

## Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*: Some background



**Setting:** Rhodesia: at the time (1960s and early 1970s) of the events recounted in *Nervous Conditions*, the name of the southeast African country, colonized by the British, in which the characters live. At independence in 1980, the country was renamed Zimbabwe (“stone house” in Shona). Salisbury, renamed Harare after independence, is the capital city.

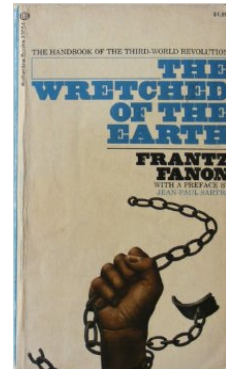
**1889:** The territory was granted, by Royal Charter, to diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes and his British South Africa Company, which ruled it until 1923.

**1965-1979:** Civil war. Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army unseat the white-dominated government. Robert Mugabe, leader of ZANLA, elected prime minister in 1980.

**Title:** from Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*

Sartre: *The status of ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among the colonized people with their consent.*

Fanon: *Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.*



**Hegemony:** the success of the dominant classes in presenting their version of reality in such a way that it is accepted by other classes as “common sense” or “normal.”

*Economic and political control of a people can never be complete without cultural control.* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Kenyan theorist & novelist)

**The Rhodesian school system,** based on the British system, was divided into primary and secondary divisions, similar to the U.S. K-12 public school system. Successively numbered forms are broken down into standards, categories like “grades” in U.S. schools, but the age equivalents are different: for example, 13-year-old Tambu mentions being in Standard 3 the

year her brother died (1968), which is below the Standard 5 level (usually 13-14 year olds) she would have been in had she been able to attend school continuously. To continue their schooling, African children must pass fiercely competitive examinations administered frequently; at each higher level, fewer places are available for qualifying black Africans, and the fees are often too expensive for even the qualified African children to attend.

**The mission school at Umtali** is a British Protestant mission (therefore probably Church of England or Anglican), and the school is primarily for black African children, although some of the white missionary-teachers' children, like Nyaradzo, also attend. Babamukuru is the headmaster of the primary levels and Maiguru also teaches there. This is the school that first Nhamo, then Tambu attends, as well as Nyasha.

**Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart** is the exclusive, expensive, private Roman Catholic convent school, located in Salisbury, at which Tambu earns one of the few places and scholarships reserved for black African girls. Tambu mentions that at Sacred Heart she can continue study all the way to A Level of Rhodesian pre-university education without having to take and pass the the yearly competitive exams continually threatening to exclude African children from continuing their education.