

**SILENCE AND STORYTELLING IN DORIS  
LESSING'S *THE GRASS IS SINGING***

Dr. Azza Khalil

**ABSTRACT**

Doris Lessing's novels and short stories have been exposed to frequent criticisms, especially after her winning the Noble Prize in Literature in 2007, due to their complex natures and the unavoidable messages they occasionally deliver. The present paper examines Lessing's first novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) as a literary work introducing the themes of apartheid and colonialism with a deliberately unique vision. The paper traces the employment of silence and storytelling as significant techniques fortifying those themes and spotlighting their atrocities. Actually, silence and storytelling are recurrent terms in the Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theory devoted to curing social injuries caused by imperialism and racialization. Unlike other civil rights movements and liberal approaches, which deny the existence of discrimination at present, CRT emphasizes the continuation of racial biases even in the most urbanized countries. Therefore, CRT theorists call for the confession of the occurrence of such a phenomenon, then the urgent need to eradicate it. In Lessing's novels the colonist and the colonized exchange silences and storytelling in their communications. Both of them sometimes find difficulties in articulating their thoughts, and some other times they find it suitable to explain their viewpoints and narrate their stories. The paper investigates how the novel gives chances to each character to express openly his/her story, showing the situations in which silences are their finest choices. CRT theorists ascribe the utilization of speech and silence to power relation in societies governed by patriarchal authority and inherited social norms; consequently they require racial emancipation and insubordination to all sorts of prejudice. They claim that the counter stories are typically used by the oppressed to defend their stance; whereas majoritarian storytelling is employed by the powerful group for proving their dominance.

**KEY WORDS**

Doris Lessing, *The Grass Is Singing*, silence, storytelling, critical race theory (CRT), apartheid, colonialism, racial discrimination.

**INTRODUCTION**

On winning the Noble Prize in Literature 2007, Doris Lessing gave a lecture entitled “On Not Winning the Noble Prize.” She started her lecture by mentioning the current deforestation in Zimbabwe and associated the phenomenon with the poor economic conditions of the African people: “People have to eat. They have to get fuel for the fires” (The Noble Foundation). Referring to the poor conditions of their schools, she explained the inadequate education the Zimbabweans received and the consequent bad behavior they attained. Furthermore, Lessing referred to the hardships a pupil found to resume his/her education. Students went to school on foot; the distances there were too large and uneven, moreover the weather was very harsh. The villages were not supplied with electricity and the learners had to study with great difficulties. Lessing emphasized the drastic lack of books and all means of instruction. Accordingly, the students hoped that London could send them some essential books to resume their education. Describing the worsening circumstances in South Africa, Lessing concluded that the graduates from such underprovided schools would never win prizes. When she told the English learners what happened to her there, they were bowled over because they were oblivious of South Africa in general. Comparing an English student with a Zimbabwean one, the first’s chance of winning prizes was more frequent and s/he had better opportunities since s/he had more suitable upbringing and healthier social circumstances (The Noble Foundation).

It seemed that Lessing’s early years spent in South Rhodesia formed her mentality and tainted her later writings immensely. Not only did she sympathize with the poor natives, but also she managed to realize the moral deficiency within the colonial organization. Furthermore, she disliked the imperial code extending the exploitation of the blacks and recurrently oppressing them. For that reason, she sided against the abuse of the natives—namely apartheid. In a conversation with Hermione Lee, Lessing disclosed much of her inner thoughts and memories. Lee commented that Lessing’s canon were “deeply autobiographical, much of it emerging out of her experience in Africa, drawing on her childhood memories and her serious engagement with politics and social concerns” (18). She added that most of her stories were set in Africa, especially those of her early phase from 1950s to 1960s, denouncing the appropriation of the African land by the colonial system and displaying the infertility of the bullying structure imposed by the white civilization on African people (18).

Interviewed by Jonah Raskin, Lessing denied the existence of a utopian world drawn by Communism. Despite her Marxist affiliation, she at a later stage of her life rejected many Marxist principles. Apparently Lessing was famous for her refusal of ideas taken for granted—a characteristic inspiring many other writers in spite of her discouraging them to follow. It seemed that Lessing entertained contradictory ideas owing to her diverse readings and miscellaneous journeys. The most obsessing enemy to a human being, for her, was time. Her previous fear of time was shaped by contemplating the past and predicting the future; however, her new obsession of time was inherent in the ability of time to change humanity. Commenting on this idea, Lessing insisted that during her later years she could not cope with the new technological advancements in spite of her acquaintance with much of them.

Mona Knapp commented that Lessing was one of some few writers whose characters combined heterogeneous aspects, therefore her works appealed to a wide range of readership, both old and young. She added that Lessing could be seen as unclassifiable since her works diminished the limited mentality of some intellectuals and called for a widely insightful understanding of human crises—an understanding devoid of biases. However, Lessing's writings had two main characteristics: “From the early realist works to the newest space fantasies, Lessing’s writings consistently provoke thought and enlarge the reader’s perceptions by questioning the validity of labels and pigeonholes” (1). Moreover, she explained that every invention had its disadvantages despite its merits. For instance, the invention of printing devices achieved enormous progress in human knowledge, but minimized people’s capacity of remembering things. She added that technology decreased people’s motivations, especially children, since they depended mainly on technological devices. In addition, scientific development caused the accelerating noise which was the obsessing enemy to any writer. Lessing confessed that she adored silence: she was fascinated by her house because it was isolated from “the clutter.” The absence of vocal annoyance and the serenity of nature captured her immensely: “I’m so lucky here in this house. At night there’s no sound at all, except a bird turning over in its bed. The silence is wonderful” (Raskin, *The Progressive*).

The aim of the present paper is to examine Lessing’s employment of silence and storytelling as significant techniques in the discourse between characters and their deliberate implementation in a variety of situations to explore miscellaneous aspects of prejudice in a racialized society. It is remarkable that Doris Lessing’s dialogue is penetrated by

numerous pauses and various silences which are entirely meaningful and essential to the narrative structure. As for storytelling, the paper traces the vital utilization of stock story and counter-story to investigate various characteristics. *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) is chosen to be the pivot of the study because of its relevant themes of colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination. The relation between a white woman and a black servant is an emblem of the relation between the colonist and the native in general. The use of silence and storytelling by each group has similar and different connotations. Despite the opposing natures of silence and storytelling, they are frequently used alike. The study, therefore, discusses why some characters express their ideas and feelings by means of narration, whereas some other characters find speechlessness suitable expressions.

### **STORYTELLING AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)**

Counter-storytelling is one of the recurrent notions in critical race theory (CRT). The origins of critical race theory (CRT) can be traced in the works of the 1970s' scholars, literary authors, critics, activists and political figures. Almost all of them are people of color who have in common a drastic denial of social injustice caused by racism and other forms of subordination. They believe that racism is intrinsic in society despite the frequent assertions disproving it. They also reject the conventional social norms and political views fostering biases, even implicitly. Their main reason for criticizing established law and normative values is their color-biased doctrine, in spite of the obvious declaration of color-blindness. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic consider critical race theory (CRT) as a hypothesis that deals with human rights and ethnicities within a broader context; however, it discards gradualism in changing society and its values. The groundwork for such a movement is based on recognition of deficiency in hierarchal social structure and values and the subsequent social inequality ensuing the urgent endeavor to reclaim them. Actually, CRT theorists prefer immediate change: "Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (*Critical race 3*). CRT theorists stress the collaborated social function in the legislation of racial discrimination and the complicity of white community to sustain it, mainly for keeping its exploitation of the colored groups and minorities. Although the rise of the theory was among American scholars mainly to refine the conditions of

black citizens and other ethnicities, its principles are applicable worldwide to other types of discrimination based on gender, class or any other criterion. Therefore, CRT can be considered as an attitude attempting to investigate and encounter the existence of racial injustice, maintaining that racialization is the result of collective ideology and inequitable power relation. The origins of CRT can be attributed to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) which adopt deconstruction approach to legal discourse for explaining how public unfairness has prevailed in US community despite the blatant outcry of civil rights movements. Solórzano and Yosso emphasize the essential role of race and class in critical race theory, associating them with gender: “class and racial oppression cannot account for gender oppression” (“LatCrit” 472). Further studies of CRT introduce the concept of “intersectionality” as a key notion meaning “the interaction between gender, race, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis 68).

