



# Racial explosion in post war era: In aspect of Doris Lessing's narratives

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**Abstract**— *This paper will run the eye over racism and the way in which it revolves round in Lessing's narratives. It will also share the movements of racial war, which begin from Africa and then spread all over Europe.*

*However, white government in which they prohibited from participating ruled the Africans. It was only the whites that were allowed voting and electing the leaders for Rhodesia. Evidently, racism in Southern Rhodesia had more of a systematic cause as its roots lay in powerful combination of ideology. Doris Lessing had to escape the society based on unequal opportunities thus, in 1949; she left Rhodesia and moved to England. It is important to note that;*

*Although Doris Lessing has lived in England since 1949, she is considered an African author because the twenty-five years she spent growing up on a small farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia had such an impact on her writing.*

(Sizemore 282)

*Doris May Lessing, the victim of post-war racial exploitation, has have her individual opinion about the particular movement of racism in the post-war era.*

*She performed her duty less as a writer and more as an architect. In fact, Lessing offers a harsh comment of the prejudicial attitudes, which maintain inequalities of the racist-oriented society. As a woman writer, she writes about her diverse culture which encourages her to create the literary work for diverse purpose thus she achieve liberating goals. It is evident how racism in Southern Rhodesia has more of a systematic cause as its roots lay in a powerful combination of ideology. Therefore, that it is necessary to define the word 'Racism' literally. Racism is a word that touches human basic sense of right and wrong and arouses strong emotions in them.*

*It is a word, which is applied is only to action by people who hold and use economic and political power to control or oppress another racial group. Different people have the different opinion about racism. This concept includes so many other thoughts along with its main doctrine. Conceptually, Racism is an ideology; a doctrine that calls for supports for the domination or oppression of one race by another.*

**Keywords**— *Racism, liberating goals, economic and political power.*

## RACIAL EXPLOSION IN POST-WAR ERA

Lessing's narrative appeals the whole human-race that it is an Imperfect Sympathies of White man's burden. Lessing spends her childhood in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, so that her writings are the bites of the antipathy of the time of her bringing-up. Her

contemporaries used to call her, "White Southern Rhodesian Female Communist" (WIS 9). She expresses remorse about her prohibition from her own land in the second volume of her autobiography, *Walking in the Shade* in following manner:

There is certain charm about all this, amateurishness: it is because I was white. Had I been black, the South African Special Branch would not have had one second's embarrassment about deporting me. Had I been black, with my views, I would have been on the run, hiding like the National Congress men, or pretending to be a house servant. (WIS 180)

According to Lessing, racism is the movement, which is, expresses by her in her stories and novels respectively one aspect becomes clear that she define the racial issue with both sides of the coin. She points out the black-explosion by the white community at the same time she, highlights the black's avenge from the white through a poetic verse in *African Laughter*:

You kick me like dirt, pull, push and kick me,  
With boot soiled with mud, and call me a filthy wretch,  
When I am dead and buried your deeds will tear your heart.  
Your farms wild and bushy, I have tamed, fenced and ploughed  
The yield I gather you sell, to spend the cash alone.  
When... (S.Jono Tso-Tso- African Laughter 374).

*African Laughter* is the counterattacking fiction by Lessing it is a great blend of comic and seriousness. It is a zigzag combo of delight and profundity. In this profound 'Testament', she tries to embryo shrewd and modern African picture with golden thread. She criticises the new black rich class through this poem prescribed in her *African Laughter*. Ultimately, the wordings and the poem is a revenge-verse from the oppressed class. However, the world is not lacking eloquent people, "the white liberals of the time" (AL 380).

Hence, *African Laughter* is a story about primitive people. She portrays their picture in the prehistoric age of human-race. The wide description of Binga, Zulu, Shona and Tonga tribes is effectively explained by her. She retorts the lives of fishermen who live at the banks of those African rivers. Fishermen are philosophical and humorous, according to Lessing they mock at their poverty and distinctive attitude. The narrative involved in innumerable conversation, about their living, and they feel great and assume that "the authorities really knew their hearts would be less hard." So that they freely talk about their ban, and about their devastating condition even after the war and prescribed changes. They exclaim, "The police there will only talk to us with guns.

Pass-ports are not for the poor people." (African Laughter 384)

In this way, they face so many problems and discrimination, in general communication with their family and relatives. Even their generation did not believe on the stories told to them by their ancestors, about their betterment in the past. According to Lessing for the next generation, these stories of richness and growth are like human existence in paradise. She compares these stories with Biblical quote:

"Once we live in Eden where Nature was so kind we hardly needed clothes and fruit fell from the trees. But then an Angel with a flaming Sword...." (African Laughter 383)

Racial- issues concern by her in almost all her novels, but the issue becomes the main theme, primary concern in her debut *Grass is singing*, and *African Laughter*, the books may consider the 'racial-bible' respectively. She enormously, speaks about her African upbringing. About her race relation in Africa, she acquires a great impression among the writers, publishers and critics.

