

The Cycle of Colonial Oppression and Violence in Doris Lessing's *the Children of Violence*: A Study of *Martha Quest*

Sameeul Haq Nazki
University of Kashmir

Corresponding Author: Sameeul Haq Nazki saminazki@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Colonial Mentality, Economic Disparity, Violence, Political Strife, Personal Conflicts

Received : 21, May

Revised : 22, June

Accepted: 30, July

©2024 Nazki: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This paper explores the pervasive theme of colonial oppression, violence and their cyclical nature in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest*, (1952) first of the series of five novels in the *Children of Violence* (1969). Lessing uses her literary prowess to dissect the complexities of human behavior and societal dynamics through the lens of her protagonist, Martha Quest. This cyclical nature of colonial violence manifests not only physically but also as an insidious psychological inheritance, shaping the characters' lives and decisions. The analysis focuses on Lessing's portrayal of the inevitability of violence in human affairs, highlighting the continuous struggle for personal autonomy amidst external conflicts and internal turmoil. The quest for meaning in a fractured world becomes a central motif as characters seek solace and understanding in a world marred by violence and chaos. The paper highlights Lessing's profound insights into the human condition and the persistent shadow of colonial violence in modern history. The study ultimately aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Lessing's work and its relevance to contemporary discussions on violence, identity, and historical memory.

INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing's the *Children of Violence* series, spanning five novels, occupies a monumental position in 20th-century literature. Through the intricate life of its protagonist, Martha Quest, Lessing embarks on a profound exploration of the complexities inherent in human existence. Weaving together personal narratives against the backdrop of significant historical events, Lessing crafts a narrative tapestry that resonates with readers across generations. Margaret Drabble hailed Doris Lessing as Cassandra in a world besieged, noting her remarkable knack for foreseeing social and political shifts long before they gained recognition as integral components of the *Zeitgeist* (1986:183). At the core of this exploration lies the recurring theme of colonial violence, presenting itself in both overt and covert manifestations and exerting a far-reaching impact on individuals and societies alike. The series commences with Martha Quest, tracing her trajectory from a restless adolescence in colonial Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to an introspective adulthood in post-war Britain. Martha's journey serves as a lens through which Lessing examines the multifaceted nature of colonial violence, encompassing political strife, personal conflicts, and psychological traumas.

Nostalgia is often thought to begin at home, with a deep longing to return to an originary plenitude, but for white African settlers like the Quests, where is home? When living in self-exile with only a provisional dwelling, what is nostalgia's object? Martha, unsettled by waves of nostalgia, uses her nostalgia to envision a homeland for black and white alike, a utopic golden city on the horizon that may have been and may yet be (Solinger, 2014: 75)

As Martha navigates the tumultuous waters of life, she encounters a myriad of challenges, each leaving its mark on her psyche and shaping her worldview. Lessing's portrayal of colonial violence extends beyond mere physical confrontation; it delves deep into the psychological scars inflicted by oppressive systems and personal hardships. The narrative deftly illustrates how historical events, such as the shadow of World War II, cast long-lasting effects on the characters' lives, perpetuating a legacy of colonial violence that transcends generations. Through Martha's perspective, readers are invited to witness the ongoing struggle for personal autonomy amidst external pressures and internal turmoil.

At the heart of this paper lies an analysis of Lessing's nuanced depiction of violence. By examining the myriad ways in which violence shapes the characters' identities and influences their engagements, the audience gains insight into the profound insights offered by Lessing into the human condition. Moreover, this study seeks to shed light on the cyclical nature of colonial violence as portrayed by Lessing, highlighting its pervasive and insidious effects on individuals and societies. Through a meticulous examination of Doris Lessing's narrative techniques and thematic concerns, this paper endeavours to delve deeply into the enduring relevance of her work within contemporary discourse surrounding colonial violence, identity, and historical memory. By plumbing the depths of Lessing's insights into the intricate complexities of human existence, an attempt has been made to unearth valuable perspectives

that shed light on the pressing issues confronting society today. By dissecting the various forms of violence depicted throughout her novel, she unravels the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate cycles of aggression and oppression, resonating with contemporary struggles for social justice and equity.

By examining the echoes of World War II and colonialism in Martha's narrative, she endeavours to elucidate the lasting legacies of historical trauma and the complexities of collective memory. This exploration considers how societies reckon with their troubled pasts and forge paths towards reconciliation and healing. By engaging with Lessing's work in a contemporary context, her aim is to underscore the enduring relevance of her literary contributions and honour her legacy as a trailblazer in the annals of literature. Through this analysis, the aim is to enrich the scholarly discourse surrounding Lessing's work and inspire continued exploration of the profound themes that permeate her writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to synthesize critical perspectives on Lessing's treatment of colonialism and its attendant violence in the series, highlighting key themes, methodologies, and conclusions drawn by scholars. Bill Ashcroft in *Postcolonial Transformations* (2000) highlights how Lessing addresses the dual oppressions of gender and colonialism. He emphasizes the ways in which Lessing deconstructs colonial narratives, offering a counter-discourse that empowers marginalized voices.

