

## CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses how Tsitsi Dangarembga's fiction brings out sustainable development through cultural diversities in a nation. In her famous novel *Nervous Conditions*, the authoress creates hybrid space in which live both native Shona Zimbabwean and European. Life that difficultly starts between the two of them finally engenders development in the country. Depicting cultural hybridity through space and characters, Dangarembga throws light on sustainable development in Zimbabwe. A culture that, henceforth, benefits double education, double language to internationally exchange and a bright developing infrastructure thanks to its diversities.

**Keywords:** cultural diversities, education, gender equality, cultural hybridity, sustainable economic development.

**Résumé:** Cet article analyse la manière dont la fiction de Tsitsi Dangarembga décrit le développement durable à travers la diversité culturelle dans une nation. Dans son fameux roman *Nervous Conditions*, l'écrivaine crée un espace hybride dans lequel vivent la communauté des natifs Shona et celle des Européens. Une vie qui débute dans les difficultés finit par engendrer le développement dans le pays. En décrivant l'hybridité culturelle à travers l'espace et les personnages, Dangarembga réussit à montrer le développement durable au Zimbabwe. Une culture, qui désormais, bénéficie d'une double éducation ou une éducation hybride, une égalité du genre et d'un échange économique stable et fort grâce à sa diversité voit le jour.

**Mots clés:** diversités culturelle, éducation, l'égalité du genre, hybridité culturelle, développement économique durable.

### Introduction

The writer Tsitsi Dangarembga, a Zimbabwean woman writer, has most of time been interested with woman social status. Critics such as Charles Sugnet and Kumari Jayawardena show it well in their works respectively "Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon" and *feminism and nationalism in the third world*. But if one understands sustainable development as a kind of development that meets the needs of the present generations without endangering the one of the future generation, then Dangarembga can also be concerned with sustainable development. This aspect of development is ignored in the works of the preceding critics on Dangarembga's fiction. In their article enlightened with postcolonial approach, Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand

and Bahman Zarrinjooee (2012) are concerned with the negative aspect of cultural meeting. In this way, it is crucial to mention the importance of this paper since it sees the positive aspect of cultural hybridity. The present article investigates Dangarembga's fiction through postcolonial approach.

This approach is crucial in the present analysis. It helps explore the relation between the colonizers and the colonized which is the main concern in this investigation. Postcolonial critics "celebrate hybridity and 'cultural polyvalency', that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture" (Barry, 2009, p.192). Colonizer and colonized are the concern since it is their interaction that forms cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity is the culture which is not fixed, it is a mixed culture. A culture that is "new, neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p.25). Here one must understand cultural hybridity as the fact of belonging to more than one culture namely the culture of the colonizer and the one of the colonized.

The work goes beyond this simple and unique thought of the preceding critics on the fact that colonization brings racial discrimination and doubles gender weight. It analyzes like Anjali Prabhu when he writes "Cultural hybridity was promoted as a way in which the white ... would assimilate all the positive qualities of the other" (Prabhu, 2007, p.42). In this way, this investigation shows the qualities of cultural hybridity. Closely reading her book *Nervous Conditions* with the vision of Homi Bhabha's cultural hybridity, one realizes that Dangarembga creates a hybrid space (a place ... which is new, neither the one nor the other (Bhabha, 1994, p.25) and hybrid characters to stress on the development of Zimbabwe through its diversities.

In fact, in *Nervous Conditions* the creation of the place of hybridity is viewed through the construction of European community with the community of Shona in the same place. This construction makes the Zimbabwean community be 'new, neither the one nor the other'. It becomes a place of hybridity since the place is neither for the European nor for the Shona. Moreover, hybrid characters are observed through the characterization of the educated Shona. By educated Shona, one must understand the Shona who go to school to be educated in the European manners while they have already received Shona traditional education. In so doing, Babamukuru, Maiguru, Tambu, Nyasha, Nhamo and Lucia are considered as hybrid characters. They possess double education even double culture. If one talks about double culture in Zimbabwean society, it is nothing than hybrid culture or diversity of culture. This cultural hybridity does not only bring double colonization or a weight that is forcefully viewed as discrimination in Zimbabwean community. But it has brought sustainable development in the Shona community.

