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[Reconsidering the *Bildungsroman*: Tsitsi
Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*]

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Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* has been universally acknowledged as an established member of the *Bildungsroman* genre because the novel focuses on the progressive development of its narrator as an individual, a characteristic that harkens back to the category's name, the "novel of formation." Yet, while the narrative may satisfy the requirement in this aspect, it also seems to fundamentally trouble the conventions of the genre in that it fails to narrate or illustrate the outcome of this development, that is, the "growing-up" part. Indeed, the only proof that Tambu eventually progresses out of girlhood is in the physical narrative itself, where she takes the role of authorial figure. Even with this occupation as proof of her eventual progression, the novel seemingly fails to complete the second part of the *Bildungsroman* equation of displaying "human character as it manifests itself in society" (qtd. in Abel et al. 6), a necessary component of development in the genre's traditional understanding. Regardless, the categorization of the novel within the genre remains, implying that some type of development or formation does take place. But if the latter part of the progression, the growing up and integrating into society, is not there, where does the concept of development work its way into this designated novel of development?

The answer to this question is primarily an epistemological concern with ontological implications. In other words, essential to Tambu's development of a personal identity is her acquisition of the knowledge that she *cannot* successfully manifest herself into her surrounding society. This knowledge is incredibly important because the society in which she exists (the environment and characters existing outside of her in the diegesis) actively works against any type of agency through its systematic mandating of acceptable identities through various forms of oppression, including sexism, classism, and racism, oftentimes as a result of colonialist ruling. Tambu, then, must come to know that she is unable to incorporate herself into society exterior to

herself because of her black, female identity. By contending that Tambu's narrative paradoxically adheres to and contradicts the original ideas of the genre, this examination of the novel follows Susan Fraiman's methodology in her study of the female *Bildungsroman*, in that this reading "suggest[s] a swerve from ruling definitions of the genre" itself (2).

In order to situate this argument within the evolving trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, core concepts from the field of girls' studies and Georg Lukacs's influential theory of the novel will be incorporated, as well as a continued discussion of the importance of space (physical, ideological, and metaphorical) within *Nervous Conditions* as a tool that both inhibits and encourages the *bildung* (formation) of identities, a concept that Christopher Okonkwo notes is a "hugely important but critically underdeveloped issue in the novel" (53). Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that Tambu's position as a girl (as opposed to a woman), as a subject caught between different epistemological viewpoints based on her spatial location, and as an authorial figure, results in a development that is vastly different from those in traditional *Bildungsroman* texts but nonetheless fulfills the generic conventions in that a development does, indeed, take place.

Nervous Conditions' categorization as a *Bildungsroman* is supported through the novel's basic plot structure, one that begins with Tambu's brother dying and, consequently, her chance to receive an education within her country of Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe). Traveling from her impoverished home to the relatively wealthy location of her uncle's mission school, Tambu is educated by white individuals with anglicized teaching methods. While she initially sees nothing wrong with her education, Tambu's interactions with Nyasha (her cousin) and her personal witnessing of Nyasha's mental collapse produces an epiphany that encourages Tambu to reconsider her original conceptions of a colonial, white education. Yet, importantly, Tambu

does not age during the narrative, which certainly troubles the novel's categorization. Because the *Bildungsroman* genre, itself, is continually developing, it is first necessary to briefly contextualize this argument as it relates to the genre's evolving nature.

The *Bildungsroman* arguably originated due to particular historical circumstances taking place within eighteenth-century Germany, primarily forming as a result of idealist conventions that were produced and influenced by the Enlightenment. With its form devoted strongly to the idea of growth and unity as well as essentialist ways of thought, it came about as a “novel form that [was] animated by a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness” (Abel et al. 5). However, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland's study of the genre in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* note that the form is largely androcentric in its scope, “presuppose[ing] a range of social options available only to men” (7). Thus, *The Voyage In* illustrates how incorporating gender into the genre radically changes the presupposed idea of “development” that was mainly formulated with men in mind; while men were able to successfully incorporate into society at the end of their *bildung*, women were left to “substitute inner concentration for active accommodation” (Abel et al. 8) because no accommodation could be made.

