



The Notion of Pride in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1973)

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Abstract : This article studies the notion of 'pride' in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. As internal emotion, pride is not easily spotted. It is a sentiment which conceals itself through mutual exchanges between people of different social classes or people held by family ties such like marital. These two entities are the stepping stones Doris Lessing uses to unfold the expression of pride in her novel. Pride is paramount throughout the novel. It is omnipresent in social relations between whites and blacks, men and women, poor and rich. It is expressed first through the relation between members of any class; people are tempted to look down upon each other for the sake of social status. It is also expressed in the relationships between people of different races and sexes. What Lessing wants to show is pride is a human prerogative; it depends neither on the color of the skin nor on the sex. In opposition, its positive connotation must be also taken into account, that is the pride to belong to a society which defends some values, a society which is not perverted.

Keywords: pride, races, whites, blacks, social class

La notion de fierté dans *The Grass is Singing* de Doris Lessing (1973)

Résumé : Cet article étudie la notion de « fierté » dans *The Grass is Singing* de Doris Lessing. En tant qu'émotion interne, la fierté n'est pas facilement repérable. C'est un sentiment qui se dissimule à travers les échanges mutuels entre personnes de classes sociales différentes ou personnes tenues par des liens familiaux tels que le mariage. Ces deux entités sont les tremplins que Doris Lessing utilise pour déployer l'expression fierté dans son roman. La fierté est primordiale tout au long du roman. Elle est omniprésente dans les relations sociales entre blancs et noirs, hommes et femmes, pauvres et riches. Elle s'exprime d'abord dans les relations entre les membres d'une même classe sociale ; les personnes sont tentées de se mépriser les uns les autres pour des raisons de statut social. Elle s'exprime également dans les relations entre personnes de différentes races et sexes. Ce que Lessing veut montrer, c'est que la fierté est une prérogative humaine ; elle ne dépend ni de la couleur de la peau ni sexe. En revanche, sa connotation positive doit également être prise en compte, c'est-à-dire la fierté d'appartenir à une société qui défend certaines valeurs, une société qui n'est pas pervertie.

Mots-clés : fierté, races, blancs, noirs, classe sociale

Introduction

Nineteen fifties coincide with the proliferation of prosaic works in African literary production. For a long time, the genre which prevailed was poetry, with writers of the negritude movement. The atmosphere of the period was, in fact, fresh. World War II was off. Super-powers emerged. And Africans were more and more willing to be free. The situation gave birth to realistic works including novels, short stories and essays.

The prominent writers of the period just follow the trend of their predecessors. The contents of their works dealt with colonisation and its problems. For that, they gave evidence for political, economic and social conditions with factual means. The works were more internal, more down-to-earth. An aspect, the academic L. Kesteloot (1992, p.175) tries to find answers when she asks:

Pourquoi ce réalisme ? Est-ce parce que les problèmes et situations traités sont cruciaux, tragiques et qu'ils exigent une vraie solution (...) ? Ou est-ce dû au fait qu'une grande partie de ces romans relatent les expériences personnelles de leurs auteurs ? En effet, il y'a dans toute cette production littéraire un étonnant pourcentage d'autobiographies.¹

By the same token, Doris Lessing wrote her masterpiece, object of this study: *The Grass is Singing*. But before coming straight to the author and the links between the novel and her life, let just try to give a brief explanation for readers who would be tempted to raise this question: how a writer of white colour can be labelled in writings concerning blacks. We are not going to remake history for it is largely known that white people settled in the continent for a long time. It is learnt in primary school that Bartholemeu Dias was the first European to skirt round Africa to reach le Cap de Bonne-Esperance in 1488. It is a landmark. Likewise, the first settlement in South Africa was of the Dutch farmers (called Boers; their expansion gave birth to the language: Afrikaans). The British domination did occur in the nineteenth century, followed by the war against Boers which led to the consecration of the entire region as a British Dominion in 1910. Not leaving out the presence of Germans in the South-West in what is now called Namibia... In sum, there were a variety of white people in the region, intermingling with native people since an eternity. For that, they held the

¹ Why this realism? Is it due to the reason that the treated problems and situation are crucial, tragic and it demands a true solution (...)? Or is it due to the fact that the major part of these novels relates their author's personal experiences? In fact, all this literary production includes an astonishing percentage of autobiographies.

necessary tools to discuss African issues, especially with the later advent of Apartheid and its effects in that part of the world.

The novel under study comes up with this period. Generally, critics neglect somehow the western literary perception of the continent; they confine African issues in native writings. While to a certain extent, some white writers positively contributed to enlighten the rest of the world about the transgression perpetrated in Africa. These writers appealed to their own experiences, to join with Kesteloot theory, to draw the ambience of that time. It is the case of Lessing.

