

Colonial Ideology, Patriarchy and Madness in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract

'Nervous Conditions' unfolds the story of two African girls: Tambu and Nyasha. As their society is traditional and male-dominated, they struggle to voice and attain their true selves under the patriarchal pressure of Rhodesian Shona culture. It is a fascinating journey of Tambu's struggle to take education as a poor black African child. Her family cannot cater her needs of education as she belongs to a traditional poor farmer family in colonial Rhodesia. However, despite all odds, she succeeds to attain academic heights due to her strong determination and tenacity. At the same time, Dangarembga presents a grim and sad picture of Babamukuru's daughter, Nyasha, who is a hybrid child. Being misfit in the Rhodesian society, she surrenders to madness. The present analysis seeks to understand the factors responsible for propelling (in case of Tambu) and stunting (in case of Nyasha) the growth of the girls in the text.

Key words: colonialism, patriarchy, femininity, madness

Nervous Conditions (1988) is set in colonial Rhodesia during the 1960s. Dangarembga uses Fanon's statement 'The condition of native is a *nervous condition*' from *The Wretched of the Earth* as an epigraph to her novel. It points to the prevalent theme of

colonialism, femininity and madness in the novel. Through the present text, Dangarembga seeks to prove the aptness of the above statement in relation to the colonial situation of Rhodesia. It demonstrates the subjugation of a variety of African women. According to many scholars, along with femininity, the text tries to open up many issues related to colonialism, patriarchy, hybridity and sexuality. Shaw views the novel as ‘an individual daughter’s struggle to define her own identity as a woman, independent of her father and the confines of constricted cultural codes, reflects the broader effort of women in society to assert feminist conceptions of adulthood’ (8). In a collectivist and traditional society like colonial Rhodesia, Tambu’s mother Shingayi, Nyasha’s mother Maiguru, Lucia, Nyasha and Tambu herself are victimized by patriarchal society of Rhodesia. These female characters represent what it means to be an African woman. Dangarembga seems to suggest that irrespective of place, status, class and education, African woman is exploited in one way or the other. The form of exploitation may vary, but the exploitation remains at the core of man-woman dyad in the society. Besides, the text is one of the radically written coming-of-age narratives in African literature. It can serve as an authentic document for the case study of coming-of-age experience of two African girls. It explores the ripening minds of two African girls who are in their adolescence. The narrative centres on Tambu’s formation and Nyasha’s deformation in colonial Rhodesia.

The text unfolds the story of two African girls: Tambu and Nyasha. As their society is traditional and male-dominated, they struggle to voice and attain their true selves under the patriarchal pressure of Rhodesian Shona culture. It is a fascinating journey of Tambu’s struggle to take education as a poor black African child. Her family cannot cater her needs of education as she belongs to a traditional poor farmer family in colonial Rhodesia. However, despite all odds, she succeeds to attain academic heights due to her strong determination and tenacity. It is an inspirational story of the transformation of Tambu, a village girl, into an educated girl who can think rationally and sensibly. At the same time, Dangarembga presents a grim and sad picture of Babamukuru’s daughter, Nyasha, who is a hybrid child. Being misfit in the Rhodesian society, she surrenders to madness. The key person that holds the reigns of the plot is Babamukuru who determines the fate of every character of the text. As the only educated man in the Sigauke family, he dominates every male and female character

in the novel. He is very passionate about the education of his family. Babamukuru is subjected by colonial ideology, as he is a mixture of modernity and traditionalism. He strongly feels that girls should take education; however, he expects his daughters to be voiceless, submissive and traditional Shona women. As an elder member, he views himself as an authority of his family. He is apparently a patriarch. According to Gunner, Babamukuru symbolizes ‘the two forms of patriarchy, the colonial and indigenous’ (145). It is under these two patriarchies that the text *Nervous Conditions* explicates the ‘coming-of-age’ experience of two African female adolescent characters. The present analysis seeks to understand the factors responsible for propelling (in case of Tambu) and stunting (in case of Nyasha) the growth of the girls in the text.

