

## “An Ecofeminist Analysis Of Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest*”

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### Abstract:

The ecofeminist reading of *Martha Quest* has revealed how the novel serves as a powerful critique of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. It has clearly demonstrated their role in perpetuating systems of oppression for women and nature. By highlighting these interconnections, the paper has shown that a more holistic approach is required for both gender and environmental justice as reflected in the novel. In conclusion, the paper has found that Lessing's *Martha Quest* offers a powerful critique of patriarchal and exploitative systems and paints a vision for a better future for all.

**keywords:** Doris Lessing, Ecofeminism, *Martha Quest*, Intersectionality, Patriarchy.

**Note:** The research is based on an M.A paper.

### Introduction

Bolstered by the issues of race, class, religion, patriarchal thinking and colonization, ecofeminism—both in the growth of the theory and in political praxis—not only reimagined, redefined, and revolutionized notions of women and nature, but also the way they are inextricably linked with each other. Most ecofeminist scholars and activists tend to believe that the dual entrapment of women and environment stems from one and the same source: the patriarchal structure that is always found in all societies and. As Mary Becker asserts “patriarchy is not stable, but ever-changing in response to resistance. It is also resilient. Patriarchal social structures have been tribal, monarchical, and totalitarian; dictatorial and democratic; nomadic, feudal, capitalist, and socialist; religious and atheistic; primitive and post-modern; tolerant and repressive of pornography” (Becker, 1999, p.26). In the novel, Martha's mom and dad are no exception to this patriarchal control.

Defined literally as rule of the father or the 'patriarch', it is rather difficult to have a consensus on a strong, comprehensive, and concise definition of patriarchy. In a very broad way, it can be defined “as a complex, dynamic and adaptive system in which we are all implicated” (Oosterom and Scott-Villiers, 2016, p.59). In this context, there seems to be no escape from the terrors of patriarchy. And as Barbara Smuts argues “the origins of patriarchy lie far back in time, long before the development of agriculture, civilization, capitalism...” (Smuts, 1995, p.2). For much of human history, the idea of patriarchy seemed natural and self-satisfying because those who wrote the legal codes, the tales and stories, the spiritual texts, the philosophical theories, the history of humanity, the medical manuals and who made important scientific, academic, and technological discoveries were, to a large extent, men doing all these for the sake and enjoyment of men. While this gap, according to the traditional patriarchal mind-set, is most probably a direct result of productive differences between men and women, the ecofeminist scholars claim that it might be because women are neither known nor appreciated for their contributions. In her *Creation of Patriarchy*, American historian Gerda Lerner cites “Women have been kept from contributing to history-making, that is, the ordering and interpretation of the past of humankind” (Lerner, 1986, p.5). The history of the world is only told from men’s point of view. In other words, it is a distorted, partial record that lacks the contributions and experiences of women.

For instance, a recent study which has explored the gap between the measured quantity of scientific research produced by female scientists and by male scientists concluded that “women are not less productive, but rather that their work is undervalued” (Huang et al., 2020, p.4615). Building on this, ecofeminism places women at its centre, and as a driving force, towards sustainability and social justice in opposition to all forms of patriarchal domination and violence.

Mary Wollstonecraft was obvious and direct in her world-famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which she defined “the tyranny of men as the primary source of women's oppression” (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p.64). Yet, it took nearly another two centuries before the term ecofeminism – as we used it today – was developed and acquired its modern usage. It was only through Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* that patriarchal thinking moved from theory to practice and experience.

Over the years, more scholars and activists have turned their professional and academic attention to ecofeminism and produced a substantial amount of holistic, multidisciplinary and multicultural research (Warren 2000, Mallory 2001, Kheel 2008, Davis 1995, Fairbanks 2010, Diehm 2007, and Wenz 2003) Some of the world's most prominent ecofeminists include Carolyn Merchant, author of *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmental activist and ecofeminist, and Maria Mies, a German Marxist feminist scholar and author of several feminist books. Ecofeminism did not remain static as an ideology linked exclusively to women and nature but has evolved over the decades. Since its formal inception which came about five decades ago, it has built and generated new theories, asked fresh and smart questions, and opened new avenues for learning and practice, bringing together the modern-day global social and environmental movements with the ideals of ecofeminism.

