

NERVOUS CONDITIONS

These are two **key concepts** within the novel:

Patriarchy: *Encyclopedia of Feminism* by Lisa Tuttle, page 242: Patriarchy is the universal political structure or social system which privileges men at the expense of women. It sometimes means male dominance, and sometimes refers to a specific historical and social structure. Literally it means 'rule of the father'.

Gender: *The Encyclopaedia of Feminism* by Lisa Tuttle (Arrow Press, 1986, pgs 123 - 124) defines gender as follows:

“Term for the socially imposed division between the sexes (male and female). Whereas sex refers to the biological, anatomical differences between male and female, gender refers to the emotional and psychological attributes which a given culture expects to coincide with physical maleness or femaleness.

‘Masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are gender terms, and although individuals born male are expected to develop masculine gender-identity as the natural course of events, it is widely recognised that sex and gender do not always coincide. Although a baby’s sex is (usually) obvious at birth, an individual’s sense of self as a sexual being must be acquired.

Out of the awareness of the difference between sex and gender comes one of the most important concepts in feminist theory: that although a human being is born male or female, woman and men and men are created by society rather than nature.

Gender can be used as a term for *sex-role*, and is usually considered to have developed out of the awareness of obvious sexual differences and to have led to the creation of an increasingly rigid definition of masculine and feminine, which results in patriarchy.

Gender may be as inevitable and necessary a part of human identity as sexuality; differences between people need not be hierarchical or reasons for oppression.

Some theorists have argued that women’s oppression may be traced to the universal restrictions of mothering to women. To abolish sexism, therefore, would require that childcare be shared equally between the sexes, to enable male and female infants to develop primary relationships with both same-sex and different-sex caretakers.

How gender is formed, what it means to us, whether and how it can be altered all need to be studied.”

What do you think of these definitions? Can you see gender-roles as they exist in your day to day life? Is anything confusing to you?

How do you think this definition relates to the works you are studying?

Then, go through your copy of *Nervous Conditions* and find three quotes that demonstrate each of these concepts. Please include page references so I can check.

This is a very helpful exercise as you will impress your lecturer during your exam if you know quotes from the novel.

If you are unsure of the definitions and needs help, post here and I will help you.

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Re: Key Concepts

by [K BUCHANAN](#) - 16 Feb 2017 @ 14:56

The concept of gender as a social construct was actually discussed in a module I did last semester called "**Engaging with Society**" (EWS2601). I quite liked the study guide's definition of gender: "*the social and cultural roles and identity assigned to someone who manifests particular biological sexual characteristics*".

The study guide went on to say "*the gender role assigned to an individual may dramatically influence all aspects of his or her identity, from how he or she behaves, to the work that he or she does, to what he or she wears, and to the role that he or she fulfils in the family, depending on the broader societal context.*"

Although I think all of these definitions are valid, I think the gender gap is definitely not as wide as it was 50 years ago. With more women in the workforce today than at any other point in history I think there has been a shift in how we view gender roles. With many women working outside of the home now, many responsibilities that would have traditionally been the woman's, are now shared between men and women, and as a result there is an overlap in gender roles. This is clearly more evident in urban areas than it is in rural areas. I think post-colonialism and globalisation have played a big role in changing the way we view what is "masculine" or "feminine".

I'm afraid I've been so busy with other modules that I have only read a couple of chapters of *Nervous Conditions* so far, but here are a couple of quotes that I've come across so far that demonstrate patriarchy and gender:

* In Chapter Two, Tambu is complaining to her mother about how she will have to drop out of school because there is no money, but her brother will be able to continue with his education. She feels it is unfair that all of the families resources is being spent on her brother, even though she knows that as the eldest male he is the future head of the family. Her mother responds by saying "*This business of womanhood is a heavy burden...When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them*" (page 16). Her response is typical of somebody who has been raised in a patriarchal society in which men dominate and women have a very specific gender role. In this type of society the education of men is far more

important than that of women, whose primary responsibility is to grow vegetables, cook, and look after her children.

* In Chapter One, another great example of patriarchy and gender inequality is illustrated when Tambu is telling the reader about how her brother only helps in the fields if he knows their uncle is coming. If the uncle arrives and nobody is at the homestead, he would drive out to the field where they are tending to the crops. Although her uncle would sometimes help out, "*when Babamukuru was not wearing shorts they would return to the homestead immediately*" (page 7) leaving the women in the family to work in the fields on their own. Tembu says "*We would follow in the tracks of my uncle's car when the sun began to set, herding the cattle back to their kraal as we went...We would travel as briskly as we could so that we would not be late in preparing the evening meal*" (page 8).

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[Re: Key Concepts](#)

by [K BUCHANAN](#) - 16 Feb 2017 @ 14:57

Forgot to add, I was given a very old copy of the book so page references might be different to yours if you have a newer version.

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[Re: Key Concepts](#)

by [R BEHARI](#) - 17 Feb 2017 @ 17:44

Great examples. The book is full of quotations that demonstrate this issue. I hope you manage to get finish it as soon as possible. It is a fantastic book.

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[Re: Key Concepts](#)

by [S NGWENYA](#) - 16 Feb 2017 @ 20:44

Page 13 " The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority or even legitimate" This is how gender roles eroded women's needs in the novel. We see Tambu's education not being seen as a right but as a privilege and everyone do not see the importance of educating a girl child as they all assume she will get married and benefit her husband's family, even the educated Babamukuru thinks page183 "As for you, we think we are providing for you quite well. By the time you have finished your Form Four you will be able to take a course, whatever you choose.....You will be in a position to be married by a decent man and

set up a decent home." that a girl child is born to be cared for until marriage age. No one has ever thought a girl can be educated and choose not to marry. Nhamo also says on page 21 " It's the same everywhere. Because you a girl." Also showing how the males are born into this kind thinking that women have specific roles to play in society like staying home, caring for the family, cooking, washing and going to the fields. We also realise that Nyasha, Lucia and Tambu have different ideas with their lives and rebel against the norm and male dominance/ patriarchy with various levels of success but non-the-less understand that there is a battle to be fought.

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[Re: Key Concepts](#)

by [R BEHARI](#) - 17 Feb 2017 @ 17:44

Great examples. You have a good idea of what "gender" and "patriarchy" mean.

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[Re: Key Concepts](#)

by [C CHIGWESHE](#) - 20 Mar 2017 @ 4:26

I don't have my book to quote the page. The idea of Tambu's bother leaving his luggage and walk home carrying nothing then ask his sisters to go and carry them shows male supremacy too