Yet while the authors of *The Voyage In* are right in their argument that development is “colored by many interrelated factors, including class, history, and gender” (Abel et al. 4), their reliance on Victorian examples of *Bildungsroman* leaves them susceptible to overlooking the factors of race and ethnicity. Consequently, in *The Female Bildungsroman by Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston: A Postmodern Reading*, Pin chia Feng seeks to incorporate these important identity markers because, as Feng herself states, “*The Voyage In* fails to specify cultural and racial differences, and instead centers around white, middle class women's issues”

(13). Incorporating these multiple components of intersectionality (race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status) aligns properly with the growing field of Girls' Studies, where it is frequently acknowledged that all of these factors, particularly race/ethnicity and social class, are important when addressing the contexts and concerns involving the development of girls (Ward and Benjamin 20).

All of these identity markers are important when examining the *bildung* of Tambu, who is located within multiple different sites of oppression as a colonized black female. However, because the narrative does not illustrate her aging beyond adolescence, her position as young girl subject located within the liminal space of childhood and adulthood should also be considered as an important component of her eventual identity development (hence this essay's reliance on the field of girls' studies.) The inclusion of age is important because it goes against the ideas formulated by the authors of *The Voyage In* in that, typically, female fiction shows "women developing later in life, after conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient" (Abel et al. 7). While the novel certainly does feature females who have found both marriage and motherhood unsatisfactory, Tambu has not yet crossed either of those thresholds. Similarly, the fact that these older women have realized that their exterior society is not compatible with their interior, personal development positions them as figures who already *know* this. Thus, this epistemological concern is fundamental for the potential development of Tambu's personal, self-constructed identity, or *bildung*; she must understand that, as a black girl, she is "constituted as [an] object at the intersection of a number of competing claims to truth" (Griffin 29), or, in Lukacs's terms, realize that the "immanence of meaning of life has become a problem" (186).

In order to express this idea of Tambu existing within a space of competing notions of “truth,” it is important to look at the physical spaces she inhabits as areas where these epistemological concerns (i.e., knowing how to be a “correct” girl subject) are in battle with each other and influenced by various forms of oppression. Doing so will demonstrate how Tambu is, as Christine Griffin states, “constituted in an uneasy and shifting location between competing external demands and pressures” (40). Not coincidentally, this idea is appropriately similar to the title of “Nervous Conditions,” a Sartrean concept that Dangarembga uses to express the uneasy position of Tambu as colonized female subject. This examination will be focusing on certain locations within the narrative, including the individuals who occupy those spaces, such as the home, school, and garden plot. Observing these areas will allow us to map out Tambu’s progressive development in which she comes to know that her original assumptions of these spaces as potential sites that could positively produce her growth are, in reality, ideologically laden with forces that seek to do the opposite.

Tambu’s initial space at the beginning of *Nervous Conditions* positions her within two intersecting forms of oppression which sees her unable to pursue an education, a concept that she originally perceives as necessary for her development. These two intersecting disadvantages—socioeconomic status and being a girl—both combine and manifest primarily at the site of her homestead. Therefore, Tambu’s hopes of receiving an education are not only diminished because there are not enough funds for the family to send her away to school, but also because the funds they do have have been allocated to sending her brother to school instead. Indeed, even when Tambu attempts to become educated in less institutional ways, such as “reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from magrosa had been wrapped,” her father quickly accuses her of partaking in acts that are unfeminine, claiming that Tambu should not “fill [her] mind with

impractical ideas, making [her] quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living” (Dangarembga 34). Consequently, Tambu’s home becomes a site where opposing ideological forces result in contesting notions of what it means to be a “natural” girl; while her father, acting as the main patriarchal force, claims that it is “natural for [Tambu] to stay at home,” the protagonist opposes this by stating that her “father’s idea of what was natural had begun to irritate [her] a long time ago” (34).

