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Doris Lessing's *the Grass is Singing*: A Postcolonial Feminist Hauntological Approach

The Grass is Singing oleh Doris Lessing: Pendekatan Hauntologi Pascakolonial Feminis

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ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing is known for her metafictional narratives that provide a literary framework towards understanding historical events from embedded, postmodern perspectives. Most of her work is said to have autobiographical elements but there is a definite distinction that needs to be made between authorial insertion and the actual characters in her novels. This article analyses the ways in which her first novel, The Grass Is Singing may be understood through the perspective of Doris Lessing as a Third-Culture Kid (TCK) but by also demarcating the differences between Lessing and the protagonist of that novel, Mary. Following from this, a postcolonial feminist hauntological approach is deployed as a theoretical intervention to better understand the different states of trauma and existence imbued in Lessing's characterisations in The Grass Is Singing. In the novel, Mary's clashes with the environment in which she is situated and with the natives of the land is complicated by the spectres of colonial domination and of her father. Subsequently, this article offers an analysis of Mary as an individual and the ways in which understanding her contentious and difficult character sheds a light on the postcolonial hauntological aspect of life in-between margins from a TCK perspective. The implication of the study is that an interrogation of Lessing's oeuvre from the perspective of the TCK will yield a new perspectives towards approaching postcolonial feminist hauntologies in Lessing's novels through a broader context that can be applied across postcolonial nations in the Global South and in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, Memory, Postcolonial Feminist Hauntology, Third Culture Kid, Settler Colonialism

ABSTRAK

Doris Lessing dikenali dengan naratif metafiksyen yang menyediakan kaedah kesusasteraan bagi memahami peristiwa sejarah dari perspektif pascamoden yang tersirat. Kebanyakan karyanya boleh dikatakan mempunyai elemen autobiografi. Namun, terdapat perbezaan jelas yang perlu dibuat antara peribadi pengarang dan watak sebenar dalam novelnya. Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana novel pertamanya, The Grass Is Singing, boleh difahami melalui perspektif Doris Lessing sebagai Third-Culture Kid (TCK) tetapi juga dengan membezakan antara Lessing dan protagonis novel tersebut, yakni Mary. Pendekatan hauntologi feminis pascakolonial digunakan sebagai intervensi teori bagimemahami dengan lebih jelas kondisi trauma yang terkandung dalam perwatakan karya Lessing dalam The Grass Is Singing. Dalam novel ini, pertembungan Mary dengan persekitaran di mana dia berada dan dengan penduduk asli tanah itu dihantui dengan bayang-bayang dominasi kolonial dan bapanya. Seterusnya, artikel ini mempermukakan analisis tentang Mary sebagai individu dan cara memahami wataknya yang kontroversial dan sukar. Sekaligus, analisis ini menyerlahkan aspek hauntologi pascakolonial dalam kehidupan di antara margin dari perspektif TCK. Implikasi kajian ini adalah bahawa soal siasat karya Lessing dari perspektif TCK akan menghasilkan cara baru untuk mendekati hauntology feminis pascakolonial dalam novel Lessing melalui konteks yang lebih luas yang boleh digunakan merentasi negara pascakinial di Selatan Global dan Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: Doris Lessing, Memori, Hauntologi Pascakolonial Feminis, Third Culture Kid, Kolonialisme Peneroka

INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* presents a shocking and powerful exploration of the cankered settler colonial perspective of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) through the physical and psychological trauma and disintegration of Mary Turner, a white settler woman who slowly descends into a white supremacist path from which she cannot return. In *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary is haunted by the ghost of her parents and their fractured relationship as well as the poverty that she experienced growing up. This dialogue between Mary's past and her own racist tendencies leading up to her demise very much feeds into the hauntological imperative to speak back to the past and how it implicates the present. Poverty and gender underscore the fraught positionality of the White settler who is not privileged in relation to class but is privileged in relation to race and nationality. Because of Mary's attitude and actions towards the African community living on the land owned by her husband, it is hard to find her a sympathetic character, but Lessing paints the layers of underlying trauma and the ways in which the system of settler colonialism has fractured her own psyche. Brian Reiken (2023) explains that the destabilizing effect of settler colonialism in South Africa finds a pluralizing of characters in settler colonial fiction in authors such as H. Rider Haggard and Olive Schreiner (p.206). In Lessing's fiction, she is however writing about the settler colonial experience from the perspective of a Third Culture Kid (TCK), and one who critiques the ways in which colonial segregation impacts the psyche. As such, it is timely to deploy a postcolonial feminist hauntological reading to interrogate the spectral aspect of trauma in the text. The eventual death of Mary, murdered by the native Rhodesian Moses unfolds the unspeakable trauma of all involved in the colonialism, including the shocking revelation of Mary's racism towards Moses and the other workers on her husband's farm. In a sense, both Mary and Moses are specters inhabiting the narrative from opposite ends of the Manichean divide. This is embodied by the language used in the narratives that reflect the bigoted mentality of the colonial oppressors through whose eyes the events are told, often in a manner that dehumanizes the native inhabitants of the land.