Very pertinent to CRT is the idea of storytelling which is one of its essential notions. Moreover, it is usually classified into majoritarian storytelling and counter-storytelling. Storytelling can be viewed as the narrative method in which the majority and minority may find an outlet to recount, justify and foster their social conduct, irrespective of its dogmatic deficiency or partiality. In contrast with silence, storytelling is a blatant form of expression that fortifies the characters’ principles and shed light on their backgrounds, while silence can be viewed as the difficulty of expression or fear of utterance, despite the fact that both of them are meaningfully and intentionally employed. Delgado accentuates the significance of stories to “outgroups,” who are usually referred to as those people “whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective—whose consciousness—has been suppressed, devalued and abnormalized” (“Storytelling” 2412). Although storytelling is usually associated with the subjugated and the oppressed, its conception is extensive and inclusive: therefore it can be classified into majoritarian storytelling or what is called stock story or master narrative and counter-storytelling. Majoritarian storytelling is the descriptive way in which the majority disperses and reinforces normative social values; consequently, it presents racism and other forms of oppression as permissible and inevitable, and it is rarely narrated as they are inherent in people's consciousness. Whereas counter-storytelling is the illumination of the same incidents and situations in another perspective, usually the contrastive—the minority's outlook. One of the most essential objectives of storytelling is to introduce the others in a different way, summoning their realities and the facts of their lives

usually ignored. Brilliant storytellers, on the other hand, spare no pains to inform larger sector of people of their messages (Delgado and Stefancic 41). Brooks maintains that counter-storytelling rejects racialism by spotlighting common occurrences “that ignore or discount structural barriers to equality faced by people of color” (38). Solórzano and Yosso discuss the method of counter-stories in a similar way other critics implement by clarifying its deliberate consequence in giving voice to the dismay of the other ethnicities, “challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story” (475).

Delgado maintains that the main purpose of counter-stories is that they provide therapy for people suffering persecution by means of irony or sarcasm: “Stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic or satiric; [...]” (“Storytelling” 2414). Some other critics summarize the functions of counter-stories in four principal features. First, storytelling provides theoretical background to unify the experiences of marginalized citizens and shelter them from the atrocities they encounter in their racialized societies. Second, by means of counter-stories CRT has a reform program concerning education, emphasizing ethical principles instilled in students for cultivating equality and justice at early stages. Third, it has also another social function of revealing the lies wrapped in majoritarian stories for demolishing them. Fourth, by mingling the fantastical narrative element with the factual one of reality storytelling can be regarded as more illustrative and persuasive.

These counter-stories can serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions: (1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (Solórzano and Yosso, *LatCrit* 475)

## SILENCE DEFINITIONS

Silence is actually the opposite to communication and storytelling as well. However in the dictionaries' definitions one can notice how speechlessness and narration are very pertinent, each one of them leads to

the other. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* defines silence as “abstinence from speech or noise; taciturnity” (1169). *Chambers Combined Dictionary Thesaurus* puts out that silence is the “absence of sound or speech, or a period marked by this.” It can also be defined as “failure or unwillingness to disclose information or give way secrets” (1152). *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* gives a long, comprehensive definition to silence, denoting the role of silence in speaking, writing and performance. It is said that silence is the most important topic in postmodernism since the ability or disability to speak is an essential issue in postmodern research. It is said that silence originates speech: the actual utterance is associated with celestial ceremonies since “just as actual silence is never free from the reverberation of the word, so actual speech is never free from the deconstructive judgment of silence” (366). Moreover, silence exists around and within speech. It has numerous connotations with “the unsaid and the unsayable” (366). That is, the unspeakable parts in discourse are given in silence. The other important role silence plays in discourse is in establishing the meaning of the figures of speech. This type of silence is seen as attacking, permeating and counteracting the capability of speaking. Such silence is very pertinent to postmodernism (366). In the following pages the use of silence and storytelling in Lessing’s narration will be discussed through several strategies.

## **I- SILENCE AND STORYTELLING VERSUS ACTION AND REACTION**

### **I-1 THE REGION PEOPLE AND THEIR REACTION**

The incidents of the novel opened with the newspaper brief story publishing Mary’s murdering at the hands of her servant. Strikingly, Mary’s acquaintances and neighbors received this news with unanticipated indifference and passiveness. Moreover, they “felt a little spurt of anger mingled with [...] almost satisfaction, [...]” (Lessing, *The Grass* 9). The unresponsiveness with which they turned the page of the newspaper did not only show their little concern with the cause but also the frequency of such crimes in their environment. Fundamentally, CRT was grounded on the naturalness of racial discrimination. In other words, society considered racist behavior as common and therefore crimes among whites and blacks were unquestionable. The result was the resistance of community to reform such recognizable mischief. The inevitability of racialized inequity “means that racism is difficult to cure or address” (Delgado and Stefancic 7). On the other hand, the expectedness of Mary’s death could be attributed to the unfamiliar relation between Mary and her servant, Moses. Mary, a white woman, and Moses, a black servant, were condemned by whites and blacks as

well. As for the prevailing social standards, white people usually expected harm from blacks; therefore they got satisfied when their expectations came true. The elements of anticipation, inequity and prohibition accounted for the secrecy of killing “a white woman by a black man in the context of apartheid South Africa” (Wang 40). However, the reaction of those people who were very close to Mary was somewhat unusual. The narrator predicted them to cut off the paragraph from the newspaper and keep it within their old stuff, and she was certain that they would never remember the incident or discuss it any longer. The real motive of the crime was unintelligible, but it seemed prohibited to speak about such a crime in a society in which prejudicial customs were very rigid and color violation unpardonable. To such a racist society, Mary’s fault seemed unforgivable and her death was inescapable. “Needless to say, Mary’s breach of the color bar on a human, emotional level is an unspeakable delict; and the white collective, feeling it owes her no more allegiance, sees the death penalty imposed on her as just” (Knapp 27).

The issue of assassinating Mary seemed appalling: to everybody in the country it was logical and predictable, but a taboo. It seemed like a shameful stock story in which the white woman did not take care of her black servant’s cunning plans which caused her fatal demise. Yet there were three persons involved in the investigation and therefore they had to speak despite the secret air of the crime: the Sergeant, Charlie Slatter and Tony Marston. However, the way they discussed the topic was incomprehensible. For example, the Sergeant exclaimed in a sharp unpleasant way then he “shut his mouth tight, as if to present a brave face to the world” (Lessing, *The Grass* 24). Tony, on the other hand, was confused and embarrassed by the investigation. In response, he gave short horrified answers—sometimes incoherent. When he asked about the time of the crime, he gave an uncomfortable answer: “They didn’t call me. I woke and found Mrs. Turner” (Lessing, *The Grass* 23). His sense of guilt was less stressful than the two other men who seemed somewhat “implicated”; even when their sense of sympathy was rendered in a dignified way, it was given “with unutterable burdens” for the sake of the misery of their friend Dick Turner (Lessing, *The Grass* 24). Even to sympathize with the victim in such a society was unconventional. In this case both Mary and Moses were victims of biased society; moreover, Moses was more wronged by Lessing’s delineation because “he is almost entirely presented from the outside” (Walder 109).



