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sur les Sociétés et civilisations
(**LARSOC**)

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Les cahiers du LARSOC est une revue pluridisciplinaire qui publie des contributions originales (en français, en anglais, en espagnol et en allemand) à la recherche sur l'histoire et filières voisines des sciences humaines et des sciences sociales. Sont particulièrement bienvenues les contributions transcendant les limites entre les époques, espaces géographiques et domaines de recherches établis. La voie de distribution principale est la publication en ligne par article.

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Les contributions, en texte justifié, doivent être envoyées sous la forme d'un document Word, police Times New Roman, caractère 12, interligne 1,5 et en portrait, pour le corps du texte. Caractère 10 pour les notes de bas de page.

La rédaction refusera, les contributions de moins de 10 pages et celles de plus de 25 pages. Les marges des manuscrits doivent respecter les paramètres suivants : 2,5 cm haut, bas, et 2,5 cm droite, gauche.

La structure des articles se fait selon :

- Article théorique et fondamentale : Titre (15 mots maximum, taille 14, gras et centré), Prénom et NOM de l'auteur (taille 12, gras et centré), Institution d'attache et Adresse électronique (taille 11, centré), Résumé en Français (200 mots maximum, taille 10), Mots-clés (maximum 5, taille 10), Abstract, Key words, Introduction (Justification du thème, Problématique, Hypothèses/Objectifs scientifiques, Approche méthodologique), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Références Bibliographiques.

- Article résultant d'une recherche de terrain : Titre (15 mots maximum, taille 14, gras et centré), Prénom et NOM de l'auteur (taille 12, gras et centré), Institution d'attache et Adresse électronique (taille 11, centré), Résumé en Français (200 mots maximum, taille 10), Mots-clés (maximum 5, taille 10), Abstract, Key words. Introduction (Justification du thème, Revue, Problématique, Hypothèses/Objectifs scientifiques, Question de recherche), Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Références bibliographiques.

Les articulations de l'article, à l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, doivent être titrées et numérotées par des chiffres (exemples : 1. ; 1.1. ; 1.2 ; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.). Pas plus de 3 niveaux. Les tableaux, figures, graphiques, photographies en noir et blanc ou en couleur, seront présentés dans le texte à leur emplacement exact.

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Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998 : 223) est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile qui, dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991 : 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

« le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères » (S. Diakité, 1985 : 105).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page en indiquant :

Pour la source orale : l'initial (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur + Nom de l'auteur + lieu + date de l'entretien.

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Pour les sources d'archives : il faut mentionner en toutes lettres, à la première occurrence, le lieu de conservation des documents suivi de l'abréviation entre parenthèses, la série et l'année. C'est l'abréviation qui est utilisée dans les occurrences suivantes. Ex. : Abidjan, Archives nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (A.N.C.I.), 1EE28, 1899.

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Pour les sources orales : NOM Prénoms des informateurs + qualité et profession des informateurs + âges des informateurs ou leurs dates de naissance + date, heure et lieu de l'entretien + principaux thèmes abordés au cours des entretiens.

Par exemple : COULIBALY Gberna, *Dozoba* ou Vieux dozo, garant de L'initiation au *Dozoya* de Dagbakpli, 70 ans, 27 janvier 2016, de 16h20 à 17h, Korhogo, Rôle des Dozo dans la crise en Côte d'Ivoire de 2002 et 2011.

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Ex. 1 : FROISSART Jean, 1846, *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richart Deux roy Dengleterre*, éd. et trad. Benjamin WILLIAMS, Londres, S & J Bentley.

Ex. 2 : STUBBS William (éd.), 1882, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, vol. I, Londres, Longman.

Ex. 3 : *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London. Letter-Book H*, Reginald R. SHARPE (éd.), 1907, Londres, John Edward Francis.

Une monographie : NOM Prénoms de l'auteur, année de publication, titre du volume (italique), lieu de publication, nom de la société d'édition.

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Ouvrage collectif : NOM Prénoms du ou des auteurs, année de publication (dir), titre du volume (italique), lieu de publication, nom de la société d'édition.

Ex. : MARCHANDISSE Alain, KUPPER Jean-Louis (dir.), 2003, *À l'ombre du pouvoir. Les entourages princiers au Moyen Âge*, Liège, Droz.

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Ex. : SANGARÉ Souleymane, 2007, « Une famille de serviteurs d'États au Soudan occidental aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles : les Naddi », *Revue ivoirienne d'histoire*, N° 11, p. 102-119.

