

ASSIGNMENT ONE FOR ENG 2603



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NERVOUS CONDITIONS BY TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

This essay is based on the novel "Nervous Conditions" written by Tsitsi Dangarembga. This is a compelling novel that reveals a powerful indictment of cultural imperialism, a sensitive exploration of plight and struggle of African people subjected to the system calculated to poison their sense of self. One would wonder why would Tambu say 'I was not sorry when my brother died' reflected at the beginning of the novel. All women in this novel are in a predicament. This assignment will unpack the dilemmas in which MaShingayi (Mainini), Tambunzai (Tambu), Maiguru, Lucia and Nyasha find themselves in the novel, trapped in the bondage of patriarchy. This is a first person narrative, addressing someone in the second person. The protagonist is Tambudzai (Tambu in short).

MaShingayi is the protagonist mother. Her struggles started in her teenage years, coming from a very poor family. She fall pregnant with Jeremiah's baby, and 'was obliged to take her home with him'. (Dangarembga, 1988:128). MaShingayi's husband is a very lazy person, this leads her to do all the physical work at home, even when Babamukuru was moving to England for five years she "hoped that her husband will grow responsible" (Dangarembga, 1988:14). MaShingayi acknowledges the fact that being a woman is a heavy burden yet she was determine to carry the burden on her shoulders because that's what women entails. She is very submissive to her husband, even when he slept with her sister and want to take her as a second wife, she did not say a word.

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Furthermore, MaShingayi dearly loves her children, the death of her four babies, whom three of them were sons had a lot of impact on this. The fact that when they get older are taken away from her without consultation hurts a lot. The death of her only son (Nhamu) devastated her to a point that she does not want to give away her children ever again, but she have no say in that. Babamukuru and Jeremiah have decided to take Tambu as an older child to study at the mission, MaShingayi kept quiet about this, even though she does not approve of it.

The real signs started when Tambu told her she is moving away from the mission to the convent to further her studies, she threw herself under the train. She did not want to eat, did not want to wash herself, actually she did not want to do anything, even her dress was dirty that leads to her younger son getting diarrhoea. 'I've had enough of that man dividing me from my children... He say this and we jump.... If I am a witch I would enfeeble his mind... and see how his education and his money helped him' (Dangarembga, 1988:187). These are the words of angry women, without her children she saw no purpose in life.

Tambu is Jeremiah and MaShingayi's daughter. Her struggles started at a very young age, when they were told that there is no money to send them to school, her brother cried, then her mother started to sell boiled eggs and vegetables to send him back to school. Tambu understood that the money would not be enough for both of them, but she was so tenacious to go back to school. Her father discouraged her saying that, "can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (Dangarembga, 1988:15). Tambu did not care what her father says, because she has a role model, Maiguru who is an educated and does not serve books for her husband. She went and complained to her mother but her answer did not make sense. Then Tambu came with a plan that will take her back to school. She asked her parents for seeds to plant so that she can sell them for school fees, her father did not want to help but her mother insisted that he must give a child a chance to try, and fail herself, Jeremiah agreed.

Tambu started her project the next day, she planned to plant mealies and sell it to get money to go back to school. Nhamo did not like the tenacity of her sister, in one of the conversations he mocks her and asked "don't you know I am the one who has to go to school?". (Dangarembga, 1988:20). He continued to convince her sister that wanting to go to school will not help, "It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl. It was out. That's what Baba said remember?" (Dangarembga, 1988:21). "A few weeks later when the cobs were ripe for eating, they began to disappear. What did you expect?" Nhamo said. Did you really think you could send yourself to school?" (Dangarembga, 1988:22), this must be very painful for Tambu who is trying so hard to get an education.

