s title, *Nervous Conditions*, is taken from Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), a call to arms against the oppressive colonizer. In his introduction, Sartre states, “The status of ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*” (Fanon 20; emphasis in original). Dangarembga’s reference to Fanon in her title may act as an “interpretive framework for reading the novel”; however, the novel itself, as well as the play *She No Longer Weeps*, includes an aspect of colonization not addressed by either Fanon or Lefebvre – its relationship to gender (Willey xii). Only when the women are able to exercise physical control of their bodies or experience bodily transformation are they able to resist and create alternative paradigms of female speech and behavior. Lefebvre writes:
The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphoses the body that it may forget it altogether — even though it may separate itself so radically from the body as to kill it. The genesis of a far-away order can be accounted for only on the basis of the order that is nearest to us — namely the order of the body. (405)

The acts of physical or bodily resistance, as Lefebvre suggests, can be so extreme or violent that they may transform a body all together. But the creation of something different and visionary must first begin with transformation of that which is closest to Dangarembga’s female characters, their bodies.

Perhaps more so than any other character in *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha becomes the embodiment of the novel’s titular allusion. A potent mixture of her traditional Shona culture and colonization, Nyasha thinks of herself as “hybrid” and her body is the space on which this identity struggle acts itself out (*Nervous Conditions* 78). At the novel’s conclusion she is emaciated, largely delirious, and committed to an institution. When Nyasha rebels by not following the rules of Babamukuru’s house and later by refusing to eat the food he has provided for her, she is rejecting him as not only a figure of male authority and patriarchal oppression, but also as the colonial oppressor of Africans, by whom she has been educated for the majority of her life. “‘It’s bad enough,’ [Nyasha] said severely, ‘when a country gets colonized, but when the people do as well! That’s the end, really, that’s the end’” (*Nervous Conditions* 147). She communicates her resistance through her body. Nyasha rejects Babamukuru’s food, food that is representative of colonization and sexist ideology; she asserts her autonomy by vomiting up the very food he provides. Nyasha’s bulimia is her refusal to ingest, literally and figuratively, the
patriarchal and sexist ideology that is fed to her via Babamukuru’s patriarchy and colonialism’s educational legacy.

Nyasha’s vomiting is a cleansing and a purification of her body. In the shrinking of it from bulimia she is violently deconstructing her physical self, breaking it down to the point of near death in order to cleanse it. In a pivotal moment in the narrative, Nyasha furiously rips apart her colonial textbooks and rips at her flesh with mirrors and the African clay pots she has made. She destroys the objects most at work against her in the battle for her identity – her Shona heritage and colonial education. Her destruction of those objects and partially herself leaves behind her bare flesh and emaciated body, stripped of patriarchal and colonial markings. Nyasha’s bulimic rage is her final act of resistance that unravels most violently. Nyasha says to Tambu, “‘They’ve [colonists] trapped us. They’ve trapped us. But I won’t be trapped. I’m not a good girl. I won’t be trapped…..Look what they’ve done to us…..I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you’”(Nervous Conditions 201). Moving from object to subject, Nyasha uses the tearing into her body as her ultimate act of resistance in the search for selfhood. At this moment, as Nyasha is in her most fragile physical condition, she is also in her most formative. The violence and deconstruction gives way to an enabling story, to use Lefebvre’s term, a “genesis of a faraway order” which first entails a spatial clearing of traditional and colonial ideologies in order to produce a space ready for ideologies in which the female body can flourish.