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Ex. : WARNER Kathryn, 2010, « The Trial and Execution of Thomas of Lancaster », Edward II, Welcome to the site which examines the events, issues and personalities of Edward II's reign, 1307-1327, <http://edwardthesecond.blogspot.de/2010/10/trial-and-execution-of-thomas-of.html> (17/6/2023).

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Staging the Wounded Self: Cinematic Aesthetics and Corporeal Memory in *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of postcolonial trauma and the disintegration of feminine identity in *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, through an aesthetic framework rooted in cinematic language. Adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, the research draws upon trauma theory, feminist literary criticism, and intermedial studies to explore how the novel resists traditional narrative structures. It examines how Dangarembga employs experimental techniques second-person narration, bodily fragmentation, temporal discontinuities, and visual staging not merely to describe trauma, but to embody and enact it within the text. The analysis revolves around four principal thematic axes: the body as a visual and cinematic object; narrative fragmentation as a marker of traumatic memory; the distanced narrative voice as a manifestation of dissociation; and intermediality as a feminist strategy that challenges dominant aesthetics of representation. Central to this enquiry is the portrayal of the wounded body, which becomes a site of memory, vulnerability, and resistance through formal disruption. By rejecting realism's expectations of coherence and closure, the novel constructs a hybrid literary space that fuses text, image, and performance. Ultimately, the study argues that intermediality offers a compelling critical framework for understanding the intersections between corporeality, narrative form, and gendered memory in contemporary African fiction.

Keywords : intermediality, trauma, cinematic aesthetics, feminist narration, fragmented subjectivity

Résumé

Cette étude analyse la représentation du traumatisme postcolonial et de la désintégration du féminin dans *This Mournable Body* de Tsitsi Dangarembga à travers une esthétique inspirée du langage cinématographique. L'approche adoptée croise la théorie du traumatisme, la critique littéraire féministe et les études intermédiaires. Le roman mobilise des procédés tels que la narration à la deuxième personne, la fragmentation corporelle, les ellipses temporelles et une mise en scène visuelle pour traduire le trouble psychique. L'analyse s'articule autour de quatre axes : le corps comme objet visuel, la fragmentation narrative en tant que trace de la mémoire traumatique, la voix narrative distanciée comme extériorisation de la conscience fracturée, et l'intermédialité comme stratégie féministe de subversion des normes esthétiques. Au centre de l'étude se trouve la représentation du corps blessé, que la discontinuité narrative et l'opacité formelle transforment en espace de mémoire et de résistance. Loin des conventions du réalisme littéraire, le récit construit une forme hybride, entre littérature, image et performance. L'intermédialité devient ainsi un outil critique pour penser l'articulation entre corps, mémoire et narration dans la fiction africaine contemporaine.

Mots clés : intermédialité, traumatisme, esthétique cinématographique, narration féministe, subjectivité fragmentée

Introduction

In the aftermath of colonial domination, African literature has emerged not only as a site of resistance and memory but also as a space for aesthetic innovation. Contemporary African women writers, in particular, are reconfiguring narrative forms to explore the inner landscapes of trauma, identity, and survival. Among these voices, Tsitsi Dangarembga stands out for her multidisciplinary approach, blending literature and cinema to portray the existential fractures of postcolonial womanhood. *This Mournable Body* (2018), the final installment of her acclaimed trilogy, continues the life journey of Tambudzai, a Zimbabwean woman whose psychological disintegration mirrors the collapse of her nation's moral and socio-economic fabric.

This study, entitled *Staging the Wounded Self: Cinematic Aesthetics and Corporeal Memory in This Mournable Body*, explores how Dangarembga employs cinematic technics such as framing, montage, voice-over, and visual sequencing to narrate trauma through the body. Far from being a mere narrative gimmick, the novel's aesthetic structure echoes a visual language rooted in cinema, turning the protagonist's corporeal experience into a screen for postcolonial and gendered suffering.

The central question underpinning this research is: How does Dangarembga mobilize cinematic aesthetics to represent the trauma and fragmented identity of the female self in a postcolonial context? We hypothesize that *This Mournable Body* constructs a form of corporeal cinema, where the body becomes both subject and surface of a trauma that cannot be expressed in linear, traditional prose. Through an intermedial poetics, the novel projects a visual and embodied narrative that resists erasure and insists on memory.