G. Greene *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (2001) argues that Lessing meticulously delineates the psychological impact of colonial rule on both the colonizers and the colonized. Greene posits that Martha Quests evolving sense of self is deeply influenced by her awareness of racial and social injustices. A. Smith, in "Colonial Unconscious: Colonial Trauma in Doris Lessing's Novels" (2010). Lessing uses violence not merely as a narrative device but as a means to underscore the dehumanizing effects of colonialism. Smith's analysis reveals how scenes of explicit violence serve to disrupt the complacency of both characters and readers, compelling a confrontation with the brutal realities of colonial power dynamics.

M. Patterson in *Colonial Encounters in New World Writing* examines Lessing's depiction of the colonial setting is informed by her own experiences in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), lending authenticity and urgency to her narrative. D. White in *Fragmented Narratives: Modernism and the Colonial Experience* examine how her use of fragmented narrative structures and shifting perspectives mirrors the fractured realities of life under colonial rule. White asserts that these stylistic choices enable Lessing to convey the complexity of her characters' experiences and the multiplicity of truths in a colonized society.

The critical literature reveals a consensus on Lessing's skilful depiction of the psychological and physical impacts of colonialism, the intersection of gender and colonial critiques, and the importance of historical context in understanding her work.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct a comprehensive study of the cycle of colonial violence and its recurrence in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest*, particularly focusing on the character of Martha, a mixed-method research approach can be adopted. This methodology would incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyse data, allowing for a multi-faceted understanding of the theme and its manifestations throughout the series. **Textual Analysis:** Perform a close textual analysis of the *Children of Violence* series, paying specific attention to passages, scenes, and character interactions that illustrate instances of violence and its cyclical nature. Identify recurring motifs, narrative structures, and character developments related to the theme of colonial violence, particularly Martha's trajectory and her interactions with other characters.

Character Studies: Conduct in-depth character studies focusing on Martha and other significant characters in the series. Utilize qualitative research methods such as character profiling, thematic coding, and narrative analysis to examine the psychological motivations, personal histories, and moral dilemmas that shape their engagement with violence and its recurrence. **Historical and Socio-political Context:** Situate the analysis within the historical and socio-political context of the settings depicted in the series, particularly colonial and post-colonial Africa. Incorporate archival research, historical documents, and secondary sources to contextualize the portrayal of colonial violence within broader historical narratives of oppression, resistance, and social change.

Reader Response and Reception: Explore reader responses and critical reception of the *Children of Violence* series, utilizing surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather qualitative data on readers' interpretations, emotional reactions, and personal reflections on the theme of violence. Analyze how different readers engage with the text and perceive its portrayal of violence and its recurrence. **Quantitative Analysis:** Complement qualitative findings with quantitative analysis of textual data, such as word frequency counts, sentiment analysis, and thematic mapping, to identify patterns and trends related to the portrayal of violence in the series. This quantitative approach can provide statistical evidence to support qualitative interpretations and enhance the overall rigor of the study.

Comparative Analysis: Compare and contrast the portrayal of colonial violence and its recurrence in *Martha Quest* with other literary works addressing similar themes, both within and outside the genre of Bildungsroman or coming-of-age narratives. This comparative analysis will enrich the understanding of Lessing's approach to the cycle of violence and its significance within the broader literary canon. **Ethical Considerations:** Throughout the research process, maintain ethical standards regarding the representation and interpretation of sensitive themes such as violence, trauma, and identity. Respect the autonomy and privacy of participants, obtain informed consent when conducting interviews or surveys, and ensure the responsible dissemination of research findings in accordance with ethical guidelines. By employing a comprehensive research methodology encompassing literature review, textual analysis, qualitative and quantitative approaches, historical

contextualization, reader response studies, comparative analysis, and ethical considerations, a study of the cycle of colonial violence and its recurrence in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* can offer valuable insights into the thematic complexities and literary significance of the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Doris Lessing's exposure to the British Empire from a young age played a significant role in shaping her worldview and the themes she explored in her writing. Born in Persia (now Iran) in 1919, where her father worked for the Imperial Bank of Persia, Lessing was immersed in the culture and operations of the British Empire from infancy. This early exposure provides a crucial context for understanding her works. Her father's employment at the Imperial Bank of Persia exemplifies the British Empire's global reach and the presence of its institutions in far-flung territories. Working in such a capacity, her father was part of the administrative and economic machinery that upheld the empire's interests abroad. This environment likely offered Doris Lessing a unique perspective on colonialism, the complexities of imperial rule, and the lives of expatriates. When her father decided to move the family to Africa after being influenced by the Empire Exhibition of 1924, it marked another significant shift, underscoring how imperial influences directed personal and familial paths. The family relocated to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a British colony, where they faced the harsh realities of settler life. The decision to move was likely motivated by the promises and opportunities showcased at the exhibition, which painted the colonies as lands of potential and prosperity. Lessing's subsequent life in Africa further deepened her understanding of the colonial experience. The move to Southern Rhodesia exposed her to the social hierarchies, racial tensions, and economic disparities inherent in colonial societies. These experiences profoundly influenced her literary work, where she often explored themes of power, displacement, and identity. Lessing mystically ponders in her book *Under My Skin*: it is of an enormous dangerous horse towering up, up, and on it my father still higher, his head and shoulders somewhere in the sky. There he sits with his wooden leg always there under his trousers, a big hard slippery hidden thing. I am trying not to cry, while being lifted up in tight squeezing hands, and put in front of my father's body ...I am inside the heat . . . the smell of horse, the smell of my father, all hot pungent smells (1994:19)

It reflects how the Empire Exhibition of 1924 set in motion a chain of events that shaped not only her consciousness but also her creative powers. In essence, Lessing's life and work were deeply intertwined with the British Empire's legacy. Her father's roles in Persia and Africa, influenced by imperial policies and events like the Empire Exhibition, underscore the pervasive impact of empire on personal destinies. Lessing's literary exploration of these themes offers valuable insights into the human dimensions of imperialism, revealing how deeply the currents of history flow through individual lives.