This article contends that the interiority of Mary's perception as laced by these colonial mindsets and the ways in which she is haunted by the specter of her father is very much hauntological. Accordingly, this article interrogates Lessing's first novel *The Grass Is Singing* through the lens of a postcolonial feminist hauntology. Although Mary herself cannot be read as a Third Culture Kid (TCK), Lessing's writing has been closely related to her own unique female and colonial life experience and memory from the very beginning. Born as a Third-Culture Kid, Lessing lived a wandering and divided life in her early years in Africa and later in London, suffering physically and psychologically. Arikan (2025) writes that Lessing's "early life was marked by racial segregation, social dislocation, and political unrest" (p. 6). Lessing was born in "colonial Persia" and grew up in Southern Rhodesia (Arikan, 2025, p.6), a fact that contributed to her multi-layered identity. Lessing ultimately decided to leave Africa, which Arikan comments was "both a literal migration and a symbolic rejection of colonial structure" (Arikan, 2025, p.6). Jane Rogers (2025) wrote that Lessing was seen as a 'political agitator" who was "deported from South Africa in 1956" (p.92). Rogers (2025) further pointed out that Lessing was "fearless in her determination to explore and dissect the history she lived through" (p.92). Lessing's writing about racism and imperialism in *The Grass is Singing* is therefore based on her own colonial experience under the imperialistic system of settler colonialism and may be read from a hauntological TCK perspective even though Mary as a character is not coded as a TCK.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

DORIS LESSING'S LITERATURE OF RESISTANCE

Lessing has attracted the attention of both the readers and the critics for creative contribution based on her experiences and has "won the highest public recognition by depicting the dramatic struggle of her autobiographical characters to free themselves" (Visel, 2010, p.3). Her complex and cosmopolitan life as a Third Culture Kid (TCK) contributes to the intricately dimensioned characters in all her oeuvre. Lessing was born and raised in Asia and then in Africa in a British family. Lessing returned to London at 30, she was therefore always on move as a rootless wanderer. Lessing's cross-cultural identity made her both a sensitive and responsive writer. Her works are inhabited by characters who experience existential suffering because of their complex identities to expose the relative problems and to make the world learn a lesson and build the human world a harmonious world. Ruth Whittaker (1998) stated that "all her novels, without exception, are closely related to her own life" (p.133). Indeed, her unique personal experiences in both Africa and London have made her a witness of the trauma and plight associated with colonialism, war and various movements for which humans, particularly women suffer greatly. These elements add to the sense of anger that imbues Lessing's text. Deborah Scheidt (2022) writes that Lessing's "dissent and fierce commitment to her principles" have become hallmarks of a "prolific life and career" (p.37). Lessing's strong anti-apartheid sentiments led to her being "declared persona non grata both in South Africa and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (Scheidt, 2022, p.38). Because of her strong revolutionary leanings, Lessing's writings are always preoccupied with the survival challenges of marginalised individuals, especially women, at different stages of life. James Arnett (2018) writes that Lessing's activism in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe did not stop with her "lifetime ban" (p.435). In fact, after the ban was cancelled by the post-independence government, Lessing visited Zimbabwe several times to compile valuable knowledge about the Zimbabwean people (pp.435-436). This proves that for Lessing her experiences in Rhodesia marked her as a person and that she continued to feel a social responsibility towards one of the homes she inhabited in life.