Apparently Nhamo was the one who sabotaged Tambu's plans to raise money for her school fees. He started stealing mealies and give it to their friends, to roast after class. This was revealed by Nyari (Tambu's friend) not knowing what was going on, it ended up to a fight, that was resolved by Mr Matimba, who also offered to help Tambu on her project. Through Mr Matimba's help Tambu was lucky enough to get ten pounds donated towards her school fees by the white lady called Doris, who was worried why she is selling mealies instead going to school. Tambu was so excited, they decided to give the money to the headmaster, and keep the receipt instead. She went home to share the good news.

However, instead of being happy for what happened to Tambu, they did not believe her, Nhamo mocks her saying "lies won't get you to school" (Dangarembga, 1988:30). Her father who failed to send her to school was very angry, claiming that is his money, he even went the headmaster to claim it, because he believes that it is a waste to give education to a girl child because it will not benefit them as she would leave one day and marry her husband. Tambu went back to school the following year, until she was

taken to the mission to further her studies.

Maiguru is Babamukuru's wife, she has equal education as her husband and she has a Masters degree just like him, but she was never recognized for that. She has to provide food and cooks for the whole family, and when they were moving to England, no one wanted to believe that she is going to study, they all said she is going to look after her husband. Maiguru is very angry about this, her anger is portrayed where she narrates her story to Tambu who was shocked to hear that her aunt has a masters degree. "Maiguru snorted...., Maiguru was more serious than she ever before" (Dangarembga, 1988:102), She continued with her story, "whatever they thought", she said, "much good did it do them! I still studied for that degree and I got it in spite of all of them-your uncle, your grand parents and the rest of your family." (Dangarembga, 1988:103).

In addition, this became worse when Tambu asked her "what happens to your money?" (Dangarembga, 1988:103), which she never received, her aunt laughed, trying to force herself to be happy and cheerful again but she failed. Maiguru was not happy about the manner in which her husband handles household finances. She resents her husband's lavish support of his brother and family partly from her salary. However her position as a wife prohibits her to act against her husband's will. Maiguru has sacrificed a lot for her family but no one cares about that, her husband is taking decisions using her money without consulting her, for example when Babamukuru decided to give their house to his brother as a gift after their wedding, he did not inform his wife, and being a submissive wife did not question her husband.

Furthermore, the problem started when Babamukuru punished Tambu for not going to the wedding, Lucia thinks that the punishment was harsh, so she stepped in the house claiming that she wants to speak to Babamukuru no one else. Maiguru was offended by Lucia's attitude, she decided to leave and come back when her husband returns. Babamukuru came back, then Lucia said whatever she wanted to say to Babamukuru and he "applauded her in her absence. 'That one,' he chuckled to Maiguru, 'she is like a man herself'" (Dangarembga, 1988:174). Then Maiguru decided to give an opinion on what Lucia was talking about, she said Lucia is right, the punishment is enough. This is when her husband protested that it is not, beside "Tambudzai is my brother's daughter, I am her father, I have a right to discipline her. It is my duty" (Dangarembga, 1988:174).

This is when Maiguru burst with anger, saying all the things that has been eating her inside, she said " 'Yes, she is your brother's child,' 'But when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that's when they are my relatives too, Then she continued" I am tired of being nothing in a home that I am working myself sick to support"; "And now

even that Lucia can walk in here and tell me that the things she discuss with you, here in my home are none of my business", "I have had enough!" (Dangarembga, 1988:174).

Apparently even though Maiguru have decided to be submissive to her husband, she is been exposed to different systems during her studies (patriarch and feminism) when she was in England, she knows how to stand up for your rights and that kills her. Being married to a patriarch, her husband did not spend much in their conversation, instead he told her to go where she will be happy, then he left to the office, because he knows that he had the entire control of his wife income, hence she will not survive without him. Surprisingly she left to spend five days with her son, she told her son to inform his father that she is safe with him. That was great start to emancipation, because when she came back she was stronger than before and not too submissive.

Lucia is Tambu's aunt, a younger sister of MaShingayi. On the death of a husband, a woman is inherited by one of man's brothers, Lucia obliged to conform to such cultural attributes. She stayed for a while without a husband and kids, and because of that she was thought to be jealous of her sister who managed to get herself a husband and was accused of her sister's misfortunes of losing four child in mis courage, thus "poor Lucia was indicted for both barrenness and her witchery". (Dangarembga, 1988:128).