In her autobiography *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing includes a preface titled "A Note on Population, where she describes the dramatic changes in the

African population over the years cause by empires expansionist policies. Doris Lessing describes in *Under My Skin* how her parents were excited at the prospect of moving to a foreign land to make a fortune. Lessing laments “The Empire exhibition of 1924, which lured my father out to Africa... changed my parents’ lives and set the course of mine and my brother’s. Like wars and famines and earthquakes, Empires shape futures”. The Empire Exhibition of 1924, held at Wembley Park in London was a pivotal event that not only influenced the lives of those who attended it but also had lasting effects on future generations. Lessing’s father being lured to Africa as a result of this exhibition and sparked his interest in the colonial territories, a decision that significantly altered the course of his life. She further elaborates:

“It is believed that when the whites arrived in the area that later became Southern Rhodesia there were a quarter of a million black people. By about 1924 there were half a million. In 1982 the estimate was nine or ten million. Some demographers believe that there will be thirty million by 2010. Now, in 1993, ninety percent of the population are under the age of fifteen” (Lessing, 1994: 46).

This note provides a crucial historical context that frames the narrative of her life and the social environment in which it unfolded. The data Lessing shares reveals the profound demographic shifts in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, spanning from the arrival of European settlers to the early 1990s. When European settlers first arrived in the area that would later become Southern Rhodesia, the indigenous African population was estimated to be around a quarter of a million. This initial figure reflects the relatively small, pre-colonial population living in a region characterized by traditional lifestyles and socio-political structures. The arrival of the settlers marked the beginning of significant changes, as colonial policies and economic systems began to reshape the demographic landscape. Such (re)ordering of land and its inhabitants becomes a form of epistemic violence to the extent that it involves immeasurable disruption and erasure of local systems of meaning that guide the ownership and use of land. Because it actually suppresses the difference of the Other, colonial representation in this sense is a mode of violence (2005: 87).

The above quote delves into the concept of “epistemic violence” in the context of colonialism. This refers to the colonial practice of restructuring territories and populations according to colonial interests. This could involve redrawing borders, reallocating land, and redefining social and political structures. Doris Lessing and the *Forming of History* (2016) written by Kevin Brazil, David Sergeant, and Tom Sperlinger, is a comprehensive exploration of Doris Lessing’s work in the context of historical changes and literary form. The book examines how Lessing’s writing reflects and engages with the historical periods through which she lived, from colonial Rhodesia to post-war Britain and beyond. Chapter one examines her early work and commitment to political ideals, influenced by her experiences in colonial Rhodesia and her engagement with Marxist ideas. Lessing’s novels often reflect the turbulent historical changes of the 20th century, providing a narrative that intertwines personal

experiences with broader social and political shifts (Brazil, Sergeant, and Sperlinger, 27).

By presenting these demographic insights at the beginning of her autobiography, Lessing sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and political dynamics that shaped her experiences and those of the people around her. These statistics provide a backdrop against which the personal and societal struggles in her narrative can be better understood. The dramatic population growth and its implications are a testament to the profound changes that Southern Rhodesia underwent during Lessing's lifetime. They also reflect the broader historical forces that influenced the lives of millions, including issues of colonization, independence, and the ongoing quest for a sustainable future. Lessing's underscores the importance of understanding demographic trends as a fundamental aspect of historical and social analysis. It invites readers to consider how population dynamics intersect with other historical events, shaping the destinies of individuals and nations alike. This historical snapshot of population dynamics provides valuable context for understanding the socio-economic and political landscape of Zimbabwe, both past and present. It illustrates the profound impact of colonialism on demographic trends and underscores the importance of demographic analysis in understanding the challenges and opportunities facing contemporary societies.

The childhood experiences of colonial oppression and violence whether literal or metaphorical manifest in various ways in Lessing's life and literature. Her narratives often grapple with themes of power, domination, and resistance, reflecting her deep-seated awareness of the underlying tensions and conflicts within human relationships and societal structures. The sense of being overwhelmed and constrained, as seen in her childhood recollection, is echoed in her characters' struggles for autonomy and self-realization. The violence embedded in Lessing's childhood memories serves as a foundational element in her life and writing. The early experiences of colonial violence, fear, discomfort, and sensory intensity inform her exploration of power dynamics, personal and collective trauma, and the quest for selfhood, making them central to her literary legacy. This trauma and colonial conflict are expressed through Lessing's protagonist.