In light of these considerations, the present research intends to explore patriarchy, women and nature in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* through an ecofeminist lens. Being raised in Iran and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) and inspired and influenced by many diverse cultures including African, Asian, and European, Doris Lessing is a prolific writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. She is a key figure in post-war English fiction and a transnational mediator between the Eastern and the Western cultures. Regarded as one of the most fearless woman novelists in the world, she is "a writer for all times" (Majoul, 2016, p.1). In addition, she deserves a unique place among the female authors of the 20th-century for the sheer volume, variety, and quality of the work she produced. Inspired by her personal life experiences motivated by the socio-political crises and conflicts during her childhood and adolescence, which included the First World War and the post-war era, she has embraced a creative and vivid dramatic voice in her writing and produced a rich and varied oeuvre of novels. Adored by some, loathed by others, Lessing's work in the role as a feminist, socialist, Marxist, postcolonial, and, most significantly, ecofeminist author is undoubtedly a controversial, influential, and world-changing one. She is "a well-known writer of novels for all the categories, addresses major societal issues originating from women's marginalisation in a

male-dominated society. She is for everyone and at all times” (Saraswati and Mahal, 2022, p.91). This is perhaps the main reason why her novels, especially the *Martha Quest*, have become the subject of various critical reviews and studies both in scholarly and practical pursuits. *Martha Quest*, Lessing's first novel in the sequence of five novels collectively called Children of Violence Series, is set in Southern Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe) which was established in 1923.

The research is the analytical work which starts with a short biography of the author and a synopsis of the novel. This part will help to better understand the reception of the novel by the readers under the socio-cultural, economic, political parameters as well as the aesthetic, environmental and feminine struggles of the era. Through an ecofeminist lens, the second part will shed light on *Martha Quest* as an ecofeminist novel.

### ***Martha Quest* As An Ecofeminist Novel**

The primary focus lies on the examination of the ecofeminist elements in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* with respect to the feminine and masculine sides of the novel and the challenges against the nature and female qualities embedded in the setting, plot, and narration. Accordingly, the main branches, critiques and frameworks of ecofeminism will be applied in the dissection of the plot. It will delve into the ecofeminist elements present in the novel, examining how they contribute to the novel's themes and messages. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of how *Martha Quest* can be viewed through an ecofeminist lens.

It will start by introducing the life of Doris Lessing, a celebrated British novelist, and Nobel Prize laureate. A brief overview of her life, including her early years in Southern Rhodesia and her eventual move to London, which have greatly influenced her writing, will be presented first. It will then provide a synopsis of her critically acclaimed novel, *Martha Quest*, which will serve as the primary text analyzed in terms of ecofeminist elements.

Set in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the 20th century, the novel vividly depicts the exploitation of nature and natives, women in particular, at the hands of British colonizers. Due to this, time and location serve as the key symbols of gender, ecology, and colonialism as represented in the novel. In this novel, Lessing also demonstrates the ways in which the oppression of women and nature are tied to colonialist, capitalist, and patriarchal systems of

power. In this context, as previously noted, the paper will adopt an ecofeminist perspective to analyze the interconnectedness of the oppressions of women and nature as reflected in the novel. We also aim to contribute to the ongoing discussion about ecofeminism in literature by examining the novel's depiction of the interaction between humans and nature.

### 2.1. Patriarchal Discourse: Women-Nature Relationship in *Martha Quest*

First and foremost, the main story of the novel centres around that like how nature is suppressed by patriarchy, men rule over women in the same way. The dominating patriarchal society has caused environmental degradation because of this mutual dominance. This kind of thinking is based on the principle that women's oppression and the exploitation of nature are inextricably linked as mentioned in the first chapter. When the ecofeminist principle is applied to *Martha Quest*, it can be seen that the parts of the novel contain various passages that highlight ecofeminism.