Tambu’s strategy to grow her own mealies in her garden plot in order to raise money to fund her education illustrates her early attempts to challenge the system currently preventing her sense of growth. By doing so, she leaves her designated domestic space to occupy the masculine position of producing and obtaining an income. As Pauline Ada Uwakweh states, “symbolically, it is ... an attempt to define herself in a male world” (80). Yet this does not come without opposition. Tambu’s brother soon begins his own assault on her potential *bildung*, acting as both a patriarchal and colonizing force in his unauthorized conquest and stealing of Tambu’s crops (Dangarembga 23). Subsequently, Tambu’s private sanctuary likewise becomes a space for masculine domination, as his reason for preventing her potential education comes to mirror their father’s: “it’s the same everywhere. Because you are a girl” (21).

Yet likewise important here is Tambu’s reaction: she “was no longer listening” (21) to her brother’s complaints and challenges. This is an early foreshadowing of her inability to realize that these intertwining systems of oppression based on gender, race, and class do not originate from the homestead nor do they solely exist there; rather, the oppression exists as a universal construct. Furthermore, the fact that her brother has been educated yet still retains these ideas of oppression reinforces this idea of universal oppression. It is thus not surprising that Tambu’s mother (a grown woman who is already aware of these intersecting oppressions) does not try to

prohibit her daughter's attempts to gain money for school, but rather wants Tambu, through her trying and failing, to "see for herself that some things cannot be done" (17), to become aware of and understand her situation as a disempowered girl subject.

The insistence of receiving an education as part of Tambu's *bildung* is fostered through an overwhelming emphasis that the novel places on education as a method for achieving social and economic mobility. This is especially true given that these ideas are frequently expressed by Tambu's father, seen primarily when he states, "Do you think we would be living the way we are! No! In a brick house with running water, hot and cold, and lights" if they had an education (5). Tambu's father's hypocrisy of emphasizing the importance of education while simultaneously declaring that Tambu, as a girl, should not receive one—"Can you cook books and feed them to your husband" (15)—leads her to believe that she has "no alternative but to ... go to school" (27) as a way of raising both her class status and challenging masculine ideas of girlhood. This is reinforced by the presence of Babamukuru, who, because of his English-based education, quite literally gains divine status at the homestead and is frequently labeled their "returning prince" (36). The thought of a girl getting an education is so hard to imagine that it is seemingly hard for her uncle to even voice—"Er – this girl – heyo, Tambudzai – must be given the opportunity" (56). Yet, Tambu's self-admitted "rosy view of male nature" makes her claim that she "knew [Babamukuru] was different" (50) in relation to her father and brother's oppressive mindsets. Consequently, Tambu proposes that Babamukuru need not "bully anybody any more," especially his wife Maiguru or his daughter Nyasha, precisely because he has "plenty of power ... money ... education ... everything" (50). Arguing, then, that she knows with education-induced socioeconomic progress comes a lifting of oppression, Tambu assumes no

epistemological challenges could possibly be present at her future school and Babamukuru's home, concluding that her enrollment will leave her triumphant and vindicated (57).

Tambu's current thoughts on oppression and the potential disrupting of it through education can be framed with a Lukacian lens. Indeed, Lukacs's idea of a novelistic totality, defined as the coalescence of interior wants with exterior ideologies, seems especially appropriate here. Tambu's epistemological problem of needing to know that she cannot successfully find a place in her oppressive society, mirrors Lukacs's notions in that the "immanence of meaning in life has become a problem," but Tambu has not yet realized this, and instead continues to think "in terms of a totality" (186). This leads to her insinuating that "because it *should* be, it necessarily *must* be" (207, original emphasis). In many ways, Tambu follows Lukacs's definition of abstract idealism; she showcases a "mentality which chooses the direct, straight path toward the realization of the ideal" through her reliance on Babamukuru's school as a way to develop and ultimately define herself. She is literally "dazzled by the demon" that is Babamukuru (oftentimes through his house or cars), and, consequently, "forgets the existence of any distance between ideal and idea" (Lukacs 207).

