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Assignment: 01

Unique no: 728899

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Module: Eng2603

Semester: First semester

Book: Nervous Condition by Tsitsi
Dangarembga

Heartless and cruel one would think of Tambudzai in the book 'Nervous Condition' but on a critical look on the lives of all the female characters, it becomes clear that she is not to be blamed. It is a glaring fact that the death of her brother (Hhamo) paved way for her so desired education. Nervous Conditions by Tsitsi Dangarembga is an autobiographical story about a young girl who strive to escape from a life of tradition and patriarchy to western life and civilization. This essay will explore the dilemmas in which women find themselves as a result of Africa tradition and Western life styles in Rhodesia during 1960 and 1970.

Rhodesia now known as Zimbabwe as at the time of this novel was under British colonial rule. The women in this book are portrayed as having no authority whatsoever over men but are only expected to do all the work with no credit. Tsitsi throughout the book lament how patriarchy is the order of the day and the dilemmas the woman were put in as a result of this. The female characters in *Nervous Condition* were all put under a nervous condition. Tambu made clear her point from the onset '*My story is not after all about death, but my escape and Lucia's, about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion – Nyasha – farinded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful*'(p1).

Do not italicise quotes

Tambu as she is referred to in the book had a senior brother, named Nhamo. Nhamo is given the opportunity to go school because he is a boy while Tambu on the other hand is to sit at home and help with cooking, cleaning and growing of vegetables. All of these led to the anger Tambu bear inside for a long time which resulted in her striking opening '*I was not sorry when my brother died*' (Tsitsi Dangerembga 1988:1). In addition to the denial of her educational rights, Tambu believes and made it clear to the reader that '*the needs and sensibilities of the women in her family were not considered a priority or even legitimate*' (Dangerembga 1988:16).

Tsitsi Dangerembga in this novel explores the difference between the western and African traditions. She takes a look back at her adolescence stage and the struggle it entails into adulthood alongside with ordeal all the married women had to face. She narrate the troubles she needed to put up with on her way to self- actualization. Her mother would go any length to raise enough money to keep Nhamo in school while everyone expects Tambu to understand there would be money for her fees. To Tambu surprise, Nhamo who she is so concerned about

does not feel same about her. He maliciously told her *'Don't you know I am the one who has to go to school?'* (Dangerembga 1988:20), Nhamo continued to hurt her more with his words *'You go nowhere.....20', 'it's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl.....'* he concluded. These words hurts her so bad that she decided to let her concern for him die *'my concern for my brother died and unobtrusive death.* (Dangerembga 1988:20).

Furthermore, in African tradition, it was believe that women are brought up to accept their roles and live as obedient wives. They are raised to stay at home and learn domestic duties. While all the men are raised in a patriarchic society. All of these gave Nhamo the guts and made him treat his sisters the way he did. This was seen in the way he sends them to get his bags each time he comes home from school. He also did all in his power to sabotage Tambu efforts in getting the education she so desires by stealing her mealies and giving it out to her friends. When Tambu tries to complain about the unfairness of Nhamo's education being more important than hers because he is male and all the father could say, *'can you cook books and feed to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Lean to cook and clean. Grow vegetables'* (Dangerambga, 1988: 15)'.

Tambu explore the struggles and experiences she need to cope with on her way to self-actualization. The torture from her brother because he is boy and jeopardising her chances for education, her father (Jeremiah) traditional Shona belief that women do not need to be educated, and her well respected uncle, Babamukuru and his wield patriarchal power over all the women in her family. As time goes on, she began to embrace, emulate attitudes, beliefs and ways different from those of her parents and her traditional upbringing. She gain more educated and got assimilated in the white ways. This arouse something in her that made her began to question things and refuse to be brainwashed (Dangarebga, 1988:204).

MaShingayi Tambu's mother acknowledges the fact that being a woman is a heavy burden and yet she is prepared to carry it because that is what a womanhood entails. She links Nhamo's death and Nyasha's eating disorder with Englishness and now Tambu is heading the same path. *'The problem is the Englishness, so you be careful!'* she warned. Tsitsi presented as model of humbleness who accepts any challenge life bring her way. She made her daughter understand that by her words in chapter 2 *'and these days it is worse, with poverty of blackness on one side*

and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burden with strength'. She urges her daughter to forget about getting education and anglicized and accept the fate of womanhood. *This business of womanhood is a heavy burden...*(Dangerembga 1988:16).

Tambu's aunt, Maiguru has a master's degree in Philosophy. She is expected to be first a wife and a mother and as a typical Shona woman, she has been brought up to see the men as the head of the house. Her desires and ambitions are left to die because she does not possess the kind of power her husband (Babamukuru) has. Instead of questioning her husband's (Babamukuru) patriarchal and authoritative powers, she pampers his ego. She sees to it that her family come first. She too like Ma'Shinagyi decides to be the one to make sacrifices whenever there is one to be made just for peace to reign in her home. Although she try to stand up to Babamukuru and explain how bad she feels about entrapment and left the house, she soon came back to resume her duties.

Dangerembga uses the character Nyasha as representative of herself. Nyasha is one who hates and fight against the oppression of women. Having grew up in England, she had developed many western values which were quite different from the traditional Shona culture. As a product of two separate worlds, she often gets into argument and fight with her father. (p:19). Even though she tries to challenge her father's control, but she cannot escape her relative powerlessness of his patriarchal as long as she is in his household and this led to her suffering from anorexia.

Lucia unlike the other women Does she completely escape? al system simply by avoiding marriage. As a result of her strong-will, she has the audacity to gate-crash into the meeting of the patriarchs (Mbatha 2009:37) she speaks her mind not minding who's hut is got. She is seen as the only female character who escaped the entrapment of this 'business of womanhood' by not getting married. With determination and ambition she got Babamukuru to get her a job and she also attend night classes to get education.

Throughout the novel, Tsitsi takes the reader through emotional trauma each of each of these female character of *Nervous Condition* went through as a result of gender inequality and

patriarchal system. She successfully conveys her feelings and stand as far as patriarchy is concerned. Though these women, (Tambu, Nyasha, MaiShingayi and Maiguru) try to challenge the practices of male domination in their own little way but they were hardly successful. They therefore, learn to live their lives in spite of it.

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You focused too much on Tambu and did not give adequate attention to other characters.
Nyoni K

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DECLARATION

Module Code: Eng2603

Assignment Number: 728899

I declare that this assignment is my own original work. Where secondary material has been (either from a printed source or from the internet), this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the department's policy in this regard. I have not allowed anyone else to copy my work.

Signature: Victoria Anyanwa ✓

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