The general objective of this study is to examine the ways in which Dangarembga translates trauma into visual and bodily forms within the textual space. To do so, this work adopts an interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from intermedial theory (Irina Rajewsky, Lars Elleström), trauma studies (Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra), and feminist literary theory (Judith Butler, Susan Suleiman). This combined approach will allow us to highlight the interplay between form, memory, and corporeality in the narrative.

The structure of the study unfolds as follows: The first part explores the representation of the body as a fragmented and cinematic object, where the reader's gaze functions like a camera. The second part investigates how silence, ellipsis, and discontinuity aestheticize trauma and mirror filmic montage. The third part analyses the use of second-person narration as a

voice-over, emphasizing the dissociation of the self and the internalization of the social gaze and the last part reflects on intermediality as a feminist gesture, showing how Dangarembga's dual identity as novelist and filmmaker enriches her critique of postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Ultimately, this study aims to show that *This Mournable Body* is not merely a novel of psychological collapse, but a cinematic text that reclaims narrative authority through a poetics of the wounded body.

1. The Representation of the Body as a Fragmented and Cinematic Object

In *This Mournable Body*, Tsitsi Dangarembga meticulously crafts the protagonist Tambudzai's physical presence, eschewing the conventional notion of a unified, integrated self. Instead, she portrays Tambudzai as a fragmented, unstable, and disjointed entity, thereby offering a nuanced depiction of psychological complexity. This fragmentation is not solely psychological but also aesthetic, as evidenced by the novel's narrative structure, which draws upon cinematic conventions. In this context, the body becomes a projection surface of a cinematic object that reflects trauma, social deterioration and alienation. The narrative employs a repeated framing, dissection, and viewing of Tambu's body from various distances, thereby inviting analysis through an intermedial lens where literature mimics the visual language of cinema.

The disintegration of Tambu's body is presented early in the novel. Rather than offering a stable description, Dangarembga introduces the protagonist through a process of observation, almost as though viewed through a camera lens: "You start at the corner. You begin to walk. Your arms hang loose. Your limbs are stiff. You want to quicken your pace but there is nothing to respond to in your mind. It is silent" (Dangarembga, 2018: 1). This disembodied second-person voice acts like a detached narrator, directing the protagonist's actions as if she were being filmed. The choice of narration in the second person creates an effect akin to the camera's eye, observing the subject from the outside. The fragmentation begins here, with the protagonist alienated even from her own body an object that is watched, directed, and externally choreographed.

The visual nature of this presentation aligns with what Elleström (2010) terms "intermedial transposition," where one medium (literature) imports structural logics from another (cinema). The positioning of Tambu's body within the space of the narrative mimics cinematic framing: her movements are slowed, dissected, and described in a sequence of discrete images. The disjointed rhythm of the opening pages resembles the slow, contemplative shots of a film that

introduces its protagonist through visual suggestion rather than exposition. This narrative cinematography contributes to the creation of a disaggregated subjectivity.

Throughout the novel, Tambu's physicality is rendered through partial glimpses and indirect observations, often mediated by mirrors, others' gazes, or spatial distortions. This is exemplified when she observes herself through the reaction of others rather than through self-recognition: "The pupils' eyes narrowed with disdain when they saw me. Their mouths turned down. Their shoulders stiffened. I realized I had become what I hated" (Dangarembga, 2018: 42). The body here is framed through external perspectives, echoing Mulvey's (1975) concept of the "male gaze," which posits that in cinema, women are often depicted as objects to be looked at, rather than as subjects who look. Although Dangarembga's character is not sexualized in this instance, the visual logic of objectification remains: Tambu is seen before she sees herself, and her identity is constructed through others' perception.

In addition, the novel's use of space and Tambu's movement through it mirror the tracking shots of a camera. Tambu's navigation of the city, the hostel, and her workplace is presented in a way that privileges spatial observation and external narration over internal monologue. Her movement is marked by stasis and detachment: "You drag your feet through the township. A car hoots, and you start. A child laughs, and you flinch. You are not in your skin" (Dangarembga, 2018: 68). The phrase "you are not in your skin" metaphorically encapsulates the protagonist's dissociation, but also foregrounds a visual logic that separates subject from embodiment. The sensory overload car hoots, laughter, and flinching resembles a montage of rapid sensory impressions, a cinematic technique used to convey disorientation and fragmentation.