Applying Simon de Beauvoir's insight to Doris Lessing's life and work, particularly her portrayal of Martha Quest, enriches our understanding of the protagonist's struggles. De Beauvoir's concept of the child's experience in a pre-established universe provides a valuable framework for understanding Martha's struggles in Lessing's work. Simone de Beauvoir shows concerns regarding the child's situation in her essay, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1949) which according to her:

Is characterized by his (Child) finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees.⁶

Like the child described by de Beauvoir, Martha is born into a colonial society with rigid structures and values that she had no part in creating. This society, with its entrenched racial and gender hierarchies, represents an absolute reality for Martha, one she initially feels she can only submit to. Martha's childhood is steeped in the customs and values of the British colonial world in Southern Rhodesia. She perceives these societal constructs as given facts, much like de Beauvoir's child views human inventions and customs. Her initial acceptance of these constructs is a result of her upbringing, where the colonial mind-set is presented as inevitable and unchangeable. However, as Martha matures, she becomes increasingly aware of the contradictions and injustices within this imposed universe. Her growing sense of anger and betrayal is a response to realizing that the values and customs she has been taught to accept are not as immutable as they once seemed. This realization fuels her desire to break free from the constraints of her environment. In this sense, Martha's story aligns with de Beauvoir's notion of a child confronting an imposed reality but ultimately seeking to transcend it.

Children of Violence is Doris Lessing's semi-autobiographical novel. The protagonist, Martha, experiences profound anger and a sense of betrayal, which drive her to leave home. These emotions stem from her upbringing in a colonial setting and the oppressive dynamics within her family and society. Martha grows up in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), much like Lessing herself, and feels stifled by the colonial shifting from one place to another. Martha's anger is not just personal but also political. She resents the limitations imposed on her as a woman and the injustices she witnesses in the colonial system. This sense of betrayal is both familial and societal, her parents' adherence to conventional norms and the broader colonial exploitation conflict with her emerging sense of self and justice. Martha's departure from home is a pivotal moment that encapsulates her struggle for autonomy and her desire to break free from the constraints of her upbringing and the colonial environment. Through Martha's story, Lessing delves into the complexities of personal and political liberation, reflecting her own life experiences and broader themes of resistance and transformation.

The first part of the *Children of Violence*, initiates Martha's narrative with a detailed exploration of her family history, anchoring Martha's personal journey within a broader historical and socio-political context. This approach serves to contextualize Martha's experiences and provides insight into the forces that shape her identity and worldview. Lessing begins by tracing Martha's lineage, delving into the origins of her parents and the dynamics of her family tree. Through vivid descriptions and anecdotal accounts, she establishes a genealogical narrative that spans generations, revealing patterns of behaviour, values, and traditions that influence Martha's upbringing. Against the backdrop of colonial Africa, Lessing depicts Martha's family as part of a larger colonial project, with her ancestors playing various roles in the colonization and exploitation of the land and its indigenous inhabitants. This historical account underscores the legacy of imperialism and racial hierarchy

that permeates Martha's environment, shaping her understanding of power dynamics and privilege.

As Martha grows up and comes of age, her awareness of her family history deepens, prompting questions about her own place in the world and the responsibilities that come with her lineage. She grapples with the contradictions and complexities of her heritage, navigating tensions between tradition and progress, loyalty and rebellion. Through Martha's exploration of her family history, Lessing lays the groundwork for a broader examination of societal structures and the interplay between personal agency and historical forces. Martha's journey becomes not only a quest for self-discovery but also a reckoning with the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and class inequality that continue to shape her world. The narration begins with a historical account of Martha's family history. Lessing sets the stage for the unfolding narrative, inviting readers to accompany Martha on a journey of exploration, discovery, and resistance against the backdrop of a tumultuous era in colonial and post-colonial Africa. The reader is immediately immersed in Martha's world, which is deeply entrenched within the historical and familial roots of colonial Africa. Lessing masterfully weaves together Martha's personal narrative with broader historical and socio-political contexts, creating a rich tapestry that underscores the pervasive presence of colonial violence.

Lessing vividly portrays Martha's familial lineage, tracing her ancestry back to colonial settlers who participated in the exploitation and subjugation of indigenous peoples. Through Martha's reflections and memories, we gain insight into the legacy of colonialism that haunts her family history. For instance, Martha recounts stories of her ancestors' involvement in land acquisition and displacement, highlighting the injustices perpetrated against native communities in the name of empire-building. As a result of this, Martha aims at slaying her mother although many of her choices reflect unconscious attempts to do so (Rosen, 1978:55).

In the opening chapters of *Martha Quest*, Martha reflects on her family's legacy, recalling how her grandparents acquired land and established themselves as colonial settlers. Lessing's descriptive prose paints a vivid picture of Martha's ancestral home, evoking a sense of privilege and entitlement rooted in colonial exploitation. Martha reflects on her family's legacy and the role of her grandparents as colonial settlers: "Martha was the child of farmers who had taken up the land and settled there; her parents and their parents before them had come from somewhere in England to acquire land and become farmers in the new country" (5). Martha directly establishes Martha's familial background as descendants of colonial settlers who migrated to Africa to acquire land and establish themselves as farmers. "Martha was the child of people who had taken up land in Africa, worked it, and who now were quite unable to understand how the world had changed, leaving them behind." In this reflection, Martha grapples with her identity as a descendant of colonial settlers who are now struggling to adapt to changing times. The reference to "people who had taken up land in Africa" (11) underscores the historical legacy of colonization and land acquisition.

