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What Triggers Nyasha’s Eating? What does it Symbolize

**Background about the novel**

Tsitsi Dangarembga authored a novel Nervous condition. She is a Zimbabwean writer. It is considered by the BBC to be on the list of 100 books that have changed the world in 2018. In 1989 it won the prize for Commonwealth Writer. The novel revolves around and focuses on the post-colonial era of the 1960s. It revolves around the protagonist Tambu. Two main themes of this novel are related to the concept of gender and colonialism. The Rhodesian culture has its female subjugate to male domination. Gender inequality is the main driving force behind many arcs of the novel

The second main theme is colonialism that how a fixation to colonial culture and mindset drives the character motivations in the novel.

**Natasha**

Nayasha is the first cousin of Tambu (novels protagonist) and daughter of Babamukuru. She has a desire to live an independent life which often delves her into the trouble. She refused to be subjugating of her father's desire. She has spent some of her time back in England that has shown her different lifestyle. She has the trouble of getting back to her own cultural lifestyle of Rhodesia. She developed an eating disorder.

**Eating Disorder**

An eating disorder is sometimes misinterpreted as a choice of lifestyle. It is an actual serious and dangerous illness which is inhabited in people because of their behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. When a preoccupation related to body weight, food and shape occurs, it could relate to the eating disorder. Some common types of an eating disorder include binge-eating, bulimia nervosa, and anorexia nervosa disorder.

**Anorexia Nervosa**

People having this type of disorder may consider themselves underweight even when they are considered to be dangerously overweight. Such people weigh themselves frequently, exercise in excess, and restrict the food intake. These people may force themselves or may use a laxative in order to lose weight. It is a mental disorder with the highest rate of mortality as compared to other mental disorders.

**Bulimia Nervosa**

People with such conditions have most often recurrent episodes of eating food in large amount and they may feel a lack of control over their food consumption. For compensation, these people tend to vomit forcefully, fast, do excessive exercise, etc.

**Binge-eating disorder**

These people have lost control over their eating habit. These people do not overcompensate as seen in bulimia nervosa and as a result mostly seen as overweight and obese.

**Causes**

The effect of eating disorder has on all genders, ages, racial backgrounds, and bodyweights. This disorder is seen mostly in teenagers or adults but can be developed in childhood and later life. It has an effect on both the genders but mainly its rates are higher among women.

Eating disorder according to researchers is caused due to psychological, behavioral, genetics, biological and social factors. People with an eating disorder have other mental disorders like depression or problems related to the use of a substance.

Most likely, Anorexia Nervosa is the disorder type that is involved in Nyasha’s eating disorder. Most of the symptoms of this type of disorder match with the Nyasha personality and mode of living. It has been noted by researchers that Anorexia nervosa is seen among 80-85% of young women with age ranging from 12-25 years. This happens mostly in the middle and high socio-economic families women. It has been noted that this type of disorder is seen among children with having abused. These types of children's have shame feeling, low self-esteem and have negative thought process towards their body and towards people of the opposite sex.

The social-psychological aspect of this behavior is due to the fact that it is demanded as a reaction for an adolescent need of finding more independence and their sexual and social activities. It has been noticed that such children have a troubled relationship with their parents and it is a coping mechanism in drawing their attention.

Most likely this case emerges from the Nyasha as a coping mechanism against her father’s demands and abuse.

**The passage from the Novel**

As far as passages from the novel are concerned, it is seen that development and clues can be gathered of her eating disorder throughout the text in the novel. The text narrates

"You will eat that food. Your mother and I are not killing ourselves working just for you to waste your time playing with boys and then come back and turn up your nose at what we offer. Sit and eat that food. I am telling you. Eat it!" Babamukuru, Pg. 192

This passage is a threat posed by Nyasha father when she refused to eat when coming late to dinner. In its response, Nyasha goes to the bathroom and forcefully vomits. It is her eating disorder beginning. She uses the coping mechanism of controlling her food consumption in an attempt to take control of herself as her father does not let her to. This basically triggers her eating disorder.