Tambu’s narration allows her to re-evaluate Nyasha’s example in the larger scheme of female identity transformation. Tambu uses Nyasha’s example as inspiration to revise her own female identity. Initially while at Babamukuru’s home Tambu
describes herself as “a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because [she] hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all [she] did not question things” (Nervous Conditions 155). However, Tambu’s realization about sexism and witness of Nyasha’s victimization by Baba inspires her to reject the imposed spatial code of feminine paragon. Her eventual refusal to acquiesce to Babamukuru’s demands in his controlled space becomes pivotal in her identity formation. Like Nyasha, Tambu finds an alternative means to communicate her resistance. In her refusal to attend the Christian wedding of her mother and father, she describes the wedding as an act that “made a mockery of the people I belonged to and placed doubt on my legitimate existence in this world” (Nervous Conditions 163). Notable in this resistance is how Tambu describes it in bodily and spatial terms:

Nyasha talked to me. She tried hard to coax me out of bed, but I was slipping further and further away from her, until in the end I appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the bed, watching her efforts to persuade me to get up and myself ignoring her…. The body on the bed didn’t even twitch. Meanwhile the mobile, alert me, the one at the foot of the bed, smiled smugly, thinking that I had gone somewhere where he [Baba] could not reach me, and I congratulated myself for being so clever. (Nervous Conditions 166)

Tambu’s out-of-body experience is her creation of a new body in a new space, which enables her to actively assert herself. Rather than only think resistant thoughts, at this moment she acts on them. Lefebvre says “the shift from one mode [of thought] to
another must entail the production of a new space”(46). Tambu produces a space in which her re-created, resistant self can take shape. This is a crucial moment in her identity formation, one which re-emphasizes the importance of spatial autonomy. She is disillusioned with Babamukuru’s home and the anglicized education he provides her. Neither her homestead nor the mission home and school are spaces which allow female autonomy; however, in the act of lifting herself from her own body and placing herself in a space Babamukuru can not touch, Tambu illustrates that ideological transformation can and must give rise to the production of space absent of male hegemony.

Similar to Nyasha’s most violent and transformative event, Martha’s most subversive act of resistance in *She No Longer Weeps* is acted out though and upon the body. If Freddy can penetrate Martha’s home and body and claim what he feels is within his male privilege to control, namely Martha and their daughter, then he will re-affirm the nation of Zimbabwe as a masculinist state. The final confrontation between Martha and Freddy in their battle for control begins with Freddy’s claim to their daughter.

Freddy: ‘She belongs to me.’

Martha: ‘You’re behind the times as usual, Freddy. No court in this country would grant you custody rights in a case like this.’

Freddy: ‘Stupid woman. Do you think I don’t know about the Age of Majority Act. It’s all written down on paper, but it gets no further. All I have to say is that I can give her a stable home.’

Martha: ‘You! Stable! Ha!’ (*She No Longer Weeps* 52-53)

The Age of Majority Act in Zimbabwe (1982) to which Freddy refers states that as of the age of eighteen all men and women are to be considered adults and independent in the
eyes of the court; yet the implementation of the law is undercut by lingering views about women’s and girls’ subservient roles in society. This Zimbabwean law had most direct application to child labor activities; however in the context of child custody, as the law states, Martha, although not married, could legally retain custody of her child without having a husband or father. Contrarily, pre-independent, traditional Shona custom and Rhodesian law granted full paternal rights to the father, following the patrilineal line of descent for all families reinforcing that children, particularly girls, are property to be owned, bought and sold. Although post-independent laws may be written on paper that does little to change the ideological framework that so rigidly continues to be a controlling force in the national discourses of gender, sexuality and marriage. Freddy remains the representative voice of the masculinist nation that attempts to control the bodies of the nation’s women.

Freddy foolishly believes Martha will give up the control she has gained over her home and her body and return to him, even though he is already married. It is unclear if Freddy is suggesting Martha be his mistress, his second wife or a replacement for his present wife. But Martha refuses his sexual advances and threatens his power by refusing him any agency over her home, her body and Sarah’s body. What is clear at this point is that when Martha refuses his advances, the “masculinized humiliation” to which McClintock refers becomes the impetus behind Freddy’s final push for control. To reassert his power and regain his masculinity, he claims ownership over Sarah. To that end, Freddy continues to explain why he wants to take Sarah away from Martha:

‘I want everything from you, everything. I had your virginity and your love but you tried to prove that you could manage without me, so now I
must teach you a lesson. You are not a good woman. You don’t know your place in this world, which is underneath. You thought you should be on top.’