In chapter 4, Lessing provides a detailed account of Martha's grandparents' journey to Africa as part of the colonial migration wave. "The farm had been bought by her grandparents, who had been of the first wave of immigrants to the country; they had come in a ship with a sailing schedule that left London and came round Africa, stopping here and there, and on that last leg, a journey that lasted from four to six weeks, often into very high seas, to disembark at Durban or the port of East London" (55). It emphasizes the deliberate choice and effort involved in acquiring land and establishing themselves as colonial settlers. Martha's observations of the racial dynamics within her family further emphasize the inherent power imbalances that underpin colonial society. Lessing portrays Martha's discomfort with her family's casual racism and condescending attitudes towards indigenous servants, highlighting the insidious ways in which colonial ideologies permeate familial relationships. Moreover, Martha's own upbringing is marked by familial discord and emotional trauma, reflecting the intergenerational transmission of violence within her own household. Lessing explores Martha's fraught relationship with her parents, particularly her mother, whose authoritarian tendencies mirror the oppressive structures of colonial governance.

The protagonist Martha is filled with a feeling of hatred and contempt. Her life on the farm had exposed her to the numerous problems pervading Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), which mirrored the broader issues in South Africa and other parts of the colonial world. Martha's upbringing on the farm is marked by an acute awareness of the injustices and inequities of colonial society. She witnesses firsthand the exploitation and harsh treatment of Black Africans by white settlers, including her own family. This exposure to systemic racism and economic disparity fuels her sense of anger and disillusionment. The oppressive social hierarchy and the pervasive sense of entitlement among the colonizers breed a deep contempt in Martha for the colonial system and its values.

The farm represents a microcosm of the broader colonial landscape, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal and political realms. Martha's personal experiences of gender and racial oppression are inseparable from the larger colonial context. Her internal turmoil reflects the external conflicts and contradictions of the society she inhabits. Martha's growing awareness and rejection of these realities lead to a profound sense of alienation. She feels estranged from her family, her community, and the very land she was born into. This alienation is a catalyst for her eventual decision to leave home in search of a life that aligns with her emerging values and sense of justice. Martha's feelings of hatred and contempt are deeply rooted in her exposure to the systemic problems of colonial Southern Rhodesia. Her life on the farm brings her face-to-face with the racial and gender injustices of her society, fuelling her disillusionment and desire to escape. These emotions drive her to seek a new path, one that rejects the oppressive structures of her upbringing and strives for a more equitable and self-determined existence. Lessing's memoir *Under My Skin*, is about a middle-aged person observing a young self-

grow up (Sternberg, 2007:48). Martha is deeply influenced by her experiences growing up on a farm in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). This setting exposes her to the stark realities of colonial society, fuelling her awareness of its injustices and inequities.

Martha is keenly aware of the racial divide and the exploitation of Black Africans by white settlers. She observes the unfair treatment of farm workers, who are paid meagre wages and subjected to harsh working conditions. This is evident when she reflects on the labourers' lives: "She saw them in their hovels, ill-fed, ill-clothed, and suffering the insults and humiliations of the white people's scorn" (66) Lessing describes Martha's awareness of the harsh realities faced by Black farm workers. Her mother embodies the conservative values of the colonial society, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Martha's disdain for these restrictions is palpable: "She hated the way her mother seemed to accept everything the farm, the life, the suffocating heat, as if there were no other world than this" (49). She observes their poor living conditions and the disparity between their lives and those of the white settlers: "She saw them in their hovels, ill-fed, ill-clothed, and suffering the insults and humiliations of the white people's scorn" (78).

This awareness is developed through her experiences and observations, as well as her interactions with different characters. She notes how the Black population is relegated to menial jobs and confined to poor living conditions, in contrast to the privileged lives of the white population. This begins to open her eyes to the systemic racism in her society. "Martha saw the black men and women moving about in the white part of the town, their heads down, their bodies bent, as if they were carrying invisible loads. The sight filled her with a vague, unfocused anger" (101). Martha's encounter with Mr. Maynard, who works for the British colonial administration, further exposes her to the injustices faced by the Black community. Mr. Maynard's casual racism and patronizing attitude toward Black people make Martha uncomfortable and contribute to her growing disillusionment with the colonial system. "Mr. Maynard spoke about the 'native problem' as if it were a minor inconvenience, a fly to be swatted away. Martha's stomach churned with a mix of anger and helplessness" (16). A pivotal moment in the novel occurs when Martha attends a dance hall event where the racial segregation is blatant. She witnesses the exclusion of Black people from the event and feels a deep sense of injustice. This incident is crucial in her developing awareness and the sense of solidarity she begins to feel with the oppressed. "The dance hall was a glittering sea of white faces, the music loud and joyous. Outside, in the shadows, she saw the dark figures of black men and women, barred from entry. The unfairness of it all struck her like a physical blow" (67). Martha's conversations with more politically aware characters, such as her friends and love interests who are critical of the colonial regime, further shape her understanding of the racial inequalities in her society. These discussions often leave Martha feeling conflicted but increasingly aware of her own complicity in the system. "As they sat around the table, talking late into the night, Martha listened to the

passionate arguments about justice and equality. She felt a stirring within her, a call to question everything she had been taught" (33).

Throughout the novel, Martha's internal monologues reveal her growing discomfort with the racial status quo. Her reflections often highlight her sense of guilt and responsibility as she becomes more conscious of the plight of the Black population. "Lying in bed at night, Martha thought about the black maid who cleaned her room, the gardener who tended the lawns. She saw their faces, their tired eyes, and felt a pang of shame. How could she live in comfort while they suffered? (44). This moment signifies a critical point in Martha's journey of self-awareness and empathy, as she begins to feel a deep sense of shame for her privileged position in a society marked by racial inequality.