Sustainable development is 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987, p.87). Another understanding of the concept which is that "sustainable development is dependent upon moving beyond

dichotomies” (Maclean, 2015, p.3) is crucial in this work. From all these definitions, let us consider sustainable development as the development that takes into account the resolution social conflicts and lets progress be in education, social equity and in economic domain. The aim of this article is to show how cultural hybridity or cultural diversity fully contributes in sustainable development in the fiction of Dangarembga. To reach this goal, it is necessary to answer the following question: how Dangarembga portrays sustainable development through cultural hybridity in her fictional production? The answer to this question leads to analyze sustainable development in term of education, in women condition, and at economic level in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*.

### **1. Education: Cultural Hybridity and Sustainable Development**

Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* depicts sustainable development in the system of education through her creation of cultural hybridity. The aim of this section is to show how hybrid education engenders sustainable progression in local system of education in Zimbabwe as portrayed by Dangarembga. In fact, Dangarembga portrays the notion of local educational as an education that is orally transmitted from generation to generation. The authoress writes: ‘She (grandmother) gave me history lessons as well. History that could not be found in the textbooks; a stint in the field and a rest, the beginning of the story, a pause. ‘What happened after, Mbuya, what happened?’ (Dangarembga, 1988:17). From this quotation, the author informs the reader about two elements namely orality and forgetting. The orality is observed when she notes “history lesson ... that could not be found in the textbooks”. This means that in the Shona community before cultural hybridity, history are not written. This is why it cannot be found in textbooks. Then before the grandmother continues the history lesson, there is “a pause” while the protagonist Tambu needs the remaining story. The grandmother says “more work, my child, before you hear more story” (Dangarembga, 1988:17). These words “pause” and “more work, my child, before you hear more story” are symbol of forgetting. Since when one forgets an issue, s/he takes time to think about that issue before telling the remaining story. In doing so, the coming story can be modified or false because the grandmother needs to count the entire story to Tambu in order she can also keep in mind for the future generation. Consequently, it can be observed as an unstable or unsecured lesson.

In this sense, the article joins Tracie Church Gozzio when he writes: “ He cannot heal himself or his family because he cannot share stories of his past. Each of the main characters ... are tragic because they have forgotten the songs sung to them as children and the stories that sustained them through pain and trauma; they have forgotten their “fictions”” (Guzzio, 2011, p.9). Here one can understand a main point that is the instability of oral story. Normally, a story told by someone is original and non-fiction. But, being unable to tell the entire story cannot secure the story from one generation to another. While, what is sustainable is secured for the future generations. From this statement, it is observable that orality is not sustainable. Thus, through Dangarembga’s

writing, it appears that written history lesson (derived from cultural hybridity) is the sustainable one.

In *Nervous Conditions*, history lesson found in books is the sustainable one. To throw light on this fact, the writer mentions “‘Umtali is on the other side of these mountains,’ Mr Matimba said as we approached the intersection of the Inyanga Highway with the Umtali Road. ‘The mountains around here are some of the highest mountains in Rhodesia. All the high mountains are found in the eastern part of our country. These are things you will learn about when you come back to school.’... These are things that you will learn”. (Dangarembga, 1988:26). In fact, the first time that Tambu sees the “mountain”, she is in rush to know something about it. Knowing that these are things taught during the history lesson in the school where Tambu will go. Mr Matimba, the school teacher, tells Tambu that “These are things you will learn about when you come back to school”. When Tambu decides to know more again about the town Salisbury, Mr Matimba is stable by saying “These are things you will learn”. This stability of Mr Matimba shows the credibility and sustainability of the history lesson taught in the school. It is in this sense that Dangarembga adds ‘that boy and his books! he’ ll make a fine teacher one of these days with all that reading. (Dangarembga, 1988, p.9) to show credibility of the lesson taught at school.

