

Male Domination of Feminine Identity in a Patriarchal Culture Through Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*

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Abstract :

Lessing's pioneering novel, *The Grass Is Singing* 1950, is tremendously significant in the history of feminism. It reflects a robust psychological study about a frustrated woman and her marital relationship with Dick Turner. The problem that this research will explore and possibly solve is that Lessing's feminine identities do not get the life they deserve, even though they have a lot of good traits and potential. The study examines how Lessing portrays and interprets the oppression of female protagonists in the capitalist patriarchy. The study is qualitative. Textual analysis is the instrument that is used to collect data for this study, while content analysis is the instrument that is used to analyze the data. The study found that even if a woman is unable to overthrow the oppressive system alone, she encourages all women to change and break free from capitalist and patriarchal false consciousness. It concluded the restrictive dynamics that occur in families when men dominate women through marriage and partnership. The study recommends future research to be conducted on other Lessing's' novels from a socialist feminist perspective, which will undoubtedly lead to fresh interpretations of these classics, which primarily explore women's lives.

Keywords: Male Domination, Feminism, Capitalist, Patriarchal, Oppression,

هيمنة الذكور على الهوية الأنثوية في الثقافة الأبوية من خلال رواية دوريس ليسينغ "العشب يغني

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ملخص

رواية دوريس ليسينغ الرائدة، العشب يغني التي نشرت في عام 1950، لها أهمية كبيرة في تاريخ الحركة النسوية. تعكس هذه الرواية دراسة نفسية قوية حول المرأة المحبطة وعلاقتها الزوجية مع ديك تيرنر. مشكلة هذا البحث هي ان هويات ليسينغ النسوية لم تحصل على الحياة التي تستحقها، على الرغم من انها تمتلك العديد من الصفات الجيدة والامكانيات. هذه الدراسة تتفحص كيفية تصوير الكاتبة لقمع بطلة الرواية النسوية في النظام الابوي. الدراسة نوعية. التحليل النصي استخدم كأداة لجمع البيانات لهذه الدراسة. بينما تم استخدام تحليل المحتوى كأداة لتحليل البيانات. الدراسة وجدت انه حتى اذا كانت المرأة غير قادرة على الاطاحة بالنظام القمعي بمفردها، فانها تشجع جميع النساء على التحرر والتغيير من الوعي الزائف الرأسمالي

والأبوي. استنتجت الدراسة ان الديناميات القيودية تحدث في العائلات عندما يسيطر الرجال على النساء من خلال الزواج والشراكة. اوصت الدراسة بأجراء بحوث مستقبلية على روايات اخرى ل ليسنغ من منظور نسوي اشتراكي مما سيؤدي بالتأكيد الى تفسيرات جديدة لهذه الكلاسيكيات التي ستكتشف بشكل اساسي في حياة النساء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهيمنة الذكورية، النسوية، الرأسمالية، الأبوية، القمع

Introduction:

Doris Lessing (1919-2013), a renowned novelist, explores significant socioeconomic concerns stemming from the male domination of women in a patriarchal culture. She has a deep comprehension of the specific issues faced by women, which provides proof of their broad importance and significance (Gelbal, 2014). Lessing illuminates the many sociocultural systems and hierarchies that women in traditional power positions encounter, including marriage and intimacy problems, career-focused wife challenges, and marriage loneliness (Ross, 2021). Her works examine how the patriarchal system affects family dynamics, cultural norms, economic disparities, political power dynamics, psychological well-being, racial tensions, and women's sexual harassment. She is considered the world's most audacious female author, an outspoken dissenter, and a staunch feminist.