The narrator of this text, Tambu, belongs to the traditional society of Rhodesia which is quite conservative. She is the member of a huge Sigauke family that has 24 members. However, her father Jeremiah’s branch of the family is poverty-stricken. She is a self-conscious girl who minutely explains her domestic life at her homestead and later at the mission. She is quite ‘stronger and sturdier’ (22). Her initial life at her father’s homestead, which is full of poverty, squalor and hardships, symbolizes her barricaded life. However, Tambu’s life at the mission stands for her emancipation. As her uncle Babamukuru is the Headmaster of the mission school, this world is full of comforts and resources. She is inevitably a part of a collectivist society of Rhodesia that promotes the collectivist values of interconnectedness, interdependence, concern for fraternity and priority to society over individual. On the special occasion of feast organized to celebrate Babamukuru’s return from England, she feels that she has distanced from her cousins. Tambu gets a feeling of exclusion. It lowers her confidence. However, when she is praised for her cooking skills by the other women, she gets her confidence back. She says: It was comfortable to recognize myself as solid, utilitarian me (40). What reinforces Tambu’s collective identity is her belief in her own self as being utilitarian. It presents Tambu’s firm belief in the Shona cultural values that she has internalized. However, this society also maintains hierarchy and hardly believes in gender equality. Apparently, women are reckoned to be second class members of this culture. Though her pre-pubertal life on the homestead with her mother and father is full of destitution and dirt, Tambu narrates her pleasurable moments:

Nevertheless, when I was feeling brave, which was before my breast grew too large, I would listen from the top of the ravine and, when I was sure I had felt no one coming, run down to the river, slip off my frock, which was all that I was wearing and swim blissfully for as long as I dared in the old deep places (4).

She is always integrated with ‘the river, the trees, the fruits and the fields’ around her (3). But when it comes to household chores, it is never blissful for Tambu for sure. She is denied many privileges due to her being a girl and not a boy. During her life at homestead, she particularly hates her brother and father for their unfair treatment to her. As a part of traditional Rhodesian society, she is dissuaded and discouraged to be educated by her brother and father. His patriarchal thinking is revealed when Nhamo, Tambu’s brother, says, ‘Did you hear of a girl being taken away to school’ (49). He thinks that only boys are meant to be educated. Also her father’s patriarchal mentality is manifested when he says:

Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables (15).

In her father’s view, cooking, cleaning, working in the fields and feeding her husband are the only concerns of women.

Like any other girl in traditional families, what Tambu lacks as long as her education is concerned, is a support from her father and brother. She says, ‘I wanted support, I wanted encouragement’ (20). Her father pressurizes her to accept the traditional gender roles that are allotted to women. Because she is in the phase of her life when family forces female teenager to conform to feminine decorum recommended by the society, her mother makes her aware of the double burden of ‘the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other’ (16). She tells Tambu that ‘Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength’ (16). Tambu is always reminded that she is a girl and she is destined to be a sacrificing, submissive and the so called decent woman who bears child for her husband. While they articulate these realities, they reveal the ideals of the Shona culture. Tambu’s mind perceives these subtle discrepancies in her society. For example, when she has to catch, to kill and cook a bird, Tambu’s cognitive mind decides to debunk this gendered schema that promotes unfair division of labour. She thinks:

Next time, I thought naively, Nhamo will catch it himself. If he wants to eat chicken, he will catch it and kill it. I will pluck it and cook it. This seemed a fair division of labour (12).

What Tambu seems to want is gender equality; however, it makes her aware of male dominance, incessant pregnancies, gender inequality and injustice to women. Her acceptance of the harsh reality as a challenge makes her tough and determined.

The Rhodesian society that Dangarembga describes in this text gives a privileged treatment to males. Nhamo, who is a brother of Tambu and the only male child in the family, gets an opportunity to be educated at his uncle's house at the mission. According to Babamukuru, Nhamo's status as a boy wins him this privilege. As Nhamo always poses a great opposing force for Tambu's growth, she has to compete with him. However, she is never faltered. Rather, it doubles her energy to be educated. Despite all these things, Tambu has a great urge to take education. Her first rebellion as a teenager girl occurs when she is denied an opportunity to go to school. She plans to manage her own school fees through growing her maize on her separate plot. However, her brother Nhamo tries to foil her plan by stealing her green mealies so that she remains outside the school. She shows manliness and courage to collect her school fees by selling her corn in Umtali with the help of her teacher Mr. Matimba. Tambu overcomes all these obstacles with doggedness. It is only after the death of Nhamo that Tambu is permitted to take education at the mission at her uncle's house. Therefore, Tambu describes her state of mind in these words: "I was not sorry when my brother died" (1). Her antipathy towards her brother and cold reaction over his death may be interpreted with the help of Freud's views on death. Freud, in the second part 'Our Attitude towards Death' of his essay 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death' reveals the nature of unconscious and its attitude towards death. He holds that our unconscious may commit a murder even after the crime is so trifle, since it does not know other punishment for crime than death. Further he says that,

'Our unconscious does not carry out the killing; it merely thinks it and wishes it. But it would be wrong so completely to undervalue this psychical reality as compared with factual reality. It is significant and momentous enough. In our

unconscious impulses we daily and hourly get rid of anyone who stands in our way, of anyone who has offended or injured us' (Freud).