Doris Lessing was born in Persia in 1919 and spent her childhood in a large farm in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). She left Africa in 1949 for London, taking with her the manuscript of the novel: *The Grass is Singing*. Her social and political concerns are implicit in the story. In the *Cambridge Guide to English Literature*, we can read that: *Her writings imply her experience of life in a constricting world where rigid convention and racial prejudice had to be resolutely withstood if individual integrity was to be preserved* (Stapleton, 1983, pp. 517.518). Doris Lessing experienced two unsuccessful marriages, a dead-end life in Rhodesia and, to crown it all, a mental breakdown. All these circumstances are found in her work.

The Grass is Singing, to be more accurate, is about the life of a white woman whose name is Mary. And the story, in reality, gives a broad outline of her existence, from her childhood when she lived with her parents, passing by her days in town as an independent woman to the tragic event of her death (murdered by her own native servant). The intertwinements that can be drawn between the author and the main character are manifold; in particular we can cite their hard and ill-fated lives in farms, their failed marriages, their experiences of next to madness state and so on.

In fact, the reader notices straightforwardly a shared sentiment for the best part of the characters. This sentiment is pride, and it can be pointed out as one of the basis of the torments aforementioned. *Dictionnary.com* (1995) gives us here a definition of the term:

a high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.; the state or feeling of being proud; a becoming or dignified sense of what is due to oneself or one's position or character; pleasure or satisfaction taken in something done by or belonging to oneself or believed to reflect credit upon oneself (p. 495).

These senses can be examined in the novel for pride affects for example Mary and Dick when they refuse categorically to socialise with their kinsmen, the other connotation is in the way the Slatters strive to fish out the Turners from the darkness of misery. In a word, the theme of pride is recurrent in the work; it offers

a wide range for research. We will try to draw some comparison with the writings of native people and also authors from overseas.

The study is articulated into two parts containing each one two sections. The first part entitled "expression of the notion of pride", focuses on the way the sentiment of pride is expressed through the characters and its consequences in their behaviour. It is, in fact, expressed via two different channels: the social stratification, with the considerations and inner feelings a member of a class hold for another one and in the household. The second part, entitled "the concept of superiority", highlights the prevalence of pride in the white man's connection with the native and discusses the probable existence of the concept with the rise in power of the native people.

1. Expression of the Notion of Pride

As internal emotion, pride is not easily spotted. It is a sentiment which conceals itself through mutual exchanges between people, people of different social class or people held by family ties such like marital. These two entities are the stepping stones Doris Lessing uses to unfold the expression of the notion of pride. Social stratification, to define it, is a term used in sociology to express the different categories or groups of people sharing the same social, economic and political conditions. An analysis of the relationships between the members of these categories is enclosed, especially the mouse-hole through which pride shows its face. Additionally, considering household relationships, the novel gives evidence to the progressive decline of marital principles; the woman stands up with her husband.

1.1. *Through Social Stratification*

Broadly, social stratification is known to be organized into three main layers: upper class, middle class, and lower class. Each of these classes is represented by a character in the novel. However, before going far, we need to make this clear; it is false to confine social stratification on the mere basis of racial groups. It does not only depend on the colour of the skin. It is more structured in terms of social groups than race. The author points it out through Mary's misconception of the fact:

It had never occurred to her to think, for instance, that she, the daughter of a petty railway official and a woman whose life had been so unhappy because of economic pressure that she had literally pined to death, was living in much the same way as the daughters of the wealthiest in South Africa, could do as she pleased – could marry, if she wished, anyone she wanted. These things did not enter her head. "Class" is not a South African word; and its

equivalent, "race," meant to her the office boy in the firm where she work, other women's servants, and the amorphous mass of natives in the streets, whom she hardly noticed. (Lessing, 1973, p. 41)

In comparison to native people the faction of white is more dealt with, in spite of the fact that black people in South Africa are culturally and linguistically heterogeneous, there are Zulus, Xhosas, Basothos, Vendas, Tswanas, and so on. But Doris Lessing does not in the least specify them; servants and labourers are gathered together in one class, the natives.

Going through the work, it is observed that Mary Turner, the main character (white of course) has experienced through her lifespan, different class categories. She, first, spent her childhood with her parents; her father was a railway officer. At the age of thirty, with a good job as personal secretary, she gained good money. But, she finally and regrettably got married to the despicable Dick Turner and lived in a remote farm in very precarious conditions. All told, we consent that she has tumbled down from comfortable life to profound impoverishment.

Beforehand Mary the town-girl reflected the perfect woman: '*she was a person of some importance, and out of the usual run (...) she had come to have what was the role of a comfortable maiden aunt to whom one can tell one's troubles*' (43). But pressing concerns removed her from her pedestal. Specifically, she did not think of marriage, and would never, if she had not accidentally caught her friends gossiping on her back: they said that she'd better stop acting like a fifteen years old girl; it was time for her to find a husband. Mary is that sort who revolves everything to themselves. She paid too much attention to gossiping. That little, apparently unimportant conversation had profound effect. And this, is actually a salient characteristic of pride. The individual, who believes that he or she is beyond reproach, accepts with difficulty critics and finds in it a sort of devaluation. At all costs, Mary tried to find a husband, not for the reason that she felt the need of it, but she must. It was the only way to save the regard people dedicated her.