Lessing's strong morality and activism made its way into her books. Roberto del Valle Alcala (2025) writes that Lessing's "fiction of the 1960s…marks an important departure within the broadly New Leftist constellation of British literary socialism...introducing a key anarchic dimension" into what he calls a "project of a realism without guarantees" (p.137). Deploying a partially Derridean lens (from *Of Grammatology*), Alcala (2025) interrogates the narrative of Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* to consider the ways in which anarchy is present in the novel which examines the life of a socialist woman protagonist (Anna) who is a writer and growingly disenchanted socialist (p.138). The publication of Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* in 1950 caused a sensation in the circle of the English critics. The novel expands upon Lessing's lifelong concern with social, economic and political structure, the problems of women's existing in a man's world, and finally the crucial relationship existing between the white masters and the black African servants" (p. 5). Thorpe avers that reviewers of the novel, "acclaimed it as the most promising novel to have appeared in England since the Second World War and certainly it was the most successful colonial novel since the story of an African farm surprised London in 1883" (Thorpe, p.11). The books and articles on *The Grass is Singing* reveal different perspectives of study, such as colonialism, post-colonialism, psychological studies and feminism. Previous studies have focused on exploring specific problem in Lessing's texts from a cultural or postcolonial perspective, but this article deploys a blended perspective to fill the gap in Lessing studies by applying a postcolonial feminine hauntological lens to the Third Culture Kid (TCK) perspective

which has been utilized recently in reading Lessing's novels. It is a fact that Lessing's novels are usually set in the in-between hybridized culture or background between African colony and London, represented by *The Grass is Singing*.

ANGER AND APARTHEID: A BROADER CONTEXT

Although the language in *The Grass is Singing* is dated and problematic in its racial markers, the narrative is a powerful indictment of the dehumanizing that occurs within settler colonialism and apartheid policies. Lessing's narrative is therefore not only a reaction against the traditional unreal depiction of heroism and romanticism in the long-term British overseas colonization and imperial expansion, but also a real portrayal of the collective identity of many communities, under the racist policy of apartheid. Altaf Ahmad Khan and Anita Harris Satkunananthan (2025) write about the dynamics of displacement and collective trauma within settler colonial states that practice segregation and partitioning extend across post-colonial nations (p.158). The narrative dehumanization of natives may also be found in colonialist depictions of Malaya, which disempowers the inhabitants of the land whilst also leaning into the divide-and-conquer modus operandi of colonialism. Karl Hack (2012) observes that the British colonial policy spread across South-East Asia by creating "divide and rule strategies" which "politicized differences" and ossified "plural societies" (p.161). Hack's (2012) research indicates that the pattern of segregating already pluralised societies to control populations is a pattern replicated in more than one colonised nation. This can also be seen in the segregationist policies that Lessing writes about. This dynamic of segregation is relevant in Malaysia as well where colonial policies in relation to race have left its traumatic mark on the nation's history as can be seen in the novels of Preeta Samarasan, Tan Twan Eng, and Rani Manicka which all depict the impact of the colonial divide and conquer strategies upon the different populations of Malaya. The impact of segregation trauma from a Rhodesian perspective may be read in *The Grass is Singing* which bristles with anger, rendering in stark terms the result upon a traumatized diaspora from England, offering readers a view of their real living status, rather than the imperial utopia of heroes and masters. Saloua Karoui-Elounelli (2024), in an analysis of Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) examines the novel through the lens of "the play of anger as affective intensity that is goaded by the tendency of metafictional narrative to assume the problematic nature of originality, representation and commitment" (p.83). Anger may also be found in the narrative of *The Grass Is Singing*, in the ways in which different axes of marginalization and privilege collide. In Lessing's fictional representations she allows the readers to see the competing imperatives within which a TCK must navigate.

THIRD CULTURE KID (TCK) PERSPECTIVES

Chloé Donohue (2022) writes that the term Third Culture Kid was coined by Ruth Useem "in the 1950s to describe her observations as an American expatriate in India" (p.47). Donohue (2022) notes that a third culture rather than a blended culture arises in the TCK condition which is to say it is "co-constructed interstitially" between "the spaces of the home and host culture" (p.48). In their seminal book *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken (2001) define Third Culture Kids as those who are spending, or who have spent, at least part of their childhood in countries and cultures other than their own" (p.6). This liminal experience results in TCKs being raised in a "neither/nor" world, one that is "neither fully the world of their parents' culture (or cultures) nor fully the world of the other culture

(or cultures) in which they were raised (p.6). In relation to Lessing, this article interrogates the ways in which her TCK experience may be read from a hauntological perspective particularly in relation to spatio-temporal displacements. Monika F. de Waal et al (2020) in a study on the intercultural competences and diversity beliefs of TCK note that TCK were better able to "relate to members of other cultures and learn from them" (p.178). Accordingly, these intercultural competencies related to exposure to other cultures brings about a potentially better developed "cultural sensitivity" (p.180). Although the research in this article has a limited sampling, it does relate to Lessing's cultural sensitivity and the ways in which this may seem to jarringly contrast with the internal life of characters such as Mary in *The Grass Is Singing*. It is therefore very important not to conflate a very important narrative strategy harnessed by Lessing to showcase the epistemic violence of apartheid and colonial domination with Lessing's own personal convictions. The distinction between the interiority of Lessing's characters and her own personal convictions needs to be made because Lessing's work is widely considered autobiographical to a fault.

