

Oppressor and the Oppressed: A Postcolonial Reading of Female Marginalization in the Select Novels of Doris Lessing

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ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing is one of the revolutionary novelists of modern English fiction. Her writings enlarge the boundaries of fiction, experiment with different genres, and discover the world of Africa and Europe. Lessing's writing is usually a traumatic narrative of the marginalized women, who fight constantly against estrangement and subordination to seek their legitimate place in a hostile culture. The deep-rooted commonness of oppression and suffering is fundamental in the lives of her female characters. The alienation and identity crises are global problems; she has taken these problems and issues as the primary themes. In an alienated western society, she discusses the problems faced by immigrants. Isolation is often used in modern literature to express the sense of aloofness of an individual towards society and nature.

KEYWORDS: Traumatic Narrative, Marginalized women, Subordination, Oppression.

INTRODUCTION

We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance by any political leader or by any government. ¹ (Moon-2009)

Marginalization is a social demonstration of side-lining an individual or a group of people and regarding them as they belong to some inferior status. It is a process of segregation. Marginalization is an evolving concept in literature, in the contemporary world, the notion of marginalization is new. It is an approach to study the literature, lending identity, and offering emphasis to the voice of negligible individuals in the society. The term marginalization has wide connotations and is multi-layered. It is about the status that one can enjoy a higher rank somewhere in the society and a similar individual can

face a situation where a person is being treated like somebody from the privileged segment of the society.

Feminism also contends that a woman is marginalized because of the male-centric structure of society. It happens when an individual is cornered, separated, and driven to the wall in society. It is an orderly procedure, so to state; a sort of conspiracy woven like a web with the essential features of domination and subordination compelling the woman into compliance. The feministic theories advocate equal opportunity politically, socially, and economically. Considerably after nuisance these equivalent rights alone, numerous writers have come to understand that these can't free women from sexual and social subjection.

To be marginalized... is to be distanced from power and resources that enable self-determination in economic, political, and social setting... It is an inherent characteristic of those in the margin that they have poor access to economical and other resources education and social services, meanwhile participation, and self-determination are on a low level. However, definitions of what is regarded as marginalized are highly depending on the historical and socio-economical context of society. [Fletcher: 1998:2]

Marginalization has many connotations people denied of financial open doors for their sustenance. In the process of being affected by the male dominated web, and by turning into the victims of social, spiritual, and political devastation. Being marginalized alludes to being isolated from the rest of society, being compelled to involve the fringes and edges, and not to possess the center stage in any circle of normal human life. They need to be perceived as separate but equivalent humans. People who face marginalization are deprived of control over their life and they don't have access to the facilities of a community. These women are included in these sections who are underprivileged for living a qualitative life in the whole lifespan. Female marginalization is not a new story. Women have been regarded as subservient to men since time immemorial. They are viewed as marginal in male commanded society and the marginalization of a woman continues disgracefully unabated even today.

DORIS LESSING: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Doris Lessing was born as Doris May Tayler in Kermanshah; that time is known as Persia, (now Iran) on 22nd October 1919, to British parents. She witnessed almost the complete century of contemporary history. Lessing spent her childhood on her father's farm. As a young girl as well as when she attained womanhood, a colonial in Southern Rhodesia, she witnessed the exploitation of the people. Her mother adjusted to the harsh life in the settlement passionately endeavoring to repeat what was in her view, a civilized, Edwardian life among savages; yet her husband did not, and the thousands of acre

of land he had purchased failed to yield the expected assets. This proved a very bad move for the family as their expectations were not fulfilled. But on the other side this move proved fruitful to her, she was six years old then and this adventure had a great store in the future of her novels. She began writing around this time within her family and was called ‘rebel in residence.’ It can be imagined that she had not a joyful upbringing because of her parent’s financial and psychological struggles. After leaving her job as a nurse-maid, she returned to her parent’s farm. As a passionate reader at the farm, she wrote two novels but later she thought that they were not good and destroyed both the novels. Intentionally obstructing her parent’s academic desires for her, however, she kept instructing herself by reading widely. She has an extraordinary love for books and was a ravenous reader.