The above lines of Freud are sufficient to prove Tambu's unconscious wish for her brother's death. It is due to this unconscious death wish that she does not feel sorry for her brother. Many a times, in her quarrels with him, she has unconsciously wished her brother die at once. The roots of this death wish for one's own brother can be found in the nature of the society. Patriarchy brings sexism and creates gender inequality. Tambu's cold reaction to her brother's death has its roots in patriarchal and sexist nature of African, in general, and Rhodesian society, in particular. The sibling rivalry and jealousy between Tambu and Nhamo is due to the conscious or unconscious sexism that families practice while rearing their children. Demonstrably, it is a sexist and gendered world of Tambu that begins with her smoky kitchen in the morning and ends in the same place in the evening when she sleeps there with other female members. The text describes Tambu's emancipation from this gendered world.

In her second world, she is transferred to her uncle Babamukuru's posh and elegant house to get a decent education. However, Tambu never forgets where she has come from. She gives commands to herself not to get dazzled and distracted by the splendour of the house. She describes her feelings of the moment:

Comfortable it was, but overwhelming nevertheless. Some strategy had to be devised to prevent all this splendour from distracting me in the way that my brother had been distracted (70).

Unlike her brother, Tambu uses her own discretion and decides to remain 'as aloof and unimpressed as possible' (70). She gives commands to herself that 'I had only to think of my mother, with Netsai and Rambanai superimposed in the background, to remember why and how I had come to be at the mission' (70). Unlike her brother, she never loses her identity as a daughter of a poor farmer. However, she is gradually dissociated with nature and made more urbane and refined. Tambu feels that her transfer to the mission is her reincarnation. Slowly she disinters from her village. She is educated and learns many things at the mission. She learns to eat, bath and dress. She also comes to know how to keep hygiene and dance.

She acquires her new self at the mission. She develops a warm relationship with her cousin Nyasha and Maiguru. She reads a great number of books with Nyasha. She refers:

I read everything from Enid Blyton to Bronte sisters and responded to them all. Plunging into these books I knew I was being educated and I was filled with gratitude to the authors for introducing me to the places where reason and inclination were not at odds (94).

The reading of European classics brings out a considerable change in her thinking process and outlook. However, covertly, she receives these positive changes at the cost of her toughness, doggedness, headstrongness and outspokenness that she develops at her father's house. She feels that she is no longer the Tambu that she was at homestead. Tambu becomes aware of this change that comes over her at the mission. Her cognitive mind perceives this change and seeks to understand her quietness and submissiveness that she has acquired at the mission. She realizes that it is because of her reverence and sublime image of Babamukuru in her mind that she grows quieter. Nyasha and Babamukuru's discordant relationship affects Tambu. She moulds herself according to what Babamukuru expects Nyasha to be. However, it makes Tambu's robustness disappear from her personality. In addition to this, she is also overwhelmed with Babamukuru's charity and benevolence to her family. She seems to have been burdened under a sense of gratitude. It makes her conscious about her own self-effacement. The sublime image of her uncle stunts the growth of the faculty of criticism. Tambu's awareness of her self-effacement creates a psychological conflict. It is what Leon Festinger calls 'cognitive dissonance'. Cooper explains 'the state of cognitive dissonance occurs when people believe that two of their psychological representations are inconsistent with each other. It occurs when person's belief does not coincide with his behaviour' (6). In Festinger's words:

The holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has drive-like properties and must be reduced (qtd. in Cooper 7)