This disintegration is not simply a reflection of internal trauma but also of a broader socio-political condition. Tambu's body becomes a symbol of Zimbabwe's post-independence collapse, a trope that McClintock (1995) has examined in her analysis of gendered national allegories. The fractured female body often stands in for the fragmented nation, and in this novel, Tambu's deterioration operates as a critique of a society that consumes and disposes of its subjects. The visual logic of the narrative its emphasis on frames, fragments, and incomplete images mirrors this societal violence. The cinematic nature of Tambu's embodiment thus becomes a tool for articulating the failure of both personal and national cohesion.

Furthermore, the use of repetition and the cyclical revisiting of bodily sensations evoke the loop structure often used in experimental cinema. Tambu's recurring discomforts, aches, and visceral responses are not narrated linearly but reappear throughout the novel, each time

reframed with new emotional and psychological context. As Sobchack (1992) notes in her phenomenological approach to film, the body is not merely a container of experience but also a medium of expression. Dangarembga's writing enacts this by making the body the principal site of narrative transmission, where meaning emerges not from dialogue or exposition but from physical reaction and spatial positioning.

Even the hospital scenes underscore the visual logic at play. When Tambu is hospitalized after a breakdown, her body is described as passive, handled by others, and seen rather than felt: "They inject you. They put you to sleep. You wake up in another place" (Dangarembga, 2018: 183). The cinematic cut here from sleep to awakening, from one space to another functions like an abrupt scene transition. The body, again, is not the agent of its own movement. It is scripted, displaced, and manipulated by external forces, reinforcing the motif of alienation through visual fragmentation.

It is also worth noting that the novel's author, Tsitsi Dangarembga, is herself a filmmaker. This biographical detail does not determine the text's meaning, but it provides a context for understanding the convergence of narrative strategies. According to Stam (2000), intermediality is not merely the borrowing of elements from another medium, but a dialogic interaction that transforms both. In this sense, Dangarembga's novel performs a reconfiguration of literary form through a cinematic sensibility, where the representation of the body becomes a means of aesthetic and ideological interrogation.

The depiction of Tambudzai's body in *This Mournable Body* is characterised by a cinematic logic that fragments, frames, and externalises her experience. The body, as such, becomes disintegrated into a mediated space, a screen upon which trauma, societal failure and dislocation are projected. In this study, the focus is on how Dangarembga uses cinematic aesthetics to explore the concept of postcolonial identity. By examining the wounded body as a site where narrative and image converge, the author interrogates the form and substance of this identity.

2. Between Scenes and Silences: Aestheticizing Trauma through Cinematic Discontinuity

The narrative structure of *This Mournable Body* relies heavily on fragmentation, ellipsis, and silence techniques commonly associated with cinematic editing. Rather than presenting a linear account of the protagonist's experience, Tsitsi Dangarembga constructs a

disjointed narrative that reflects the psychological dislocation of Tambudzai. This formal discontinuity does not only serve an aesthetic function; it mirrors the rupture of identity resulting from postcolonial trauma and economic disillusionment. The literary techniques employed simulate cinematic montage, generating meaning through gaps, juxtapositions, and what is left unsaid. In this context, trauma is not narrated but evoked its presence lingering in the silences between scenes.

One of the striking stylistic features in *This Mournable Body* is Dangarembga's deliberate use of ellipsis both at the textual level and within the psyche of the protagonist. Emotional developments and key plot transitions are often delivered in fragments or left conspicuously unexplained. When Tambu departs from the advertising agency, the narrative offers minimal context: "the agency has terminated the employment of the individual in question" (Dangarembga, 2018: 37). The stark brevity of this sentence, its impersonal tone, and the lack of emotional commentary reflect Tambu's internalisation of her trauma and her difficulty confronting personal failure. The sparse phrasing mimics the abruptness of a cinematic cut moving from one psychological or narrative frame to another without revealing the connective tissue in between. This stylistic economy intensifies the sense of disorientation and mirrors the fractured state of the protagonist's inner world. According to trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma resists narrative because it is not fully assimilated at the time of the event. Dangarembga's use of silence and ellipsis thus aligns with Caruth's assertion that trauma often emerges in the form of belated expression, or "a gap in the conscious registration of reality" (p. 6).