Doris Lessing’s writing is usually a traumatic narrative of the marginalized women, who fight constantly against estrangement and subordination in order to seek their identity and legitimate place in a hostile culture. In the lives of marginalized women, the deep-rooted similarity of oppression, despair, and suffering is fundamental. In today’s world, alienation and identity crises are global problems. These problems Lessing has taken as the main themes of her writing. In an alienated western society, she discusses the problems faced by immigrants. Isolation is often used in modern literature to express the sense of aloofness of an individual towards society and nature. This creates two types of alienation ‘social alienation and self-alienation’.

Lessing’s writings take different explanatory patterns but still play a significant role in remembering home in one’s nostalgia. Her works are annoying and depressing. She writes about shattered convictions, socially and artistically,. Her works equalize the great philosophical scale of writers such as George Eliot, Robert Frost, and Tolstoy; all of them are giant figures in literature. In the explorations of philosophical aspects through female experience, Lessing is unique and outstanding. She is primarily concerned with the portrayal of female characters; she asserts that the situation of women in society is the only concern. Her psychoanalytical approach focused on the interpretation of dream that could explain the female protagonists and their self construction. Lessing shows how experiences such as insanity and schizophrenia to be more profound than the same feeling of normality in mapping the character’s inner world. Her writing is a divine message against complacency and the beatific hope for the humanity.

FEMALE MARGINALIZATION IN *THE GRASS IS SINGING*

Doris Lessing made her debut with the novel *The Grass is Singing* published in 1950, this novel is described as: “a psychological exploration of the colonial settler class and the frustrations caused by imposed racial and sexual boundaries” [Gikundi: 2003: 287]. Mary Tuner, the victim of marginalization is the protagonist of the novel. She is dissatisfied by the harassment of race, deterioration, and other

social discrimination. Her life is rich in psychological isolation that accompanied her until the death. Lessing's resilience in the novel lies in the exploration of Mary's alienation, conflict, trauma, and marginalization. In the beginning of the novel confirms the death of Mary Turner, a white woman at the hands of her black servant, Moses; mainly for money. Mary Turner, Richard Turner's wife was found murdered by the farmer at Ngesi, yesterday morning on the front veranda of their homestead. The houseboy, who was arrested, admitted to the crime. No motive was uncovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables.

This sensational news acts as a warning for other white people of African society. Her death only makes readers very interested in continuing to read and see the cause of the murder. The reality behind the storyline is uncovered with the story's progression. The indigenous servant Moses appears to be the murderer, the true explanation for marginalization is the dominance of dark colonialism. It is not possible to reconcile the conflicts between the colonizers and colonized, particularly with Mary Tuner, who was raised to look down on natives. Seeing Mary Tuner's general life, her escape, despite her death is just the process of searching for her own identity. It is not difficult to discover that Mary Tuner never ceases to seek her ideal home and space to survive. What's more, her fleeing is just powerful evidence of her cognizant awakening from different biological stages, in words from daughter to wife.

Mary Tuner's life is fraught by social loneliness that she suffered until the death of her life. When the novel starts, Mary Tuner had no personal issues, nor psychological problems, and was happier than anyone of her circumstances. Lessing says, "*Till she was twenty five nothing happened to break the smooth and comfortable life she led.*" (TGS –P-33) after marriage she becomes the victim of oppression, not like Lessing's other characters, as she is never given any independence. All that controlled her whole life is marginalization, psychological sterility, and emotional vacuity. Lessing says: "*she seemed not to care for men she would say to her girl, Men! They get all the fun.*" (TGS-37).

This shows Marry is aware of the oppression of males. After the wedding she faced discord and tension in her family relationships. The reality is that she was pushed into a loveless marriage due to the patriarchal status of her family. As she finds that she is in a different situation than the one she first assumed, she feels her first shock. She imagines that her life will go as she wishes, being young, pretty, and loving be her peers. As it is shown in these lines: "*She was friend to half the town, and in the evening she always went to sundowner parties which lasted until midnight, or danced, or went to the pictures*" (TGS-35).