Actually, this whole novel tells the impact of colonialism on the inhabitant affected by the colonial era. Being originally from Rhodesia, Nyasha’s family especially her father Babamukuru is the head of his tribe. He is most successful in his life and being a burden to support his community makes him more of a control freak. In this act of control, the desires to control Nyasha and subjugate her is not well received by Nyasha. She is a student in England and adopted the lifestyle there tends to resist her father's controlling nature. Being two culturally and socially different countries, inhabitants affected by colonial mindset are more inclined towards the colonial country.

Another cause of her eating disorder is because of her more culturally inclined towards the society of England where women tend to become slimmer to be accepted by society. Being the resident of Rhodesia culturally women are inclined to become overweight to appear more attractive to the masses. This is because Rhodesia was a poor country with food shortage issue and the one overweight seems to belong from high social family.

**Symbolization of Nyasha Eating Disorder**

This idea is best shown by Nhamo who did not remember his native language after he gets admission in a British mission school and was ashamed of his culture when he returns home. When Nyasha rejects food that was provided by her father and when ordered to eat, she vomits up all the food which shows her rejection of physical and symbolical power patriarchy of her father which destruct her spirit. The only way Nyasha gets her independence was through using her studies and food control.

An interesting thing to consider is that Nyasha’s Anorexia nervosa when Rhodesia is taken into context is that this eating disorder is very rare when colored women are taken into consideration. Primarily Anorexia nervosa is woman's disease of American and European descent, as in both these cultures, women appearance is based on her slimness. According to Nyasha’s cousin, round hips and being heavier is considered as more delightful because they represent them from well off family. As the Rhodesia culture was dependent on the amount of food there which is in scarce and abundance of food is required to gain weight in the environment of continuous physical labor. Nyasha in opposite to her cousins belongs to the wealthy family branch where food supply is in abundance. She was subjected to English foods, fashion and their way of life. When she returned from England to her home, she was subjected to Shona society which is a male-dominated society. She is in a confused mindset being a subject of both these cultures, always struggle to devise her own way. She is a woman of hybrid nature with hybrid land inhabitant and both these values make her life difficult to navigate and satisfy others expectation.

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Although she was attracted by the image and new form of her identity, her eating disorder is an illustration of her rejection of gender discrimination in Africa. Her father uses the view of Tambu and contrasts it with her views which is more inclined toward traditional African female body perspective using ‘fat' and ‘healthy' words interchangeably. Excess eating is an indication of high-status socio position which indicates that enough food is provided by her father or husband. Nyasha, on the other hand, is in rejection of this male-dominated structure flourishing in Africa. However, her rejection against this patriarchal structure is not allowing her to engender westernization. In sense, African representation is mirrored by her body and its famine association is not fully inhibit western woman role. Nyasha disorder of eating not only is subjected to the gender context specification but also portrays the patriarchal society implication depicted in the Novel.

Therefore due to the influence of patriarchy and difference in modes, mandates of female loss fundamentally either as the individual identity of gender or race. Nyasha resistance in this context to her father's mixed African colonial belief and views on different sexes are the reason that she strips herself of idealized feminist.

**Conclusion**

It has been observed in the novel and clearly depicted that whenever there is a clash between two cultures, one with more freedom and power dominates the other culture. It also shows how colonialism affects the ideology and try to variant its inhabitant with its culture. Nyasha’s disorder of eating symbolizes the colonization effect that has taken place inside her. This happens when the powerful culture took control of the other culture slowly. Control by Babamukuru threatens Nyasha’s individualism. At novels end, her mother claims that her daughter condition is due to the exposure of “Englishness” which suggests that African culture is threatened by the English colonialism which eats it away and threatens to wipe out its existence. She is in a confused mindset being a subject of both these cultures, always struggle to devise her own way. She is a woman of hybrid nature with hybrid land inhabitant and both these values make her life difficult to navigate and satisfy others expectation. It would be right to say that English culture has put the "nervous condition" in her.

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