Male dominance stems from the distinction between biological sex and societal gender roles. Sex is the biological categorization of individuals into male and female, while gender refers to the corresponding and socially unequal categorization into femininity and masculinity. Socialist feminism posits that the prevailing ideology is constructed by a privileged group of males from higher social strata, resulting in male supremacy over women. Socialist feminism posits that sex is an act of physical subjugation perpetrated by men. Feminism claims that a male-dominated society marginalizes women which the person is confined, secluded, and pushed too far in society (Gilarek, 2012). Women suffer social, spiritual, and political degradation due to male dominance which have traditionally been submissive to men. In a male-dominated society, women are marginalized and excluded shamefully even now (Pugliese, 2021)

Doris Lessing's writing often follows marginalized women fighting alienation and subjugation to find their place in a hostile society (Hossain, 2018). The lives of marginalized women are characterized by a core presence of oppression, despair, and sadness. These themes are the primary subjects that Lessing writes about. Even though Lessing's words might be interpreted in a number of different ways, they tend to make people feel homesick for their native land. In both art and culture, she examines notions that have been shattered. Her primary concern is portraying female characters, and she is of the opinion that the way in which society treats



women is the only thing that truly matters. She used psychoanalysis to understand female characters' psychological development and self-formation through dream analysis (Moore, 2014).

The Grass Is Singing is a narrative that explores the subjugation of a woman who was overcome and hindered by harassment based on race, gender, and other forms of societal prejudice. The author derives the novel's title from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which combines ancient stories with depictions of modern civilization. Mary Turner, who experiences marginalization, is the narrative's central character. She is discontented with racial harassment, decay, and other forms of societal prejudice. She experienced profound psychological isolation throughout her life, which persisted until her death. Mary Turner, the recipient of such subjugation, stands apart from the other characters in Lessing's work, as she has never been afforded any autonomy. Following her marriage, she experienced a sense of laxity and meaninglessness due to the mismatch between her and her partner. She felt compelled by societal pressure to get into a loveless marriage, which she had observed in her parents' relationship.

The problem that this research will explore and possibly solve is that Lessing's feminine identities do not get the life they deserve, even though they have a lot of good traits and potential (Krasniqi, 2013). Their abilities are natural but always limited because of how society treats them and what it forces them to do. The issue is that Lessing's female figures live in a modern time that says everyone is equal, but they still have the same problems women did in the past (Ahmed, 2013). The study's objective is to examine how Lessing portrays and interprets the oppression of female protagonists in the capitalist patriarchy.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it delves into important issues concerning women's lives that have not received adequate attention. This study offers a new interpretation of Lessing's selected work via the lens of socialist feminism. It's important because it looks at female characters and how they are abused, and it also tries to give a new meaning of the New Woman, a New Feminine Character based on socialist feminism and Lessing's writing. This will help modern readers understand the New Woman of today differently. The important thing about this study is that it found a new missionary job that Lessing thinks women seeking freedom and independence need to do. Accordingly, in her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), Lessing focuses on the most frequent, most private, and most important facets of women's oppression. Another thing is that this novel covers more than fifty years of Lessing's work, so the study will help us understand how



she felt about women being abused and dominated in capitalist, male-dominated societies.

Synopsis of the novel

The Grass Is Singing is a potent literary work authored by Doris Lessing, exploring the intricate interplay of race, authority, and selfhood in colonial Africa. The narrative is set in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the 1940s, focusing on the experiences of Mary Turner, a Caucasian woman, and Moses, her African servant. Mary, a dissatisfied and isolated woman, enters into matrimony with Dick Turner, an aspiring farmer aiming for prosperity in the challenging African terrain. Nevertheless, their marital relationship declines as Mary faces difficulties in adjusting to the suffocating temperature, seclusion, and societal demands placed upon a colonial spouse. Moses, a taciturn and perceptive individual, assumes the role of the Turners' servant, however, his mere existence upsets the delicate equilibrium of authority on the farm. Despite Moses' unwavering dedication and diligent efforts, he is met with contempt and exposed to racial prejudice and discrimination by the Turners and their Caucasian counterparts. A devastating incident occurs amid underlying tensions, causing profound devastation to everyone involved. Upon the discovery of Mary's murder, Moses becomes the primary suspect, leading to the unraveling of the delicate illusion of racial unity, exposing the entrenched biases and inequities that pervade colonial life. *The Grass Is Singing* delves into oppression, identity, and the detrimental consequences of racism through its vivid prose and well-developed characters. Lessing's adept narrative skill reveals the intricacies of interpersonal connections and the detrimental influence of cultural conventions. This prompts readers to contemplate the genuine essence of fairness and salvation in a society riddled with disparity.