This not only encourages her to not question the education she will receive, but further results in what she considers an entire reshaping of her identity. The ideological implications of space as related to class and social status is so strong that, even before arriving to Babamukuru's house, his car ostensibly begins to shape Tambu's *bildung*:

When I stepped into Babamukuru's car I was a peasant. You could see that at a glance in my tight, faded frock that immodestly defined my budding breasts ...

This was the person I was leaving behind. At Babamukuru's I expected to find another self, a clean, well-groomed, genteel self ... I was going to be developed in

the way that Babamukuru saw fit, which in the language I understood at the time meant well. (Dangarembga 58-9)

For Tambu, her entire sense of self and development is placed within Babamukuru's own ways of thought, which, she assumes, will allow her to transgress both her previously defined social status and the patriarchal forces of her homestead, where "the needs and sensibilities of the women in [her] family were not considered a priority" (12). In this way, as Sue Kim states, Tambu's "desire goes backward in time and replaces her own 'homestead' self with her current self, making Tambu of the mission *more real* than Tambu of the homestead" (104, original emphasis).

Yet while Tambu originally thinks that her residence at Babamukuru's house will positively influence her social status and gender status through education, her development, instead, comes in the gradual acquisition of knowing that even this more educated, wealthy home is also a site of ideological oppression. Her first experience with this comes in an interaction with her aunt Maiguru. Although Tambu's mother remarks that the "weight of womanhood ... was a burden because [women have] to bear children and look after them and the husband," Tambu dismisses the statement, claiming that she "did not think [it] was *true*" (16, emphasis mine). Her reasoning for this is Maiguru's very existence, a woman "well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission ... who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood" (16). But Tambu's understanding is tested when Maiguru reveals that, despite her having an equal education to her husband, she is not able to keep her earned money and instead is confined to the domestic sphere. Maiguru's statement that a woman has to "choose between self and security," juxtaposed with asking Tambu "didn't you know?" acts as an important milestone for Tambu's eventual *bildung*; it is an acknowledgement that her originally perceived

space of development (Babamukuru's home and the mission school) is, in fact, going to keep her from doing so.

Nevertheless, at this point Tambu is still too invested in her preconceived image of Babamukuru to take Maiguru's hints as anything close to factual. While she does find her aunt's situation distressing, she ultimately concludes that "it was not so simple, because she had been married by my Babamukuru, which defined her situation as good" (103-4). Tambu's claim that Maiguru's situation was good because of Babamukuru prohibits her from realizing that, rather, Maiguru's situation (her lack of being able to use her own money, leave the house, etc.) has been *defined* by Babamukuru himself. This lack of knowing only allows her to continue blindly following Babamukuru's developmental advice.

Tambu's idealized expectations of going to school at Babamukuru's house are further blemished by the existence of Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, who, like herself, is still occupying the space of girlhood. Furthermore, Nyasha's position at Babamukuru's house as a space close to the mission school where she is educated, coupled with the fact that she was also educated in England, places her in an uneasy position, one in which she is defined by the patriarchal rulers in her African culture, African society's white minority, and England's white population. This uneasy and shifting location, as Christine Griffin puts it, or nervous conditions, as the title of the book illustrates, marks Nyasha's body as a site where her very position and ontological status as a girl come to be counteractively defined by both her African culture and the white culture in which she was educated, two forces that act in opposition to each other. But, paradoxically, the native African culture is still seen oftentimes insisting that to be educated in a white setting has both positive and negative consequences. Thus, Babamukuru takes Nyasha to England to be educated in order to alleviate possible hardships on the homestead, yet, upon returning, both

parents claim that she has become “too anglicized” (75). These competing notions of girlhood play out on Nyasha’s physical body in the form of clothing; the only “explanation for the tiny little dress she wore” was that she had been to England, yet Tambu does not “give her approval” (37). Nyasha’s English upbringing causes her young body become “naturally” sexualized, while her African upbringing polices any displaying of sexuality, illustrating how there is “no obvious right way to be a girl” (Griffin 40).