Martha: ‘No, what I wanted was to be side by side.’

Freddy: ‘It is the same thing because a woman will never be as good as a man. Whatever the law says, society will remain on my side. Do you think any court in this country will give a child to a loose woman like you? Our moral standards in Zimbabwe are very high – we do not do such things.’ (She No Longer Weeps 53)

Freddy aligns himself with the state and infantilizes Martha in his attempt to remind her of Zimbabwe’s lack of progress in the advancement of women’s rights. But Martha refuses relegation to that place and instead, insists on a space of equality.

In the scene that follows, Martha’s actions illustrate how women’s bodies must enact a clearing of patriarchal ideology. In an attempt to take control over the situation in which Martha now finds herself, she draws a knife and demands Freddy to take Sarah with him, never to return to her home. If Sarah will go with Freddy, it will be on Martha’s terms, with her say and authority. Frightened that Martha has called his bluff, Freddy hesitates but is forced out of Martha’s home by her threats at knife point. In a scene quite similar to Nyasha’s rage of tearing apart the colonial textbooks at the end of Nervous Conditions, Martha’s response to Freddy’s intrusion culminates in tearing apart Sarah’s birthday presents, which she earlier was meticulously tending. This is soon followed by the tearing into Freddy’s body with a knife, a continuation and culmination of the bodily and violent means through which Martha resists. The moment of both these
women’s apparent insanity also becomes the moment of their lucidity. Rather than read these moments as examples of the hysterical woman, they should be read as pivotal moments in their identity formation, a climatic moment which at once illustrates the psychological effects of oppression but which also suggests that women’s resistance and independence lay in their own hands.

The textbooks Nyasha furiously rips apart are the imperialist attempt to strip away the Africans’ identity and replace it with Western culture and ideology. Nyasha’s struggle to hold on to her Shona roots while being immersed in colonial education, all the while at the mercy of Babamukuru’s patriarchal authoritarian rule, has culminated in the moment where she shreds all the objects at work against her, objects she previously revered. Sarah’s birthday presents, on the other hand, stand as markers of the domestic. Since domesticity has traditionally been a reflection of the nation’s notions on gender, then the presents as a representation of those patriarchal ideologies must be destroyed in order to make space for a new manner in which women exist in domestic spaces. The presents that Martha earlier wrapped and arranged so carefully become the objects that she violently rips apart after Freddy has penetrated the space from which Martha felt she was free of his influence, like Tambu’s displacement of her body when confronted with Baba’s colonial views on women and marriage. Both of these incidents are moments of transition where a deconstructive act clears the way for a constructive act— a literal and figurative shredding and clearing of a history controlled by colonial and patriarchal forces in order to make way for a new enabling story.

The concluding scene of *She No Longer Weeps* depicts the resistant act that most aggressively attempts to reclaim domestic space. Martha’s parents arrive at her home for
the first time and are soon after joined by Freddy. The reason Martha has brought them all together is to punish Freddy for what she refers to as “being unhappy ever since you interfered with my life” (*She No Longer Weeps* 59). Ever composed and calculated, with two men present to assist Martha in Freddy’s murder, Martha plunges the knife into Freddy three times while her parents stand by and watch helplessly. When they try to intervene, Martha states with great composure, “Be quiet both of you. This is a domestic affair” (*She No Longer Weeps* 58). With these lines Martha appropriates the linguistic and material means through which men have typically defended domestic violence – what goes on between man and woman in the home is no business of anyone else, including the courts. By re-enacting what has been coded in male ideology and language, Martha reveals the hypocrisy of it, as Tambu does with her parents’ Christian wedding. Martha’s line solidifies the need for women to reclaim the domestic realm which has been male-defined and dominated. Reclaiming, however, is not going back in time; it is an action through which the women can empty traditionally male dominated space to make way for something new. Dangarembga herself is clearing literary space dominated by male constructions of female identity, and creating opportunities for female authors to tell previously untold female-centered stories. As illustrated by her texts, appropriation of male-dominated spaces must be done in order to redefine the codings of national and domestic spaces.