Alice Ridout (2020) described Lessing's transnational experiences in different countries and the identification of Lessing as a cosmopolitan third-culture kid (TCK) of a colonial mother and further emphasized Lessing's "lived displacements across time, space and ideology that so impacted her work and leave critics reaching for categories beyond the national in classifying that work" (p.2). *The Grass Is Singing* shows the horrific effects of socioeconomic disparity on both the white colonial rulers and southern Africa's black populations. It is evident that a TCK reading and analysis of Lessing's works is essential in the 21st century and this article works to fill the gap in both TCK studies and the study of Lessing's work by interrogating *The Grass Is Singing* through the lens of postcolonial feminist hauntology. As a TCK writer with a multicultural background, Lessing lived in Africa in the first three decades of her life. Her cultural identity and literary writings are partially based on her colonial life experiences. However, Lessing is entirely self-aware that she is not a South Rhodesian, but an English subject, being one of the white colonists. She also knows that the native Rhodesians are regarded as barbarians and animals by the colonizers although they are the native masters of the African land. Lessing's love and attachment to the African land coexisted with her anger at the miserable life of Africans under racial discrimination. Lessing's unique experiences and identity as a TCK woman writer make her literary works greatly different from the other female writers, although there are only a few women writers including those predecessors who can only write privately with pseudonyms. Saloua Karoi-Elounelli (2024) writes that authors such as Ronald Sukenick and Lessing utilize the "crisis of literary creativity and the uncertainty of the authorial aura" as "recurrent themes in postmodern metafiction" (p.88). Lessing, as inserted in her metafiction speaks of her reclaiming of the feminine in her narrative of historical events.

PREVIOUS CRITICISM ON *THE GRASS IS SINGING*

Lessing's first novel is arguably less written about than her other novels despite drawing considerable introspection on its troubling aspects as will be explored in this section. Katherine Fishburn (1994) asks this question and explains that its "relative neglect" could be because it is "so self-evident, so readily accessible" (p.1). Fishburn (1994) however considers the Manichean Allegories contained within *The Grass Is Singing* to be of particular importance and that this is probably why the novel was (as of 1994) ignored by critics (p.2). Joy Wang (2009) writes an incisive critique and analysis of the novel that points out the "white postcolonial guilt" which incorporates the Black Peril and the sexualising of Moses which is a nod at apartheid policies

(p.38). Wang (2009) asserts that the deployment of white postcolonial guilt within the context of Mary and Moses's interaction can be read as both "abjection and agency" because it connects with the "abject dimension of white female interracial desire" (p.38). The problematics of Mary's relationship with Moses is probably in part why *The Grass Is Singing* trouble critics and fans of Lessing's work.

From the perspective of a postcolonial ecocriticism, Cajetan Iheka (2018) writes about the different ways in which the settler colonialists in the novel relate to the land particularly in relation to "the ecological attitudes of Charlie Slatter and Dick" in relation to "human exploitation and commodification of nature" (p.665). Particularly, Iheka (2018) contributes to the discourse surrounding *The Grass Is Singing* by underscoring the ways in which human oppression connects to the "exploitation of the larger environment" (p.665). It is particularly important that Iheka (2018) connects these aspects to white settler colonial ideology (p.666) because this ideology is at the heart of the trauma and spectrality of Lessing's first novel. From the Zimbabwean perspective of ecocritical literature, Anias Mutekwa and Terrence Musanga (2013) have looked at the paradox between humanity and nature in colonial Zimbabwe by comparing *The Grass is Singing* with Chenjerai Hove's Ancestors (p. 240). Mutekwa and Musanga (2013) opine that *The Grass is Singing* is a "critique of colonial racism based on Enlightenment binary notions of civilized and uncivilized" (p.241). Mutekwa and Musanga's (2013) analysis of binary relations in the novel therefore can be read in tandem with Fishburn's (1994) Manichean critique of the novel. The natives of Dick Turner's farm are seen through Mary's eyes as subhuman, even as she alternately reviles and fetishizes Moses. It may be observed, as Wang notes (2009), that her growing attachment to Moses could be read as a kind of abjection from the perspective of apartheid attitudes towards mixed relationships. The land and the native therefore, are viewed as the ultimate Other through the lens of an exploitative settler colonialism and this connects to the spectral aspect of the text.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article's research methodology is theoretical and qualitative in nature, deploying literary analysis to analyse the text of Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* to investigate the ways in which a postcolonial feminist hauntology may be discerned in the text. Purposive sampling is used to identify the aspects of the text to analyse to ascertain the ways in which Lessing's TCK perspective bleeds into her account of Mary, and her interactions with the people in her life. Through a narrow lens, this analysis considers Mary's experiences from a postcolonial feminist hauntological perspective but the TCK perspective is a very important one because hauntology, this article ultimately argues, is different when it is from a multi-national and liminal perspective such as that exhibited by TCKs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST HAUNTOLOGY AND COLONIALISM