Significantly, although Nyasha is still a girl like Tambu, she is much farther progressed in terms of her *bildung* by an awareness of the universality of female oppression and understanding that her spatial location at Babamukuru’s house only increases her disempowerment. Indeed, Nyasha voices both the hypocrisy of her parents and her confining, liminal position when she states, “now they’re stuck with hybrids for children. And they don’t like it ... It offends them ... I can’t help having been there and grown into me that has been there. But it offends them – I offend them. Really, it’s very difficult” (Dangarembga 79). Nyasha’s budding knowledge, her “exposure and resistance to the ideological systems,” threatens to disrupt the Babamukuru’s house as a space “marked by certain codes and scripts” (Kim 106). Consequently, in one of the novel’s climatic scenes, Nyasha’s bedroom becomes a space where Babamukuru attempts to both mentally and physically force his ideological positions onto her mind and body. Asking Nyasha “why can’t you behave like a young woman from a decent home,” insinuating that proper femaleness is produced by the space in his house, Babamukuru accuses her of whoredom and physically assaults her:

Babamukuru ... gather[ed] himself within himself so that his whole weight was behind the blow he dealt Nyasha’s face ... Nyasha fell to the bed, her minuscule skirt riding up her bottom. Babamukuru stood over her, distending his nostrils to

take in enough air. “Today I am going to teach you a lesson ... I cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore” (Dangarembga 116).

Babamukuru's anger towards Nyasha stems not only from the performance of her female sexuality, but the fact that she challenges him within the *space* of his home. This challenge is so intense that, to her father, Nyasha begins to perform a masculine role: “She has dared to challenge me ... We cannot have two men in this house” (117). The thought of his definition of proper femaleness being challenged becomes so much for Babamukuru in this instance that he threatens to remove Nyasha from the space by killing her (117).

This violent episode acts as an important step towards Tambu's sense of knowing; following the altercation, Tambu comes to know that the patriarchal strategy of “making [women] ... victims of [their] femaleness” is, in fact, universal, and that it “didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education, or on tradition” (118). In Lukacs's terms, Tambu is experiencing a shift in knowing, where she is realizing that her exterior surroundings that she once thought matched with her interior motivations (Babamukuru's space will help develop her, not oppress her) are “incomprehensible, unknowable in [their] real substance” (190) in that they do not meet her expectations. Yet even at this point Tambu is afraid to acknowledge her patriarchal-influenced identity, simply because it is the only identity she knows: “I didn't want to read the end of those mazes, because there, I knew, I would find myself and I was afraid I would not recognize myself” (Dangarembga 118).

With Tambu gradually beginning to understand her disempowered position as a girl, what ultimately produces Tambu's *bildung* is her further realization in regards to the second part of her mother's original ideas of oppression: the “poverty of blackness” (16). Although Tambu herself has acknowledged that an English-based education negatively changes one's identity—

Nyasha and her brother had “turned into strangers” (43)—she nevertheless fails to understand her mother’s claim that Babamukuru and, importantly, the education that he allowed, had killed her son when she declares that receiving this same education will result in her “emancipation” (59). This is a failure that causes her to not understand that her gender limits her educational pursuits and her race does as well, and that this intersectionality is an institutionalized form of oppression. Therefore, despite stating that the white-ruling government acts as the force who decides when “African children were sufficiently developed cognitively to be able to understand the abstractions of numbers and letters” (13), Tambu does not realize that the very space in which she seeks to develop is ideologically positioned to restrict this progress. This is done by not only deciding the age required for African development, but also by deciding how many African students are allowed to receive this education. This lack of space for Africans to receive a “positive” white-based education even takes on a physical manifestation; the six Africans, including Tambu, that were allowed into the education sphere must all share the same bedroom, where beds were “so closely arranged that there was barely space to walk between them” (198).