Moreover, the novel's silence must not be regarded as a mere void; rather, it is a semiotic space through which meaning accumulates. The protagonist's silence, her reticence to articulate grief or anger, is itself an expressive act. These moments can be likened to non-diegetic silences in film, insofar as both are effective in creating atmosphere and tension. In the context of the visit to her cousin Nyasha, who is now the proprietor of a rehabilitation centre, the interaction between the two is characterised by emotional restraint and unresolved dialogue. The text reads as follows: "Nyasha regards you. She articulates a statement, yet it remains inaudible. You nod anyway" (Dangarembga, 2018: 160). Here, silence does not denote a void or failure of speech, but rather becomes a potent marker of psychic rupture. What is left unspoken emerges not as absence, but as an excess an emotional intensity so vast that language falters before it. This narrative gesture resonates with the cinematic principle of montage, particularly in the vein of Eisenstein's (1949) theory, which posits that meaning is generated

not within isolated frames but through the tension and interplay between them. Likewise, in *This Mournable Body*, it is in the fractures, the disjunctions, and the unsaid that the reader encounters the raw imprint of trauma. Likewise, Dangarembga's novel does not rely on detailed exposition but creates meaning through juxtaposition. Tambu's recollections of her youth, her moments of hallucination, and her dislocated present are layered in such a way that temporal coherence is sacrificed in favor of emotional resonance. The scene transitions abruptly between interior monologue, flashbacks, and physical action, often without clear markers. For instance, while Tambu is working as a biology teacher, the narrative suddenly shifts into a recollection: "You are with the children. This metaphorical state of being evokes a sense of rejuvenation, reminiscent of childhood, as the speaker is positioned alongside the river, and the mother's voice resonates with a sense of urgency and concern. (Dangarembga, 209). The transition is characterised by its unannounced and unpunctuated nature, akin to the cinematic technique of flash cuts where memory disrupts the present without logical introduction. This technique illustrates Dominick LaCapra's (2001) argument that trauma involves the constant intrusion of the past into the present, disrupting linear temporality.

Furthermore, the recurrence of certain images and motifs functions like a visual leitmotif in film. Tambu's recurring dreams of water, her flashbacks to the Sacred Heart school, and the recurrent motif of food rotting, desired, or withheld are not just thematic elements but aesthetic repetitions that punctuate the narrative rhythm. These recurring signs offer a non-verbal language of suffering. As Laura Marks (2000) argues in her theory of "haptic visuality," certain cinematic images invite not distant observation but intimate, tactile engagement. Dangarembga's portrayal of Tambu's physical experiences her irritated skin, pangs of hunger, and episodes of exhaustion does not aim at analytical precision but instead summons a visceral response. These bodily impressions, sparsely verbalised, generate an affective atmosphere rather than a clear-cut understanding. Notably, the narrative invites the reader to participate in deciphering its ellipses and gaps. The omission of explicit explanations compels the reader to piece together meaning, positioning them as a co-creator of the text's significance rather than a passive observer. The reading experience thus resembles viewing a film in which crucial scenes have been deliberately withheld, compelling spectators to bridge the absences with emotional and intellectual engagement. Such an approach recalls Roland Barthes' (1977) concept of the "writerly text" a form of writing that demands interpretative labour, where meaning is neither fixed nor handed down, but emerges through the reader's active involvement. In this sense, the silences within Tambu's account are not narrative voids but deliberate provocations, drawing

the reader into the fractured and disoriented inner world of the protagonist. The political ramifications of these silences must not be disregarded. In a postcolonial context, silence may be indicative not only of personal trauma but also of structural disempowerment. Tambu's failure to articulate her pain is indicative of a psychological and historical phenomenon, rather than merely a psychological one. This failure is rooted in the legacy of colonial education, gender oppression, and capitalist alienation. As Spivak (1988) famously asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" Dangarembga's novel suggests that the subaltern body can be shown, framed, and broken but not always heard. The aesthetic of silence, then, becomes an ethical stance, resisting the compulsion to translate trauma into coherence or closure.

At a formal level, the chapter and section divisions in the novel also simulate the scene sequencing of film. Each section functions as a discrete narrative unit often opening with an image or a physical sensation, and concluding with a visual or emotional cut. The structure is episodic rather than developmental, resisting the arc of traditional bildungsroman. Tambu does not grow into enlightenment; she regresses, breaks, and ultimately re-enters the world not through clarity but through the management of wounds. This narrative structure embodies what Bhabha (1994) calls the "unhomely," a state where identity and narrative are constantly interrupted and displaced.

