Nervous conditions response

White Man's Burden and Nervous Conditions The " white man's burden" was a narrative created by Europeans as a part of a civilizing mission (lecture, 3/4). Above all it meanteducationand Christianity. These two things were brought to the African continent under the assumption that they would bring wellbeing for Africans. Yet that was not always the case. In many instances, these assumptions were contested by the real life experiences of many Africans and manifested in nervous conditions. We see examples of this in Tsitsi Dangarembga's work.

The various relationships Babamukuru has with different characters throughout Nervous Conditions are emblematic of the multi-faceted and complex relationships colonizers had with Africans especially when analyzed in the context of the ' white man's burden' as related to education, Christianity, and control. Many Africans were convinced of the " white man's" promise that a Western education was key to breaking the cycle ofpovertyand a means to a better life. Babamukuru is a shining example of this, especially the ways in which he uses his education in relation to others.

The first case this is present is in his decision to bring Nyasha and Chido to England for his own education because he did not want them to experience the " hardship that he had experienced as a young child" on the homestead (14). This choice suggests that he viewed his education as a way for his children to indirectly benefit and promote their wellbeing. A more direct example is Babamukuru's vested interest in the wellbeing of his extendedfamily. He declares, " we need to ensure that at least one member form each family is educated" (44).

Babamukuru feels that it is his duty, as an African educated in the West, to provide opportunities of education for his family. This feeling of obligation—or burden—to provide is rooted in his own education as it relates to his colonial experience. This is not to pass judgment on his offer, rather, further analyze the relationship between wellbeing and education as it relates to the colonizer and the African more generally. Although Babamukuru's gift is well received by the family, it is necessary to consider the notion that western education, as a means to wellbeing truly is a colonial conviction.

Moreover, western education is not necessarily valued in traditional Africa the way that is often taken at face value. Consider the fact that on page 15 Jeremiah said to Tambu, " Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. " As is evident, the type of education Babamukuru is offering his family is strictly colonial and influenced as such. It is not the panacea that is often considered at face value. Moreover, it the experience with education cultivated nervous conditions that challenged the traditional African identities of some characters.

This is evident in characters like Tambu and Nyasha which will be discussed in more detail shortly. In sum, western education as a means to wellbeing under the mindset of the white man's burden is often contradictory. This is evident from the standpoint of Babamukuru through the examples provided. On one hand it was a means to a better life. However, in this offer to and aspiration toward higher education came struggles with identity and what it meant to be African. Yet this is not the only example of Babamukuru's

relationship with characters in the book as emblematic of the " white man's burden".

Just as Europeans were convinced Africans needed to be educated, they were also convinced that Africans needed Christianity in order to be saved by the grace of God. In the same way " white men" felt burdened to facilitate this relationship, Babamukuru internalized this attitude. His conviction that Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi need a proper Christian wedding shows this. He says, " Jeremiah…you are still living in sin. You have not been married in a church before God. This is a serious matter" (149). Babamukuru's imposition of a Christian wedding on Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi symbolizes how colonial values of religion manifested in African life.

It was imposed from the outside inward as if to suggest African religion before colonialism was inherently flawed. In demanding a Christian wedding Babamukuru challenged traditional African ways of ceremony and union which, consequently, presented struggles in the life of various characters. One particular case is with Tambu in her refusal to attend the ceremony. In response to this Babamukuru exclaims, " I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is doing an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying my authority" (169).

Two important modes of analysis come out of this. The first is how the colonial tradition of a Christian wedding seemed to disturb Tambu. The second is the element of control that Babamukuru exhibits. For him, just as for the colonizers, it was more than a wedding. It was a way to impose European values and traditions in order to change what it meant to be African. In short, Christianity as part of the white man's burden was an

imposition that challenged African traditions. As symbolized in the case of Tambu's refusal to attend the ceremony, this created tension for many Africans.

Moreover, the way in which Babamukuru handles the situation with Tambu exemplifies the element of control that was pervasive in living out the white man's burden. Finally, this analysis of the white man's burden through the scope of Babamukuru's relationship with other characters in the book culminates with the theme of control, specifically his relationship with Nyasha. This is a good example because their relationship highlights the multifaceted aspects of the relationship between the colonizer and African. First, there is thecare and concern of wellbeing Babamukuru has for this daughter.

He takes her to England then enrolls her in school so as to provide her with a better life. At the same time he places high pressure on her to perform well and become more " English". He has high expectations for her and, in many ways, expects her to become more " white" by adopting European customs and disciplines. All of this pressure creates nervous conditions for Nyasha and consequently puts strain on her relationship with her father as exemplified through the tensions and fights between the two. This issue of pressure and control manifests prominently in the scene where Babamukuru forces Nyasha to eat.

He demands, " Sit down and eat thatfood. I am telling you. Eat it! " (192). After consuming the food like a maniac she forces herself to vomit. Further, this marks the beginning of an eating disorder. Using this as a metaphor, the European control many Africans felt from the white man's burden led many

to feel starved of an identity that was essentially African. Some populations became subservient and assimilated, like many French colonies (lecture, 3/11). Still others rebelled and/or broke under the pressure in a way similar to Nyasha.

One example of this would be rebellions in the Congo in the 1960s as well as the Mau Mau Rebellion (lectures, 3/4; 3/6). What persists, though, is the pressure Africans felt in the manifestation of the white man's burden created nervous conditions that led to neuroses of entire populations. In conclusion, the various relationships Babamukuru has with different characters throughout Nervous Conditions are emblematic of the multi-faceted and complex relationships colonizers had with Africans especially when analyzed in the context of the ' white man's burden' as related to education, Christianity, and control.

Babamukuru as an African educated in the west internalizes many European values that are subsequently projected on other characters in the book. As is clear, these manifest in different ways. However, is also clear is the assumption of African wellbeing through colonization under the " white man's burden" is contested. In fact, the " white man's burden" created nervous conditions for many Africans.