Nevertheless, Tambu’s initial knowing that her education at Sacred Heart (the core space of proper, white education) would be “another step upwards in the direction of [her] freedom” (186) remains steadfast, despite her mother protesting that she will eventually “come home a stranger full of white ways and ideas” (187). Indeed, her original beliefs only begin to be challenged by Nyasha’s own battle with knowing the truth. Nyasha’s position as a girl (as opposed to Maiguru or Tambu’s mother) is of utmost importance here, as she is currently experiencing the same epistemological crisis that Tambu is. Certainly, Nyasha displays a stronger sense of knowing than Tambu, for she realizes that what antagonizes the ruling forces is her very identity as a girl subject, ultimately claiming that it is impossible not to do so (201),

mirroring the idea that “the girl herself is an impossible subject” (Griffin 42). Nevertheless, existing between different epistemological forces (patriarchal, colonial) that seek to define and entrap her, she similarly contradicts her point and brings the blame onto herself: “I guess [Babamukuru] is right, right to dislike me. It’s not his fault, *it’s me*” (Dangarembga 193, emphasis mine).

This struggle for Nyasha eventually manifests itself physically in her anorexia and bulimia, as the dining room, and thus even food, becomes a site for forcing these ideologies onto Nyasha’s mindset. As Sue Kim notes, “the dining room is a symbol of class privilege, both in the food consumed as well as the very fact of its existence” (109), and this leads Tambu to assume that “no one who ate from such a table could fail to grow fat and healthy” (Dangarembga 69). But Nyasha’s anorexic condition acts as physical proof that Tambu’s assumptions have no value. Thus, the dining room becomes a space where different notions of identity cause Nyasha to experience an ontological conflict; she should consume Western food yet simultaneously not read Western novels. With Babamukuru acting as the patriarch and enforcer of these ideologies, Nyasha is soon forced to consume food, as not consuming Babamukuru’s meal takes on a symbolic act of aggression that sees her “upend[ing] the proper order—mentally and bodily—prescribed by these spaces of consumption (Kim 109).” Yet even when Nyasha further attempts to challenge the ideological systems by vomiting the food shortly after, her anorexic condition insinuates the impossibility of being a girl subject; she can either be force-fed unwanted definitions of girlhood or risk losing her existence altogether through starvation.

For Nyasha, this eventual realization that her exterior surroundings cannot coalesce with her interior idealizations, that “it was more than food” (Dangarembga 190), if we are to follow Lukacs’s theory, results in what girls’ studies scholars frequently label a “crisis faced by girls as

they enter adolescence” (Ward and Benjamin 15). It is Nyasha’s “increasing awareness [of] the structures and processes of power conflict” that eventually “drives her dramatic psychological decline” (Kim 109). Nyasha’s emotional collapse at the end of the novel is what, perhaps paradoxically, triggers what could be considered her own awakening and *bildung*, as it results in her *knowing* the forces have trapped not only her, but all the other women. Yet, she claims, she “won’t be trapped” because she is “not a *good girl*” (Dangarembga 205, emphasis mine). Nyasha’s sense of knowing and truth comes with her realization that to be a “good” girl as determined by the exterior forces around her, whether it be racially, educationally, or sexually, is to be trapped, thus preventing her development and growth. Nyasha’s intent to do otherwise, then, acts as her *bildung*, as it allows for the beginning of a self-constructed identity.