Moreover, the stability of written history is well perceived when the protagonist Tambu says: “Nyasha taught me this history with a mischievous glint in her eye. I was like a vacuum then, taking in everything, storing it all in its original state for the future inspection. Today I am content that this little paragraph of history as written by Nyasha makes a good story” (Dangarembga, 1988:63). Here the passage clarifies the originality and credibility of written history for “future inspection” or future generation. In this way, written history cannot be marginalized in preserving the stability of the future development because ones written, the story stays stable and sustainable for the present generation without disturbing the future generations.

In short, through the fiction of Dangarembga, it is clear that oral story is not sustainable while history lesson written in books enters in the context of sustainable development because it is secured for the present generation and does not disturb the future generations. In this way, if written history is a source of sustainable development, then, school education becomes central in term of social stability. Schooling remains as a source of sustainable development in Zimbabwe. This assertion can be seen when Dangarembga mentions “These children who can go to school today are the ones whose families will prosper tomorrow” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.45). In the previous time, one is called to cultivate on the farm, to feed animals as the grandmother does to survive. Unfortunately, growing in the field is not stable or sustainable one because of climate change. With great climate change, one can find himself/herself “upon the grey, sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren” (Dangarembga, 1988:18). In this case, s/he can no more produce food to the family. Most of the time, this situation of soil’s infertility engenders two

kind of migration namely “coercive migration” and what I call “positive migration”. The first is not the concern in this article since it does not bring about sustainable development. To be concrete, it is better to give a detail on the two concepts. As Nikos Papastergiadis puts it “During colonialism, migration was predominantly forced and coercive.” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p.26). Through his work, one understands slavery as coercive migration. Thus coercive migration is the fact of moving by force or without a legal rule. This is the case of the grandfather who “lured by the wizards’ whispers of riches and luxury and driven by the harshness of the homestead, took himself and his family to one of their wizards’ farms” (Dangarembga 1988, p.18). Moving to white people community without any authorized paper expecting good condition is negative and unstable. This is reason why the grandfather and his family “find that they have been enticed into slavery” (Dangarembga 1988, p.18). This is a coercive situation. This is not stable situation, it is negative. Consequently, the grandfather lives in unsustainable condition, that is why “the grandfather managed to escape” (Dangarembga 1988, p.18). As already said in the preceding lines the concern here is to show the way positive migration conducts to sustainable development.

Positive migration brings progression in a nation. Contrary to negative or coercive migration, positive migration is perceived when one has a legal authorization to move abroad. In *Nervous conditions*, Dangarembga depicts positive migration through Babamukuru’s and his small family’s schooling. She writes ““Yes, we both studied, your uncle and I, in South Africa for our Bachelor’s Degrees and in England for our Master’s’.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.102). Here, it is clear that Babamukuru’s migration to England is legal, objective and more positive. How is this positive migration perceived as an element of sustainable development?

During his return in Shona community, Babamukuru has a stable job (headmaster) and stable salary. Stable job and salary must be understood as regular because his job and his salary do not depend on the fertility of the soil. There is an organized program and hours which make him be in the school. Babamukuru also has a salary that is monthly received. With this money, Babamukuru not only makes progress in his family but also in the entire Shona community. This is observable when Dangarembga writes “Truly our prince has returned. Full of knowledge that will benefit us all!( Dangarembga, 1988, p36). And she writes again “Now that he had returned, he said, it was time for the members to put their heads together to think of the means of ensuring the prosperity of each branch of the family” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.44).

## 2. Gender equality and Sustainable Development

In *Nervous Conditions*, the conditions and the behavior of the hybrid women are strong in the understanding of sustainable development. Cultural hybridity has removed women in the subordinated conditions to center them. From marginality women are being in the center of the society through cultural

hybridity. To better understand sustainable development here it is crucial to consider Kirsten Maclean: “when one considers the social development aspects of sustainable development, certain similarities appear. These are related to the previously mentioned buzzwords: gender, good governance, empowerment and participation (Maclean, 2015, p.22). It is obvious that sustainable development takes into account empowerment. From this argument, this section shows women empowerment and participation as a mirror of sustainable development.