At the age of thirty, this woman who had had a good State education, a thoroughly comfortable life enjoying herself in a civilised way, and access to all knowledge of her time knew so little about herself that she was thrown completely off her balance because some gossiping women had said she ought to get married. (Lessing, 1973, p. 52)

Reasonably, the reader would ask then what explain the choice of such a good-for-nothing like Dick Turner. Mary had acknowledged some failed love relation, before coming across Dick Turner, whom she followed over a hundred miles in the woods. Her fear for abasement made her run away from her society,

to hide with the first male on offer. In fact, Mary can be compared with Charlotte Lucas, Elisabeth's friend in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. She married Mr Collins to avoid the look of her society.

Mr Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome. But still he would be her husband. – Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women, and however uncertain of giving happiness.

(Austin, 1813, p. 85)

It is clear that these women have yielded to social forces in order to save their images. A sentiment of pride prevents them to stand against the established rules. They are obliged to conceal themselves in what is at reach.

As well, another tentacle of pride through social stratification is alienation. Social pressure pushes the individual to get unfriendly and withdrawn. Proud and unluckily underprivileged, Mary has closed all access to socialise with people of other class. Tactlessly, she shuns any contact with the neighbouring. It is the case with Mrs Slatter who tried in vain to help her find her place.

(...) she had made repeated attempts to get Mary out of herself. Sensing Mary's fierce pride, she had asked her time and time again to a party or a tennis afternoon, or an informal dance. She had tried to make Mary break her isolation. But always came back those curt little notes from Mary that were like the deliberate ignoring of an offered hand. (pp. 208-209)

Solid walls are built by those people. Mary was opaque and so was his husband Dick. It is like the different dimensions Jabu Banda expresses in the following extract. Each one constitutes a sort of barrier. He analyses it through Max Weber theory:

Max Weber viewed social stratification from three dimensions: economic class, social status and power (party). According to Weber each of these dimensions had its own stratification: the economic, represented by income and access to goods and services, the social, represented by prestige and honour and the political, represented by power.

(Banda, 2012)

Those, who do not benefit from these privileges, see themselves discarded. Tired of trying, Charlie Slatter somehow reprimands his wife to skip the Turners for they suffer from pride.

'Leave her,' said Charlie Slatter. 'She'll come off her high horse. Got ideas into her head, that's what's wrong with her. She'll come to her

senses. Not that she's much loss. The pair of them needs some sense shaken into them. (p.98)

In a nutshell, the author shows far and wide that the Turners suffer from the negative connotation of pride: high esteem of oneself. 'A proud man, C. S. Lewis declares, is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as he is looking down, he cannot see something that is above him...' (Mere Christianity). The Turners could not accept the fact that the Slatters were higher, socially speaking. They knew it. And mixing with them would attest and remind the miserable life they led. In this prospect, pride can be defined as a disagreement with truth.

In a reverse way, the persisting attitude of the Slatters can be seen as the other sign of pride. In Wikipedia's page where the site discusses the theme of pride in general, we read that: *Pride is generally associated with positive social behaviours such as helping others and outward promotion* (Pride). Charlie Slatter proposed to Dick to sell out the land and get a steady job in town. He offered a good price for it. But Turner was reluctant to the idea. Unbending, Charlie made the sacrifice to hire a young Englishman coming straight from London, to replace Turner in the works in the farm. He set up a good escaping plan. His attitude can be recorded as pride, but in a positive sense, like the pride to share common features, a sentiment of attachment to a group of people, a fulfilled feeling of belonging.

Charlie was fighting to prevent another recruit to the growing army of poor whites, who seem to respectable white people so much more shocking than all the millions of black people who are crowded into the slums or on to the dwindling land reserves of their own country (p. 224).

To conclude, it can be argued that, through social stratification, some classes are ill at ease to keep relationships with other classes. In one hand, they are too proud to meet people ; on the other hand, too high to lower their ego and come down with people. Lessing describes the consequences of such a view in this way, we quote: *Mary behaves simply as if she lives in a world of her own, where other people's standards don't count. She has forgotten what her own people are like* (232). In order to find an alleged reason for her behaviour, we would say that she fears for failure, she fears to be looked down, for that she flees her kinsmen, an estrangement she even transferred in her household relationships.

1.2 In Household Relationships

Things can happen where they are not expected to be. Conviviality is supposed to prevail between husband and wife and if this established fact is broken, a problem suggests itself. At the basis, attraction by love is the foundation

of any marital relation, marriage is to symbolise the will to start a family. In spite of everything, couples tear progressively apart then abandon all these consents. Thus, investigations have demonstrated that the fading of love is the main cause of these troubles, and also time shortage (because of activities like working); a situation which gives place to detachment, disobedience, disrespect, inconsideration and pride. The case of Mary and Dick comes within this framework, but differs from the start. Mary went with Dick because she needed someone at her reach, the first arrival, someone with whom she could run away, to escape the negative sights she suffers from her mates. Consequently, she did not follow Dick for sole love. Lessing describes how Mary was in a hurry to find a husband, no matter how or who it was.