Her colleagues and other people around her who have a significant influence on her life reflect alienation. She discovers that her image of what she sees herself differs from that of reality when she hears friend's gossip about her, clothes, age, and marriage. Lessing projects how her life changes from her joyful years to anxious and hopeless years as a married one. She groomed in a poor family, she was

subjugated by alienation. The surge of social tension and sexual frustration launched her life into a vortex. Her plight intensified as the race took place and patriarchy dominated her. She was murdered by Moses, the black slave, not because she was white, but because she was the weaker sex as a woman.

The novel explores the inter-racial conflicts she has experienced first-hand, relying on the bright life of a woman whose spiritual being is demolished by catastrophic marriage and an atmosphere to which she can never fully react. On the desolate ranch, Turner is increasingly becoming furious under the strain of a patriarchal culture that pressures her to take both suspect and survival positions. A local conspiracy of silence overshadows her death. The novel reveals the physical reality of Mary Tuner, postulating sexual and racial problems that become catalysts for her internal disintegration the meaning of her experience marginalized out of existence. By madness, she responds to the polarization of reality. The resulting breakdown emphasizes the disjunction between self and world through the fact that both political and psychological modalities have domination and segregation both of which are unquestionable. Notably, the seeds for many of Lessing's later preoccupations are to be found in her novel *The Grass is Singing*. Her main concern in many of her other novels is the method of her mental breakdown, the innermost cluster of her notions regarding abnormal consciousness is fragmentation, marginalization, and breakdown, the subjective falsehood of perception, and implicit questions about the relationship between internal and external event perspectives.

Mary Tuner's escaping is due to her complex internal world, particularly her development of realization. In other words, Mary Tuner's escaping is one way of freeing her caged self. She decided to flee her husband to look for the girl she used to be, and the pleasure she used to live in. She realizes that she must run away from the place that constrains her not only from outside but also from inside, after drifting between the town and the farmland. This shows the misery that the protagonist Mary Tuner lives in. Her despair pushes her to think of running away. Even she does not want to face her friend's judgment; still she decides to escape no matter the price. Mary Tuner breaks conventional ideas and encourages new ideas and innovations on the issues of colonizer and the colonized relationship.

Mary Tuner never enjoyed family love and happy life when she became young. Accompanying her growth is just a father's maltreatment and mother's complaints. So she makes a firm decision afterward that she will never walk the old way as her mother did. She is pushed into a volatile world after marriage, where she plays different roles in her daily life. She is so meek at the beginning that she handles domestic chores well as an excellent wife. She seeks to balance the great distance between reality and the ideal. Throughout her life, Mary Tuner had been isolated, both in fact and in feeling, and this isolation had created in her a feeling of non-involvement in the lives and feelings of others that she calls 'freedom'. This freedom however is not at all akin to the sense in which this term is used by the feminists and female protagonists of Lessing's later fictions, for the freedom Mary Turner claims for

herself is considerably less viable and carefully responded than it is for the feminists or Lessing later central characters. Her real freedom, she believes, comes only after her parent's death for then she is unhindered from her pursuit, although even then her innate fear of involvement can be seen; for although she is 'free', she is not free at this time to enter into others' lives.

Mary Tuner is bound to experience such kind of process on her way of seeking freedom. The whole story is a tragedy not only of Mary Tuner but also belonging to the Marginal man. Such kind of group cannot find their spiritual homeland; they will be on the way forever and will never be accepted by society. Lessing's writing will make readers follow the protagonist's spiritual experiences to recognize Mary Tuner's marginalized self.

FEMALE MARGINALIZATION IN *THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK*

Lessing's pioneering novel, *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 is tremendously significant in the history of feminism. The novel upholds feminist classic, expressive of female anger and aggression of female desire for bodily, intellectual, and emotional freedom. The novel is considered as the foundational feminist work and belongs to the handful of books by focusing on the twentieth century view of male-female interactions and the fragmentations of society in the modern age. The novel focuses on the theme of art by exploring the problem of female marginalization and subjugation. It is one of the most popular novels of Lessing, as it is a trenchant attack on the treatment of women within left political movements.

