

Considering *The Grass is Singing* as a Postcolonial Content

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Abstract

This paper deals with the matter of postcolonial movement which took place in Rhodesia (now in Zimbabwe) in the late 1940s in the very famous work; Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950). This article interprets a psychological study of a frustrated woman Mary Turner and her marital relation with Dick Turner. At the same time, Rhodesian society's picture has been also painted by Lessing's. This paper focuses on how black people and white masters during that period. Rhodesia remained a white colony during 1923 to 1980. *The Grass is Singing* is a semi-autobiographical novel which brought to public attention the awful variances in connection between black and white people in South Africa. The novel is an excellent re-creation of Africans exalted beauty, a lovely psychological sketch of lives in uncertainty and, most of all, an intense investigation into the ideology of white sovereignty.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Sexual obsession, Othering, Hybridity, Rhodesian,
Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*

As a strong anti-colonial text *The Grass is Singing* prefigure contemporary postcolonial themes and issue. To make our paper a better comprehension it's better to analyse some of the fundamental tenets of postcolonialism from the beginning. In a simple and singular term the word Postcolonialism cannot be defined. Definition of postcolonial theory is rather controversial in a single definitive. As a literary point of view, the term "postcolonial literature" seems to be written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. No doubt what the term originally means but this is not the adequate elucidation of

the term. Many of the theorists have noted, the ancient connection alone is not enough to describe the meaning of the “post-” in “postcolonialism”. According to Kwaine Anthony Appiah’ essay’s title, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” (1991)¹ hinted that the importance of the term postcolonial enlarge beyond the ancient connection of colonialism to comprise themes, times and discourse.

Postcolonialism become well known issue first in literature and later, through literature which “deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies,”² in the areas of international relation and sociology. In arrange to pickup an knowledge into the impacts of colonialism of the colonizing and colonized societies considering writings gets significant as one of the most edification strategies since writing is basically centered around the human condition. Literary texts work as a variable devices to speak to the diverse angle of diverse societies in a colonial setting. Literature can gotten to be a medium through which subaltern, which alludes to “those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes”³ declares itself by implies of the “complicity between violence and discourse.”⁴

Centrality of cultural representation in the imperial structure were emphasized in *Culture and Imperialism* (vintage, 1993), Edward Said. He suggest if colonised peoples are to become theme of history then ‘postcolonialism’ must stronger as well as examine the discourse of opposition to colonialist perspective. Like this variety of activities often called ‘postcolonial’, that it is completely meticulous to find an appropriate elucidation. Some of the example in the literatures of nations such as Australia, Canada, India, Pakistan, New Zealand, Kenya, Jamaica, Nigeria and Ireland has been called ‘postcolonial’. Here one question arise anyway they all are ‘postcolonial’ in the same way, and we find the answer, ‘No’. In the readings of postcolonial literatures, we find sometimes resource and concept taken from many other critical practices, such as feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and linguistics. Actually, this abundance of numerous notions creates both conflict and friction within the field resulting in the lack of a singular critical procedure that we might recognize as typically ‘postcolonial.’

Most of the critics gave their opinion regarding postcolonial literature in various terms of overlapping topics which are as follows:

1. The native people's beginning encounter with the colonizers and the disturbance of aboriginal culture.
2. Imitation (the strive of the colonized to be receive by imitation the behaviour, speech, dress and lifestyle of the colonizers)
3. The requirement for uninterruptedness with a precolonial past and self-definition of the governmental future
4. Othering (the colonizer's treatment of members of the aboriginal civilization as less than fully human) and colonial persecution in all its forms
5. The grapple for separate and collective cultural identity and related subjects of double consciousness, alienation, hybridity and unhomeliness.
6. The expedition of the European visitor through an unfamiliar wastes with a native advisor
7. Exile (the experience of being an "outsider" in one's own land or a overseas traveler in Britain)