## I-2 TONY MARSTON AS A REMARKABLE WITNESS

Tony, who had arrived at the farm only three weeks before the crime took place, and who belonged to a different generation having a liberated mode of thought, was shattered by the incident and found much difficulty in reporting the story of Mary and Moses to the police. When Tony was investigated by the Sergeant, he was not able to deliver his real explanation of the case. A clash seemed to arise between the Sergeant and Tony because of their different mentalities and attitudes. As a result of imposing a certain way of speaking on Tony, he was infuriated saying, “Do you or do you not want to hear what I have to say?” (Lessing, *The Grass* 26) The dialogue between the two seemed inconsistent and flowed restlessly. There was a growing tension among the three. Unable to cope well with them, Tony was ordered to give “definite” facts, not assumptions as he uttered. Instead of speaking, he burst into laughter. His laughter announced his utter denial of their storytelling—his radical opposition to their attitude. Again, he could not speak their language or harmonize with them. Afterwards there was stagnation, and no one gave a word.

At an earlier stage of the narrative the reader was told that Charlie was uncomfortable with Tony since he did not come to him abruptly to tell him about the crime. Charlie was the one in the district who considered himself the mentor and the one in charge among white citizens. To Charlie, Tony represented the type of youth who seemed spoon-fed and coward: they were not suitable to the harshness and cruelty of the farm life. Paradoxically, despite the negative attitude of Charlie to the younger generation, he inwardly admired them: “He had a rooted contempt for soft-faced soft-voiced Englishmen, combined with a fascination for their manner and breeding” (Lessing, *The Grass* 16). Moreover, Charlie claimed that the youth of such a generation were “adaptable,” “diffident,” “proud” and “withdrawn.” Their main problem was that they did not preserve the regulations of the country, nor did they keep on ceremonies (Lessing, *The Grass* 226). The difference between Tony and Charlie seemed to be one of culture: while both of them belong to the same race, each had a distinctive mores. The dissimilar cultures were ethnicity-oriented. Anoop Nayak maintains that ethnographic storytelling is something between stock story and counter-storytelling. “Ethnographic accounts remain also inter-subjective narratives formed at the confluence of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and telescoped through our own personal interpretative lens” (413). On the other hand, Dick saw Tony as an active energetic Englishman—“a charming companion.” However, there was lack of communication between them since the kind of topics Tony tackled were perplexing and untraditional, such as “miscegenation,

perhaps, or the effect of the color bar on industry” (Lessing, *The Grass* 226).

For Tony, Mary was an unpredictable woman with queer, pointless behavior. The most notable characteristic distinguishing her was her quietness, “as if she had forgotten how to speak” (Lessing, *The Grass* 227). It seemed that Mary was a reticent woman from her early infancy due to her unusual social circumstances. She was brought up in a disjointed family in which there were an irresponsible drunken father, a tirelessly complaining mother, a feeble sister and an awkward brother. It seemed that her father and mother run short of money for several years owing to their accumulating debts and bad budget-planning. Neglected and deprived of good nutrition and adequate healthcare, her sister and brother died at an early age out of dysentery. Mary thought that the time when her sister and brother died were the best time in her childhood since her mother stopped her grumble that she had three mouths to feed and her rows with her father gradually faded. Mary's disappointment with men and her reluctance to marry in her youth stemmed from her father's ridiculous behavior and alcoholism which exposed her and her mother to numerous upsetting situations. Part of her problem was caused by her mother's apathy towards him:

This is not to say that he drank himself into a state of brutality. He was seldom drunk as some men were, whom Mary saw outside the bar, frightening her into a real terror of the place. He drank himself every evening into a state of cheerful fuddled good humor, coming home late to a cold dinner, which he ate by himself. His wife treated him with a cold indifference. She reserved her scornful ridicule of him for when her friends came to tea. It was as if she did not wish to give her husband the satisfaction of knowing that she cared anything for him at all, or felt anything for him, even contempt and derision. She behaved as if he were simply not there for her. (Lessing, *The Grass* 39)

## II- SILENCE AND STORYTELLING AS EXPRESSING SUPPRESSION AND TRIUMPH

### II- 1 SAMSON AS TRIUMPHANT

Restless, arrogant and discomfited, Mary had an irritable relation with her servants. Her relation with her servants was liable to tension and erratic fluctuations. Her first plan was to get full control over them so that they would perform all the household chores regularly without any resistance or insufficiency. Sometimes she succeeded; some other times she failed. Her first battle was with Samson, Dick's faithful servant. Despite Dick's awareness of Samson's habitual thefts, he seemed

forgiving and had a friendly understanding of his needs. When Samson at first met Mary, he thought that she was a considerate, attractive woman; therefore, he expressed his admiration for her beauty to Dick—“very nice, boss” (Lessing, *The Grass* 68). However, Mary seemed offended by such a daring reaction. She had something to say but shut her mouth so as not to bother Dick: “She was left with a feeling of indignation, saying to herself, ‘And who does he think he is?’” (Lessing, *The Grass* 69) To Samson, Mary was an ugly woman who paid meticulous attention to all the trivialities of the household affairs, never permitting the servant any space of freedom. Discovering that she was a miserly woman who did not allow him even the leftover, he grew irritated with her. Unlike Dick, Mary was a sullen woman who could not speak with the natives or make comic comments. The anger with which Mary behaved in sighting Samson stealing some raisins culminated into tears and she sobbed in front of Dick to dismiss him. Sympathizing with her, Dick allowed her to cut the servant’s wage for two shillings. In spite of Samson’s growing fear and hatred of Mary, he accepted the reduction of his salary “with a shut sullen face, saying nothing to her” (Lessing, *The Grass* 77). On the contrary, Dick was benevolent and tolerant because of the shallowness of the amounts of food he stole. Dick’s manners with servants and laborers were quite different: for example, when he offended one of them at once, he joked at the next moment (Lessing, *The Grass* 77). It seemed that Dick knew exactly how to treat the natives whether on the farm or in the house. Mary thought she was triumphant in such a situation because she managed to punish Samson and silence him ultimately. Her stock story was that Samson like all the black was a thief, and he responded to such an accusation with silence since he was not allowed to give a counter story. Speechless as he was, Samson decided to leave Dick’s house for ever.

## II-2 THE SECOND HOUSEBOY AND SUPPRESSION

Mary, like all white women, was raised in an environment in which the natives were considered mystifying creatures one should suspect. She could remember her mother’s way of warning her against the natives: her mother used to say that the natives “were nasty and might do horrible things to her” (Lessing, *The Grass* 70). The hatred of those mischievous creatures was inherent in her soul. Moreover, being the wife of a white employer gave her opportunities to frequently suppress them. Another exemplification of suppression and triumph was when the second houseboy came to her home, demanding work. He required seventeen shillings a month—a normal requirement in such a situation. She was triumphant again by reducing his wage: “feeling pleased with herself because of her victory over him” (Lessing, *The Grass* 80). She managed

to overcome him by means of hostile words and aggression, but his surrender was expressed mainly by silence and submission. Her stock story derived from her white culture was that black servants were usually indolent and offered little help. CRT theorists maintained that the usual submission of the black to the white could be explained in terms of “white supremacy,” denoting the overwhelming authority bestowed on whites by social standards which gave them unlimited freedom and sheltered them from any punishment, even in case of causing blacks real troubles. It is relatively taken for granted that in a racist society recurrent ideas of white superiority over other ethnicities were pervasive, emanating unequal relations of white dominance and non-white mistreatment. White supremacy is often accompanied by social complacency. This sort of complacency is due to the ordinariness of racism in a society cultivated by majoritarian storytelling or “master narrative.” Indeed, the “master narrative” was usually exploited by whites to characterize the essential superior traits of the majority over the minority, and set them as unquestionable values—an exploitation which strengthened racial discrimination and kept white privileges. White authority seemed an innate feature: “we are defining White privilege as a system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White” (Solórzano and Yosso, “Counter-storytelling” 27).