(...) what was Dick to her, really? Nothing. She hardly knew him. He was a spare, sun-burnt, slow voiced, deep eyed young man who had come into her life like an accident, and that was all she could say about him. And yet, she would have said it was for his sake she was making herself ill. All her restlessness, her vague feelings of inadequacy, centred on him, and when she asked herself, in chilly dismay, why it should be he, rather than any of the other men she knew, there was no satisfactory reply. (p. 59)

Accordingly, despair led her to choose Dick. A feel, she shared with the latter. Dick lives in shabby conditions. He is a farmer but never makes it, each harvest year is failure and he is riddled with debts. In sum, his situation is desperate, just like Mary. In a way, each of them is the solution. As each sacrifice has its price, Mary tyrannizes him at will.

Through her writings, Lessing gives evidence to the fact that childhood shapes in some way the moral fibre of any person. The individual in fact is the result of several experiences and those of his youth are indelible. Therefore, they follow him wherever he goes. Going back to her childhood, Mary could be influenced by the tension subsisting between her parents. Though, her father was worse compared with Dick; he used to waste money in gambling and drinking, whereas Dick was consumed by labour. It was hell and fire in her native home. Lessing describes the atmosphere:

His wife treated him with a cold indifference. She reserved her scornful ridicule of him for when her friends came to tea. It was as if she did not give her husband the satisfaction of knowing that she cared anything for him at all, or felt anything for him, even contempt and derision. She behaved as if he were simply not there for her. And for all practical purposes he was not. (p. 39)

Most of the time, when the husband does not succeed in bearing the charges of the household, no respect is shown and his commands are flouted. As a matter of fact, Mary grew up seeing her parents clashing, so she inevitably reproduces those scenes in her own household.

She was speaking in a new voice for her, a voice she had never used before in her life. It was taken direct from her mother, when she had those scenes over money with her father... in a moment she would begin to cry, as her mother had cried on these occasions, in a kind of dignified, martyred rage. (Lessing, 1973, p. 96)

This state of fact gives place to an advanced expression of pride in the household. The spouses are turned bad. This explains why Mary is, in fact, all the contrary of a perfect wife, she was far above the ground and did not even try to show love to Dick.

Marriage, legally speaking, is defined as: (...) *un acte juridique conférant l'état de conjoint à un homme et à une femme. C'est une situation juridique créée par l'union de ces deux personnes dans le dessein de fonder une famille*² (Le Mariage). Therefore children are somehow the cement which strengthens a household. Dick thought of children to save the failure of his marriage.

Children were what he wanted now that his marriage was a failure and seemed impossible to right. Children would bring them close together and break down this invisible barrier. But they simply couldn't afford to have children. When he had said to Mary (thinking she might be longing for them) she had assented with a look of relief. He had not missed that look. But perhaps when he got out of the wood, she would be pleased to have children. (Lessing, 1973, p. 100)

The look on Mary's face made things clear and reminded the poor condition they were living in. However; her reaction raises some suspicions she sounds to find demeaning to bear Dick's children and she takes their condition as a pretext (...)

Disobedience is another aspect of pride in the household. For instance, an old Muslim adage says: « *La base de la désobéissance c'est la fierté. Une femme désobéissante, c'est une femme qui est fière et orgueilleuse vis à vis de son mari et qui aime le contredire et lui désobéir.* »³ It is the case with Mary. The latter likes to stand up with her husband, especially on questions related to native servants. Since her coming to the farm, she managed to fire the best part of the servants. Her sole

² (...) a legal act which makes a man and a woman husband and wife. It is a legal context created by the union of two people willing to start a family. ["Mariage (droit)" Microsoft® Études 2008 [DVD]. Microsoft Corporation, 2007.]

³ Pride is at the basis of disobedience. A disobedient woman is a woman who is proud, conceit towards her husband and likes contradicting and disobeying him.

aim was to hurt Dick because she knew how affective he is tempted to be with native workers. On several occasions, she had rejected Dick's commands with the back of her hand. For example when Dick had the idea to open a store where they could sell some stuffs in order to put right their situation, he proposed the charge to his wife, she: (...) *replied sharply that she would rather die than set foot inside it. Nothing would make her, nothing.* It makes clear that there is a direct relation between disobedience and pride. Nothing is humiliating in standing behind a counter, unless being someone who sees high his ego. Dick replied: *'It wouldn't hurt you. Are you too good to stand behind a counter, then?'* (Lessing, 1973, p. 115)

The only time Mary was deferential to her husband, the latter was coerced to defeat and this, is called pride over victory. Mary seems to be in constant competition against everyone.

It was the only time she could bring herself to use endearments to him, when she was feeling victorious and forgiving. His craving for forgiveness, and his abasement before her was the greatest satisfaction she knew. (Lessing, 1973, p. 80)

In our time, goings-on such as labour have completely torn apart affective family relations. Internet, televisions, radios make things worse for they put a stop to old warm exchanges that existed between members of the family.