The creation of the cognitive dissonance in an individual is caused when one is coerced to perform an action which contradicts one's own beliefs, ideas and understanding of the reality around him or her. While applying this thought to Tambu's context, it can be said that, as a

sign of cognitive dissonance, Tambu gets angry with Babamukuru for devising a plan of marriage of her parents: 'A Church Wedding', since her parents are not wedded at Church. Tambu calls this anger as 'guilty anger'. She is angry with Babamukuru for unnecessarily making her think about her illegitimate existence; at the same time, she feels guilty that she is having the nasty thoughts about her benefactor. However, after much psychological upheavals in her mind, she finally decides to deny attending marriage. It can be argued that Tambu's rebellion against Babamukuru is her strong endeavour to pacify this inner conflict and reduce the cognitive dissonance. It is her struggle to regain 'internal consistency' and comfortableness. After this realization of self effacement, she rebels against her uncle by opposing and denying to remain being present for her parents' marriage. Tambu does not like the idea of her parents' marriage. She uses her faculty of judgment and calls it a null and void exercise that reduces her parents to 'the stars of comic show, the entertainers' (165). Though Tambu is punished for her annoyance of Babamukuru, it gives her a sense of great satisfaction that she does not attend her parents' wedding ceremony. It reduces the 'uncomfortable tension' created due to her cognitive dissonance. She learns for the first time to express her views. She makes her decision despite the fact that it goes against her benefactor, Babmukuru's, authority. It is a sign of the creation of what may be called autonomous inner authority. She overwhelms: 'I had made my decision and the decision at least was mine' (171). By breaking this deadlock, Tambu listens to her inner voice. Discernibly, it is Tambu's assertion of herself as rational and independent entity.

By and large, the text describes Tambu's metamorphosis into a mature girl making her capable to use reason and logic to understand the colonial realities around her. Due to a peer like Nyasha, Tambu learns to argue and question the authority, if it is wrong. It is due to her cousin, she rebels against Babamukuru. However, unlike Nyasha, Tambu has a collective identity as she knows her culture better and knows its strengths and weaknesses. It is predominantly Tambu's collective self which values interdependence and harmony in relationship that upholds her morale to sustain in nervous conditions. Eventually, with her diligence in her studies, Tambu manages to enter one of the finest multiracial convent schools 'Sacred Heart'. Overcoming all hostile and unfavourable conditions, Tambu succeeds and excels in her academic career. At every crises of Tambu's life, she meets with her benefactors

or the safeguarding components. These benefactors save her from her downfall and propel her towards her aim.

The first safeguarding person is her mother. When Tambu's father stops her education for his inability to pay school fees, Tambu says:

I will earn the fees...If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much. Just enough for the fees (17).

In this situation, it is Tambu's mother who insists that she should be given her chance. Tambu's growing maize symbolizes her growing hope to be educated.

The second safeguarding factor for Tambu is Mr. Matimba who is her teacher and who helps her sell her mealies. He takes Tambu to Umtali to sell her maize. The third defending factor that Tambu meets is her uncle Babamukuru who shoulders the responsibility of Tambu's education. Besides, Nyasha also plays a significant role in Tambu's transformation as an intelligent girl. Maiguru is also Tambu's defending factor, because she supports Tambu's admission to Sacred Heart, a multiracial convent school. When everyone else believes that Tambu may be corrupted under the bad influences in the school, Maiguru disagrees with this fear. She convinces Babamukuru to allow Tambu to go ahead.

Primarily, Tambu internalizes the value of interdependence and interconnectedness, upheld by her benefactors especially Babmukuru. Her concrete belief in her collective existence rescues her from depressing conditions. After her admission to the Sacred Heart, everybody urges her not to forget him or her. However, Tambu reasons that 'If I forget them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself' (191). Tambu knows exactly well that her existence is inseparably bound with the existence of her people. It demonstrates her ripeness and a sense of collective identity. Altogether, she passes through the stormy and stressful coming-of-age phase successfully. So, apparently Tambu's coming-of-age features her quality of resilience. No matter how dismal and anxious conditions she finds herself in, she shows great ability to recover and chase her desires. Dangarembga suggests that what we call a normal path of success may be a beginning of amnesia of who we are, what we are and where we come from. In Tambu's case, Dangarembga finally clears that unlike Nyasha, Tambu does not succumb to the colonial process of assimilation which, according to Nyasha, blunts precocious native minds and their potential for questioning and

rebellious against the empire. She calls her formation a long and painful ‘process of expansion’ in which she questions things and refuses to be brainwashed (208). The process of Tambu’s formation into a well-educated rational human being is smoothed due to her being firmly rooted in her culture. She does not dissolve in the unAfrican ambience of her school; on the contrary, she cherishes her Africanness.