Jacques Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology refers to the presence of ghosts from the past in the present, disrupting linear notions of time and history. In the novel, the ghosts of past colonial trauma, particularly those of colonialism and patriarchal oppression intertwining together with

gender and poverty, continue to haunt the lives of its characters. The concept of hauntology offers a lens through which to understand how postcolonial trauma persists in the lives of individuals and societies. Derrida (1994) writes that ghosts or remnants of the past continue to influence the present despite their apparent disappearance. In a postcolonial context, these ghosts represent the enduring legacy of colonialism, amplified within a feminist framework by patriarchal structures that further marginalize women. The spectres of colonial rule and gender oppression haunt the lives of both colonizers and colonized. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) asserts that haunting both "raises specters" and "alters the experience of being in time" (p.xvi). Gordon (2008) explains that the ghost or spectre is not "invisible or some ineffable excess" (p.xvi). Rather, it demands attention and interferes "precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us" (Gordon, 2008, p.xvi).

Hauntology is a philosophical and cultural theory that focuses on the intertwining of the past and the present and how the past inflicts the present in a ghostly manner. The spectrality aspect of hauntology is deeply tied into the discourse of hauntology. In the context of postcolonial feminist hauntology, past traumas and oppressions persist in the present society in the form of ghosts that affect women's lives and identities. These ghostly memories are not only individual but also collective, and they connect the past, present, and future across time and space because of the past traumas, such as violence, exploitation and oppression in colonial history, have had a profound impact on women. Building off Nancy J. Holland's feminist treatment of hauntology (2001), Anita Harris Satkunananthan further defined feminist hauntology by contextualising it as a "postcolonial feminist hauntology" (2018), combining the markers of postcolonial feminism with hauntology and linking the ghosts of history with its significance for the future. Writing about her experience with her own father's demise, Holland (2001) reflects that the Derridean spectre of the father in *Spectres of Marx* when appearing to the hypothetical daughter can only prescribe the limits within which she must live her life. Harris Satkunananthan (2018) connects this reading of the father to a postcolonial feminist context in relation to what Gayatri Spivak terms the "double bind" with which a postcolonial woman must contend. The postcolonial feminist dimensions of haunting as connected to colonial trauma is deeply relevant in this analysis of *The Grass Is Singing* because it reveals the layers of prejudice and oppression that limns the present of the narrative. A postcolonial feminist hauntological reading may shed light upon the ways in which Mary is haunted by her own father. While it could be read from a feminist hauntological perspective, Lessing's TCK experience intersects with the postcolonial experience. The connection Mary has to England haunts her, as do the cultural artefacts of a British existence, which may be connected to what Sadeq Rahimi (2021) describes as the "hauntology of everyday life", explaining that the "call to hauntological thinking entails the call to a fundamentally different mode of understanding the human subject, including what makes it tick, what drives it, and what the nature of its experienced reality is" (p.2). Rahimi's pragmatic approach is founded in psychoanalysis and may be helpful to apply in understanding the ways in which the material realities of Mary's life contribute to her hauntogenic experience both as a living character and one who is deceased.

It is also important to connect other aspects of hauntological research to the work which have been proposed by anthropologists and sociologists. One such manifestation is the "spectral turn" that arose from various scholarly responses to Derrida's hauntology. In *The Spectralities Reader*, Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (2013) aver that analysis afforded by the spectral turn encourages engagement with "the temporal and spatial sedimentation of history and tradition" along with its "impact on possibilities for social change; the intricacies of memory and trauma, personal and collective; the workings and effects of scientific processes, technologies, and media"

(p.2). Blanco and Peeren (2013) assert further that this incorporates the "exclusionary, effacing dimensions of social norms pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class" (p.2). All of the dimensions mentioned may be connected to the postcolonial feminist hauntological approach deployed in this article in an analysis of *The Grass is Singing*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST HAUNTOLOGY: GHOSTLY MEMORY OF PAST TRAUMA IN *THE GRASS IS SINGING*