La famille, le travail et les loisirs sont les trois principaux aspects de la vie moderne. Mais ont-ils une valeur égale? Le travail représente-t-il le tiers du diagramme? Une brève leçon d'histoire démontrera que le dur labeur, quelle qu'en soit la forme, a toujours été un objet de préoccupation chez l'homme. Mais où l'équilibre se situe-t-il maintenant et qu'en sera-t-il demain?⁴ (Shepell, 2004)

The spread of pride through social stratification, in household and family relationships, is trouble-free. So it is conceivable that if pride succeeds in thrusting between spouses and even people of the same race, we can imagine how easily it can prime between master, the white and servant, the native.

2. The Concept of Superiority

White people have always considered themselves as the superior race, an alleged conception of pre-eminence upon other races which dates back several years. It is consisted of stereotypical distinction between people on the basis of colour. A supremacy, which goes beyond the usual narrow focus on barbaric,

⁴ Family, labour and leisure time are the three main aspects of modern life. But, do they share the same value? Does labour represent the third of the diagram? A short lesson of history demonstrated that hard labour, whatever it may be, has always been an object of concern for mankind. Though, how these aspects are balanced now and how will it be in the future?

extreme and explicitly racist organisations like Ku Klux Klan (KKK), The Order or the White Patriot Party (WPP). Rather, a supremacy which is normalised, naturalised and taken for granted. However, an old Korean proverb says: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' Through persecuting the native man, the white man finally built up a rebel.

2.1 *Master-Servant Relations*

From a biblical perspective, Adam is the first man from whom all men and women are descended from. Centuries after his passing away, God unleashed a flood on earth, killing all humans and animals except those of Noah's ark. By this regard Noah becomes the first man of the next stage of humanity and is portrayed as a white man, father of Asian and Black people. For that reason, Europeans claim the fatherhood of any other race and take this as a basis for an established ascendancy and elevated status to rule over humans. This notion progressed through centuries. It evolved through the Trans-Atlantic slave, the European conquest and finally colonization. Biologic theories as well, were upheld to confirm this concept of white superiority as a natural fact.

(...) white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as whites. Usually, this occurs through the valuation of white skin colour, although this is not the only criterion for racial distinction. Hair texture, nose shapes, culture, and language also multiply the privileges of whites. (Hunter, 2007)

The main themes of the novel in study are just prerogative of white people. But the theme of master-slave relations is quite recurrent. Literary speaking, the effects or the expression of colonisation have been expounded by most important works from native writers. Therefore, it is very interesting to confront these writings with those of white authors who once experienced the continent; otherwise only one version will prevail. It is important to know the sentiments through the writings of their fellowmen.

The picture on the cover of the novel shows a native servant carrying a tray with two teacups and a teapot by hand, sleeves rolled up and many elements substantiating manual labour, weakness, helpfulness, coercion, exploitation and so on. When the reader opens the book, he discovers the perpetration of all these. Unfortunately, it ended up with the murdering Mary Turner by her native servant Moses. In sum, the relation between people of different races in South Africa proves to be thorny and Doris Lessing treats it through a critical perspective. If we question South Africa's history, we learn that:

La coexistence entre les différentes communautés sur le territoire sud-africain a toujours été conflictuelle: conflits entre colons blancs et

populations noires, mais aussi entre Zoulous et Xhosa, et entre colons, Britanniques et Boers (...) la ségrégation raciale s'inscrit dans l'espace sud-africain. Les Noirs, majoritaires, n'avaient le droit de vivre que sur 7% des territoires. L'apartheid fut systématisé après 1948, et la création de bantoustans ou homelands consacra l'exclusion territoriale, sociale et politique des Noirs.⁵ (Encarta, 2008)

Doris Lessing paints a space where interferences between white people and some native employees consisted of farm labourers and domestic servants. The relation between the two entities is mainly conflicting, though some exceptions are described as friendly.

In effect, the author demonstrates how the inferiority of native people is instituted. She uses two types of individuals disposed to take as granted any ideas they are given, to show the way this inferiority is inserted in minds. She takes the child and the newcomer in the continent.

It is certain that the child retains easily what he learns. His mind is fresh and adult activities have not ever polluted it. For that reason, parents are asked to pay attention to the messages they convey towards their children for the repercussions it will arise when they grow up. Mary Turner has, since her childhood, a negative image of native people. She hates them, belittles them and does her best to bring them trouble. *Mary just couldn't get on with natives and that was the end of it. He had to accept it; she was made like that, and couldn't be altered. A cook never lasted longer than a month, and all the time there were scenes and storms of temper* (Lessing, 1973, p. 100). It is the case all along the novel until the advent of Moses... Mary's attitude has reached a point in which she felt irritated for even a flattering remark.

The old boy kept his eyes on the ground and said 'Good morning, missus.' Then he added politely to Dick, as if this was expected of him, 'Very nice, very nice boss.' (...)