To sum up, the aestheticization of trauma in *This Mournable Body* is realized through cinematic strategies of discontinuity. Ellipses, abrupt transitions, visual repetition, and narrative silence are not simply stylistic flourishes; they are formal enactments of the psychological and political ruptures that shape the protagonist's world. By mimicking the logic of montage and invoking the sensory density of film, Dangarembga creates a textual space where trauma resists containment and calls for visual and emotional decoding. The result is a novel that does not narrate trauma directly, but lets it emerge through the intervals—between scenes, between silences, and between selves.

3. Scripted Inner Voice: Second-Person Narration as Voice-Over

One of the most distinctive features of *This Mournable Body* is its use of second-person narration, a choice that challenges conventional modes of storytelling and reframes the relationship between subjectivity and language. This narrative strategy does not simply function as a stylistic device but operates as a form of cinematic voice-over, allowing the reader to experience the protagonist's internal fragmentation and dissociation. In this chapter, the second-person voice is interpreted as a cinematic mechanism, echoing the disembodied narration often used in film to express interiority, alienation, or memory. The chapter examines how this

technique constructs a divided self and how it translates psychological trauma into a narrative form that mimics audiovisual language.

From the opening line “You climb into the combi” (Dangarembga, 2018: 1) the reader is immediately addressed as the subject of the sentence, yet is also positioned as an observer. The effect is unsettling. The use of “you” displaces Tambudzai from her own interiority and makes her both agent and object of the narration. This self-alienation is not incidental; it reflects a central dynamic of post-traumatic experience. As LaCapra (2001) notes, trauma often produces a dissociation of consciousness, wherein the subject experiences events without full affective engagement. Second-person narration captures this fractured state of being by presenting actions and thoughts as if they belong to someone else a version of the self that is acted upon and narrated from a distance. This narrative voice evokes the function of voice-over in film, particularly when used to convey inner turmoil or retrospective commentary. According to Chion (1999), voice-over in cinema is “acousmatic” detached from the body that speaks, hovering between omniscience and subjectivity. In *This Mournable Body*, the second-person voice enacts a similar acousmatic presence: it is Tambu’s voice, and yet it is not. It is the voice of a self-watching herself disintegrate. The narrative thus constructs an audio-visual effect within the text, where the character is framed not only visually (as seen in previous chapters), but also sonically heard, but distanced from her own voice.

The disjunction between the “you” and Tambudzai’s internal sense of self is particularly visible in moments of emotional crisis. After a humiliating experience at the hostel, the narrator observes: “You lie there. You do not cry. You do not move. You do not want to feel anything” (Dangarembga, 2018: 17). The repetition of “you” and the flat, impassive tone mimic the neutrality of a camera lens or a voice-over describing a scene without emotional inflection. This detachment signals the protagonist’s emotional numbness and inability to integrate her experiences into a coherent self-narrative. The second-person voice thus functions as a narrative prosthesis, replacing the protagonist’s broken subjectivity with a script that records her life like a series of film takes. This formal choice challenges the traditional confessional model of trauma narration, which relies on first-person accounts to express suffering and recovery.

Instead, Dangarembga opts for a mode that denies the protagonist full access to the “I.” As Butler (2005) suggests, the capacity to say “I” is intimately connected to recognition both self-recognition and recognition by others. Tambu’s inability to speak in the first person reflects her lack of social and psychological grounding. The use of “you” suspends the possibility of stable identity, framing her subjectivity as something externalized, scripted, and

observed rather than owned. This is further reinforced by the narrative's tendency to describe Tambu's actions in behavioral terms, often with minimal insight into motives or emotions. The language recalls the descriptive stage directions of a screenplay: "You button your blouse. You open the door. You leave the room" (Dangarembga, 2018: 28). These sequences simulate cinematic blocking, where a character's movements are choreographed and captured on screen. The effect is to render the protagonist less as a speaking subject and more as an actor following a script one that she neither writes nor fully understands. The narrative voice becomes a kind of cinematic director, orchestrating her actions while withholding the autonomy usually granted by first-person narration. Such a structure also complicates the reader's position. The second-person address creates a forced intimacy, implicating the reader in Tambu's experiences while simultaneously distancing her from them. According to Keen (2006), second-person narration can foster narrative empathy, but in Dangarembga's case, the effect is more ambivalent. The reader is made to inhabit the shell of a character who is herself dislocated, producing a doubled estrangement. This technique mirrors the Brechtian distancing effect in cinema, wherein the audience is made aware of the constructedness of the narrative, thereby prompting critical reflection rather than immersion.