The Grass Is Singing depicts the real life of poor white settlers such as Lessing's father in the 20th century while showcasing the ravage of colonial policies on human nature. Through an omniscient narrator's point of view, the novel starts from a news clipping about the murder of a white woman (Mary) by a local African servant, Moses. *The Grass Is Singing* focuses on the traumatic experiences of Mary to display the real living conditions of white women in colonial Rhodesia. The novel depicts the traumatic experiences of the others and the interweaving of multiple otherness of various communities under Eurocentrism and patriarchy. An important part of that depiction is that of Moses who is both victim and murderer and the later object of Mary's obsession. Fishburn (1994) considers Moses as one of the most important aspects of the Manichean allegory in *The Grass Is Singing*, particularly noting the ways in which Moses "moves inevitably in the colonial script from field laborer to houseboy to murderer" (p.2). When one is considering the spectrality which inhabits the Turner house, it is very telling that Moses becomes the subject of both Mary's desire and of her abjection. She alternately clings to him and reviles him in a manner that creates a bond of psychological torture.

Wang (2009) astutely points out that Mary's "belligerence is a clear projection of her anger against an unsatisfactory marriage and the oppressive gendered social norms that led to its existence" (p.40). While Mary lived the life of a carefree single woman, she did not realize the influence and control of patriarchy in her childhood memories. However, her avoidance of marriage for so long was proof enough of her unconscious fear of it, of following the path her mother in a patriarchal society. So, she was still "one of the girls" (p.45) over the age of thirty. However, Mary was finally forced into marriage because of the perception of the age at which women should get married. It was when she overheard friends talking behind her back about not getting married at such an old age and still acting and dressing like a little girl. Mary realized that she was "deeply wounded" (p.49). Therefore, Mary hastily married Dick Turner, a farmer who happened to be in the town. In fact, Mary and Dick do not know each other at all, and they are completely two kinds of people from two different worlds. Dick had told Mary about the poverty of their farm, and Mary had thought in her empty mind that it, "was another abstraction, nothing to do with her pinched childhood. She saw it as a rather exhilarating fight against odds" (p.62). When Mary went to boarding school, she was temporarily removed from the poverty in the patriarchal society and family's oppression of women in her memory. Mary enters her own tragedy later when these memories are activated and her own traumatic experiences as her mother's appearance in her marital life and the ways in which Mary's issues related to her dead father are in a sense transferred over to Moses as well as to her husband. In a sense, one may read Mary's relationship (problematic as it may be) as a transference of Mary's fraught connection with her own father and the lack she perceives in her husband. Although Mary's husband fits into the role of patriarch, there are many aspects of Mary's relationship with Moses that bleeds over into a kind

of a parent-child role. Moses dresses her and grooms her when her mental state approaches dementia. She at the same time degrades him but upholds him, giving him agency over her daily actions. It is when she wants to cut the cord and separate herself from Moses that he takes the ultimate act of killing her. In a sense, that one act of violence creates of both Moses and Mary, ghosts. Rahimi's (2021) approach to hauntology seeks to "to admit the presence of the ghost" thereby unearthing and unpacking "a text's layers and dynamics of spectral presences, an exorcism, whether benign or aggressively postured, intends and attempts to separate, to identify, to recover and release one or the other (the haunted, or the haunter)" (p.3). This approach allows for the unpacking the ways in which both Mary and Moses bedevil and haunt each other, creating the tragedy that catalyses the narrative of *The Grass Is Singing*.

According to Caruth, people's reactions to traumatic events "sometimes delayed to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviour stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (1995, p.4). The novel describes Mary's later loneliness, fear, sadness, refusal to communicate with the outside world, lingering nightmares and psychological breakdown and a series of abnormal state as the symptoms of the traumatized. This is especially true of Mary when Mary left home to go to the boarding school and then found a job in the city. She was very happy to find such a good place to live in the city far from the link "she hated to remember" (p.42), as if Mary's previous traumatic experience was no longer there. And yet, the fact that Mary seems to be deliberately avoiding everyone and everything involved in her traumatic experience. She was reluctant to go home and go back to the scene that reminded her of her childhood.