Literature Review

The literature review on socialist feminism encompasses books and articles that elucidate the perspectives of renowned feminist and socialist feminist critics and thinkers. *The grass Is singing* was chosen based on two factors: the degree to which this text aid in comprehending the thematic diversity of Lessing's writing career and the degree to which it contribute to showcasing the originality of this research, which adopts a distinctively socialist feminist perspective towards Lessing's chosen novels. The presented text is anticipated to provide insights into the characteristics of capitalism, patriarchy, marginalization, consciousness-raising, public and private life, femininity, sexuality, motherhood, and other factors contributing to a comprehensive comprehension of socialist feminism as an approach that esteems emancipatory endeavors.

Multiple studies have examined Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*, each from a different perspective. This study examines the novel from a “social feminism” perspective. The protagonist of *The Grass Is Singing* comes from a poor white South African family with an alcoholic father and a hopeless complainer mother. Two of the three youngsters die of dysentery. Mary is from a middle-class white colonizing household with many problems. Mary is happy living alone in the neighborhood throughout the story. In a study by Mohanty (2013) analyzes the influence of the capitalist patriarchal system on women's identity and actions. This study states to increase awareness of the necessity for change by analyzing the socioeconomic challenges and subjugation experienced by women under patriarchal hegemony. This process of increasing awareness results in the acknowledgment of common issues and the potential for devising and executing remedies (Makama, 2013).

When studying women's status and lives, addressing the underlying causes and methods of women's marginalization and subjection is crucial. As a matter of course, it is through the awareness of the whys and how's that theorists, activists, and women in general can plan and be ready to fight back; Otherwise, forces cannot be coordinated and attacks will go awry, leaving the opponent unharmed or scarcely impacted. In a study by Lišková (2016) describes women as ‘fundamental to the human condition’ yet peripheral in ‘their economic, social and political roles’. She advocates a marriage of socialism and feminism. She divides women's subjugation into four categories: production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization, Stating that the primary cause of women's unfavorable status is not their physical inferiority, but rather their social weakness in society (Fine, 2018). Although she is gloomy about the proportion of production that women have in the present day, she maintains that improvements in industry even though they have paved the path for the greater participation of women.

In comparison, they are providing the reproductive role of women as an additional argument for their absence from the domain of production during this discussion. Sexuality, wherein women are regarded as objects owned by men, is another facet of women's existence that contributes to their oppression and lower status (Canan, 2019). The socialization of children is an extra aspect of the subjugation of women. Asserts that achieving women's emancipation is contingent upon the transformation and deconstruction of all four systems of oppression (Arat, 2015).

The authors note that the objective of socialist feminist ideology is to provide a clear understanding of reality, referred to as a new consciousness, in order to enhance women's capacity to assert themselves and protect their positions. However, it does not detail how this empowerment might be achieved. Heidi



Hartman (2005) advocates eradicating the hierarchical structure of gender-based division of labor to achieve gender equality and women's liberation. She goes so far as to say that men should be made to give up their favorite jobs to women because it is in their nature not to be subservient to women, even if they are from the same class. In order to achieve emancipation, women must address and transform societal structures on a broad scale, as well as challenge the deeply rooted behaviors and customs of males (Makama, 2013). However, the methods by which these possibilities can be achieved and the specific techniques that need be employed to reform institutions or alter these deeply rooted behaviors are neither provided nor suggested.

In order to achieve equality and freedom for women, Heidi Hartman (1976) advocates for eliminating the hierarchical character of the division of labor between the sexes. She believes this would be the best way to create a more equitable society. For Hartman, women's emancipation requires fighting both patriarchy and capitalism. Ehrenreich (1976) introduces socialist feminism as a favorable strategy to fight back against both patriarchy and capitalism. Ehrenreich proposes that women can achieve liberation by developing a collective consciousness that challenges the longstanding misrepresentation of women as passive, uncritical, and dependent. However, she does not address men's involvement in this process, nor does she clarify how the formation of a collective consciousness alone can empower women and dismantle the patriarchal power structure.