Lessing is a bright star of exclusively new talent and vitality of extreme learning. Her racial work may be considered as a great masterpiece because she portrays the real picture of the dominated white society in 1930's and 1940's Southern Rhodesia. So that, main theme of this chapter revolving-round her *The Grass is Singing* and *The African Laughter* reported documentary on racism. She highlights upon the degradation of black people in African society. Lessing offers a harsh comment of the prejudicial attitudes, which maintain the iniquities and inequalities of the racist-oriented society. She illustrates through her nameless white characters with regard to their actions and racist attitudes. She illustrates through her nameless white protagonist, who feels remorseful for her treatment of African characters, how white people were fully aware that their oppressive actions were unacceptable, even ridiculous.

### SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED RACIAL THEORY

Race is seen as more of a cultural and social category than a natural, genetic or biological one. Moreover, there is the negative representation of the African characters in Lessing's narratives that highlights another theory of racism which organises sets of attitude about other members of modern society.

The race issues that are portrayed in the work of Doris Lessing can be further carefully examined by the notion of social construction. Lessing ascribes the socio-economic

conditions of the Rhodesian people and arrangements by the political parties as the country controlled under the Chartered-rules until 1923.

Racism in these novels is socially- constructed as people seen as a products of their culture and past, thus they depend upon the prevailing culture at that time. However, the oppression and exploitation of African people are explored by the characters' social manipulations and constraints in the texts of Lessing's novel. The fact that racism is often regarded as very ordinary and a normal issue in society, demonstrating the accepted way of life and representing the common experience of an individual in the society, whether they are of colour or not. In *Grass is Singing*, the author ascribes that the mental and psychological development of Mary depending upon her parents' life-style. At one place the protagonist, remind her mother's mutilated state in these words:

Sometimes her mother worked herself into a passion of resentment, and walked up to the barman, complaining that she could not make ends meet, while her husband squandered his salary in drink. (TGS 33)

Her mother enjoy such scolding about her husband because by doing so she gain the sympathy of all the people in the bar at that time. In this way, she makes money for her family and children. Mary's father was a bad drunker, so Mary began to hate the marital life and poverty, she decided to enjoy the life in its own way and refuse the marital rituals of society but after reaching at the age of thirty, Mary was committed to a farmer Dick and unfortunately suffered from the same disgust like her parents' devastating situation. She remarks her harshness thus:

The women who marry a man like Dick learn sooner or later that there are two things they can do: they can drive themselves mad, tear themselves to pieces in storms of futile anger and rebellion; or they can hold themselves tight and go bitter. Mary, with the memory of her own mother recurring more and more frequently, like an older, sardonic double of herself walking beside her, followed the course her upbringing made inevitable. (Grass is Singing 90)

Consequently, an individual's genetic composition has no influence on the distinctions between races; instead, it is individual in society that consciously creates these differences.

Lessing portrays this situation in her text *The Grass is singing* through her characters Mary Turner and Charlie Slatter, two characters who are not afraid to turn to

violence and abuse in disciplining the farm labourers. In turn, the workers obey all their instructions and adhere to the masters' needs without dispute. The power and authority of race is of significance as human fate dictated and manipulated by person's ancestry and appearance. The characteristics of person's hair, complexion and facial features tried to settle every aspects of the African person's life. People were judged solely on external biological aspects of race, and these determined their standards of living, and ultimately their destiny and future. These physical characteristics were an immense influence as to whether a person was figuratively free or enslaved to the society. Lessing portrays Mary's appearance thus:

She was very happy: that was her perhaps her only positive quality, for there was nothing else distinctive about her, though at twenty five she was at her prettiest. Sheer contentment put bloom on her: she was a thin girl, who moved awkwardly, with a fashionable curtain of light-brown hair, serious blue eyes and pretty clothes. Her friends would have described her as a slim-blond: she modelled herself on the more childish-looking film star. (Grass Is Singing 36)

The word picture of Mary's appearance is beautifully emphasised by the author. Similarly, she ascribed the Moses a black nigger with an African black body in this manner:

He was silent, dogged and patient under her stream of explanations and orders. His eyes he always kept lower, as if afraid to look at her... He was a good worker one of the best she had had. He appeared even taller and broader than he was because of the littleness of house (GS 142).