Another difficult situation that Lucia faced is when she was pregnant with Takesure's baby. Lucia knew that she will not get anywhere with Takesure, and the fact that he is got two wives back home makes it more difficult, so she decided to say it is Jeremiah's baby. Jeremiah was happy and hopes for a boy child since he did not have one anymore, he even think of taking her as a second wife. Babamukuru did not like to have Lucia in their home, no matter what good can it bring to have her around. They gathered in a meeting as a family to find a solution to that, Lucia was not happy that they are having a meeting about her but she is not invited. She went inside and speaks her mind, that's when she told them that if I have to leave, I am taking my sister with me, and told them the reason why she does not want to go, "it was because of this man, yes you Jeremiah, who married my sister, he has a roving eye and lazy hand." (Dangarembga, 1988:147)

Well all this did not have much impact on Lucia who is an independent women, and does not care much about patriarchal rules. She fight her battles till the end, this is depicted when she confronted Babamukuru (God in Tambu's mind) and tells him that Tambu does not need to be punished so severely, as well as according to Takesure she is 'uncontrollable' because she speaks her mind, she is not submissive to any man.

Nyasha is Tambu's cousin, Babamukuru and Maiguru's daughter. Nyasha was discriminated against the grounds that she was black, female, educated and most of all

anglicised. When her parents moved to England they took their children with them and come back after five years, this is when Nyasha lost her identity and get confused between two cultures (Western and African). Nyasha's situation is a difficult one, she is trapped between two cultures, she lost her identity, she wanted to belong, she does not go along with her father, all this leads to Bulimia. Her issues started at home where she was not allowed to voice her opinions, even when she want to explain her self, for example when her father took her book without informing her, Nyasha was very angry and she lost appetite, on the other hand her father was forcing her to finish the meal but she did not.

The other day Tambu, Nyasha and Chido went out in the evening for fun, they came back late, unfortunately Nyasha was a few minutes behind them, her father makes a big deal about that, Nyasha tried to explain to him that she was not doing anything wrong but he did not listen. He hit her over and over again while she asked him not to, this drove her to a point where she decided to hit him back. "Babamukuru bellowed and snorted that if Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was at rest in her grave he would fight her like one". (Dangarembga, 1988:117). He continued saying that he can not have two man in his house even Chido. He even said he is behaving like a whore. Nyasha did not have the ability to deal with the difficult situation without saying anything that will annoy other people, especial her father.

Nyasha is a symbolic victim of pressure to embrace modernity, change, enlightenment and self improvement. After the fight with her father she said "I was comfortable in England but now I'm a whore with dirty habits," she continued "its not England any more and I ought to adjust. But when you've seen different things you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing", (Dangarembga, 1988:119). Within this statement, it is obvious that Nyasha is still confused, she does not understand a patriarchal rule.

In addition to that, one day she came late from school walking with Tambu, her father asked why she came late, she said she was working. His father argued as usual, and since Nyasha has no tact, the argument continued till she was forced to eat food, even though she explained that she was not hungry. This time she did not argue, she ate all her food, but after that she went to the bathroom and take it out, this is what leads to Bulimia. At the end Nyasha decided to obey the rules, just to please his father, while killing herself on the other side.

The presence of Tambu is really crucial in Nyasha's life whom she have no friends, even at school children do not like her because of her language, she speaks English more fluently than shona, "They think that I am a snob, that I am superior to them because I do not feel that i am inferior to men. And all because I beat the boys at maths! I know that I should not complain, but I very much would like to

belong"(Dangarembga, 1988:200).Nyasha has suffered a lot,changing to be the ideal daughter to her father must be a very hard decision for her.That is why she almost killed herself.

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You present some good and interesting facts. Please take care of word spacing. Nyoni K

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DECLARATION REGARDING PLAGIARISM

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