Methodology

Research design

To be more specific, the research is qualitative. An exponential method will be utilized to investigate the chosen novel in the context of social feminism. Specific topics like patriarchy, marginalization, oppression, and capitalist ideology, as defined and utilized by socialist feminists, will be examined and analyzed through a close reading process. Various themes related to pregnancy, motherhood, childbirth, housework, sexuality, violence, and marital problems in the characters' lives will be analyzed through the lens of socialist feminism.

Data Source

The data used in this study is from Doris Lessing's most exceptional and thought-provoking work, *The Grass is Singing*. The text mentioned above was released in 1950 and garnered substantial financial success. The author received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007. The study utilized many secondary data sources,



including publications, websites, and other credible references. The primary and secondary data sources have been examined to make inferences and draw conclusions. For this particular study, non-numerical data is extracted from the contents, and a comprehensive grasp of the contents is acquired through thorough reading.

Data Collection

The gathering of information is considered to be the first step in the process of conducting any research. As Creswell (2016) described, data collection is a methodical process used to gather and measure information from different sources to address specific questions. Textual analysis is the instrument that is used to collect data for this study, while content analysis is the instrument that is used to analyze the data. The qualitative data collected from the text have been assessed and analyzed using logical description. The source has been investigated using relevant theoretical frameworks within the context. By applying the perspective of socialist feminism, which examines a patriarchal capitalist society, we can uncover the political nature of the characters' disparities, oppression, and pain that may initially appear personal. This will help us recognize the similarities among Lessing's female identities in their subjugation and suppression inside the hierarchical power structure of a society ruled and ideologically shaped by men.

Analysis and Findings

Socialist feminism primarily examines how male domination, oppression, and patriarchy intersect to oppress and subjugate women. The applied strategy involves assuming a fabricated persona through which women are assigned and allocated to tasks dictated by these three prevailing beliefs. Before socialist feminists to bring about change in society, it is essential first to clarify the nature of the oppression and inequality they seek to address. Examining Lessing's work via a socialist feminist lens reveals their significance in two distinct ways. Initially, the author illustrates multiple aspects of oppression and delineate the methods through which women experience oppression, suppression, and domination. Furthermore, Lessing's novel resolves the issues she discusses and emphasizes. By placing new women in restrictive environments such as the family or society, Lessing establishes a setting that allows us to see and analyze the transformation of her characters as they acquire a new identity that is both subversive and purposeful.

Lessing's novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), reveals the anguish and challenges that marriage and family may inflict upon women's life. The novel depicts the female heroine's first-hand encounter with economic oppression, as described by socialist feminists, which includes underpaid or unpaid household work and a



gender-based division of labor. Additionally, the protagonist faces sexual oppression stemming from her sexuality and biological characteristics. Lessing's novel explores themes of economic injustice, patriarchal tyranny, male domination, and the tragic consequences a courageous female character faces. Ultimately, her pursuit of freedom leads to her untimely demise at the hands of a black native servant. Therefore, Mary must resist the combined societal and familial influences exerted upon her.

When a family inherits both capitalist and patriarchal ideals, women are typically viewed as laborers who can offer unpaid or poorly compensated work and can be taken advantage of by men. In order to illustrate the validity of this premise, Lessing allows us to contrast Mary's chaste existence with her life after getting married. This enables us to observe the alterations that take place in Mary's life upon her marriage to Dick. The novel illustrates that marriage leads to the downfall of Mary, a highly talented and resilient young woman who embodies the ideals of the New Woman movement. Mary's troubles as a married woman stem from the constraints and subjugation imposed by an organization that seeks to reshape her sense of self. Within the confines of her familial and marital relationships, Mary encounters situations that, despite her admirable traits, she is incapable of managing. The woman's misery can be attributed to several factors: a patriarchal family structure that isolates her in dealing with unbearable heat and hostile locals, the loss of financial autonomy, and society's misguided belief that a woman's identity is determined by her relationship to males.