A pivotal moment in the novel occurs when Martha attends a dance hall event where the racial segregation is blatant. She witnesses the exclusion of Black people from the event and feels a deep sense of injustice. This incident is crucial in her developing awareness and the sense of solidarity she begins to feel with the oppressed. "The dance hall was a glittering sea of white faces, the music loud and joyous. Outside, in the shadows, she saw the dark figures of black men and women, barred from entry. The unfairness of it all struck her like a physical blow" (98).

Martha's conversations with more politically aware characters, such as her friends and love interests who are critical of the colonial regime, further shape her understanding of the racial inequalities in her society. These discussions often leave Martha feeling conflicted but increasingly aware of her own complicity in the system. "As they sat around the table, talking late into the night, Martha listened to the passionate arguments about justice and equality. She felt a stirring within her, a call to question everything she had been taught" (166). The passionate arguments she hears serve as a catalyst for her to reconsider her previously held beliefs and the societal norms she has been raised with. Throughout the novel, Martha's internal monologues reveal her growing discomfort with the racial status quo. Her reflections often highlight her sense of guilt and responsibility as she becomes more conscious of the plight of the Black population. This leads to Martha's journey from ignorance to awareness regarding the harsh realities faced by Black people in her society. Through her observations, interactions, and internal reflections, Martha becomes increasingly critical of the racial injustices perpetuated by the colonial system.

Her feelings of hatred and contempt are not just directed at the societal structures around her but also at her own family, who embody and perpetuate these injustices. Martha resents their complacency and complicity in a system that dehumanizes others and restricts her own freedom. This internal conflict is compounded by the gender dynamics within her family, where traditional expectations further constrain her aspirations and independence.

Martha's parents demonstrate a significant level of acceptance of colonialism, aligning themselves with the prevailing attitudes and structures of the colonial society in Southern Rhodesia. Martha's relationship with her parents, particularly her mother, is fraught with tension. Her mother embodies

the conservative values of the colonial society, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Martha's disdain for these restrictions is palpable: "She hated the way her mother seemed to accept everything the farm, the life, the suffocating heat, as if there were no other world than this (88). Martha's parents conform to the norms and expectations of the colonial society, accepting their privileged position as white settlers and participating in the systems of governance and control established by the colonial authorities. "Martha's parents were pillars of the colonial community, actively involved in upholding the values and institutions of their society.

They embraced their role as white settlers, benefiting from the privileges afforded to them by the colonial regime" (78) Martha's parents benefit from the economic and social advantages afforded to them as white colonizers, enjoying a higher standard of living and greater opportunities compared to the indigenous African population. "Martha's parents lived comfortably in their colonial home, insulated from the hardships faced by the indigenous population. They enjoyed the benefits of colonial privilege, reaping the rewards of their status as white settlers" (86). Their statuses as white settlers grant them access to resources, security, and a standard of living that is denied to the local population. Martha's parents demonstrate support for the colonial institutions and structures that maintain their privileged position within the society. They are complicit in perpetuating the systems of power and control that oppress the indigenous African population. "Martha's parents voiced their support for the colonial government and its policies, believing in the superiority of European civilization and the need to maintain order and stability in the colony. They were staunch defenders of the status quo, unwilling to challenge the entrenched systems of oppression."

Martha's parents exhibit resistance to critique or change regarding the colonial system, dismissing or downplaying the injustices and inequalities experienced by the indigenous population. They are unwilling to confront the moral implications of colonialism or acknowledge their own complicity in its perpetuation. "Martha's parents brushed aside any criticisms of colonialism, dismissing them as unfounded or exaggerated. They were unwilling to confront the harsh realities faced by the indigenous population, preferring to maintain their comfortable illusions of superiority and righteousness" (85). This demonstrates Martha's parents' acceptance of colonialism in *Martha Quest*, reflecting their alignment with the dominant attitudes and structures of the colonial society. Their complicity in perpetuating colonial privilege and their reluctance to challenge the status quo serve as a backdrop to Martha's own journey of questioning and resistance against the oppressive systems of power and control.

The economic disparities on the farm highlight the broader inequities of the colonial system. The prosperity of white farmers contrasts sharply with the poverty of Black labourers. Martha is disturbed by this disparity: "The sight of the farm, with its neat fields and well-fed animals, only served to deepen her sense of the injustices that supported it. The novel portrays the social dynamics of the colonial society, where racial inequality is ingrained in the fabric of

everyday interactions. Martha's growing awareness of this inequality is evident: "In the town, the segregation was stark and unmissable. Black Africans were relegated to the margins, both socially and economically, and this blatant injustice gnawed at Martha's conscience" (134).

Economic disparities play a significant role in shaping the characters' lives and experiences. Martha's family experiences financial difficulties, which impact her upbringing and worldview. Their modest lifestyle contrasts sharply with the wealthier families in their community. This economic disparity serves as a backdrop to Martha's coming-of-age journey. "Her father never had any money, or if he did, it was gone before it came into his hands. They lived in a small rented house" (136). Martha receives a relatively privileged education compared to many children in her community. The differences in educational opportunities reflect broader socioeconomic disparities in the society depicted in the novel. "Martha had been sent to the convent because her father was supposed to be a Catholic. It was a better school than the local government school" (141). Martha and other characters face limited job prospects, particularly women. Economic factors influence Martha's decisions about her future and contribute to her sense of frustration and restlessness. "She had a job in the town, at one of the offices, but it was dull and she knew she could do better" (141).