Additionally, the shifting nature of the second-person voice reflects Tambu's fragmented identity within a socio-political context. As a black Zimbabwean woman navigating post-independence economic collapse, her subjectivity is shaped by intersecting forces of patriarchy, neoliberalism, and postcolonial disillusionment. The "you" in the novel thus functions not only as a narrative technique but also as a political statement: it marks the erasure of agency in a society that renders women voiceless and disposable. The inability to say "I" becomes emblematic of broader structural silencing. Spivak's (1988) interrogation of subaltern speech is relevant here; Tambu can be narrated, but she cannot fully narrate herself. The voice-over effect culminates during Tambu's psychotic breakdown, when her thoughts and actions become increasingly disjointed. The narrative fragments accelerate, and the "you" becomes more spectral: "You float in the corridor. You see a door. You enter. There is no one there. You are not there either" (Dangarembga, 2018: 179). The ambiguity of presence and absence "you are not there either" suggests a complete dissolution of identity. At this point, the narrative no longer documents action; it scripts absence. This linguistic void aligns with Caruth's (1996) description of trauma as the site where representation breaks down entirely. The second-person narration becomes a mechanism for conveying this breakdown, mimicking a voice-over that has lost connection to its source.

In film, such disintegration might be represented through techniques like fade to black, echoed voice-over, or disembodied narration. In Dangarembga's text, the second-person voice fulfills a similar function: it communicates the failure of subjectivity to cohere, the fading of self into a cinematic blur. The narrative voice becomes both witness and residue, a form of survival that continues to speak even as the self-collapses.

4. Intermediality as Feminist Gesture: From the Written Body to Contested Images

In *This Mournable Body*, Tsitsi Dangarembga constructs a narrative that transcends the boundaries of the traditional novel form. The story is shaped by visual, cinematic, and performative codes that function not merely as aesthetic choices but as instruments of feminist resistance. This chapter examines how intermediality understood as the interaction between literature and other media operates as a feminist gesture in the novel. Dangarembga draws on cinematic techniques and visual narration to interrogate the limits of language, expose the politics of visibility, and rewrite the representation of the Black female body in a postcolonial Zimbabwean context.

Intermediality in the novel is closely tied to the erasure, fragmentation, and re-appropriation of the body, which emerges as the principal site of mediation. Tambudzai's body is rendered through images of exhaustion, breakdown, and degradation. Her physical form is not celebrated or eroticized but consistently described in terms of absence, decay, and collapse. Early in the novel, the narrator declares, "You feel your shoulders drooping. You cannot pull them back into position" (Dangarembga, 2018: 5). This moment initiates a cinematic visual logic: the protagonist is framed through close shots of posture and subtle signs of collapse. The body becomes a screen upon which the narrative of trauma is projected. Dangarembga employs repeated images of the body in crisis to mimic the cinematic technique of visual leitmotif. Hunger, for instance, is a recurring motif used not only to illustrate Tambu's economic precarity but also her emptiness of identity: "Your belly is empty but you do not know how to ask for food. You pass the vending women without looking" (Dangarembga, 2018: 14). The narrator's emphasis on invisibility and the refusal to look reflect a rejection of the visual economy associated with objectification. This gesture culminates in Tambu's physical collapse: "Your knees buckle. You fall forward. You hit the floor with your forehead. You are bleeding" (Dangarembga, 2018: 107). The sequencing of bodily images here evokes a put-on-stage techniques, rendering the protagonist's disintegration in a series of visual fragments.

The narrative subtly engages with a form of visual erasure. Rather than offering a clear or immediate portrayal of Tambu upon her arrival at the girls' hostel, Dangarembga opts for an oblique strategy: the protagonist emerges through the filtered perceptions of others. Her presence is registered not through direct description, but through the discomfort, unease, and guarded reactions she provokes "They stare at you. Some people avert their gaze. One girl adopts a smirking expression. No one smiles" (Dangarembga, 2018: 32). Identity, in this instance, is projected from the outside in, shaped by the gazes of others rather than internal affirmation. This narrative technique resonates with Laura Mulvey's (1975) foundational critique of cinematic conventions, wherein women are traditionally framed as passive objects of visual consumption under the male gaze. Dangarembga subverts this convention by staging a withdrawal from visibility, thereby resisting the aesthetic frameworks that reduce women to visual commodities.