Martha’s actions, and *She No Longer Weeps* itself, creates a space for readers and theatergoers to bear witness to acts of female resistance and autonomy. While early in Act Three Martha refuses to act out her story in public, her final performance is orchestrated such that her parents are there to bear witness. As Tambu watches Nyasha
rip apart the colonial textbooks and into her skin with mirrors and clay pots, Martha’s parents watch her rip into Freddy’s flesh and destroy what has become for her the embodiment of oppressive patriarchal forces that for too long have controlled her bodily and domestic spaces. For even though Martha’s actions are self-determined, in order for them to have lasting meaning they must be performed in front of an audience. Those that witness Freddy’s murder – Martha’s parents and the audience – may initially be shocked, but will quickly realize that this violent act is a response to a history of violent male intrusion into female spaces, just as Nyasha’s violent rage is a manifestation of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and Babamukuru’s oppressive patriarchal rule. Witnessing these acts by characters within these works as well as by theatergoers and readers is an important part of giving life and needed space to the female-centered story.

The denouement of *She No Longer Weeps* leaves the reader with an unsettling notion that Martha will be at the mercy of the Zimbabwean justice system and punished severely for her calculated murder of Freddy. Her resistance, however, is more powerful and inspirational than what may happen to Martha as a result. Studies of spousal murder in Zimbabwe reveal that the manner in which courts deal with these cases reinforces gender stereotypes. When the female defendant claims insanity as a defense, the male-controlled courts are much more willing to accept that the women were not responsible agents, but rather irrational, overly emotional beings intellectually incapable of knowing the consequences of their actions. “African women so charged were expected to convey the qualities of gentleness, quietness, modesty and good motherhood, which judges

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5 Tapiwa B. Zimudzi’s studies on spousal murder in Zimbabwe published in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* suggest that the ways women and the courts deal with spousal murders, particularly those committed by African women, reinforce national gender stereotypes. “Spousal murder by African women...was predominantly, but not exclusively, a response to male violence and abuse”(505).
associated with the prevalent stereotypes of conventional femininity” (Zimudzi 508).

Women who displayed these characteristics were given the most leniency in their sentencing and spared the death penalty. Women who displayed a pugnacious courtroom demeanor, however, “inconsistent with traditional gender-role notions,” were treated harshly and often sentenced to death (Zimudzi 510). Martha’s rational demeanor following Freddy’s murder upsets these national gendered conventions of female hysterics and rational behavior. Even though initially Martha did not wish to speak for the “unlucky” women of Zimbabwe, her actions and subsequent surrender suggest something powerful for Zimbabwean readers, that a new female paradigm can be created. Although she has autonomy over her body and her actions, she embodies and speaks on behalf of past, present, and future Zimbabwean women who must continue to work towards the creation of female-centered space.

While Nyasha and Martha work to strip away the sexism in the space coded by male ideology, at the end of *Nervous Conditions*, the self-reflexive narrator ruminates on the time in which she desperately sought spaces which were socially, politically and economically constructed according to Western and English ideologies, pre-disposed to act out the ideologies from which they were created. As Tambu attempts to escape her African heritage by rushing to Sacred Heart, Nyasha is escaping what English education has done to her. On the way to Sacred Heart, Tambu reflects:

> For was I – I Tambudzai, lately of the mission and before that the homestead – was I Tambudzai, so recently a peasant, was I not entering, as I had promised myself I would a world where burdens lightened with every step, soon to disappear altogether? I had an ideal that this would
happen as I passed through the school gates, those gates that would declare me a young lady, a member of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. I was impatient to get to those gates. (Nervous Conditions 191)