Economic differences impact Martha's romantic relationships, highlighting the social barriers between different classes. Martha's relationships with men from wealthier backgrounds underscore the economic disparities in the society. "But Martha had lost interest in him after he had told her he was rich. She could not believe that a rich man could be serious about her." The novel portrays the exploitation of labourers, particularly Black workers, by the white ruling class. Economic inequality is evident in the treatment of workers and the conditions they endure. "The black men and women who worked on the farms were paid a pittance, barely enough to feed their families. Martha had seen their tired faces, their stooped backs, as they trudged home after a long day's work" (144). This illustrates how economic disparities pervade the characters' lives in *Martha Quest*, shaping their opportunities, relationships, and aspirations. The novel explores the impact of these disparities on individual experiences and broader social dynamics, contributing to its rich portrayal of life in Southern Rhodesia.

Martha's alienation is compounded by her growing consciousness of the colonial mentality that pervades her community. She feels increasingly isolated as she questions the values and assumptions of those around her: "She felt herself suffocating under the weight of the colonial assumptions, the casual racism, the unquestioning acceptance of the status quo." Colonial mentality and the resulting sense of alienation are prominent themes, especially as the protagonist navigates her identity and place within the colonial society of Southern Rhodesia.

Martha feels a sense of ambivalence towards the colonial society in which she lives. While she benefits from certain privileges as a white person, she also grapples with the moral implications of colonialism and its effects on

the indigenous population. “Martha felt a strange mixture of pride and shame whenever she thought of herself as a white Rhodesian. She knew that she enjoyed certain privileges because of her skin colour, but she also felt a deep sense of guilt about the injustices suffered by the black population” (169). It highlights the duality of her feelings, where pride in her heritage is marred by a profound sense of guilt over the racial injustices perpetuated by the colonial system. Martha experiences a sense of alienation from the indigenous African culture that surrounds her. She is aware of the vast cultural divide between herself and the black population, which contributes to her feelings of isolation and disconnection. “Martha often felt like an outsider in her own country, unable to fully connect with the indigenous culture that surrounded her. She longed to understand the customs and traditions of the black population, but she knew that she could never truly belong” (177). Martha grapples with internal conflict and an identity crisis as she questions her role within the colonial society.

She struggles to reconcile her own values and beliefs with the oppressive structures of colonialism, leading to a profound sense of alienation. “Martha felt torn between her desire for freedom and her sense of duty to conform to the expectations of colonial society. She wondered if it was possible to break free from the constraints of her upbringing and forge her own path” (181). In colonial societies, roles are often strictly defined by race, gender, and class. Martha's struggle indicates a conflict with these predefined roles, especially as a woman in a patriarchal and racially segregated society. Through Martha's observations and experiences, the novel critiques the colonial institutions that perpetuate oppressive systems of power and control. Martha becomes increasingly disillusioned with the colonial government and its policies, contributing to her sense of alienation from the society in which she lives. “Martha could see the hypocrisy of the colonial government, which claimed to promote justice and equality while systematically oppressing the indigenous population. She felt a growing sense of anger and resentment towards the authorities who maintained the status quo” (173). This demonstrates how colonial mentality and alienation are central themes in *Martha Quest*, shaping the protagonists' understanding of herself and her place in the world. Lessing skilfully explores the psychological and emotional impact of colonialism on individuals, offering a nuanced portrayal of identity, power, and resistance.

Throughout the novel, Martha grapples with moral and ethical conflicts arising from her environment. Her internal struggle is encapsulated in moments of introspection: “Martha often found herself questioning the moral fabric of the society she was part of, feeling a gnawing sense of guilt and complicity.” Martha's moral and ethical conflicts arise as the protagonist grapples with societal expectations, personal values, and the complexities of human relationships. Martha's Ambivalence Towards Colonialism: Martha experiences a moral conflict regarding her complicity in the colonial system. While she benefits from her white privilege, she becomes increasingly aware of the injustices faced by the indigenous population. This conflict drives her to question her role within the colonial society. “Martha struggled with her

conscience, torn between the comforts of her privileged life and the knowledge of the suffering endured by the black population. She wondered if it was possible to be both a beneficiary and a critic of colonialism." Martha contends with the expectations imposed on her by her parents and society, which conflict with her desire for personal freedom and autonomy. This tension leads to internal struggles as Martha seeks to assert her independence while navigating familial obligations. "Martha felt trapped by the expectations of her parents, who wanted her to conform to the traditional roles assigned to women. She longed to break free from their control and forge her own path in life" (201). It highlights her desire for autonomy and her longing to escape these constraints to define her own life and identity.