Lessing wants to focus on human relationships, especially the relationship between men and women as a key image of postmodern humanity or inhumanity. The world of the novel is a female world, but its feminism gains no sense of closeness or blindness. It intends to signify an inner world of the contemporary female intellectuals. Though the complicated relationship between men and women, Lessing presents a psychological world of the modern free women in front of her modern readers through her narrative techniques and women character's self-analysis, she maintains her concern in female issues as a vent through her panorama of the current society, especially women's psychological conflicts.

Lessing conveys the theme of women's confinement within the patriarchal discourse and resistance to the patriarchal imprisonment of female subjectivity. It talks about the sexual privations emotional snubs, aesthetic and ideological suppression, and social oppression, suffered by a sensitive intellectual, social, and political activist, and critically acclaimed woman novelist, Anna Wulf, a forty-year-old female protagonist who is a divorcee, a single mother in "essentially masculine world," (Schlueter, 2003:27). Anna Wulf's psychological conflicts mirror the sickness of the world beyond for which she has to face hurdles and barriers. Fragmentation brings about a tragic downfall for Anna both as a mother and as an author. The main reason for her segmentation is her experience of her life.

She suffers from a neurotic, but stupid engagement with Max Wulf, while she does stay in Africa and Jannet, is the offspring of the outcome of that physical union. Both Anna and Max Wulf are sexually and psychologically not compatible. She gets married Max Wulf, whom she had never a strong attraction of love and finally, after Janet's birth, they get divorced. She goes to London with her child taking the manuscript of her first novel, *Frontiers of War* with her. She enabled to have a celebrity after the publication of this novel in London. But her literary career does prove a hurdle to her creative knowledge. So she has to suffer from an awful experience of futility. Her melancholic mood is aggravated by the sudden end of her physical relationship with her lover Michael a medical practitioner by profession. She is described as undergoing a schizophrenic breakdown, which results in a paralysis of will and writing block. Anna becomes vulnerable, and suffers a complete loss of identity, after being deserted by her lover, Michael, an ex- European psychiatrist, and an erstwhile communist.

Anna lives a life of sexual and emotional fulfillment with Michael, for five years. As the long affair is abruptly broken off by Michael, against Anna's will, Anna suffers a sense of futility which hurls her life into a state of chaos. She gets frightened and mentally sickened, being disheartened by traumatic union with males and disheartened with communism. Anna, at the age of 40, feels as a hopeless and helpless woman. The conflicting senses torture her life personally and professionally. Anna's psychological and artistic breakdown is bred by these factors, among which the demise of communism, his disillusionment with its political ideas as well as the failure of a love affair with Michael, and later her involvement in a sadomasochistic relationship with another lover, Saul Green. To eradicate her lunatic crisis, she decides to project the cruel pictures of her harsh experiences through writing four different notebooks. To save herself from a chaotic state, she records her experience these four notebooks, black, red, yellow, and blue.

The black notebook reflects her dissatisfaction as a writer, and her disappointment with the film companies that desire to buy the rights of her first successful novel, she has given a record of her African life in the 1940s, Red notebook is concerned with her Communist Politics, and records the dithering engagement and gradual disenchantment with the political ideology of communism, which fails to serve as a panacea to the problems confronted by mankind. The blue notebook serves as a diary and recording the daily events that depict her painful session's especially her dreams and emotions are recorded. Yellow notebook in which she creates her fictional alter ego, records her life as a writer and about Elia, Anna's alter ego for Molly.

However, these four notebooks are followed by a fifth one which is *The Golden Notebook* that is considered successful self-healing from the fragmentation and the blocked creativity to which Anna has been exposed. *The Golden Notebook* is a story of a female writer who experiences, separation as well as

disintegration in her consciousness in a cruel world. Anna is being subjected to physical as well as psychological exile.

CONCLUSION

Hence, Lessing's works communicate her concern for an enhanced society, a society that can provide fairness and equality to all its members. She believes in the artistic obligation of a writer, the social responsibility is to bring a social change for the welfare and upliftment of the people through his writings. Lessing's opts for a society where there should be no conflict between men and women. If such a society where to exist, then the world will be a better place to live.

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