### II-3 THE THIRD HOUSEBOY AND HUMBLENESS

Mary tried to silence herself in front of her husband instead of offending the place in which they lived. She was about to describe it as “pigsty” but swallowed the word owing to its aggressive attitude. The servant annoyed her by his inability to prepare the dinner table properly. Her victory over her husband was achieved again by means of shouting and nervousness. Her manner of speaking was described as “hot, blind, tired voice” (Lessing, *The Grass* 82). However, her husband’s reaction was not given by means of words. Strikingly, he was speechless, and went on smoking cigarettes. Out of nervousness, she dismissed another servant. Her husband was blurred by the dichotomy of her behavior. He thought she was motherly with him but strongly aggressive with her servants: “With him she seemed at ease, quiet, almost maternal. With the natives she was a virago” (Lessing, *The Grass* 83). The next boy who came to serve her was more dutiful; moreover, his politeness and experience in dealing with white women made her bully him extensively, “as if he were a machine.” He seemed so humble and taciturn with her to the extent that she sometimes thought of selecting a dish and throwing it in front of him to move his feelings. It seemed that Mary adopted the

stock story claiming that the natives were nonhuman; therefore they did not deserve mercy. Observing that the bathroom was not clean enough, she ordered the boy to scrub it soundly until it glittered. The boy remained for approximately four hours scrubbing but achieved little. However, Mary got a headache by the sound of scrubbing and left the place abruptly. As a result, she forgot to feed him or to give him a rest. To her, the natives were not real human beings, and therefore they did not need any rest or food (Lessing, *The Grass* 91). Mary's bigotry against her black servants was seen as an avowed expression of impatience caused by an undesirable marriage and repulsion for the "gendered social norms that led to its existence" (Wang 40). After the servant cleaned the bathroom, he was exhausted and asked for a break for lunch. Afterwards, the servant entered the verandah behind them carrying his contract of service "without speaking." Dick, accordingly, took him to the kitchen and explained that the new lady did not know how to treat the natives (Lessing, *The Grass* 94). Motivated by the sense of persecution in a racialized society, law professors coined the essential principle of "equal personhood" to refer to the necessity of treating people in the same community fairly with correspondent esteem irrespective of race, creed or color. "To treat someone as an outsider, a nonmember of human society, violates this principle and devalues the self-worth of the person so excluded" (Delgado, "The Imperial Scholar" 564).

#### II- 4 MRS. SLATTER AND CLASS STRUGGLE

Mary's frustration was expressed in another situation mainly by means of silence. Mr. and Mrs. Slatter decided to visit Dick and Mary suddenly. Consequently, Dick and Mary were embarrassed since it was the first time some people of the white community came to visit them. Initially it was Dick who welcomed the guests and received them hospitably; on the other hand, Mary was taciturn and inactive. The tiny room in which they gathered encompassed Dick and Charlie who were absorbed in their usual conversation on one side and their wives on the other. Mary and Mrs. Slatter sat opposite to them on another corner rarely speaking. Although both of them came from the same urban background and realized the difficulties of the country life, Mrs. Slatter had overcome the hardships competently, and became well-off by means of her husband's intelligence and flourishing projects. She showed Mary her sympathy with her miserable conditions, but Mary behaved arrogantly with her "because she had noticed Mrs. Slatter looking keenly round the room, pricing every cushion, noticing the new whitewash and the curtains" (Lessing, *The Grass* 91). Mary felt she was inferior by her compassionate looks, therefore she preferred withdrawal and silence. Similar to class structure categorizing people according to their economic

ranks and humiliating them as a result was racialization which deprived minorities of their necessary rights because of their different biological traits and ethnicities. To critical race theory, “race and races are products of social thought and relations” (Delgado and Stefancic 8). This feature was referred to as “‘social construction’,” denoting the creation and manipulation of races by social customs, which were equally capable of eliminating it when necessary. The notion of “social construction” considered heredity as the main clue supporting common features among people of the same race, neglecting entirely individual differences and unique characteristics. “That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory” (Delgado and Stefancic 8). Both class stratification and racialization were the output of biased communities which insisted on removing boundaries among members of the same categories and placing them among others.

#### II-5 DICK'S EBB AND FLOW

Mary was suppressed by Dick's hesitation and endless fruitless projects which threw them into sheer poverty. Frequently she was enraged by Dick's fluctuations and recklessness. Dick's response was usually tranquility and he went on his unremitting ineffective procedures. His method of running the farm was considered unproductive, and he abruptly changed his plans without careful managements. She thought that his unstudied enterprises pushed them from the frying pan into the fire. Finally, when he decided to change his enterprise from turkeys to rabbits, she lost her temper; her anger was described as unutterable (Lessing, *The Grass* 112). This marked the beginning of her inner disintegration which led her to her ruinous downfall. Tony Marston, on sitting in her cottage after her death, thought that her life must have been a long journey of pain and wretchedness that had ultimately disrupted her. He defined the three elements which drove her to her demise as temperature, isolation and shortage of money (Lessing, *The Grass* 33).

Mary and Dick's relation seemed relatively fragmented. When he attempted to appease her, he unfortunately gave a sardonic remark, describing her as a “boss.” She disliked his comment because it “said more about their marriage than she had ever allowed herself to think” (Lessing, *The Grass* 112). She asked him for money to purchase some clothes after a little profit from cultivating turkeys. However his response was again silence, maintaining that he prepared for another enterprise. At this particular moment he wanted to establish a kaffir store, a store which sold the merchandises for the black. On confronting Mary with his new project, he avoided looking at her eyes as he confidently knew her

growing annoyance at such ambitious ideas. His stock story was a kaffir store in their location could be a successful enterprise because of the numerous natives serving on his farm. Mary seemed unconvinced because she recognized the existence of a kaffir store on the Slatters' farm, which was not far away from theirs. However, Dick went on the procedures of setting up a new shop for the natives despite Mary's objections. To him, the idea was irresistible; therefore, the dialogue between the couples was penetrated by many silences and shifts. In spite of her repulsion of the idea of the kaffir store, she finally decided to assist Dick in organizing it, hoping that the project might eventually end their financial difficulties. She needed money for settlement and welfare. Her preoccupying dream consisted in erecting the ceilings which would dispel her fright of "approaching hot season" (Lessing, *The Grass* 114). Because of Dick's poverty and delusion she was not able to have a ceiling in her house to protect her from the summer season.

## II-6 THE KAFFIR STORE AND PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In fact, the store was associated in her memories with her early desolate days where she, as a child, was imprisoned by its ugly walls and black faces. Moreover, she was forbidden to play with the Greek girl only for her different descent—another racial sign. She used to fetch her mother cheap food and utensils from there, or to ask for the weekly newspaper to bring it to her. Afterwards, the store had another association since it was the dreadful place where her father got his alcoholic drinks. Worse, her mother used to go to the barman to implore not to give her husband such unpleasant drinks because they were bankrupt. Despite her tender age and innocence, Mary recognized her mother's tendency to gain other people's compassion, and it was her mother who "really enjoyed the luxury of standing there in the bar while the casual drinkers looked on, [...]." Therefore, the Kaffir store, to Mary, was the place of embarrassment and social humiliation. Rejecting her mother's personality and her disagreeable way of tackling problems, she preferred to keep calm rather than to have such a mournful voice and disgraceful attitude. Actually she did not only hate her father and mother's relation, but also she disgusted her mother's way of displaying her misery in order to elicit caring responses, and she realized at an early stage that her mother disliked her father and inwardly despised him (Lessing, *The Grass* 38). Similarly, Mary disliked her husband when he showed signs of disappointment. She actually disdained her husband and the natives with whom he worked; in addition, she abhorred the idea of setting up a Kaffir store for them. Her repugnance of the idea arose from her upsetting childhood memories which were unspeakable even to her husband. The way Mary announced her refusal was given in silence and repulsive facial

expressions (Lessing, *The Grass* 114). To CRT theorists, the most notable factors initiating social injustice were race, class and gender. Despite the fact that Mary scorned the natives because of their different race and ethnicity, she and her mother were oppressed in a patriarchal society in which women and poor whites were persecuted. "Race, gender and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is , as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different" (Crenshaw 1241). Some other critics deny the disconnecting effect of storytelling on race, gender and class, emphasizing the importance of the interaction of the three elements in racialization (Solórzano and Yosso, "Counter-storytelling" 24).