Tambu’s reaction to Nyasha’s “nervous condition” does not immediately suggest an acquisition of a new knowing. However, significantly, it does cause her to *consider* the possibility. This is apparent when looking at two questions that Tambu posed in regards to Nyasha, both before and after the traumatic episode. Tambu’s original opinion towards Nyasha’s apparent detachment from her exterior environment at Babamukuru’s mission school shows her naivety of the situation and makes her “uncomfortable ... because something had extinguished the sparkle in [Nyasha’s] eyes,” concluding that Nyasha “was not sensible enough” to know of her privileges. Her view of Nyasha’s collapse, however, makes her wonder “if Nyasha who had everything could not make it, where could [she] expect to go?” (60, 206). Following her mother’s contention that “it’s the Englishness” that is destroying the African family, Tambu begins to question her assumptions more:

Was I being careful enough? I wondered. For I was beginning to have a suspicion, no more than a seed of a suspicion, that I had been too eager to leave the

homestead and embrace the “Englishness” of the mission; and after that the more concentrated “Englishness” of Scared Heart” (207).

While this is only a suspicion at this point in Tambu’s development (indeed, at the end of the novel), Tambu’s narration lets us know that “seeds do grow,” and that “something in [her] mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed” (208).

It is this refusal, this specific understanding of her position as a black girl caught between competing notions of truth, that most definitely illustrates the development of Tambu, her *bildung*. Following Lukacs’s ideas makes this even more apparent; Tambu’s realization that the “immediate unity of life and ... a completely rounded architecture of the system,” that is, her inner idealizations and actuality of the exterior environment form a totality, is “unrealized and unrealizable in isolation produces a new and autonomous life that is, however paradoxically, complete in itself: the life of the problematic individual” (198). Thus, Tambu’s awakening, her realization and reworking of her epistemological framework, sees her coming to *know* that she cannot fit in with the system, as it typically is with the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Yet, nevertheless, both *Nervous Conditions* and Lukacs’s theory demonstrate that Tambu’s development is nonetheless still present, and that it, regardless of age, still allows her to manifest herself into an autonomous individual.

It is important to conclude this argument by positing two ideas that are crucial for both the *Bildungsroman* genre and the field of girls’ studies, as well as the continuing development of Tambu herself. That is, both Maiguru and her mother’s knowing and advice, as well as Nyasha’s realization at the end of the novel, spark Tambu’s growth, and such development illustrates that, unlike the classical *Bildungsroman*, one involving girls focuses not solely on a single identity development (as this novel seems to do), but on a communal, feminine development. Kim

somewhat echoes this idea when she states that “the adult narrator Tambu ... argues that the women’s only real way out of these various structures of patriarchy, colonialism, and class is by coming together” (111). The beginning of Tambu’s narrative supports this claim; her story is not her story alone, but also “Lucia’s; about [her] mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion” (Dangarembga 1). This idea challenges (or at least somewhat conflicts with) recent trends in girls’ studies in which scholarship has “moved from the collective to the individual” (Ward and Benjamin 19). While Tambu’s individual development is certainly important here, the novel likewise makes an important claim in regards to a collective female identity, where females realize they are in an intersection of oppressions that attempt to define them as women, “the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other” (Dangarembga 16)

This collective feminine identity, then, is fostered and developed through Tambu’s narration itself. While Kim is right in saying that mere consciousness of the oppressive situation is not enough (110), as shown through Maiguru and Tambu’s mom especially (they are indeed trapped according to Tambu), the physical act of voicing this oppression, narrating all of the concerns, and then, finally, “writ[ing] this account” is what allows for any development at all. Thus, similar to Uwakweh’s argument that Tambu’s escape “lies ... in her status as narrator” (83), the physical text produced by Tambu not only provides the space needed to achieve her *bildung* in a highly controlled and governed diegesis, but also makes space within the evolving tradition of the *Bildungsroman* genre itself, where Tambu’s narrative, as shown, acts as an important new edition.

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