This effective appearance of Moses disturbed Mary's white mistress integration. She likes to look at his naked body during washing while as a white mistress she did not consider him more than a dog.

Lessing's mind upon the hierarchical relationship between the black African people and the white people can be attributing to that of puppet and puppeteer. In the *Oxford School Dictionary*, a puppet defines as "a kind of doll that can be made to move by working it with strings and wires, whose actions are controlled by someone else" So that it can immediately observe that the role of the blacks are the puppet and the ruling class were the puppeteers. These ruling powers controlled every aspect of their restricted life. In this way Lessing, represent the picture of Zambesia.

### INFERIORITY OF BLACKNESS

However, black and coloured characters when considering their identity have been, similarly conditioned to associate the idea of blackness with inferiority.

The authoritative characters address and communicate with the subjugated black or coloured people in a demeaning and disrespectful way, thus using language as a carrier of the belief that the Africans of designated colour, and worthless and unimportant society.

Lessing's text focuses on the certain degree about the inferior position of black people in society, they enjoying superior status of white community in society. She illustrate the concept in *Grass is singing*, when Samson, a black African character responds Mary's hailing in a respectful manner using terms "missus" and "madam," which suggest Mary's superiority and power. This is evident in the quote: "the old boy kept his eyes on the ground and said "Good Morning", missus" (TGS, 68). It is evident that racism, a social problem, is cognitive notion embedded in the individuals' mind and is social problem that deteriorates the quality of life of the black Africans on a large scale. Thus, the discrimination possessed in the society is not because of an objective but determined by the thought processes of the individual in society.

The racial differences between diverse cultures or groups of characters in the narratives of Lessing uncritically believe that their culture is more civilised and ultimately superior to that of black characters. It is for this reason that the white characters structure the functioning of society, politically and socially, on their group ideology resulting in their opposition to the black characters' best interests. Mary's hatred to the native man and her guilt and humiliated thoughts for the black women and children expressed as thus:

If she dislikes native man, she loathed the women. She hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone. She could not bear to see them sitting there on the grass.....above all she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. 'Their babies hanging on to them like leeches', she said to herself shuddering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child's lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it, she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them

from a violation. And since so many white woman are like her, turning with relief to the bottle, she was in a good company, and she did not think of herself, but rather these black women, as strange; they were alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about. (TGS 95)

Under the influence of cultural discrimination, Mary fails to preserve her individual growth she developed with master narratives and superiority as a white mistress. She observes those native women as "other" in society. She treats them according to the fixed ideas in the society and the pattern of white people. The continued invisibility, mistreatment and exploitation of the Africans of colour results in devastating effects to the individual incurring emotional and psychological trauma. Furthermore, the physical abuse endured by the Africans of colour had a harmful and injurious impact yet this physical mistreatment was over-shadowed by the resultant mental destruction of the individual's psyche. Lessing interprets the particular issue in her debut as once Dick fell ill and the farm's responsibility got over Mary, she treated the workers as cruelly and badly as she add and represented the mimicry of the society.

The intimidating and brutal attitude of "the Other" is then incorporated into each facets of the black's life, as it is through the disguise of the white person that offers the black person a feeling of importance and worth. Lessing explain the fact in her novel *The Grass is singing*, she exposes that the 'Turners' failure at farming and their poverty and reclusiveness have made them disliked in the district. The Turners' primitive condition of life is irritating for other white settlers because they do not like the natives to see they live in the same manner as the whites, which would destroy that *spirit de corps* "Which is the first rule of South African society" (TGS 11).

With this in mind, it is possible to understand the troubled characters of the selected Lessing's texts. Her characters are the spokesperson of the story about the authorial work and the powerless victim of cruel African society. Mary is the traumatic character she was psychologically weak and unable to come out from such traumatic conditions since childhood

The traumatic Mary suffers from the masculine hatred as well as racial disliking. In other dreams, she sees herself in the playing postures with her brother and sister when her father holds her "in his laps with small hairy hands, to cover up her eyes" and she can smell the sickly odour of beer and the "unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him" (TGS 63). Under the disintegration, Mary confuses Moses with her father, with

mixed feeling of horror and desire, "her father who was threatening her, they advanced together, one person." (TGS 165) her dreams are the showcase of the terrifying power of her upbringing. These psychologically damaged characters are thus portrayed as being mad or irrational, illustrating their inability to deal with the trauma endured. In *The Grass is Singing*, Mary Turner, a white racist female character displays extreme hatred towards black African characters and treats them like worthless animals. She manipulates situations giving her reason to physically inflict harm to them, further intensifying her hatred for them. Mary's obsession with the black characters eventually leads to her own destruction as she becomes psychotic and consumed in her own inner world of fear and revolution. It is her tremendous hatred for the black people that results in her insanity, and ultimately her death.