### **III- SILENCE AND STORYTELLING AS EXPRESSING ASTONISHMENT AND ANTICIPATION**

#### **III-1 GIRLS OF THE CLUB AND ANNOYANCE**

Mary was shocked and astonished by her friends' gossip about her. The way they discussed her private life bluntly embarrassed her, and their ridiculous comments about her childish appearance and behavior hurt her deeply. On the one hand, she hid herself, insisting on not uttering a single word or even defending her self. "She was stunned and outraged; but most of all deeply wounded that her friends could discuss her thus" (Lessing, *The Grass* 48). Indeed their behavior propelled her to accept any apparently apt bridegroom irrespective of her emotions. The outcome of their rumor about her spinsterhood was her harassing marriage to Dick and her discontent afterwards. She was neither happy nor satisfied with Dick, either socially or sexually. It was maintained that Lessing's delineation of Mary's predicament was mainly influenced by her Marxist affiliation and familial fragmentation which urged her to oppose all sorts of oppression. Mary, like Lessing, was unconsciously interested in politics, especially the relation between whites and blacks. Therefore, it seemed that Lessing was mainly concerned with depicting Mary's reaction to Moses, rather than explaining her relation with him: till the end of the novel it was not determined whether they had sexual intercourse or not. This could be explained in the light of "the utter narcissism of white postcolonial guilt." The white postcolonial guilt resulted in considering blacks as nonhuman. Mary's obsessing guilt initiated by her defenseless state developed into infatuation with Moses. Towards the end of the novel Mary seemed sexually attracted to Moses in spite of the difference in color, social rank and the indignant disapproval she previously showed. Therefore, Mary's political concepts were ultimately changed by eroticism: "sexual desire as the agent of her



political re-education is a limited means through which her racist preconceptions are challenged, since it is only towards Moses and Moses alone that she feels a sense of human connection” (Wang 44).

Mary’s most agreeable days seemed when she was a girl at the boarding school. Her school represented a shelter where she can escape from her muddled father, her despairing mother and the unpleasantly swinging house (Lessing, *The Grass* 40). Afterwards, she liked her town-life extensively, especially when she became a thriving employee. She was promoted at an early age and became an eminent clerk in her office; besides she earned much money through her job. Although she had the choice to live on her own and enjoy a moderately luxurious life, she decided on resuming her life among people, preferring to live in a small feminist community. The small community she chose was the girls’ Club—an establishment founded to help women who did not have regularly sufficient income. The narrator maintained that she was satisfied with such a decision because the girls’ Club resembled her boarding school, thus it evoked good memories in her soul. The long period she spent there made everybody think of her as an insider, hence they never thought of asking her to leave (Lessing, *The Grass* 43). Moreover, she became a notable member of such a community since she played the role of an elder sister who could provide much support and counsel to other women in troubles. To them, she was the most thoughtful and had motherly understanding of their problems. Her upset therefore was indescribable when she heard their wicked conversations. Mary thought that the girls of the Club treated her fairly but discovered that they sneakily despised her, and she subsequently felt alienated in such a racist society. She detested such a racist society because of its wronging customs which persecuted spinster and lonely women. Actually Solórzano and Yosso attributed the origins of discrimination to the inherited values and common social and political principles emphasizing the superiority of those in charge like whites, men, and upper classes over less powerful people (“Counter-storytelling” 24). Since Mary was a woman of a poor descent, she was persecuted, even by her best friends. For the first time Mary discovered that she was peripheral to them—a bystander, not an insider. She realized that she spent many years among them, hearing their plights and trying to help them without uttering any word about her own: “She moved among all those young women with a faint aloofness that said as clear as words: ‘I will not be drawn in’” (Lessing, *The Grass* 44).

### III-2 MOSES AND MARY DISINTEGRATION

Mary was overtaken by Moses’s request for leaving the house. Despite her growing suspicion of him, she expected him to remain longer

with her to help her in the household affairs. Above all, she tried to shun any clash with him in order not to provoke her husband. Dick was usually ill at ease with her because of her recurrent ill-treatment of the natives. To him, Mary did neither acquire the skills of treating the servants, nor did she know how to keep the house. Therefore, he sometimes resorted to explaining such an idea to the indigenous servants to appease them, irrespective of the white community's strict social norms to which he was committed. On the other hand, he used to illustrate to her that he exerted enormous effort to get "some work out of them [the natives]" (Lessing, *The Grass* 95). Consequently, he was not able to tolerate any other troubles at home. He advised her not to expect much from them because they were mainly "savages"; however, he avoided telling her that those "savages" used to serve him good meals, clean and tidy his house and work on his farm for several years obediently and silently. His style of informing her about the natives made her exasperated. She recalled her mother's conflicts with her father and told him that he pushed her to lead a grievous life—the life of the deprived white. Kata Gyuris ascribed the despondent life of the Turners to the narrowness and discomfort of their cottage which resembled the indigenous' dwellings rather than the colonists' (190). Despite Mary's detestation of the relation between her mother and father, she unconsciously summoned up her mother's frustration: "It was taken direct from her mother, when she had those scenes over money with her father" (Lessing, *The Grass* 95-96).

Her first acquaintance with Moses was on the farm when she was asked to run it immediately after Dick's serious illness. After a six-year marriage, Dick fell ill and another phase of her life began. It was a phase characterized by Dick's abiding patience and his evasion of any trouble with her because of his weakness. Unfortunately, Dick was inflicted with malaria despite the quinine he addicted, and he was not able to resume his work on the farm regularly. He began to be supportive for his wife mainly because of his realization of her importance in his life after her futile endeavor to escape. He tended to neglect her quarrels with the natives, thinking they gave much vividness to his ugly inert home. When she was asked to help him on the farm previously, she usually refused owing to the unbearable heat of the atmosphere and her displeasure with the natives. However, when he asked her again to join him in his work, he was afraid she might elude again. But the attack was so rigorous that he was prescribed to remain at home for along time. Therefore, she had to go to the farm. In spite of his acquaintance with her edginess, he was accustomed to the marriage life they had irrespective of all its misunderstandings. "And even her rages against her servants seemed to

him during that short time, endearing; [...]" (Lessing, *The Grass* 128-29).

Strikingly, her first encounter with Moses was a severe clash in which she whipped him violently on his face during the working hours among all his comrades. The problem initiated when he left his work for a while merely for taking a rest and drinking some water. His behavior and way of speaking with her were considered rude, especially when his folk laughed at his attempt to implore her to let him drink. He asked her first by his own tongue, then by hers and finally by gesture. The result was her infuriation and her following attempt to gain control by thrashing him aggressively with her whip. The narrator described that Moses defiance of her as a white woman was a stimulus which drove her into this mindless silent response. Mary thought that Moses ridiculed her: "That lazy insolence stung her into an inarticulate rage. [...]. And she saw in his eyes that sullen resentment, and—what put the finishing touch to it—amused contempt" (Lessing, *The Grass* 146). The stock story was used by the "ingroup" to undermine the counter-storytelling of the "outgroup." For example, the majority overlooked the harassment faced by blacks and browns, maintaining that it was due to their cultural deterioration. On the other hand, blacks and browns thought that they are deprived of their appropriate rights because of the mentality of whites which consider racism as ordinary and unquestionable: "with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom" (Delgado, "Storytelling" 2413).