Through hybridity of culture, women are socially developed in Shona community. Like men, women are educated at school. Women schooling is viewed as women’s progression at many levels. According to Sudershan Kumar Pathania “Sustainable development aims at eradicating poverty through, in particular, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities raising basic standards of living and fostering equitable social development and inclusion...sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality” (Pathania, 2017, p.77). From this quotation, it is observable that sustainable development takes into account creating opportunities and gender equality. Dangarembga reveals these issues many times in her writing.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu and Lucia are given opportunities despite their femaleness. Leaving her “poorer” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.127) family, Lucia has job opportunity in the mission thanks to Babamukuru. Dangarembga writes: “Lucia...I have found something for you to do. Not much. A little job. At the girl’s hostel.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.160). Here through her writing, eradicating poverty is clear enough. The authoress uses the opportunity given to Lucia in the hostel to show a strategy to eradicate poverty or to reach sustainable development. Through this job Lucia can take care of her family. Moreover Tambu’s schooling enters in the system of sustainable development. Going to school is viewed as liberating her from women burden. For Tambu’s father she is living to cook for men. This is why, her father says: “Can you cook books and feed them to your husband. Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.15). Thus Tambu’s going to school establishes gender equality in the Shona community. One notices that giving job opportunity and schooling opportunity to women or girl is a way of reaching sustainable development since there is no sustainable development without gender equality.

Through the employment of the young Lucia, Dangarembga draws attention of the readers on the employment of the young Zimbabwean girls as one key element of sustainable development. It is in this vein that Taner Güney confirms: “the increase in the level of young employment increases the level of sustainable development” (Güney, 2017, p.155). Güney brings an equation between young employment and sustainable development. This equation is viewed in the work of Dangarembga when she portrays the job as a way of women’s autonomy. Lucia’s autonomy is perceived when she is able and free to use the money she earns to go “to school to Grade one class in the evenings”

(Dangarembga, 1988, p.162). In short, equality of gender in the question of job opportunity for young Zimbabwean fully participates in sustainable development. Job opportunity for young Zimbabwean is regarded as autonomy for the young people.

This job opportunity for young Zimbabwean in general and women in particular opens a way to sustainable development through women participation in home expenditure. In addition to their traditional roles of children bearers, house keepers, and voiceless person, hybrid women are the equal to men in the participation to the expenditure at home. Hybrid women help their husbands to do the expenditures. Dangarembga highlights this fact in her work when portraying Maiguru, the wife of Babamukuru, a hybrid Zimbabwean woman teacher in the school led by her husband. She indirectly helps her husband pay everything at home. In fact, at the end of the month, Maiguru has “never received her salary” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.103). Despite this, “Maiguru, always smiling, always happy, was another puzzle. True, she had good reason to be content. She was Babamukuru’s wife. She lived in a comfortable home” (Dangarembga, 1988, pp.98-99). Maiguru does not receive her salary from her husband but she is content. This joy of Maiguru expresses her acceptance to participate in the expenditure at home because she is aware of the price paid in the “comfortable house”. This is why, she does not ask for her salary. For this reason, one can only say that she considers her salary as the money completing her husband to pay everything at home and let the family be happy in a sustainable living condition. This also helps understand that gender equality fully contributes to sustainable development at home. From this view, is it possible to analyze the relation between cultural diversity and economic sustainability?

### 3. Economic sustainable development

This section underlines the way cultural hybridity brings about economic sustainable development in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. Dangarembga portrays the precolonial trade in the condition of barter which is unsustainable. She writes: “We lived in Chipinge, where the soil is ripe and your great-grandfather was rich man in currency of those days, having many fat herd of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests. All this he could exchange for cloth and beads and axes and a gun, even a gun, from the traders” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.18). Through these lines, one can grasp two ideas: the system of trade and richness. First the system of trade is barter that is to say to trade in exchange for other goods, services rather than money. ( *Collins English Dictionary*, 2000). To be concrete on the fact one must check it when the authoress notes “All this he could exchange for cloth and beads and axes and a gun, even a gun, from the traders”. Second, Dangarembga reveals that to be considered as a wealthy person, one must have “many fat herd of cattle, large fields”. But after colonization or beyond cultural hybridity the system has changed or has progressed.