Lessing's fictional character, Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing*, also exemplifies a character who imitates the subjugated behaviour of women in society at that time. Even though Mary is a white woman, who is considered to have more power than the black African women do, she is also conditioned to carry out certain roles and responsibilities as a married woman living in a society full of unequal opportunities.

The members within those specific environments socially construct Lessing's world as racism. In so far the injustice and struggle of Rhodesian and Botswana society are mirrored in the fictional lives and communities created by Lessing. Racial oppression, hatred, prejudice, detestation, intolerance, cruelty, subjugation and brutality are a few terms that reflect the insensitive and cruel characteristics of these racially divided societies. The protagonist Mary Turner's extreme hatred for the black African characters can be defined as psychological as she has been infused with racist notion of white supremacy has been instilled in her psyche by the other white racist members of society.

Ironically, later in the novel there is a shift in the power relations between Mary and Moses. Instead of Mary holding all the power, as in the beginning of the novel she has now placed Moses in a powerful position as she has come to rely on him. This is evident when Moses leaves the house to return to his sleeping quarters and Mary commands him to stay with her. He, in a sense, is able to console and calm her, which contradicts her racist feelings towards him at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, it is also ironic that Moses is a black character that is now giving instructions to a white character. This is evident when Moses orders Mary to drink water. "Drink, he said simply, as if he were speaking to one of his own women; and she drank" (TGS 186). Lessing represent

Moses' manner as typical with Mary as he would speak to the submissive women in his culture. The tone he uses is also important, as it is similar to the commanding tone used by the white characters.

All white, black and coloured characters are conditioned to behave in a certain manner in society; if they do not confirm to this conditioning, they are shunned for their alternate beliefs. Therefore, Mary, like other members of society, is taught to view the differences between black and white characters as fundamental to Rhodesian society. Mary increases the intensity of her hatred for the black characters by continually reaffirming in her mind their inferiority and danger to the white characters. The psychological state of Mary is evident in the quote: "She was afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be... that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her" (TGS 70).

As a result, Mary reaffirms her white authority in the presence of the black characters working in her house or as labourers in Dick's farm by continually giving orders and carefully examining their behaviour and work. "The sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence; it was a good feeling, keeping them under her will, making them do as she wanted" (TGS138).

The fact that Mary Turner and other white character distanced themselves from the black characters and discounted their tradition and culture leads to the characters' creation of racial stereotypes in the text. This is apparent throughout the story where the black characters are continually likened to animals. For instance, whites arriving from Europe are shocked by the ill-treatment of the blacks: "They were revolted a hundred times a day by the casual way they were spoken of, as if they were so many cattle..." (TGS 20). In another instance, the black characters are also regarded as tantamount dogs. "A white person may look at a native, who is no better than dog" (TGS176).

### **Institutional Racism**

Lessing also put the nuances upon the Institutional Racism, Lessing incorporates the idea of black labour supporting white productivity and profit in the book, *The Grass is Singing*; "They, the geese that laid the golden eggs, were still in that state where they did not know there were other ways of living besides producing gold for other people" (TGS 15).

In the 50's society, the black characters experienced with so many disintegrated issues on colour-bases. They deprived from education as it is believed that it will empowered them and their community so that people disgust them of being of a darker skin colour. In

spite of highlighting the issue of literacy, Lessing portrayed the group of black people that are thieves and scheme to obtain wealth by stealing from whites. This notion is observed in the novel's opening paragraph in which Mary's murderer is assumed a thief. Moses, the confessed murderer, is immediately labelled a thief, regardless of what the actual motive of the murder might be. He is conformed to the stereotype that black characters are dishonest and dangerous to the whites in society.

Members of the society of Lessing are inspired from the theory according that members of society conduct themselves in a manner that is determined by the ideological state appliances. The diversity in racial group of Rhodesia interrogates in Lessing's narratives in manner of Althusser's theory of over determination. In the character's world, most social institution elevates the status of the white character characters while diminishing the position of the black character.

### **Stereotype Racial-Conflicts**

Stereotyping, violence, intense mental and physical abuse, are but a few factors that are frequently endured by the black characters in *The Grass is singing*. Lessing points out the disintegration individually in the black character, Moses, as he has been the black character most affected by physical violence and emotional abuses. The primary traumatic incident experienced by him is the severe whipping by Mary, occurring merely because he needed a rest and a drink of water while performing strenuous work in the field.