Mary's mentality and psychic health started to deteriorate when she had no servant at home, in addition to the aggravated conditions of Dick's economic status. She spent much time and effort doing the daily activities which resulted in her dwindling health. Her appetite grew worse and she felt as if there was "thick cottonwool in her head, and a soft dull pressure on it from outside" (Lessing, *The Grass* 164). To her astonishment, Dick brought her the servant whom she hit on the farm—Moses. When she objected, he insisted: "He is clean and willing. He's one of the best boys I have ever had" (Lessing, *The Grass* 174). Unexpectedly, Moses was resolute and quiet, and he proved to be a self-reliant assistant despite the lady's outrageous assaults. Her emotion towards him remained complex, a mixture of anxiety and fascination. The first situation in which Mary's relation to Moses developed into attraction was when she came by accident to the chicken yard to find him bathing under the tree. The sight of his black body against the white foam when he was cleaning his back startled her. Although a white woman usually thought of a native merely as an animal, she was hurt by his audacious looks at her, asking her to leave—a situation in which she realized his humanness (Lessing, *The Grass* 176). The other situation in which Mary began to admire Moses

was when he stayed up with her to take care of the ill Dick. By observing his body and movement, she observed his strong-built figure compared with hers and her husband's fragile one. Moreover, she noticed his self-confident movement which was contrasted with her hesitation and Dick's confusion. In spite of her attempt to remain powerful and conceal her emotions from him, she burst into tears for the second time when he handed her a glass of water. In fact, she lost control over her emotions and pleaded for him not to leave as if she unconsciously confessed his importance in her life (Lessing, *The Grass* 186).

Although Crenshaw in her article concentrated on violence against women of color which brought them into psychological accommodations, she introduced the element of poverty as the main reason for their sufferings: "many women who seek protection are unemployed or underemployed, and a good number of them are poor" (1245). Mary's mental disintegration could be attributed to the arduous work in the plantation and the family's increasing impecuniousness. She spent much time standing among workers in the sun without a hat. She "felt as if she were bruised all over, as if the sun had bruised her flesh to a tender swollen covering for aching bones" (Lessing, *The Grass* 182). Gyuris commented that Mary was gradually transformed under the burning sun of South Africa; above all, her transformation consisted in a "corporal reduction" of her body then her integration with the spacious area of the African bush—a state in which both the land and her body became comparable (194). Accordingly, she grew feeble and damaged. It was the hot season which mainly caused her deterioration. The daily activities which previously took her few minutes became then taxing tasks consuming longer hours. Above all, she was so irritated by Moses' adjacency that she gave him endless assignments: she made him usually occupied with several tasks in order to keep him away from her. Moreover, she became so fidgety and merciless about the organization of utensils and the neatness of the house. Moses, on the other hand, kept obedient and wordless with her. Her increasing fear and anxiety drove her into fatal mistakes reflecting her shattering self. For example, she left the door of the cupboard open despite her finishing the process of organizing its items; she overlooked cleaning the ceilings which were covered with cobwebs in spite of her meticulous concern with the orderliness of the house; and she forgot to feed the poultry until they vanished one after another. Similarly out of absent-mindedness, she forgot to fill the troughs with water either on the farm or in the house. As a result, the Turners were thirsty and they had neither fowls nor eggs in their meals for several

weeks, and they could not afford to get them any longer (Lessing, *The Grass* 183-85).

Tony was blurred and silenced by watching Moses dressing Mary and buttoning her gown in her bedroom; therefore, Tony had suspected Mary to suffer “complete nervous breakdown” as a result of her isolation and poverty (Lessing, *The Grass* 228). However, he did not expect her relation with Moses to reach such a dreadful degree. Comparing Mary with Martha in *Martha Quest*, Jannette King found both as wounded women by their “inadequate environment” (16). Mary seemed usually distracted and absent-minded, inattentive to the danger to which she exposed herself. Dick observed that she could not complete a sentence she had already pronounced: she forgot many things despite her husband’s attempts to remind her. Her relation with Moses appeared to be the real reason behind her dilemma. Her nightmarish days began when Moses asked her to go to her bedroom to sleep while he resumed his labor of serving Dick. Perplexed, she found herself pushed by Moses to her bedroom. When she woke up and remembered what happened, she was absorbed in fear and resentment. She again recalled her father: “And through her torment she could hear his voice, firm and kind, like a father commanding her” (Lessing, *The Grass* 187). The ambiguous relation between Mary and Moses was simultaneously disapproved by the white community and the black culture. It was claimed that when the borders between settlers and natives were violated, the outcome would be “scandal, breakdown, and death” (Louw 171). This idea was accentuated by the stock story of the majority; while the counter-storytelling introduced the concept of equality: “that each human being, regardless of race, creed or color, is entitled to be treated with equal respect” (Delgado, “The Imperial Scholar” 564).

### III-3 CHARLIE SLATTER AND COLONIALISM

Charlie Slatter got astonished and bewildered by the deteriorating conditions of the Turners. Contrary to their collapse, he managed to gain wealth and became one of the fortunate farmers in a short span of time because of World War I which produced “tobacco barons” to the market, as well as the increase in maize price which created a sector of affluent farmers in South Africa. Charlie was a farmer with a shrewd capitalist mind, who could exploit every space of his land and every native working with him. Unlike Dick, he despised both the natives and their land. What he aimed at was mainly his personal profits (Lessing, *The Grass* 211). Slatter could be regarded as the best representation of the third feature of CRT, namely “material determinism” maintaining that “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), therefore large segments of society have little incentive to

eradicate it” (Delgado and Stefancic 7). It seemed that Charlie deliberately did not help Dick or give him honest advice mainly for his cunning investment objectives. He planned to usurp Dick’s land to utilize it in feeding his cattle, namely for “grazing.” By his optical experience he recognized that Dick’s land was fruitless, however he left him trying his hands at everything until he lost everything. Dick’s ambitious projects shifting from pigs, bees, turkeys, changing into rabbits and tobacco ended in the Kaffir store which brought him impoverishment. Having materialistic inclinations, he waited many years for Dick to reach the stage of bankruptcy in order to buy his land at the lowest price. The Turners, in fact, survived all those years not only by patience but also by abstinence. It was claimed that Charlie Slatter represented the hideous side of colonialism in South Africa, and therefore he “legitimizes the white male body, thereby validating the racist patriarchal exertion of control over black and/or female bodies” (Grogan 34). What caused Dick’s gradual downfall was his stubbornness, which made him resist admitting his failure or seeking guidance from any expert. After two-year absence, Slatter was astounded to find Dick’s farm entirely damaged. When Dick noticed him, Slatter nodded to him but in an unpredicted way—the way of a triumphant soldier.