Male domination is apparent, Mary's subjugation by her spouse commences with their matrimony and the choice to reside on Dick's agricultural land in the veld. Upon marrying Dick, Mary is compelled to abandon her urban residence and occupation in order to accompany Dick and reside on his destitute agricultural estate. Upon entering such a lifestyle, she must adhere to the unspoken yet firmly established norm that wives must adapt to their husbands' way of living. Consequently, Mary is forced to endure the intolerable heat, worsened by the presence of a corrugated tin roof, as well as the native houseboys she despises. Tony Marston, the recently hired farm assistant, remarks that the heat in this location is sufficient to cause insanity p.28. The heat outside is so intense that even birds are overwhelmed by the increasing temperature, even as early as seven in the morning. Mary is astonished by the unprecedented level of heat. She is so inept that she should wear a hat even indoors. She is so dreadful that she cautions Dick against raising pigs, expressing concern that the pigs may suffer from the heat. Unfortunately, her fears come true as the pigs perish due to the excessive heat p.89.



However, how is heat related to the idea of patriarchy in the novel? When Mary asked about installing a ceiling in the house, Dick delays the decision, suggesting it may be done next year if they are successful p.63. However, during an argument, Dick takes his servant's side and declares that he has no intention of installing a ceiling in the house, stating, "And as for ceilings, you can forget about them." I have been in this dwelling for six years, and it does not cause discomfort (p.79). You can optimize the situation to its fullest potential. In this instance, he asserts his authority as the ultimate decision-maker, leaving no opportunity for Mary to express her opinions or participate in the decision-making process. Constrained by the constraints of her patriarchal family life, Mary is compelled to endure and suffer. Dick displays apathy and a lack of knowledge about a problem that has a straightforward remedy.

When examining Mary's celibacy lifestyle, we observe no disagreement with the black servants who work for her. Two intricate factors contribute to Mary's issue with the locals. First, Mary can only vent her anger and displeasure with the heat and loneliness on them, not Dick, a patriarchal superior. Second, like Dick, most of them lie to Mary and leave tasks unfinished. Mary's wrath and disputes with houseboys mask her hatred for Dick. According to Louw (2010), "the more threatened and powerless she feels in the male-dominated world of the farm, the more strenuously she enforces her authority in the domestic space." Strangely, leaving this microcosm does not help Mary. Even her macrocosm is patriarchal and oppressive. When Mary escapes to town, she asks for a job she had before marriage, but her supervisor refuses. He lies to her that the position is taken and denies her a new start. Mary cannot reside at the Club, where she lived before marrying Dick, because the lady principal says she is married and cannot live there anymore. This patriarchal behavior is not confined to whites. Even serving natives apply patriarchal ideas to women, black or white. Black people refuse to work under Mary after she takes over the farm. Globally, gender segregation means women have no place in white or black society. According to Budgeon (2014), "men resist allowing women and men to work together as equals because doing so undermines differentiation and hence male dominance" (65).

Ironically, the native houseboy decides Mary's fate. Mary's romantic bond with Moses assumes she belongs to him and should obey her. After learning the Turners are leaving the land, he intends to kill Mary, a traitor. Therefore, following his tribal patriarchal principles, he executes the betrayer and bravely awaits his punishment. Along with Moses, Slatter and Dick contribute to Mary's death. Slatter organizes a six-month getaway for the Turners, fearing a Black-White romance epidemic and seeking control of Dick's land, prompting Moses to intervene. Dick's oppression destroys Mary. Thus, *The Grass Is Singing* stages collective, social, and

political personal experiences. Mary experiences post-marriage economic reliance, domestic labor, house confinement, unpleasant situations, and impetuous husbands, among other personal issues. Discontent with the status quo, which drives Mary to madness, may also be experienced by other female characters. In this novel, female characters share similarities and differ in lifestyles and destinies due to their husbands' statuses. Women's status in life is determined by their relationships with men, a common theme among all female characters.