Cultural hybridity has increased economic sustainable development. Barter trade is transformed via money exchange. The encounter of European

has overturned barter to establish money exchange in Shona community. This is obvious through the maize farm of Tambu "We are selling green mealies...He has said that I was very clever, very hard working and was selling mealies to raise my school fees...Doris had commended him for trying to help me, had donated ten pounds towards my school fees. He showed me the money" (Dangarembga, 1988, pp.28-29). This passage informs the readers that the trade in exchange for other goods is over or outdated or unstable because this kind of trade cannot pay the school fees. Now in a hybrid society like Zimbabwe, it is trade in exchange for money that is considered as sustainable one.

Trade in exchange for money is the sustainable one. In *Nervous conditions*, the authoress depicts money as a tool of sustainable development in Shona community. With money one can possess previous things that make people rich and live comfortably. It is in this sense that the authoress pens: "Babamukuru had sent money for a goat" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.33). She adds: "They live in a comfortable home. They wear decent clothes" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.45). Through these words, it is clear that with money Shona people can have "goat" whose possession makes Zimbabwean rich in the previous time. Additionally, money allows having comfortable living conditions. The fact that money helps obtain the past and the present needs makes money be seen as a source of sustainable development. This means that money can steady the needs of the present generation and preserve the future one. Hybridity has not only gone through a great progress in the domain of economy but also in the field of urbanization. Cultural diversity brings Urbanization (a progress of the rural area). Urbanization is the fact of transforming rural area into an area which "has a lot of houses, factories, shops, offices" (*Longman Dictionary of contemporary English*, 2009). This urbanization is depicted in *Nervous conditions*.

The rivers, the trees, the fruit and the fields. This was how it was in the beginning. This is how I remember it in my earliest memories, but it did not stay like that. While I was still quite young, to enable administration of our area, the Government built its District Council Houses less than a mile away from the places where we washed. Thus it became necessary for all the inhabitants of dozen or so homestead that made up our village to cross Nyamarira, as our river is called, whenever we went on business to the Council Houses. It was not long before the entrepreneurial among us, noticing that there were always more people gather at the Council House than everywhere else in the village (except at church on Sundays and on other days in places where beer was being drunk), built their little tuckshops which sold the groceries we needed-bread tea sugar, jam, salt, cooking oil, matches, candles, paraffin, and soap- there beside the Council Houses.

Dangarembga, (1988, p.3)

The quotation informs the readers about the underdevelopment of Zimbabwe before the arrival of the European in Shona community. When the writer notes "I remember it in my earliest memories, but it did not stay like that", she lets appears that Shona community does not stay the same like after



the encounter of western culture. The development of the community begins with the building of “council houses” for business and “tuckshop” to sell modern materials such “bread tea sugar, jam, salt, cooking oil, matches, candles, paraffin, and soap”. It is obvious that the hybridization of Shona community leads to its development. Not the less but the sustainable development because this “council houses” and this “tuckshop” are advantage for all generations in the community. In these modern settlements, the present generation does its business and shopping and it will stay for the future generations of both Shona and European communities. From this analysis, cultural hybridity is an important tool for sustainable economic development.

### Conclusion

All in all, Dangarembga’s fiction has revealed cultural hybridity or cultural diversity as the promoter of sustainable development in Shona community in particular and Africa in general. Even though, some critics consider hybridity as a weight or trauma for the colonized, in Dangarembga’s *Nervous conditions* it is not always the case. In her fiction, cultural hybridity is perceived as a key tool in sustainable development. That sustainability is observed at four levels especially in education, gender social development and economic sustainable development. With cultural hybridity, education has known sustainable progress, women are gaining equal social status and barter trade is transformed into money exchange trade that has good progress because of business houses and shop building. Beyond sustainable development, cultural hybridity does not transform all communities into a happy family?

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