Mary was rather outraged at this casual stockmarket attitude; then she saw that it was only a matter of form, and calmed herself. She was left with a feeling of indignation, saying to herself. 'And who does he think he is?' (Lessing, 1973, pp. 68.69)

⁵ The coexistence between different communities in South-African territory has always been conflicting: conflicts between white settlers and black populations, as well between Zulus and Xhosas, and between settlers, British and Boers (...) racial segregation came within South African space. Black people, superior in number, had only 7% of the territories to live in. Apartheid got systematised after 1948, and the creation of Bantustans or homelands confirmed the territorial, social and political exclusion of black people. ["Afrique du Sud." Microsoft® Études 2008 [DVD]. Microsoft Corporation, 2007.]

Lessing actually draws the reader's attention to the source of her loathing for natives. In fact she does not know them. Her past, her childhood, her upbringing induce her to repudiate them.

She had never come into contact with natives before, as an employer on her own account. Her mother's servants she had been forbidden to talk to (...) she was afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be. In her childhood she had been forbidden to walk out alone, and when she asked why, she had been told in the furtive, lowered, but matter-of-fact voice she associated with her mother, that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her. (Lessing, 1973, p. 70)

So, her parents have built around her an appalling idea of native people, thus she just applies what she learnt. In the same trend, young Europeans who are newcomers in the continent undergo the similar coaching.

A young man just out from Europe, having no idea about Africa, is tempted to accept as true whatever he is told. It is the case of Tony Marston. Charlie Slatter fetched him to replace Dick in the supervision of the farm. Inexperienced, Dick shows him the way the job goes, for that he lives in the latter's house. Marston is considered as a witness for Mary's murder, he was the first to get to the place. Within a short period following his coming, his fellowmen have succeeded in misrepresenting his perceptions on native people.

When old settlers say 'one has to understand the country,' what they mean is, 'you have to get used to our ideas about the native.' They are saying, in effect, 'learn our ideas, or otherwise get out: we don't want you.' Most of these young men were brought up with vague ideas about equality. They were shocked, for the first week or so by the way natives were treated. They were revolted a hundred times a day by the casual way they were spoken of, as if they were so many cattle; or by a blow or a look. They had been prepared to treat them as human beings. But they could not stand out against the society they were joining. It did not take them long to change. (Lessing, 1973, p. 20)

All said, pride is straightforwardly felt in the behaviour of white people toward natives. It is an established fact, you just follow the lead otherwise you are ejected. Lessing confirms: '*(...) to live the colour bar in all its nuances and implications means closing one's mind to many things, if one intends to remain an accepted member of society.* (p. 30). Consequently, no warm contact can subsist between black and white people. A man under the influence of pride would say: '*I'm not going to stoop to do this.*' It is the impression the author gives to the reader when she shows how unachievable a perfect and equal relation can exist. Native

people are not considered as human beings; according to Mary for example, they are savage beasts, or even worse. *She never thought of natives as people who had to eat or sleep: they were either there or they were not, and what their lives were when they were out of her sight she had never paused to think* (Lessing, 1949, p. 89). In fact they repudiated any contact with natives. In a short passage in Ferdinand Oyono's work '*The Houseboy*', this loathing is attested through a gesture that draws any attention. A white man who is called the engineer is rebuking a native in a threatening manner for he does not want to see him have a love affair with her native cook. He asked him:

'You are sleeping in the same hut as Sophie, aren't you?' he said.

'Yes... Yes, Sir.'

He pulled him by the ear.

'I shall always know where to find you again... You can go now.'

He let him go. Through the darkness he saw his white hands move in a gesture of disgust as if he has touched something unclean. (Oyono, 1960, p. 2)

Native people are despised, looked down because they are the inferior race. It is a kind of obligation for all white people to perceive things in such a way. Everything is set to prevent a deep socialisation with native people. Those who tried hard did it at their expense. It was impossible.

In *Mine Boy* by Peter Abrahams, Xuma the main character gained respect through his dedication to work. Everybody in the mines esteems him, even his master. *His white man has tried to make friends with him because the other mine boys respected him so much. But a white man and a black man cannot be friends. They work together. That's all.* (Abrahams, 1946, p. 63). It is an everlasting doom! For instance, in the same inclination; Doris Lessing writes: (...) *white civilisation will never, never admit that a white person, and most particularly, a white woman, to have a human relationship, whether for good or for evil, with a black person'* (p. 30).

The Evidence of Love is a novel about the love of a coloured man and a white girl from South Africa. Kenneth Makeer is sufficiently light skinned to be taken for a white man. In London, she falls in love with Isabel Last, a white woman. They soon realise that if they marry, they will never live a normal life in South Africa. Convinced in their sentiments, they decide to marry and return to their country to face the reality. Arrived at the cabin lounge, while presenting their passports, Kenneth undergoes a severe control. In fact, the officials refuse to accept such a union. They get troubled and conducted to the chief official who, losing control of himself, bawled out: *'you'll be sorry (...) you'll regret this day (...) you are perfectly aware that if you cohabite here, you would be committing a criminal offence under the terms of the Immorality Act'* (Jacobson, 2016, p. 85). They love each

other but the colour bar prevents them to live it normally. It is like the passage in which Tony Marston surprises Moses the servant undressing his master: Mary. He was struck motionless and felt that if something happened between them: '*it would be rather like having a relation with an animal*' (Lessing, 1973, p. 231). Therefore we can imagine how far pride can bring feelings.