One of the main subjects in *The Grass is Singing* is that the concept of predominance and biased attitude displayed by white characters. Here the peruses secures a thought with respect to how preconceived and prejudice are available in the Rhodesian supremacist, society; moreover, the truth that's anticipated as a daily paper report recommended the attitude of the Rhodesian society as reflected within the works of African creator of the time. All through Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, the dark scholarly characters are depicted as a gather of individuals whom the white characters accept are persistently strategizing to take their possessions. These negative generalizations created by the white characters underscore the social development of race in Rhodesian society whereby bigotry and racial gather categories are made and kept up by the individuals of that specific community. To begin with, the dark characters are not white; hence, they are naturally regarded second rate as in the event that a individual had to have a white skin in arrange to be noteworthy society.

Critical race theory has been put by Doris Lessing in practice in her *The Grass is Singing* through her characters. Two main characters Charlie Slatter and Mary Turner, both are not afraid to turn to brutality and abuse in drill the farm labourers. All the instructions are obeyed by workers and they stick to the masters needs without any debate. Through this the ability to see, hear and aware of the black African as compliant and complacent with their slave-like

role in labour sector, typecast had been developed by the whites and the groups of black people were simple compliant and docile.

In the explanation of Charlie Slatter's unpunished murder of black character and the control of the white characters and their power is demonstrated by this line. "But Slatter believed in farming with a sambox. It hung over his front door on the wall. You shall not mind killing if it is necessary. He had once killed a native in a fit of temper. He was fined thirty pounds. Since then he kept his temper."(15)

On the black characters' lives it explains very less value, to murder a black person it was trivial matter of a white person. The changing of a minimal fine for murder is a clear picture of this fact; the life of black person is worth a more pittance.

The term "Othering" brutalize because it accepts one to identify oneself as "the human being" and people who are different as something "other" than human. Lessing's reveal the negative feature of colonization through the othering of the native people and Eurocentric ideology in *The Grass is Singing*. The people who are different as minor considered as 'Othering'. It can easily be seen in Mary and Dick's household. Dick and Mary are hardly outliving. They have pin money and they do little try and fit in with white society, that's why they are not well-respected by others whites. In spite of this, they still consider themselves better than the servants and natives. In the inception Mary, even goes so far as to awe admiration why anyone would attach any feeling to a native. She was filled with wonder and even repulsion. She could not understand any white person feeling anything personal about a native."(78). To Mary, they were minor than human, shameful of tender, nostalgic, or attachment.

In different circumstances in which the inhabitant are othered is mug them off names. Mostly inhabitant is mentioned as natives, boy, or nigger. Some of them having names and fewer still are given defining characteristics. For the Mary the women were, "alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about."(116). after describing all the circumstance it is fact to say that the settlers thought poorly of the inhabitants.

To justify white women by comparing them with the native earthly mothers with their open breast, here one can easily find out Mary's intent. It is also shown here while feeding their children white women did not expose their breast and some of them preferred not to feed their children at all. This declares that the white women are right in their reasonable and

world-wise behaviour and this corresponds to the Eurocentric concept prevailing in the British world.

In the whole of the Eurocentric world in othering the native people, Mary acts as a prototypical. There is one instance when Moses asks for water in his own tongue and he was insult by Mary instantly, “Don’t talk that gibberish to me.” After this Moses thinks that he has been prohibited to speak his own tongue and then hers. This protesting tone can easily feel by Mary of Moses, unasked question. Natives are not good enough to use English because this language is of her. It is this illogical and haughty behaviour that strengthens the flaw between the colonized and the colonizer.