It was on their farm that the real tragedy for Mary began. It was the marriage, Dick's farm, and their lives that brought back traumatic memories and eventually pushed her into her final fatal tragedy. As a matter of fact, it was only after marriage that the symptoms of Mary's childhood traumatic experiences began to manifest themselves. The poverty and simplicity of Dick's house reminded Mary of the poverty of her own childhood. She slowly realized that she had returned to the situations of her mother who was like a demon, thought "that her dead father, from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead" (p.66). Her life began to move in the direction of that of her mother's. Dick's treatment of the natives and her poor life made Mary "stupefied with rage" (94) and she began to speak to Dick in "the voice of a suffering female who wanted to show her husband she just would not be treated like that" (p.97). Mary's manner of speaking was inherited from her mother, and this is the way in which her parents become a hauntogenic influence in her own married life on the farm. Dick was a very incompetent farmer whose farm never produced good crops and their days went from bad to worse. At this time, Mary felt that her mother in the past was "an older, sardonic double" of her present (p.110). Mary's unfortunate decision to marry in haste was caused by patriarchal societal pressures which led her towards a way of life where she was bludgeoned by the poverty of their circumstances which reminded her of the deterioration of her father and how they had suffered as a family. Subsequently, Mary takes her anger out on the natives who work with her husband and in their small home, becoming increasingly oppressive and cruel in her treatment of the natives. Through Mary's life path, the readers see clearly Lessing's attitude towards the patriarchal society as well as the long psychological constraint of the human beings in a long-established traditional cultural and social system. Mary and her husband try to escape the grim circumstances of their life by individually coming up with various schemes, all of which fail. In essence, Mary and Dick were trapped in a never-ending cycle of self-destruction and penury.

Lessing's works or the memory of the history depicted in them are also as important to the present and the future. Lessing's works are suffused with memories of the colonial past and the patriarchal past for the people in the colony and England. Through memory and narrative, women can reveal truths about the past, challenge the western tradition or the existing power structures, and lay the groundwork for social change and justice in the future. This connection is not only about personal growth and transformation, but also about progress and development on a social and cultural level. The future haunted by the past can be taken as the unresolved legacy of trauma. The spectres of colonial and patriarchal trauma do not merely affect the present, and they also shape the future. In the novel, the related characters' inability to break free from the past's constraints suggests that the future, too, remains haunted by these unresolved legacies. The cyclical nature of trauma in the novel, both personal and collective, reveals that the future is not a linear progression toward healing, but a space filled with repetition and unresolved tension.

MEMORY AND THE TRAUMATIC LEGACY OF COLONIALISM IN *THE GRASS IS SINGING*

The Grass Is Singing is a mirror of Lessing's memory and reflection of the history she witnesses as a woman in the colony. Lessing recalls the behaviour of her father and his fellow colonists and exposes that their behaviour brought great trauma to the native colonial people as their identity as the others in the colonial course and the colonial violence. In *The Grass Is Singing*, Lessing narrates a history of British colonialism and trauma and tragedy brought by patriarchy under colonialism through the experiences of the heroine Mary, her family and colonial society. However, this tragedy is not only caused by a fixed identity but also is formed by Lessing's reflection on the experience and memory of women in a colonial background. In this sense, this postcolonial feminist hauntological analysis of *The Grass Is Singing* is the deconstruction of colonialism and patriarchy, which allows readers to see a real era and history and tells the whole world that colonialism and patriarchy lead to no way out.

For Lessing, her knowledge of the concept of fathers and literary father is directly reflected in her memories of her father. In her autobiography *Under My Skin*, Lessing talks about the great influence of the war on her father and on herself through her father. Her father was physically and psychologically traumatized in World War I (WWI) and followed the British colonial policy to the strange and distant land in Asia and Africa. In her eyes, her male ancestors represented by her father are not only the embodiment of violence such as war and colonization, but also the typical representation of patriarchy. While Mary is not Lessing, Lessing's TCK experiences have some bearing on the ways in which she constructed Mary's character and is an intrinsic part of the narrative. Mary's traumatic experiences embody the personal and collective ghosts of the colonial past. Her sufferings and isolation stem not only from her hybrid living environment but also reflect the historical trauma of colonialism and patriarchal oppression. Thus, the novel reveals the ways in which these traumas linger, shaping individual identities and broader social structures. The colonial system does not vanish with political independence. Its spectres persistently haunt the characters' psyches, particularly those of the colonized. As such, colonial oppression may also be read as a spectral influence upon the decision of characters. This spectral presence illustrates colonialism's enduring legacy—often ignored or suppressed by colonial powers yet still present in the collective memory of the colonized.