Accordingly, the concept of superiority drives white people to feel above any people of other racial backgrounds. It explains their behaviour toward the natives throughout the novel. However, some abuses incite natives to get defying.

2.2 *Native People's Pride*

Colonised people have always sought to get free off the chains of whites' domination. Their only mean was to affirm themselves culturally: self-affirmation. At this stage, the works of prominent native writers or writers of black race have been remarkable. From the Negro-Renaissance writers to those of the Negritude and the generations which followed, African people have been supplied with necessary stimulus to be proud of themselves. Lilyan Kesteloot (1992, p. 110) describes this process in her anthology. She acknowledges that: (...) « *tout africain entend au plus profond de lui résonner l'écho de son tam-tam intérieur* »⁶. Therefore, the native is brought out to stand firm against the master. This leads us to ask about the weapons he uses to hold up this stance.

Education for native people has been advantageous. For that reason, credit must be rendered to missionaries. Their teachings have permitted to the Africans to stand on equal footing with whites. It is a well-known fact that the continent owes them some of its best thinkers. Missionaries have also got rid of Africa archaic perceptions which prevented from reaching an advanced modern-day civilisation. C. Nze (1996, p.165) draws here a list of misdeeds that were no longer occurring.

'It is due to Christianity that today twin babies are no longer destroyed, that their mothers are no longer tabooed and ostracised, that the practice of local slave trade, child-kidnapping and human sacrifices have been dropped, and that the frequent local community feuds and bloody clashes have been immensely reduced or, in some localities, even totally abandoned.'

Doris Lessing uses the character of Moses to point out the evolution of native people manners. Though being a houseboy, Moses is cultivated. There was nothing in his attitude that suggested malevolent behaviour. Native people like

⁶ Any African hears resound in his most profound itself the echo of his inner tom-tom.

Moses were given the title of 'Mission boy'. They made white people get on their nerves for they 'knew too much': (...) *they should not be taught to read and write; they should be taught the dignity of labour and general usefulness to the white man* (Lessing, 1949, p. 191), Mary stated. According to her, the sole purpose of any movement of a native man must be dedicated to his master's satisfaction. It was clear that they dreaded the rising of the native man. Oyono describes that fear through a conversation between some white people:

The conversation came round to the native again.
'Poor France,' said Gullet again. 'Natives are now Ministers in Paris! What was the republic coming to? Each of the Europeans present found his own reason for asking the question.
M. Fernand was the first to voice it.
'What is the world coming to?' echoed Gullet.
Then they talked about the need for a coup d'état to regenerate France (...)

So they talked about natives again... the Yellow Peril hadn't been averted yet, and here was the Black Peril already looming up... what would happen to civilisation? (Oyono, 1960, pp. 52.53)

Through the designation of Yellow Peril, they hint at the growth of Asiatic countries such like China and Japan. In the same inclination, the Black Peril foresees the black rise (including pride, assurance and liberty) so as to favour emancipation toward independence.

Another aspect in the native man's characteristics is: deference toward the master. Through the numerous works we read, rare are the native workers who show disrespectfulness to the master: a common trait. Gideon in another work of Doris Lessing, *This was the Old Chief's Country*, presents the same features. He has been working for the Farquars family for a long time. They consider him as the perfect servant for he has never been reprimanded for an out of place act. However, we see in Paul Edwards' critics of the novel a kind of refuge in this posture of obsequiousness. He writes in his literary compilation, *Through Africa Eyes*:

Gideon who begins as the so-called 'Good Native', seeming to acknowledge respectfully his inferior status, is by the end seen to be using this distance between himself and the Europeans for the preservation of his own status and dignity. (Edwards, 1966, p. 69)

Like Gideon, Samson the old cook adopts the same attitude in *The Grass is Singing*. He was too sympathetic to Dick. Lessing states in this prospect: *Between Samson and Dick there was a perfect understanding* (p. 71). The servant used this

connection as a shield against any trouble. Unfortunately, he did not know the same fate as Gideon. When Dick married Mary, the latter tirelessly ill-treat the old native and drive him to the wall. It is said that if you affect an individual to a certain point, he can show you the bad sides he had opted to hide. She accused him of stealing foods and for that Dick took out two shillings from his wages. Soon after, the old native pretended that he was needed in his kraal, he must go. Here is the farewell scene: *'When your work in the kraal is finished, you will come back and work for us again? The native answered, 'Yes, baas,' but he was already turned to go; and Dick came back into the house silent and glum. 'He won't come back' he said (p. 78).* Samson's reaction can be labelled as an expression of pride; he is affected he won't come back. In sum, most of native workers were deferent and polite in order to protect their interest. But with Mary, it won't do. Samson finally cracked up.