Another character, Tambu’s adolescent cousin, Nyasha goes through a more poignant coming-of-age due to her misplaced self and sour relationship with her father. Nyasha is Babamukuru’s anglicized daughter who has lost her sense of being African. To Tambu, Nyasha is irrepressible, precocious and perceptive girl. However, people are led to create different opinions about her behaviour. Tambu reports the views of the people around her.

People like me thought she was odd and rather superior in tangible ways. Peripheral adults like her teachers thought she was a genius and encouraged this aspect of hers.

But her mother and father were worried about her development (99).

So as long as her teacher and parents are concerned, there seems to be a discrepancy in understanding Nyasha’s behaviour. Being a scholar girl, she spends most of her time in reading. Unlike Tambu, Nyasha is far more mature in her thinking. She reads a lot about real people. Her understanding about worldly issues is far superior to Maiguru, Tambu and even her father Babamukuru. She shows much perspicacity on issues about Christianity, colonialism and African woman’s entrapment. She is well aware of how Christian missionary schools assimilate and corrupt genius native minds that may prove nuisance to the empire by giving European education. As a teenager girl, she shows such complex understanding of colonial situation which proves her precocity. Tambu describes her: ‘She was not something you could dissect with reason’ because she has her own individual point of view on almost every issue (98). Her strange but logical understanding of women’s exploitation is manifested when she says:

It’s everything, it’s everywhere. So where do you break out to? You are just one person and it’s everywhere (176).

She figures out that the females of her family are trapped under the patriarchy of Babamukuru. When Nyasha learns that after quarrelling with Babamukuru, her mother stayed with her brother, she does not like this idea. She exclaims, ‘A man! She always runs to

men...there is no hope Tambu' (177). This incident signifies Nyasha's idea of complete emancipation of a woman from patriarchy.

Another sign of her precocity is Nyasha's egalitarianism which is apparent in her treatment to her maid servant Anna. She does not like Anna to kneel down in front of her as if she were her master and Anna, a slave. She appears to believe in equality among people. She is clearly more mature than Tambu. However, she is uprooted and has acquired a hybrid identity. Her stay in England during her foundational years of life has made her a different person who cannot fit into the collectivist Shona culture. She is estranged with her indigenous language and culture. For Tambu, forgetting one's own mother tongue is 'bewildering and offending' (42). Her British accent seems so strange to Tambu that she becomes conscious of the Englishness in her. Nyasha appears to be a misplaced self who asserts her individuality. She believes in her own autonomy. Her belief in individualism is evident in her dislike for being referred to as a third person in her presence. She thinks that it makes her 'feel like an object' (101). Even she thinks that her marriage is her personal issue, whereas the marriage is reckoned as a matter of their clan in the Shona culture. She never identifies herself as a daughter of Sigauke. She believes that she is nothing else but Nyasha. This individualistic attitude towards her life leads her towards problems.

Being an African woman, what Nyasha lacks is community-oriented self that Babamukuru identifies in Tambu. Likewise, she does not conform to the feminine codes laid down by the Shona culture; rather, she behaves the way the whites do. She is suffocated in Rhodesia due to her fissured existence. This creates disharmony in her relationship with her father. As a result, all the time, they have arguments and quarrels on feminine decorum which culminates into Nyasha's rebel against her father. In one of her quarrels, her father calls Nyasha a whore for her indecent and unacceptable behaviour with boys. The quarrel between the father and the daughter turns into an awful fight when both become physically violent. Her mannish behaviour is completely disapproved, as her father declares:

We cannot have two men in this house. Not even Chido, you hear that Nyasha? Not even your brother there dares to challenge my authority (117).

Conspicuously, Nyasha is pressurized to leave her masculine behaviour and accept femininity. It is a clear revelation of how traditional societies are rigid in their imposition of

appropriate gender roles on their children during their coming-of-age period. Nyasha's act of violent rebellion is not only against her father but also against the colonial system that has made her 'a hybrid identity'. She expresses her awareness of her fractured self as an African female. She affirms that she has no sense of belonging to her homeland. She tells Tambu 'I very much would like to belong, Tambu, but I find I do not' (200). This displaced existence of Nyasha creates serious mental problems. Despite her parents' disapproval, Nyasha reads a novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* written by D. H. Lawrence. It informs that Nyasha is going through a rough period of sexual awakening. The reading of this sensuous literature underlines her curiosity about sex. Her budding sexuality suffers in the traditional male-dominated society of Rhodesia in which to be a decent unmarried woman is to be a virgin woman who has learnt to suppress her sexuality. The virginity is cherished only to gift her husband after her marriage. In other words, she is supposed to be submissive to male authority. However, Nyasha's sexual advances towards other males make Babamukuru go mad with fury. In order to avoid her father's presence, Nyasha immerses herself in her studies. Tambu informs, 'She studied fourteen hours a day to make sure she passed her 'o' levels' (204). This engrossment of Nyasha in her studies is an act of defence mechanism that adolescents usually employ. The mechanism is what Anna Freud calls 'intellectualization'. Nyasha's intellectual capacity, her arguments on socio-political issues, her firm perspicacious beliefs, her complex ideas and views on every issue are her unconscious ways to divert her sexual energy towards more socially acceptable tasks like her studies and debate.