Here Tambu’s self-reflective narrative stance acts as reclamation of the female self. Her repeated use of “I” suggests that at this moment she desperately wants to maintain control of her identitarian journey. Given the narrated framing of Tambu’s journey, the reader is constantly aware of Tambu’s realization that her story is also the story of the women (and men) whom she loved, emphasized at the beginning at end of the novel. As she journeys from the homestead to the mission compound and ultimately to Sacred Heart, the readers must keep in mind that Tambu’s “I” is made up of a myriad of experiences, experiences she lives out and witnesses, and upon which the narrator reflects. Her journey toward selfhood turns on the “I” in a constant state of creation. Her time at Sacred Heart is short-lived. She returns to her cousin Nyasha’s side and begins to realize her own haste in embracing an education system whose effects are evident in Nyasha’s current state. Tambu continues to explore the infinite layers of the female “I,” an “I” that is not a defined space hidden somewhere secret within the body, but rather an “I” that is comprised of various experiences that are in constant states of evolution.

The bodies of Tambu, Nyasha and Martha are the most important signifiers for female resistance in Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps. Their journeys throughout the ideological and physical spaces of colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe culminate in bodily acts of resistance that are the most transformative moments in their identitarian journeys. The purging of male-centered space must include not only an
intellectual and linguistic rejection of sexist ideology, but also a physical resistance to it. In using their bodies as sites of feminist resistance, Dangarembga’s female characters illustrate that spatial autonomy must begin with autonomy of language and the female body.

**Generational Support of Female-Centered Space**

The supporting cast of female characters in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*, particularly the protagonists’ mothers, illustrate the generational struggle toward female autonomy and the visionary nature of both texts. The insights and experiences of these older women as well as their material existences are emblematic of what the protagonists come to embody – self-determination and resistance to sexist ideology. Neither Martha’s mother Ma’a Mercy nor Tambu’s mother Mainini Ma’Shingayi escape her entrapment (to use Tambu’s term from the opening narration of *Nervous Conditions*). However, their ability to perceive, teach about and envision the potential of their daughters to influence future generations of Zimbabwean women support the need for generations of women to tell each other’s stories. These older women characters deepen the representations of Shona and Zimbabwean women and speak to past, present and future spaces that need to be defined by women.

Despite Tambu’s assertion that, “The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate” (*Nervous Conditions* 12), Mainini provides Tambu with stories of generations of women who have borne their female burdens with strength, as Tambu says, a “History that could not be found in any textbooks” (*Nervous Conditions* 17). When Tambu uses her aunt Maiguru, Babamukuru’s
wife, as an example of an educated woman after whom she would like to model herself, Mainini quickly retorts by stating that Maiguru, along with being educated, cooks and cleans for her husband and family. She tells Tambu:

‘This business of womanhood is a heavy burden,’ she said. ‘How could it not be? Aren’t we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can’t just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it will be easy later one. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength. (Nervous Conditions 16)

In a tone that resonates with Martha’s when she refuses to speak for the “unlucky” women who are unmarried, pregnant and fail to secure a roora, Mainini acknowledges and teaches the naïve Tambu about the sacrifices women must make and the strength with which they must face colonialism and patriarchy. This is not simply about capitulating to the existing oppressive systems. Mainini acknowledges the hegemonic forces at work against Zimbabwean women and the need for women to reclaim and redefine the domestic realm while working on behalf their children and themselves. But it is the older, reflective Tambu who comes to understand the importance of her mother’s struggles and the power of resistance undergirding the call for African women to be strong.
Through Mainini, Dangarembga provides readers with a subtle call for daughters to act and create change. A second more explicit depiction of a woman demanding change and a shifting of ideological space is in the figure of Lucia, Tambu’s aunt. She is the only other character Tambu describes in a similar way she refers to herself, as one who “escapes” (*Nervous Conditions* 1). When the men and sole matriarch of the Siguake family convene for a *dare* (a family meeting led by the patriarch) to discuss Lucia’s pregnancy by Takesure, the women and the accused are conspicuously left out of the meeting. Lucia, however, intervenes and in “opposition to the system,” speaks out (*Nervous Conditions* 137). With a presence that far surpasses the reticent and complacent one of Maiguru, Babamukuru’s university educated wife who excuses herself from the meeting, Lucia enters and immediately demands to be heard. She grabs Takesure by the ear, demands to be allowed to tell her own story, rather than have Takesure tell lies about her, and ends by claiming she is leaving of her own accord and taking her sister with her, for her brother-in-law Jeremiah has a “roving eye and a lazy hand” (*Nervous Conditions* 145). Lucia acts on her sexual urges, remains unmarried and refuses to be silent. She escapes by leaving the homestead and Takesure, with whom she only remained to satisfy her sexual urges. She gets a job and an education. Like Tambu and Nyasha, Lucia negotiates the freedoms with which Western education (and Babamukuru) provide her, while simultaneously struggles to hold on to her African identity.