Martha confronts societal norms and gender expectations that limit her opportunities and autonomy as a woman. She grapples with the conflict between conforming to societal expectations and asserting her own identity and desires. "Martha resented the limitations imposed on her by society because of her gender. She longed to defy convention and pursue her ambitions, but she knew that doing so would come at a cost" (204). Martha faces ethical dilemmas in her relationships with others, particularly concerning honesty, loyalty, and integrity. She navigates complex interpersonal dynamics and struggles to reconcile her own values with the expectations placed upon her. "Martha wrestled with her conscience as she contemplated whether to reveal the truth to her friend. She grappled with the ethical implications of betraying a confidence, torn between her loyalty to her friend and her commitment to honesty" (204). Caught between these conflicting loyalties, Martha found herself in a moral quandary, wrestling with her conscience as she searched for the right path forward. Martha grapples with the tension between pursuing personal happiness and fulfilling her social responsibilities. She confronts moral dilemmas that arise when her own desires conflict with the greater good or the needs of others. "Martha agonized over her decision, torn between following her heart and doing what was expected of her. She wrestled with the ethical implications of prioritizing her own happiness over the well-being of others" (211). This illustrates the moral and ethical conflicts that drive Martha's internal struggles and shape her journey of self-discovery and growth throughout *Martha Quest*. Lessing masterfully explores the complexities of morality, ethics, and human behaviour, offering a nuanced portrayal of the challenges inherent in navigating a morally ambiguous world. Doris Lessing's depiction of Martha's life on the farm in Southern Rhodesia is replete with references that illustrate her acute awareness of the injustices and inequities of colonial society. These textual elements underscore the protagonists' internal conflicts and her growing disillusionment with the world she inhabits, setting the stage for her eventual quest for a more just and equitable life.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Doris Lessing's "Children of Violence" series, the character of Martha serves as a lens through which to explore the cycle of colonial oppression and violence in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Across the novels, from *Martha Quest* to *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing meticulously chronicles Martha's

journey, tracing her evolution from a young woman constrained by the limitations of colonial society to a defiant individual striving for autonomy and self-realization. Through Martha's experiences, Lessing vividly depicts the multifaceted nature of colonial oppression and its lasting impact on both individuals and communities. In the conclusion of the *Children of Violence*, Lessing underscores the enduring legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggle for liberation and justice. The series culminates in Martha's rejection of the oppressive structures that have governed her life and her embrace of a new vision of freedom and possibility. Through Martha's story, Lessing emphasizes the importance of resistance and resilience in the face of systemic injustice. Moreover, Lessing's exploration of the cycle of colonial oppression and violence extends beyond Martha's personal narrative to encompass broader societal dynamics. She illuminates the interconnectedness of individual experiences with larger historical forces, illustrating how colonialism shapes not only the lives of its victims but also the identities and consciousness of its perpetrators. Ultimately, *Children of Violence* serves as a powerful indictment of colonialism and a testament to the human spirit's capacity for resistance and transformation. Through Martha, Lessing challenges readers to confront the legacies of oppression and violence that continue to reverberate in post-colonial societies. In doing so, she offers a compelling vision of hope and possibility, grounded in the belief that change is possible, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Lessing presents woman who, discover about themselves (including what they gain in what might be called their mystic states) they try to communicate to others, or to share the benefits with others. This commitment and sense of responsibility are perhaps the dynamic forces behind Lessing's novels, and help explain why her writing is so powerfully felt, especially by women, who for so long have not recognized themselves in novels and have not been taken seriously in literary work (Marchino, 1974: 265).

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be done on this topic "The Cycle of Colonial Oppression and Violence in Doris Lessing's the *Children of Violence: A Study of Martha Quest*".

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

1. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the many individuals and institutions whose support and encouragement have been invaluable in the completion of this study.
2. First and foremost, I am profoundly grateful to my advisor, Dr. Sunil, whose expertise, patience, and guidance have been instrumental throughout this research.
3. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the faculty and staff of Vignan University, department of English for providing a stimulating academic environment and the resources necessary for my research. Special thanks to Dr. Muzaffar for their assistance in navigating and accessing key research materials.

4. I am also deeply indebted to my peers and colleagues, especially Dr. Javid and Rutba for their invaluable discussions, constructive criticism, and moral support throughout this journey.
5. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the authors and scholars whose work on colonialism, violence, and literary analysis has laid the groundwork for this study. Without your pioneering research and critical insights, this study would not have been possible.

Thank you all for your contributions and support, which have been instrumental in the successful completion of this study.

REFERENCES

- Lessing, Doris. *Martha Quest*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics; Reprint edition, 23 January 2001. Under My Skin. Great Britain: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Brazil, Kevin. Sergeant, David. Sperlinger, Tom. *Doris Lessing and the Forming of History*. Published by: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. New York: Citadel Press, 1949.
- Drabble, Margaret. *Doris Lessing: Cassandra in a World under Siege* [1972]. Repr. in *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*, ed. Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 183.
- Marchino, A. Lois. *Marchino The Novels of Doris Lessing by Paul Schlueter* Review by Marchino. *Research in African Literatures*. Indiana University Press, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 262-265
- Rosen, Ellen. *Martha's Quest in Lessing's Children of Violence*. Source: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Published by: University of Nebraska Press Vol. 3, No. 2, *Mothers and Daughters* (Summer, 1978), pp. 54.
- Simatei, Tirop. *Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape, and Memory in Kenyan Fiction*. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 85-94 Published by: Indiana University Press.
- Solinger, J. Frederick. *Nostalgia for the Future: Remembrance of Things to Come in Doris Lessing's Martha Quest*. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 45, Number 3, July 2014, pp. 75-99
- Sternberg, Perrakis. *Adventures of the Spirit: The Older Woman in the Works of Doris, Lessing, Margaret Atwood, and Other Contemporary Women Writers*. The Ohio State University Press, 2007. Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/27969. For additional information about this book <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/27969>