This point of view of Mary about inhabitant people is not purely her own urge but a collective product of the colonial community. Although, when she smacks Moses, she is anxious that he could grumble to the police. She is slight distress by the fear of oppression as she knows very well that she has all the management as well as judiciary powers in her favour. But the time comes when Mary comes in problem and the fact was that even the inhabitant people had the right to file a case against the white, after this became unacceptable issue to any white people. “She had behind her the police, the courts, the jails; he, nothing but patience. Yet she was maddened by the thought that he had even the right to appeal.”(148)

Mary Turner the main character who is animosity for the black African characters may be defined as a psychological as she has been pervade with racist ideas from her early childhood. The idea of white supremacy and the inferiority of the black characters have been seen in this quote about the white racist members of community, “when the old settlers say ‘One has to understand the country,’ what they mean is ‘You have to get used to our idea about the native.’ They are saying, in effect, ‘Learn our ideas, or otherwise get out: we don’t want you.’”(20) Later in the novel we find there is a shift in power relation between Moses and Mary. Despite Mary having all the power as we come to see in the starting of the novel, now, she placed Moses in a powerful position as she came to belief on him. One of the evident take places that one day Moses leaves the house to return to his sleeping chamber then he has commanded by Mary to stay with her. Despite this the attitude of nobility she was attempt to presume, she sobbed out again, “‘You mustn’t go,’ and her voice was an entreaty. He held the glass to her lips, so that she had to put her hand to hold it, and with the tears running down her face she took a gulp. She looked at him pleadingly over the glass, and with renewed fear

saw an indulgence in his eyes.”(186). This quote draw the attention of fact that now Mary is dependent on Moses. Instead of it she hate to have him touch her of requires a black man, but she is console by him “by his voice firm and kind like a father.”(187). It is to be seen that Moses as a black character in now able to give command to white character. One of the circumstances takes place 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.”(186)

The term, ‘Hybridity’ associated with Bhabhas where he analyse the relation between the cononiser and the colonized, it also refers “the creation of new transcultural forms with the contact zone produced by colonization.” As Bhabha says, “all cultural statements and systems are constructed” in a space which he calls “the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process.”⁵ If it is understood one time then the cultural identity always emerges in this “contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation,” it becomes clear that “inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable.”⁶ After the time passes Moses, one of the most distinguishing characteristics among the blacks, tries to start and speak with a modified voice and also try to forces Mary to treat him please and fairly. Without knowing that what to do and what not to do with personal relationship, Mary feels herself weaker and weaker on the other hand Moses becomes more and more powerful.

The term ‘Ambivalence’ is modifying to colonial discourse by Bhava and he refers “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized.”⁷ On the other hand, Bhabha’s theory on ambivalence is “an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer” reason is that it “disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination” and its mean “the simple relationship between colonizer and colonized.” It is t o be said that Mary’s relationship with Moses seems to be ambivalent and this nature of colonial relationship generates the seeds of its own destruction for Mary.

Conclusion

To sum up by maintaining like many artistic works, Lessing work might be double-cross a few fault. But on the whole although in the entire novel is save by the authors’ powerful artistic power which is realized in her formation of effective techniques furthermore having at

her discarding a postcolonial ideological outlook that allows enough perception of her matter and the cavernous penetration of the realities of her characters.

Nevertheless we have venture to deal with some of the blazing matter of the postcolonial feature that the text under discussion displays, there still remain some points to be talk about the length. Yet we have also to keep in brain the certainty that not all postcolonial critics will elucidate the same text in the same way, even if they focus on the same postcolonial notion as in every field even expert specialist contradict. Anyhow we may choose to appeal postcolonial criticism, our objective in using this approach is to learn to see some major sides of literature that we might not have seen so distinctly or so enormously without this conceptual frame of mind; to acknowledge the opportunities and authorities of living in culturally various world; and to understand that culture is not just a stable group of trace and customs that preserve in time but a way of relating oneself to the world.

NOTES

1. Kwame Anthony Appiah. "Is the 'Post-' in 'Postcolonial' the 'Post-' in 'Postmodern?'," *Dangerous Liaisons* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 420-44.
2. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back :Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (Second Edition, London and New York : Routledge, 2000), p.186
3. Ashcroft et al., p.215.
4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Postmodern Condition: The End of Politics?" *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.36.
5. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York : Routledge, 1994), p.37
6. Bhabha, p.37.
7. Ashcroft et al., p.12.