

## **Honouring Tsitsi Dangarembga: a trailblazer in literature, film, and advocacy**

Tsitsi Dangarembga, an acclaimed novelist, filmmaker, and cultural activist, is being awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (DLitt) (honoris causa) by Rhodes University. This prestigious recognition celebrates her immense contributions to African literature, cinema, and advocacy for social justice, gender equality, and freedom of expression. As a fearless storyteller and an advocate for African narratives, Dangarembga's influence extends across literary, cinematic, and academic spheres.

Born in Mutoko, Zimbabwe, Dangarembga pursued her early education in Zimbabwe before beginning pre-clinical medical studies at Cambridge University. She ultimately earned a degree in Psychology from the University of Zimbabwe and later studied directing at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin, where she refined her skills in filmmaking.

A leader in creative industries, Dangarembga has held numerous academic and leadership positions, including fellowships at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute, the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, and the Rockefeller Bellagio Centre. She was also the International Chair in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia (2021-22).

Tsitsi Dangarembga's literary journey began with her groundbreaking debut novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the first novel in English published by a Black Zimbabwean woman. The book won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa Region, 1989) and was followed by *The Book of Not* (2006) and *This Mournable Body* (2018), which was shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize.

Her expertise in film led her to produce and direct critically acclaimed films, including *Everyone's Child* (1996), *Kare Kare Zvako* (2004), and *I Want a Wedding Dress* (2010). She has taught film courses and seminars at institutions such as MIT, Northwestern University and Zurich University of the Arts.

Her contributions have earned her numerous accolades, including the Alice and Clifford Spendlove Prize in Social Justice, Diplomacy, and Tolerance (2024), The Pen Catalan Free Voice Award (2023) and The German Peace Prize (2021).

Beyond literature and film, Dangarembga has been a fierce advocate for social justice, gender equality, and artistic freedom. In 2009, she founded the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa (ICAPA) Trust, an NGO dedicated to empowering African creatives through training, funding, and showcasing women's stories. She has also actively engaged in freedom of expression movements, facing legal challenges for her activism in Zimbabwe.

Her upcoming project, Creative Africa Storytelling for the Screen Incubator (CASSI), aims to revolutionise the African film industry by nurturing talent and fostering economic sustainability for filmmakers across the continent.

Through ICAPA Trust, Dangarembga has played a crucial role in developing Africa's creative industries. She also established the International Images Film Festival for Women (IIFF) in

Zimbabwe, one of the few African film festivals dedicated to showcasing female-driven narratives. She has served on boards such as the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe College of Music, and the Public Personalities Against AIDS Trust.

Dangarembga's literary and film work is complemented by her thought-provoking essays and public discourse. Her 2022 collection, *Black and Female*, examines the intersections of race, gender, and power. She has delivered keynote lectures and public speeches at leading universities and global forums, including the African Literature Association, Frankfurt International Book Fair, and the Cannes Film Festival.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's career is deeply influenced by her commitment to authentic storytelling and justice. Her decision to return to Zimbabwe during its independence transition exemplifies her dedication to the country's artistic and cultural evolution. Her resilience in the face of political and legal challenges has only strengthened her resolve to champion freedom of speech and representation for African voices.

Rhodes University is honoured to recognise Tsitsi Dangarembga's extraordinary impact with the award of an honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) degree at its graduation ceremony on 2 April 2025 at 14:30. At this occasion, Tsitsi Dangarembga will deliver an address reflecting on her journey, the power of storytelling, and the importance of ethical leadership in shaping narratives that uphold justice, inclusivity, and democracy.