Accordingly, he hated Mary, a hatred which is somehow mutually shared. In fact, if we deepen our analysis we come to the conclusion that both, the white man and the black man look down upon the other:

'How they stink,' she (Mary) said to Dick in explosion of anger.
Dick laughed a little. He said, 'they say we stink.'
'Nonsense!' she exclaimed, shocked that these animals should be so presume.
'I remember talking to old Samson once. He said: 'You say we smell. But to us there is nothing worse than the smell a white man's smell.'
(p. 142)

Pride is at the basis of this mutual abasement. Therefore, our analysis continues to confront the idea that pride is not only the prerogative of the white man.

It can be stated that Africans were dominated and they accepted it but inside themselves they invigorate a complete indifference toward the master; though they were compliant. The native arrived at this stage, in general, because he has spent with his master long time. He is accustomed to him. He is, let us say immunised against all attacks. It is the case of Kalisia in the novel *The Houseboy*. The native girl has had a white lover and spent the major part of her lifespan in whites' homesteads and mansions. She is back in her village following an absence of several years and looks for a job as chambermaid. Introduced to the wife of the Commandant, one of the most influent people in Dangan, Kalisia stands up with the lady.

Kalisia stared at Madame with that look of insolent indifference that always infuriates her when it comes from an African. The contrast between the two women was striking. The African was completely calm with a calmness that seemed nothing could ever trouble. She regarded Madame without concern. Madame changed colour twice... Suddenly her dress became damp at the armpits. This way of perspiration always heralded one of her rages. (Oyono, 1960, 93)

If it was about a competition, needless to ask who would be the winner. Pride through life experience is what explained the attitude of the native girl; she is not fascinated by the presence of a white man.

Sometimes, it is the behaviour of some white people with their native workers which causes the affirmation of the latter. It is the example of Mary and Moses. She let him impose himself in the house to be almost the commander. In reality, she secretly loves his servant, true love, reason why she gives him those liberties. For instance, one day Slatter pays them a visit, he finds the attitude of the servant exceedingly out of place and he almost sent him off.

Mary asked: 'Like some fruit, Mr Slatter? Moses, fetch some oranges. The native replied, with a rough offhand rudeness: 'oranges finished.' 'I know they are not finished. There were two left. I know they are not.' Mary was appealing, looking up at the boy, almost confiding in him. 'Oranges finished,' he repeated, in that tone of surly indifference, but with a note of self-satisfaction, of conscious power that took Charlie's breath away. (p. 219)

Considering all these facts, it is arguable to say that the native man has several reasons to push his ego high, to feel proud. Furthermore, there is the white people's fear for native people, thing that render the posture of the latter more insidious. In South Africa, white farmers and family members have been murdered in thousands of farm attacks, with many being brutally tortured or raped. Some victims have been burned with smoothing irons or had boiling water poured down their throats. Pride led Moses to stab dead his mistress Mary, just at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the notion of pride is paramount throughout the novel *The Grass is Singing*. It is omnipresent in social relations between whites and blacks, men and women, poor and rich. It is expressed first through the relation between members of any class; people are tempted to look down upon each other for the sake of social status. While some people of weak

incomes withdraw into themselves then refuse to socialise with their kinsmen. It is the case of the Turners. They were too proud to give a hint of their condition.

Another area where pride remains impossible to get rid of is between husband and wife. In our study, we came to know the importance child upbringing take on. With her husband, Mary is only resuming the scenes she used to attend between her father and her mother. Their lives were somehow exact copies. Pride also takes place in a household because of the matters that surround the union: poverty, lack of love, disobedience, dedication to labour.

Doris Lessing also demonstrates that the easiest access to personal over-value is in the relation between master and servant. The white man has always considered himself above everyone. She shows how racism and ostracism is conveyed in the psyche of the child and the newcomer. Throughout the novel, black people are taken as wild animals or called munts, an offensive term for black Africans in South Africa. They are exploited, oppressed. It becomes clear that no relation could exist between them because of the hatred which prevails. However, Mary Turner secret love affair with her houseboy Moses supposed some exceptions.

Native people too, have their pride in their way. They used education to stand on equal footing with the white man. Abuses from the latter incited them also to get defying and proud.

The notion of pride is in fact a human prerogative; it does not depend on the colour of the skin. In opposition, its positive connotation must be also taken into account, that is the pride to belong to a society which defends some values, a society which is not perverted.

The Grass is Singing offers a large overview of the colonial period, the atmosphere which prevailed between white men themselves, between white men and black men. The novel in fact paints the reality of that time. And this is characteristic of Doris Lessing. Alia'a Yousef Bahlaq writes in his thesis *A Critical Analysis of Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing*: 'Doris Lessing is a writer who prefers shedding light upon the cruelty of the real world instead of creating something imaginary which cannot be felt by people around the world.' (Bahlaq). This observation brings about the importance of the writer's manner to convey his message using realistic or imagery elements.

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