Martha’s mother in *She No Longer Weeps* utters what is perhaps the most visionary line of both texts. She states: “...if she [Martha] is remembered by our grandchildren’s children, I think they will remember her as someone who saw further than most of us are prepared to look” (*She No Longer Weeps* 38). Similar to how
Tambu’s identity transformation is described spatially and temporally, Ma’a Mercy’s words emphasize the need for women to remember, reflect on and tell their stories orally and through the written word. In order for future Zimbabwean women to effect change, it is imperative to retain the memory and sacrifices of visionary women that have preceded them. Although Martha’s actions, like Nyasha’s, are extreme, they are also visionary. Dangarembga illustrates that in order for female sacrifice to be transformative, women must have agency over their own histories, identities and stories. Ma’a Mercy, Mainini and Lucia illustrate the need for generations of women to ideologically, vocally and physically resist the oppressive forces at work against them in order to establish female centered space not only for themselves and their daughters, but equally important for future generations of Zimbabwean women.

**Scripting a New Spatial Code**

When the feminist critic Flora Viet-Wild asked Tsitsi Dangarembga in an interview about what “woman writing” meant for her, Dangarembga responded: “It means women writing about the things that move them – they should not develop formulae that they have taken from male writing. Female writing comes from the consciousness of being a woman and the problems that arise as a result of that …one has to move from the individual woman to the group and from there to the fundamental causes” (29). With *She No Longer Weeps* and *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga resists the male formulae of silencing, allegorizing and marginalizing women and their experiences. Through her strong female characters and resistant narrative voices, she illustrates that women must reclaim and redefine the public space of literary discourse
and the manner in which Zimbabwean women have been written into literary history. With their voices and bodies, women must also appropriate the domestic space of the home, which for too long has been an ideological representation of patriarchy. By doing both, women will not only refuse to occupy male-dominated spaces, but instead create female-centered spaces, which are a material, epistemological and phenomenological necessity for women. Nfah-Abbenyi writes: “A reading of women writers…shows how they seek to break away from the dominant male stance, by depicting women and women’s experiences, women’s ways of knowing in women’s spaces and locations”(36). The multiple experiences of colonized women reflected in Dangarembga’s works provide stories of women undergoing the complicated process of female identity expansion in colonial and postcolonial spaces.

The ideologically constructed spaces that exist to silence women are emptied of their power by Dangarembga’s female characters. This provides for original ways to imagine the nation, its public and private spaces, and literature that has been scripted in male discourse. Not only is female-centered space emerging, but the self-determination of Tambu, Nyasha and Martha provide an alternative manner in which women can undergo the female journey toward selfhood. Upon reading these texts we come away with the knowledge that women come to voice by telling their own stories as they move from object to subject. By positioning herself as a feminist force in Zimbabwean and post-colonial literature, Dangarembga has placed the female experience as central, rather than peripheral to experiences of men and nation. A new spatial code opens up in Dangarembga’s texts. Through Martha and her mother, and Tambudzai, Nyasha, Mainini and Lucia, Dangarembga illustrates that in order for women to undergo a journey toward
female autonomy and selfhood, they must do so in spaces that support and affirm the female voice and body.
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