#### III-4 DICK- MARY RELATION

Dick got overwhelmed and confused by Mary’s eccentric behavior. Not only did her appearance seem unkempt, or her voice sound unmanageable, but also her movement grew restless. A great part of Mary’s dilemma could be attributed to Dick and his indifference to her. On the other hand, Tony thought that Dick gradually lost his physical and mental health because of malaria and his fretful relation with Mary (Lessing, *The Grass* 229). It seemed that Mary hastened Dick’s feebleness and Dick accelerated Mary’s neurosis. Dick-Mary relation had gone through several stages. She at first had complex sentiments towards him, a mixture of esteem and revulsion, despising him as a man but admiring him as a farmer: “She respected his ruthless driving of himself, his absorption in his work” (Lessing, *The Grass* 103). However when Mary witnessed his successive failures, she lost heart. After short interrupted conversations between the couple at the earlier stage of their marriage, they had silences to replace discussions. Realizing her dissimilar mentality and unease, Dick sat down with her at meals soundless and completely preoccupied with his thoughts. One of his habits when he found himself in trouble was to leave the house and walk ponderingly in his plantation (Lessing, *The Grass* 106). Dick’s evasion of speaking with her disappointed her greatly and made her thoroughly

isolated. She began to see the future as merely standing for “emptiness,” and her premonitions of calamities accelerated (Lessing, *The Grass* 163). In an attempt to rescue herself from the state of hopelessness, she suggested the idea of having a baby. Yet Dick refused in spite of his earlier eagerness for children owing to their destitution. She explained her viewpoint by the stock story that she needed a helpless creature to take care of; however, she actually needed “a companion” to share life with (Lessing, *The Grass* 166).

#### **IV-SILENCE AND STORYTELLING AS EXPRESSING CONTEMPT AND RESISTENCE**

##### **IV-1 THE KITCHEN KAFFIR AND KNOWLEDGE**

What attracted Mary’s attention was Moses’s language; above all, his fearless facial expressions seemed different from other natives’ expressions. Despite her awareness of his knowledge of English from their first encounter on the field, she was amazed that Moses could also discuss with her dialectical topics such as war and Jesus. The stock story among whites appeared to be the natives were enormously stupid and ignorant; consequently they should have been deprived of citizenship rights. Solórzano and Yosso claimed that racism originated the use of stock story and white superiority was therefore normative and undisputable (27). Mary, on the other hand, spent much time when she arrived at the country to master the kitchen kaffir to enable her to deal with her houseboys and other natives on the field. However, she got baffled when she found Moses able to communicate with her in her own tongue fluently. During such a phase she felt powerless in his presence and tried to avoid looking at him immediately for not showing her helplessness. When she saw Moses struggling to read the newspaper, she asked her husband about the source of his upbringing. Dick replied that Moses was a “mission boy.” Indeed all colonizers disliked missionary boys because of their extensive knowledge, endowing them with power and fluency of argument. According to the colonist, the best for the native was to remain ignorant and to “be taught the dignity of labour and general usefulness of the white man” (Lessing, *The Grass* 190-91). The colonist social code implied that the natives should not be allowed to speak the language of the colonizers: “Mary is struck by a strange and illiterate feeling that Moses’s speaking to her in English connotes a bold sense of disrespect” (Wang 41). The master narrative therefore required that the indigenous people were supposed to be compliant and wordless with their masters and their language was looked down upon and could not be considered equal to the settlers’ tongue. “In other words, a majoritarian story is the one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or

normative points of reference” (Solórzano and Yosso, “Counter-storytelling” 28).

#### IV-2 INCOHERENT VOICE AND LANGUAGE

Mary rejected Dick’s irrational arrangements and his awkward projects. His impulsive shifts from one enterprise to another led her to the state of soundlessness and eventual collapse. For example, she pleaded not to set up a store for the natives, but he insisted. The result was their desolation, then Mary’s irrational decision to depart. Her attempt to elude was an endeavor to rescue her mind and restore her happiness. She thought that she would return to town—to “that lovely peaceful life, the life she was made for, to begin again” (Lessing, *The Grass* 119). However, her hopes went in vain because she was disallowed to enter the girl’s Club as she became a “married woman,” and she was not given the job in the office in which she had formerly employed. Her muddled appearance and lack of self-confidence made her unsuitable for the job and instigated her previous manager to refuse her, claiming that the vacancy was occupied. As a result, Mary experienced “a long moment of silence” which revealed her frustration. The situation was so dreadful that her employer asked her if she felt unwell, but she denied (Lessing, *The Grass* 122-23). However, the effect of her old acquaintance’s rejection of her hastens her abrupt return to the farm with Dick.

When Moses showed his willingness to desert her cottage, she seemed offended, but she could not express her discontent by means of words. The only way in which she could show her disagreement was silence. Similarly, her confused speech reflected her mental disintegration. For example, she could not proceed with the same topic even for a while. When she spoke, she gave short, irrelevant fragmented sentences, since she began to have daydreams in which Moses did not fulfill his tasks and she loudly protested. Her mental deterioration was reflected both in her “soft” “disjointed” voice and her appearance which became trembling and scrubby (Lessing, *The Grass* 184). Her troubles did not only emanate from her failure in running the house or the farm due to Dick’s reckless plans, but also from her estrangement as belonging to the colonial system without having power or even good company of equal conditions to support or counsel her. She felt alienated and despised in an estranging community. Such a racialized society governed by a colonial mode of thought was the real reason for Mary’s fatal obsessions then her collapsing death. One critic associated apartheid with a phenomenon of “collective insanity.” Mary’s neurosis reflected the author’s sardonic attitude towards racism and imperialism: “Mary’s dementia is important insofar as it creates an ironic frame for



interrogating the wider psychiatric condition of apartheid nation” (Wang, 45). Another critic remarked that the dual life of Lessing herself and her childhood memories made her repulsive to the western white civilization, in particular for its imperialism. She also sided against human civilization in general for its partiality. This resulted in a wistful attitude apparent in all her works, “and a consequent search for alternatives influenced by memories of her past, and indeed a nostalgia for idealized versions of it” (Walder 100).

#### IV-3 NATIVE WOMEN AND MARY'S COMPLEX ATTITUDE

Next to her hatred of native men, Mary abhorred their women whom she met at the store and on the field. “She hated the exposed fleshiness in them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone” (Lessing, *The Grass* 116). Gyuris commented that Mary’s rejection of the African women could be regarded as “a mixture of fascination and disgust stemming from her own desires which she refuses to accept as her own” (194). Even the sight of their babies did not evoke in her any tender feeling, or remind her of her motherhood dream. Instead, she thought of them as bloodsucking worms. The store made her so close to people whom she disliked and spectacles which were sickening. Knapp assumed that Mary’s hatred of African women and sexuality, in general, could be associated with her opposition to nature. She believed that Mary was contrasted with Dick since Mary was more attracted to town life, while Dick was more captured by the countryside. “Concurrent with her love of civilization’s comforts, Mary is disgusted by untamed nature and, particularly, by sexuality” (24). To Mary, native women represented sexuality, which she detested, and motherhood from which she is deprived. Her response to them was therefore contempt and apprehension. Her last attraction to Moses was, consequently, associated with her insanity and impurity. Lessing indicated that Mary only in her lunatic state could be intimate to Moses: “The English man who accidentally observes this sentimental exchange between Moses and Mary is fully aware of its incredulity and larger consequences” (Wang 42). It was claimed that Mary was an unpleasant woman to her community owing to her eccentricity: her behavior was not in harmony with “the rules of racial engagement.” She was condemned because of her misty involvement with Moses despite her former repulsive reaction to his physical touch (Grogan 32). Although her relation with Moses was to the very end ambivalent, Tony felt disgusted when seeing Moses behaving so intimately with her in her bedroom. Progressive as he was, he thought that a white woman’s relation with a black native could only be compared to “a relation with an animal”

(Lessing, *The Grass* 231). This could be attributed to the majoritarian storytelling in which he believed; however some critics advanced that narration could be disparaging, either constructing or deconstructing social values. “Much of what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel, but not perceived to be so at the time. Attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race* 42).