In the novel, the ghostly memory of colonialism manifests through Mary's psychological breakdown. The novel critiques the myth of the civilized missionary efforts of western colonizers, revealing the profound psychological trauma left by the colonial experience. Mary's trauma is

deeply intertwined with the racial and gendered violence inherent in the colonial apparatus. Mary's estrangement from African labourers, her failed marriage, and oppressive social structures all intensifies her psychological and emotional collapse. From a feminist perspective, hauntology also encompasses the spectres of patriarchy that continue to haunt women's lives. Mary's trauma stems not only from colonialism but also from the societal gender expectations imposed upon her. Her role within a patriarchal society intensified her isolation and emotional breakdown. The spectres of past patriarchy, amplified by colonialism continue to shape her experience of later life. This feminist hauntology challenges notions of linear time and progress. Women's liberation from colonialism and patriarchy is not a straightforward march forward, but a complex negotiation with the ghosts of past trauma. The past is not something easily overcome or erased. Mary's inability to escape her traumatic past reflects the impossibility of fully escaping the patriarchal and colonial systems that have shaped her identity and world.

Dick's incompetence and family poverty is a haunting memory of Mary's father's incompetence and family poverty had been when she was a child. Therefore, her desire to escape her miserable fate and unsuccessful marriage grew stronger. The fact that "South Africa is a wonderful place: for the unmarried white women" (p.44) was a nightmare for her. As a matter of fact, there was no place for a married woman outside the home no matter how capable she was. After returning to the farm after the failure of escape, Mary's mental condition deteriorated. Finally, "it seemed that something had finally snapped inside of her, and she would gradually fade and sink into darkness" (p.146). Later, she "looked everything straight, without illusions, seeing herself and Dick and their relationship to each other and to the farm, and their future, without a shadow of false hope, as honest and stark as the truth itself" (p.168). This series of symptoms made it impossible for Mary to rebuild a complete and healthy self, let alone start a new life of her own. Among the women characters created by Lessing, Mary's uniqueness lies in the fact that she is a victim of settler colonial white culture and patriarchal culture. Mary's trauma and tragedy may be associated with the decline of the British Empire and patriarchy. On the other hand, Mary is both an accomplice and a victim of racism. Mary is actively embroiled in the ongoing white settler racism on Zimbabwean land. In Lessing's blistering narrative, her tragic past in no way exonerates her actions towards the native workers on her husband's land nor the racism that eventually leads to her own murder. Her fate clearly shows the ways in which white patriarchy traps even white women, thus weaponizing them against the natives of the land. The ghosts that haunt women like Mary are therefore colonial and patriarchal ghosts, leading them towards not empowerment but towards a mutually assured spiral downwards into abjection.

CONCLUSION

Lessing tells the story of the marginalized to deconstruct the binary opposition in her writings, including *The Grass Is Singing*. Lessing powerfully deconstructs racism, colonialism and patriarchy in *The Grass Is Singing* to prove that any portrayal of the colonies without the perspective of the native inhabitants were unlikely to be successful. The postcolonial hauntological underpinnings of *The Grass Is Singing* may be seen to be relevant from a Malaysian perspective as well, because the spectres of colonialism can be seen in the impact of colonial divide-and-conquer policies, the spectre of which arises every time there are larger racial conflicts. Lessing's novels combine personal experience with historical background, traverse time and space, deconstruct colonialism and patriarchy, and guide readers to review the colonial and female history

through her memory in her text, recognize trauma and face up to the future from the intersectional perspectives of post-colonialism and gender. For Lessing, although both personal and historical steps are constantly moving forward, only by constantly recalling history, reflecting on the present, and taking history as a mirror, can human beings know themselves and reach a hopeful and bright future. For the readers, the present and the future is the continuation of the past, and Lessing's works can make the readers respect life and avoid violence and trauma. Mary's tragedy also unfolds a truth to the world that only by deconstructing the binary opposition under colonialism and patriarchy can the division of civilization and the trauma of the female be avoided. The narration of trauma under colonialism has been seldom explored by authors writing about colonialism whose focus instead is on the heroic activities and spirit of the white male colonizer. In the colonial and empirical discourse, the white men are the masters of the colonies all over the world. The readers may realize the binary opposition of the self and the other, equalling the white and the native, and take for granted that the white refer to the white men while the native refer to the native men. But within a patriarchal system all women regardless of race are silenced in different ways as is evident in the case of Mary who is both a victim of the patriarchal colonial settler system and an oppressor by proxy. Lessing unfolds the traumatic reality which is totally different from the traditional male empirical imagination. What is more, she makes the invisible female the protagonists of her novels.

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