However, later in the novel, Dick selects Moses to work as a servant in his and Mary's household where he further experiences severe physical and emotional abuse. This abuse is portrayed in the fact that he is expected to work as if he does not have any feelings or limitations. "As always, he behaved as if he were an abstraction, not really there, machine without a soul" (TGS188). Hence, personal feeling does not influence Moses as a black character. Mary as a person does not view him with feelings. She portrayed him as being more machine-like than human.

This disorder is characterised by the fact that a victim of trauma is unable to effectively deal with the trauma experienced. Moses' inability to objectify the trauma that has damaged his psyche displayed in the fact that he resorts to murdering Mary Turner. The murder of Mary allows Moses to release his anger and bitterness towards her, the root and cause of his trauma.

"And this was his final moment of triumph, a moment so perfect and complete that it took the urgency from thoughts of escape, leaving him indifferent" (TGS 255).

Furthermore, Lessing's placement of stereotype on the black characters changes from that of criminal in *The Grass is Singing* to the black characters being portrayed as savage in the short story. Moreover, Lessing exposes that many white characters despised it when the black characters used English. Mary illustrates this point when she says "He spoke in English, which as a rule she would have flamed into temper over; she thought it respectable. However, she answered in English, 'Yes' (TGS 189).

In this way, Lessing reinforce the situation, it is for this reason that there is conflict between the white male and female characters based on competition, between the two groups, and their differing beliefs pertaining to patriarchy and unfair treatment of the female character in *The Grass is Singing*. There are so many points where Mary is not oppressed because of her skin colour, she criticized unfairly because of her class. Mary and Dick Turner are not wealthy people; as a result, Mary is given an inferior status by the other white characters as she is considered a poor white.

What, indeed! Living the way they did! That little box of a house-it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why, some natives (though not many thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way. Then it was that someone used the phrase poor white. (TGS 11)

Mary in the *Grass is Singing* as the expected stereotypical behaviour of white women portrayed in Mary's society leads her into a loveless, unwanted marriage. Mary's reflection on her life before marriage is a life free of worries and filled with extreme happiness, however, it is after her marriage to Dick that she experiences a complete personality change, leading to her dysfunction as a character. Her carefree existence as an unmarried woman in African society is reinforced in her statement: "South Africa is a wonderful place for the unmarried white woman" (TGS 44).

Moreover, Lessing points out the black female characters, and their role in Rhodesian society. Lessing completely excludes black female characters from this story. Thus, the placement of the black female characters at the bottom level of the social hierarchy in southern African society is mirrored in the text, as Lessing does not even mention a female black character. Their absence and silence indicates their total irrelevance in a society.

Accordingly, racism in literature examine through its impact not only on the victims of racial oppression, but also comments on its effect on the operator of racism. Therefore, that racism is just the study of the

oppressed victim's experiences. Lessing applied this theory in her narratives very carefully in *The Grass is Singing* the doer themselves endured emotional and psychological trauma, and some characters are more seriously affected than others as their racist actions actually lead to their destruction in the text.

### CONCLUSION

Thus, Lessing's fictional characters' understanding of the African world and their knowledge of society is understood in terms of racial categories where every character's identity is determined by these reluctant societal issues.

Probably the black or coloured person suffered a difficult life with many hardship plainly because of their darken skin colour. The fact that a person is of a different skin colour also subjected to various stereotypes created by the xenophobic characters in the text. The first common stereotypes are that they are savage and are a danger to society; secondly, the black person is also placed on the fundamental level where they are considered to be animal-like. Another misfortune experienced by the black person is that these oppressed people is denied an education as, if educated, it is believed that if they will gain power and create a disturbance in the ordered society.

Throughout, Lessing's *The Grass is singing*, the black literary characters are portrayed as a group of people whom the white characters believe are continually straitening to steal their belongings. Mainly, the black characters are not white; thus, they are automatically deemed inferior, as a person had to have a white skin in order to be significant in the society Lessing easily supports this social, political and cultural distinction in her *The Grass is singing*. The white characters have many economic, political and social opportunities available for them to utilise in order to better themselves in the society. The black characters, on the other hand, have no such opportunities as the white characters placed restrictions on them in all spheres of their lives in order to retain their own social power and wealth in the fictional societies.

According to the works of Lessing, one may draw the conclusion that all individuals no matter what skin colour were negatively affected by the era of racial oppression. The works also emphasis the attitudes of the fictional characters based on the hostile attitude of the actual individuals in the Southern African society. Furthermore, one can actually observe the extent to which society affected writers and influenced the creation of their texts connected with the Lessing. Therefore, the texts and the theories discussed prove significant today.

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