#### IV-4 THE LAND'S RESISTANCE

It was claimed that the places of struggle, Dick's house, farm and the Kaffir store, could represent diverse types of conflict among settlers themselves on the one hand, and settlers and natives on the other (Louw 179). Frequent comparisons were unreservedly drawn between Dick's land and his wife. Both were charming, communicative at first, and promising of a more prosperous life; however afterwards they turned appalling and infertile. It seemed that both of them showed their dissatisfaction with him in a hostile, soundless ways; his land got finally barren and his wife childless. Hunter described the relation between feminine characters in Lessing's novels and the natural world as inevitable: “her protagonists are intent on negotiating a satisfactory relationship with the land itself as part of their quest for social and cultural identity, [...]” (3). Brooks drew attention to the “intergenerational land ownership struggle” in the United States (34), explaining how counter-stories are the way in which marginalized groups gave full vent to their feelings for exposing their aggrieved conditions. Consequently, counter-storytelling was regarded as a sort of medication to alleviate the injuries produced by racialization. Moreover, Brooks connected between “the role of property rights in US society and its relationship to whiteness.” It seemed that in a racist society the most important advantage was being of white skin, entailing owing land and black servants as well (38).

The land in Lessing's stories had played significant roles owing to its several connotations. Although it sometimes represented the African people themselves and their opposition to submission and derision by the colonizers, some other times it was a symbol for the inability of the colonial system to domesticate the harsh environment of the African wood. The land's resistance was mainly uttered by means of sterility, which was the best equivalent to silence. Land was compared to women, both white and black, since they were equally exploited for the sake of white settlers. Gyuris drew a comparison between Mary's body and African landscape, describing both as arid and cold (193). Grogan

maintained that in the colonial social order “woman was required to become the object possession of the white patriarch, submitting to his desire and authority” (35). In Lessing’s novels both women and occupied lands were wronged. On the other hand, land sometimes stood for accommodation and protection. Lessing had experienced homelessness in her childhood, and this had so appalling effect on her that she found herself stealing unnecessary items as a result of the alienation and hostility she felt. Therefore, when the family had a house on the farm, Lessing was so vivacious. Her happiness emanated not only from her need for settling, but also from the natural components of the house itself which she admired. The constructing elements of her childhood home were taken immediately from the bush. When she compared houses in London with houses in African landscape, she found the latter better because of its “temporary and organic nature.” Moreover, she likened the house in South Africa to a piece of garment which protected its inhabitant. It seemed that Lessing’s relation with African landscape was the opposite to her mother’s: “While Lessing as a child was open to that environment, her mother was more conservative and fearful” (Louw 166).

## **CONCLUSION**

Silence in Doris Lessing’s novels speaks volumes, and so does storytelling. Verbal communication between characters informs the reader with the essential incidents of narration; whereas, silence sheds light on their inner feelings and unutterable thoughts. Storytelling, on the other hand, explains the cultural aspects of both majority and minority groups within the same society. Stock stories are used by the majority to maintain their domination; whereas counter-storytelling is implemented by the minorities to demonstrate the atrocities to which they are exposed. Sometimes stock stories and counter-storytelling are expressed by means of words; some other times they are revealed by the silence the character chooses to interrogate the wronging common values. The unsaid ideas of miscellaneous characters in *The Grass Is Singing* indicate the inflexible social norms governing Rhodesian community because of colonialism and racist policy as well. Accordingly, silencing in such a despotic community is an ordinary act and the individuals are not given their legitimate freedom, either in action or expression.

Critical race theorists believe in the ordinariness of racism and explain that the idea of race is invented by western communities to keep their privileges; therefore, racism is not easily eliminated. The most influential way for combating racialization is narration in which the oppressed can find an outlet for explaining and changing their conditions. Counter-storytelling set in contrast with stock story foregrounds the

humanity of the oppressed and their linguistic and mental faculties. The battered citizens are deprived of almost all their rights and above all their liberty; consequently, their voices are tainted with fear, and their counter-stories are immersed in the brutalities of racialization. The most considerable problem encountered by those citizens is that their voices are rarely heard.

To the contrary of the widespread idea of the insignificance of silence, silence proves to be a scheming means by which the oppressors feel their disability to communicate with their victims. In fact, silence in Lessing's novel is telling not only for its perfect employment or its numerous connotations, but also for its inclusion of whites and blacks as well. The underlying meaning which cannot be immediately delivered is rendered in speechless moments which can be described as sounding silences. Lessing's viewpoint seems that colonialism and racism suppress the indisputable facts of the colonist and the native concurrently, and hinder their utterance abilities. In other words, the oppressed invent the element of counter-storytelling to emphasize their humanity and their right of respectable lives. Storytelling is their way of depicting their inner thoughts and realities, shedding lights on their difficulties, cultural aspects and suggesting possible solutions. It seems therefore necessary to be acquainted with the stock story and the counter-story of both groups to realize the realities of the two opposing factors, mainly for dispensing justice and eliminating discrimination.

## Works Cited

- Brooks, Wanda. "An Author as a Counter-Storyteller: Applying Critical Race Theory to a *Coretta Scott King Award Book*." *Children Literature in Education*, vol.40, pp. 33-45.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6 (July 1991), pp. 1241-1299.
- Davis, Kathy. "Intersectionality as Buzzword." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2008, pp.67-85. Accessed 16 July 2016. DOI: 10.1177/1464700108086364.
- Delgado, Richard. "The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature." *Pennsylvania Law Review*, vol. 132, 1984, pp. 561-578.
- Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 87, No. 8, Aug. 1989, pp. 2411-2441.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 2001.
- Grogan, Bridget. "(Im) purity, Danger and the Body in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2011, pp. 31-42. Accessed 16 July 2016. www.tandfonline.com/loi/reia20. DOI: 10.1080/00138398.2011.626181.
- Gyuris, Kata. "The Image of Africa in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* and J. M. G. Le Clézio's *The African*." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, vol. 4, no.1, 2012, pp. 188-199.
- Hunter, Eva Shireen. *A Sense of Place in Selected African Works by Doris Lessing: Read in Conjunction with Novels of Education by Contemporary White Southern African Women Writers*. An M. A. Dissertation. University of Cape Town, 1990.
- King, Jannette. *Doris Lessing*. Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1989.
- Knapp, Mona. *Doris Lessing*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984.
- Lee, Hermione. "A Conversation with Doris Lessing." *Wasafiri*, vol. 24, no. 3, Sept. 2009, pp. 18-25.
- Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing*. Heinemann, 1950.
- . "On not Winning the Noble Prize: Nobel Lecture." The Noble Foundation 2007. 7 Dec. 2007. Noble Media AB 2014. Accessed 20 Oct. 2016. www.nobleprize.org/noble\_prizes/literature/laureates/2007/lessing-lecture\_en.html.
- Louw, Pat. "Domestic Spaces: Huts and Houses in Doris Lessing's African Stories." Raschke et al. pp.165-180.
- Manser, Martin and Megan Thomson, eds. *Chambers Combined Dictionary Thesaurus*. Chambers, 1999.
- Nayak, Anoop. "After Race: Ethnography, Race and Post-race theory." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no.3, May 2006, pp. 411-430.

- The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language: Deluxe Encyclopedia Edition*. Trident Press International, 1999.
- Raschke, Debrah, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis and Sandra Singer, eds. *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times*. The Ohio State U. P., 2010.
- Raskin, Jonah. "Doris Lessing: The Progressive Interview." *The Progressive*, 19 Nov. 2013. Accessed 16 July 2016. [progressive.org/magazine/doris-lessing-progressive-interview/](http://progressive.org/magazine/doris-lessing-progressive-interview/).
- Solórzano, Daniel G. and Yosso, Tara J. "Critical Race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling." *International Journal of qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2001, pp. 471-495.
- Solórzano, Daniel G. and Yosso, Tara J. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2002, pp. 23-44.
- Taylor, Victor E. and Charles E. Winquist, eds. *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 2001.
- Walder, Dennis. "'Alone in a Landscape': Lessing's African Stories Remembered." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 99-115.
- Wang, Joy. "White Postcolonial Guilt in Doris Lessing's "'The Grass Is Singing'." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 40, no. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 37-47.