

Trying to balance modernity and traditional practises in nervous conditions

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The struggle to balance two things is presented in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Maiguru, Bamukuru's wife is one of the characters presented struggling to balance these things. She is educated with a master's degree which she obtained in UK, at the same time she struggles to balance with traditional practises of being an ideal wife to her husband. In other words she struggles to balance modernity and traditional practises. Just like Bamukuru, she has a master's degree but is she a master of anything in her life other than the degree? Shona culture demands woman to play some roles as a married woman. Does Maiguru despite her education play these roles? With these questions in mind the essay below seeks to analyse the Nervous Conditions of Maiguru how she balance being an educated wife and her traditional roles.

To begin with, Maiguru maybe a masters of arts but a master of nothing in her life. This statement is very true to Maiguru character in the novel. She is educated in England and has the same qualities as her husband they both have master's degree. As evidenced in the book no one viewed Maiguru beyond her being as wife to Bamukuru. As they return from England everyone was celebrating the coming and achievement of their hero Bamukuru. They were singing 'mauya mauya mauya, Bamukuru!' (35). They were singing welcoming their hero. Jeremiah jumped from the car, brandishing a staff like a victory spear. He went on to make a speech, "our Father and Benefactor has returned ...if you want to see an educated man look at my brother(36)." In contrast Master degree holder Maiguru entered last alone (37). It shows she was not recognised as just a wife no one attributes her education and she is always inferior to her husband who is

celebrated by the family. With the above Maiguru was just a master degree holder but a master of nothing else in her life.

In her quest to balance in the two cultures she fails. She wants her children to keep a distinction and difference that they have achieved from living in England. She defended her kids saying that they don't understand Shona very well anymore (42). Very interesting Maiguru said, ' They are too Anglicised' ...They picked up all these ' disrespectful ways in England' (74) Was Maiguru concede about how Nyasha was lacking the norms and value of the Shona culture to respect of elders. As she continued saying, ' it's taking them time how to behave again' (74). Given this it shows how maiguru failed to balance the two the values of what they learnt from abroad and the culture of the land, Nyasha's behaviour also shows how Maiguru failed as a shona mother to make her child acquire the values which a Shona girl is expected to have.

Furthermore, she is a very educated woman of her time but she continued being submissive to her husband. Is this being a good wife to her husband? Or it shows how she is only a master of arts and a master of nothing in her life? When, Tambu asks her about her master degree she exposed her other side. Tambu thoughts she went she just to take care of Baba and Maiguru became serious and it " changed her from a sweet, soft dove to something more like a wasp" (101). This shows the frustrated educated side of Maiguru, due to her insecurities she gave up her personal desires to be a submissive woman. To further show her frustration she said, " I still studied for that degree and got it in spite all of them-your uncle, your grandparents and the

rest of the family. Can you tell me now that they aren't pleased that I did, even if they don't admit it?" (101) Detecting from her word she can't express that she education at the same time being a good wife she choose to be a submissive wife suppressing her mind there by being frustrated.

As Maiguru continued conversing with Tambu she continued showing her insecurity with choices she makes against her desires. Tambu asks her, " you must earn a lot of money" (101). Further Tambu state that Maiguru, Laughed, forcing her to be merry again but not succeeding. She gave up, took off her glasses and leaned back on her seat... (101). Maiguru trying to smile but failing shows how it pains her not to receive pay to conform to Bamukuru against her desire. To show how she choose security at the expense of her desire she explains to Tambu that, ' in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been ... if - if - if things were - different - But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made?' (101). She is in a dilemma between her own desires, opinions, and possible opportunities and her obligations to her family. Choosing her obligation to her family for security over her desires shows that she was master of arts but master nothing in her life, This because she cannot balance the two personal desires and obligation to the family.

Maiguru insecurity are further shown on even in Nyasha her daughter when she said, " I don't think she will leave" (172). This shows that she was so insecure that even her daughter thought she will not leave or if she does she knows she will come back because she is controlled by patriarchal structures

of that time. Furthermore, Tambu realise that when Maiguru was back her baby talk had disappeared. Evaluating, speaking in baby talk it is a sign of insecurity it is highly plausible to state that due to the insecurity Maiguru was a master of nothing in her life other than being a master of arts.

Maiguru leaving the house for five days shows that she was not happy. This cement how she was a master of nothing living in fear that she may have security. In the process of wanting security she suppress her desires and expression of her education which was the same as her husband. She is viewed as nothing while she has a Master's Degree, and she leaves the house for five days (175). Her gender makes her invisible in her family, even though she has the same level of education as Baba, who is viewed as a deity. Her trying to choose one side in of being a good wife in shona culture suppressing her desires thoughts at the end becoming frustrated inside make her a master only of arts and nothing else in her life.

On the other hand to a certain extent despite her education she still plays her role as a traditional woman in her relationship. As argued from above her pay was taken by her husband it shows how submissive she was as a traditional wife though educated. As Nyasha thought she went to England there to look after Bamukuru (101). This might suggest she was performing her duty as a traditional woman this mad people not to recognise that like Bamukuru she also had a master's degree. In contrast Maiguru wanted also to be more of a modern women rather than traditional. Her insecurity baby talk shows a certain character she learned in England which a traditional Shona woman could behave. Maiguru said, ' Now you have come. Help

yourself, my Daddy-pie" (80). This sought of language shows that she want to be a modern woman in a traditional structure.

Maiguru performs some duties as elder woman in the family which also shows that despite her education she still plays a role as a traditional woman. She is more associated of being a person who want to remain with what she learned from abroad. We can evidence on how her kids are growing. She defend them that they can't speak shona and cant dance (42&43). She even buy some clothes which Bamukuru a traditional patriarch can not allow her daughter to wear. It of this we can argue that Maiguru she was a hybrid her role of was a mixture of being traditional woman with elements she learnt from her time being educated.

Tambu first arrives at the mission school, she defines Maiguru as diffident and my sweet little aunt, who liked to please (72, 73). This description of Maiguru splatters her as an unpretentious, subservient women. Nyasha is at odds with her mother because she always sides with Baba and doesn't stand up for herself. All these are characteristic of a traditional woman who is welcome. Nyasha's criticism that she always side with her Father. shows also a character of Maiguru who despite her education she performs her role as a traditional woman by being submissive to her husband. In contray she also fail to perform her role as a traditional Maiguru by refusing to participate in the tribunal, She opted to go and sleep. This may suggest that Maiguru did her role as traditional woman out of fear and insecurity rather than her will.

In conclusion, although Maiguru is educated, her education only serves to make her more angry of her entrapment. Maiguru always works for the demands of her husband. She doesn't have freedom to express her desires of what she learnt in England. She is forced to keep silent and obedient because of her fear and insecurity in a patriarchal and cultural society. In the family no one recognises that she is educated they view her as a wife who escorted her husband to England that she may take care of the husband and kids. This make her to be merely a master of arts but master of nothing in her life. Her conflict of trying to choose among two things makes her roles not be more associated with those of a traditional woman. Although she did everything for Bamukuru as a submissive woman but on the other hand she wanted also to include her personal desires of what she learnt abroad which was contrary to the traditional roles. Lastly, though she had some nervous conditions at last accept her hybridity. After going away for five days she came back able to balance her two sides and essentially escape, even though she physically continued to live in Baba's house.