

# Nervous conditions

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The story *Nervous Conditions* takes place in Zimbabwe during the period spanning the late 1960s and early 1970s. This essay evaluates the sociological aspects of this story as well as showing the progresses made so far in the post-colonial era. It evaluates the life conditions of the African women in the colonial as well as post-colonial times.

According to literature, the education, social dignity, and self-determination were far from the reach of the African girl-child as priority is clearly given to the male counterparts. However, with the coming of the colonialists, things are bound to change. This is crystal clear in spite of the fact that it was not intended that should women get formal education. In fact, for a good number of women, it comes as an unfortunate accident of sorts (Patel, 1999) The impression that is created of the women is that of people who yearn to get formal education but the society would not let them. For instance, Tambu is so keen on getting formal education that she works on a small garden of hers in order to be able to pay for her school fees. This captures the sympathy of a white lady who gives her ten pounds to enable her to go back to school.

Further, the fact that she does not feel sorry about the death of her brother is quite baffling. She actually says that she is not sorry for the death of her brother as it gives her a perfect opportunity to get the kind of education she has always desired. This exposes the social tension that the actions of the society have caused to brew between the male and female siblings. It is certainly unthinkable that anyone would ever be happy about the death of a brother. Although the writer tends to associate such a reaction with her brother's arrogance and with the fact that he would sometimes destroy her

maize as well as tease her, this would not warrant someone feeling good about the death of a brother. Essentially, she would still be happy even if the brother had behaved more friendly because it was her only chance of getting formal education (Chikwenye & Tuzyline, 2009).

The pre-colonial African society considers all the social advantages as a reserve of the male members of the society. They intend to keep this even with the emergence of the colonialist with his new cultural influence. It is quite easy to decipher what fate would befall Tambu had her brother, Nhamo, not died. In the view of the larger society, Nhamo had been selected by the elders to pursue education so that he could later return to provide for the family when he finally secures a job. However, their hopes are cut short when Nhamo dies all of a sudden and the feeling that they may never live to enjoy the fruits of modern education strikes them like thunder. It is this feeling that makes them change their mindset about the girl-child.

Indeed, they have no options left for them as the only next kid they can send to the missionary school is Tambu who is a female. Notably, it was never their wish to send her to school but a creation of situations. This brings forth the question of just what would have become of Tambu's fate had the brother lived to good education (Patel, 1999). Tambu's fate would have been confined to the kitchen had her brother not died. According to Uwakweh, ladies were left to help their mothers in the kitchen while their male counterparts went to school.

Although the society seems to appreciate the value of education, it bothers why major social canons limit it in a way that women are left aside. As a

matter of fact, African women are usually married off at a tender age so that they could bring home a bride price which would then be used to educate their brothers. This portrays the society as being largely biased against females. In spite of the fact that they know that the female members of the society aren't less intelligent, they give them a wide berth in matters of education (Ayaan, 2000). It can be said with certainty that Tambu's education would not make social issues very easy for the young woman either. She would find it very hard to live her independent life at work or have several prospective suitors sent to her against her wishes.

They would certainly try to influence the decision of who has her hand in marriage because they utterly believe that by having received her education, she is a great investment that would fend for the family at a later date. Indeed, this is why there are heated discussions among the members of her family about the worth of her education. According to them, she would eventually only benefit the husband's family (Brown, 2000).