In *The Grass Is Singing*, a New Woman faces social and political tyranny. It demonstrates how Mary, a typical New Woman, is defined by her relationship to a man who oppresses and exploits her despite her strengths. She says family can trap a heroine in a web of restrictive social interactions, driving her up the wall. Lessing considers patriarchy to be not racial or class-based. It invariably affects women. She examines the consciousness that links women to instinct, emotions, and maternity and men to technical skill and reasoning. Her work encourages all women to put their sorrows and fears in a social context to recognize that what they think is personal is political. It encourages women to find commonalities in their daily lives to change and break free from capitalist and patriarchal false consciousness.

The Grass Is Singing serves as an entreaty for individuals, particularly women, to closely examine both Dick and Mary and discern the various virtues and attributes that are lacking in Dick. Despite appearing alone, despondent, fatigued, and somewhat mentally unstable towards the book's conclusion, Mary remains aware and perceptive of her surroundings. Mary is very different from her pre-marriage self-seconds before Moses kills her. Although she is unable to overthrow the oppressive system alone, she recognizes her transgression of the oppressor's red line, breaking taboos and gaining a new identity that allows her to seek freedom, even if it means her death. Mary dies without weakness or failure. She fearlessly faces her murderer because she won't accept the oppression. She recognizes her role in setting the stage for women's empowerment.

Conclusion

The novel *The Grass Is Singing* is chosen for this research and analyzed from a socialist feminist perspective. It reveals that the protagonist of the novel undergoes experiences of marginalization, oppression, and dominance in cultures where patriarchy and capitalism shape identities and lives. Although Lessing has consistently rejected being categorized as a feminist, her books demonstrate her ongoing preoccupations with the subjugation and control of women. This study



utilizes socialist feminism as a robust and meticulous critical theory to reveal instances of oppression and domination that contribute to women's subordinate status and trigger their feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment. The findings of this study demonstrate that within the society depicted in the novel, the family serves as a significant source of oppression. Specifically, women experience several forms of oppression, including economic and sexual oppression, domestic labor and housewifery, as well as the responsibilities of reproduction and socialization of children. She strongly condemns the repressive dynamics that arise inside families when women are subjected to men's control and dominance through marriage and partnership.

Regarding the protagonist of this work, this research affirms that when they are placed in a family, they forfeit their self-governance and self-reliance, and are compelled to obey the male characters who are consistently inferior to women intellectually and in terms of their abilities. Mary weds Dick, who is significantly less capable than her, and it is this lack of ability, combined with his repressive behavior, that ultimately leads to Mary's demise and downfall. Women are heavily burdened by economic inequality and exploitation in both the home and society. Mary Turner forfeits her financial autonomy and becomes dependent on the meager income of Dick, who is unwilling and incapable of supporting a family. Paradoxically, Mary is compelled to exhaust her whole money on essential household items and is obliged to work in Dick's unprofitable store.

Regarding women's domestic labor, female characters, when entering family life, are assigned the sole responsibility for all domestic labor and home tasks. Mary performs household chores such as cleaning, washing, and painting the walls while instructing the houseboys on various tasks. In addition, she attends to Dick's medical needs when he is unwell and manages the store in his absence when he tends to the farm. The research findings demonstrate that sexuality plays a crucial role in oppressing the female characters in Lessing's works. Dick is attracted to Mary because he is looking for a lady to fulfill his sexual desires and to bear children for him. In addition, Moses regards Mary as a source of pleasure to fulfill his desires.

The study recommends future research to be conducted on other Lessing's' novels from a socialist feminist perspective, which will undoubtedly lead to fresh interpretations of these classics, which primarily explore women's lives. These endeavors will demonstrate that Lessing is a missionary writer who exposes instances of oppression and exploitation to educate and bring about change. This future research will also contribute to the deems change-makers and trustworthy



leaders to guide women towards complete freedom from restrictive relationships in patriarchal capitalist cultures.

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