Tambu's bodily presence does not follow a redemptive arc. Rather, her trajectory moves across institutional spaces each imposing new regimes of visibility and discipline. Her experience at the advertising agency underscores her displacement: "You realize the woman who wears the clothes in the ad is thin, polished, and not at all like you" (Dangarembga, 2018: 39). Here, the protagonist confronts a cinematic ideal of femininity and finds herself excluded. The advertisement becomes a literal screen, projecting unattainable standards of success and appearance. This disjunction between visual representation and lived experience continues at the rehabilitation center, where Tambu works with young girls recovering from sexual trauma. She observes: "You see them move through the compound, watch their shuffling feet, their downturned eyes. They do not speak. You do not either" (Dangarembga, 2018: 210). This moment of mirrored silence illustrates Dangarembga's commitment to what Phelan (1993) terms a politics of disappearance an aesthetic that values the unrecorded and the ephemeral over the reproducible spectacle. The characters do not testify; they endure. Their trauma is expressed through gesture rather than dialogue, reinforcing a feminist poetics of opacity.

The novel's intermedial quality is also structural. Its episodic composition resembles the sequencing of film scenes. "You are walking. Then you are not. You are sitting. Someone is speaking to you. You do not reply" (Dangarembga, 2018: 176). These abrupt transitions echo cinematic cuts. The novel resists conventional narrative continuity, opting instead for a rhythm shaped by fragmentation, affective dislocation, and silent persistence. Tambu's experience of losing control over her own narrative becomes most pronounced during her psychotic break: "You are naked. They pull a sheet over you. You do not know where you are. Someone is

calling your name. It is not you” (Dangarembga, 2018: 182). This sequence replicates cinematic tropes of dissociation and auditory dislocation. As Chion (1999) notes, the acousmatic voice in cinema heard but unseen disturbs the link between image and identity. In this scene, Tambu hears her name but is estranged from it. The disconnection is both psychological and linguistic. The protagonist is no longer the subject of the sentence, but its echo.

The final moments of the novel offer no resolution. Tambu is not redeemed. The narrative closes on repetition and minimalism: “You continue. The days pass. You wash. You eat. You wait” (Dangarembga, 2018: 204). These actions represent endurance, not transformation. There is no cinematic fade-out, no narrative arc concluded. This refusal of closure mirrors feminist critiques of teleological narrative structures. As Rajewsky (2005) explains, intermedial texts often dismantle the expectations of their host genres, and in doing so, open new possibilities for subjectivity and representation.

Dangarembga’s status as both novelist and filmmaker reinforces the intermedial quality of her work. She does not merely incorporate cinematic techniques but reflects critically on their ideological implications. The novel enacts what Hayles (2002) calls a media-conscious poetics, one that is aware of its own hybrid nature. *This Mournable Body* does not emulate film; it interrogates its codes. It turns the techniques of cinema against themselves, exposing how visibility and legibility are always mediated, always political.

Ultimately, intermediality in *This Mournable Body* operates not as ornamentation but as resistance. By fragmenting the narrative voice, withholding the body from objectification, and disrupting the linear trajectory of trauma and healing, Dangarembga articulates a feminist critique of representational systems. Her novel becomes an act of refusal of being seen, of being known, of being resolved. In doing so, it reclaims narrative space for forms of experience that defy cinematic capture and literary closure alike.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how *This Mournable Body* mobilizes cinematic aesthetics and intermedial strategies to represent the trauma and fragmentation of the postcolonial female self. Through a multidisciplinary framework combining intermedial theory, trauma studies, and feminist criticism, the analysis revealed that the novel deploys visual, spatial, and performative techniques to stage suffering, rather than narrate it in conventional psychological terms. Each chapter demonstrated how Tsitsi Dangarembga disrupts traditional narrative expectations. The protagonist's body is not depicted as a unified entity but as a series of gestures, images, and

collapses. The narrative structure mimics cinematic montage, privileging fragmentation and silence over linear progression. The use of second-person narration introduces a dissociative perspective, reinforcing the theme of identity rupture. Finally, the novel's intermediality its evocation of film, performance, and visual art operates as a feminist gesture, challenging dominant aesthetics of visibility, legibility, and resolution. This study confirms the hypothesis that *This Mournable Body* functions as a form of corporeal cinema in which trauma is visualized rather than explained. The novel offers a space where the wounded self resists containment, coherence, and commodification. Future research could expand this analysis by comparing the novel with Dangarembga's cinematic work or with other postcolonial texts that engage intermedial strategies. In its refusal of closure, *This Mournable Body* asserts a powerful alternative: an aesthetics of endurance and a politics of representation grounded in fragmentation, opacity, and survival.

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