Turning towards her psychological deterioration, it can be said that her aesthetic parameters of feminine beauty are also European that makes her over conscious about her figure. She teases her cousin for her fat bottom. She does not believe in African sense of beauty, as she has accepted the European ways. Resultantly, she seems to be interpellated by the European aesthetic ideology as she has returned from England to Rhodesia. Due to her fear to put on weight, she begins to be on intense diet that makes her skeletal. It culminates in serious problems about her eating habits. She suffers from anorexia nervosa and Bulimia. Instead of progressing, there seems to be regression in Nyasha's development. Her physical and mental health keeps deteriorating due to her study and diet. On one occasion, when

Nyasha is in abnormal state of madness, she accuses colonialism and shreds a false colonial history book under her teeth. She says:

They have trapped us. They have trapped us. But I won't be trapped. I'm not a good girl. I won't be trapped' (205).

She also expresses her lack of sense of belonging when she says, 'I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you' (205). Digging at the roots of these serious mental problems, one may view that it is due to the collision between the British and the Shona cultural values that Nyasha suffers the mental and behavioural problems. Nyasha's complex can be better understood with Lacan's perspective. He believes that anorexia nervosa and other oral addictions are the outcomes of the repetition of weaning in the subject's life. He holds that weaning complex has its continuous effect on mental life of the subject. Lacan, in his article 'Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual', calls this tendency of starvation and oral addiction as 'the appetite for death' (23). He further states:

This psychic tendency towards death in the original form that weaning gives to it, can be seen in those special kinds of suicide which are characterized as non-violent; while at the same time we can see in it the oral form of the complex: the hunger strike of anorexia nervosa, the slow poisoning of certain oral addictions and the starvation diet of gastric neuroses. The analysis of these cases shows that by abandoning himself to death the subject is attempting to rediscover the imago of his mother. It is quite generic as can be seen in burial practices, certain types of which clearly display the psychological meaning of a return to the mother's womb' (Lacan 22).

Therefore, it may be argued that these are the symptoms of Nyasha's journey not only towards her childhood, but in Lacanian perspective, a journey towards mother's womb. It is evident when Nyasha curls up into Maiguru's lap at the end of her abnormal behaviour. It provides evidence that Nyasha is shrinking backwards to her mother's womb. Tambu judges that she looks 'no more than five years old' (205). Through incessant diet, she is abandoning herself to death. The roots of Nyasha's smoking habit and her madness is an effect of what Lacan calls 'a repetition of weaning' that takes place symbolically during her transfer from her accustomed culture, language and people to an unknown and strange land. The same effect continues as she comes back home. This may have been a serious blow to her natural

development. Once uprooted, Nyasha never finds her roots back home. The rift between her and her indigenous culture is never narrowed down. Ergo, she becomes a victim of madness. Apparently, Nyasha epitomizes the insidious harm that colonialism did to the psyche of natives.

In conclusion, *Nervous Conditions* construes the formation of Tambu and deformation of Nyasha in a rigid patriarchal society. It explores the role of their family, society and political conditions that bring psychological changes during the phase of coming-of-age of these characters. At the same time, it suggests that western and African values may not easily coexist on African soil. It explicates a process of subject formation of colonial subject who is victimized to colonial ideology. The colonial educational system creates subjects who are pressurized and, to its extremes, crushed under its hegemony. Babamukuru, Tambu and Nyasha are the epitomes of this kind of subject formation. They have to shed their traditional identities and participate in the process of what Nyasha calls 'assimilation' (182). The text successfully delineates the process of how colonialism insidiously creates a colonial subject who slowly estranges from his own culture and acquires a cultural amnesia. However, few like Tambu may successfully tear this ideological veil and become intellectual, liberal and rational being.

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