For instance, from the very beginning of the novel, Lessing illustrates that both historically and conceptually; the twin dominances of woman and nature have been intertwined. Although Martha, the female protagonist of the novel, is a restless little girl in the age of adolescence, she is the only female character who is keenly aware of feminine traits and the social and familial responsibilities of women. Besides, she is an intelligent observer of a world that seems to be a natural order set by patriarchal thinking. So, she sheds light on the idea that women and nature have intimate and mutual relationship, and so is their liberation. She constantly feels at one with nature. Whenever she goes walking around the Dumfries Hills and looks at the beauties of this view, “it was with a bleak and puzzled look that she stared at a sunlit and glittering bush which stood at her feet; for she did not see it, she was seeing herself...” (Lessing, 1952, p.17). She recognizes herself when observing the bush, and therefore the natural world.

Her reaction to nature demonstrates that the alignment of women and nature provides the basis of an equal life, and such behaviour shows that natural world and females have a socially and psychologically contingent relationship. Similarly, that is why women show great reaction in their daily life to the cutting of trees which are loved like their children and why they have been consistently less militaristic and more opposed to war than men. Considering Shiva's ecofeminist thinking similar to Martha's idea about connectedness of women and nature, Shiva narrates that while fighting back

against the men cutting trees, they sing a song that subsequently becomes their slogan and contains a strong ecological ethic.

“What do the forests bear?

Soil, water, and pure air.

Soil, water, and pure air

Sustain the Earth and all she bears” (Shiva, 1989, p.77).

Shiva emphasizes how women are more sensitive to and connected to nature, therefore Martha can only find her essence when she is alone herself in the natural world. The only place she finds herself and hears herself is in nature. Natural world is the only place she can find serenity and happiness, especially freedom as well. For this reason, she always associates freedom with nature. She believes that women can be free in nature. Thus, she finds herself in a great struggle for freedom and self-recognition in her family life, which consists of a mother who has the characteristics of patriarchal motherhood and a war-supporting father, as well as an older brother who enjoys all the benefits simply because he is a male.

Considering the portrayals of women-nature relationship in the novel, “ecology as a concept and as a social movement asks us to question the assumptions and effects of human-centred thinking. This challenge is of great importance for feminists, for it asks us to evaluate our thinking about women in the light of our human responsibilities to the earth we inhabit, while at the same time providing us with an invaluable tool for disentangling the human" from what is in fact male human. Ecological thinking can help us see the provincialism of patriarchal thinking” (1994: 225).

In the novel, Martha’s father, a person who is active in politics yet has poor family relationships, generally Favors military action. He has a built-in tendency to pull together in the face of a world war, which might explain why he is more interested in conflicts and wars. He often comes together with his friends to talk about a potential war which might break out and believes that only war can resolve conflicts and disputes between countries. For instance, whenever Martha and her father had a talk with each other, “Mr Quest was completely absorbed in the ritual of being ill, he talked of nothing else- his illness and the war, the war and the illness; it was as if a twin channel drove across his brain...” (Lessing, 1952, p.39). He was a total war sympathizer, and therefore more enthusiastic to talk about war, while Martha is an anti-war person who, unlike her father, supports the idea of

pacifism and anti-militarism rather than the use of war or armed conflict to settle a dispute.

Although females and males are separated from one another and from vital characteristics of themselves in their daily lives, war represents the most extreme form of separation between humans. The former group has generally been prohibited from participating in military operations and combat tasks during times of war, while the latter has traditionally been excluded from birthing rooms until modern times. This (the physical difference) is one of the reasons which cause women differ from men in terms of war/peace relationship. When she hears the word war, the first thing that comes to her mind is her dad. She associates this word with a male. Due to their compassion and merciful nature, women tend to support peace and non-violent conflict resolution more than men who are more likely to support the use of military force and war. When she thinks of war, her father comes to her mind. She associates the word with a man. Women are generally viewed as more peaceful creatures because of their compassion while men tend to be more rigid and militarist that urge war. Throughout the novel, when Martha hears the word war, “she thought of her father, and with irritation. He would like a war, too, she thought angrily; and she took her things and went to the bathroom. They say there's going to be a war because they want one” (Lessing 227).

On the other hand, the other reason between these divisions is that women are more accountable to the world, both human and non-human. According to the voices of women, there is no space for violence against human and non-human world since they believe that peace, not war, will put the world in order, and they defend that natural power, not gun powers will make the world magnificent. Therefore, Martha contends that innocent souls such as environment, children and women should be protected since they are the most vulnerable groups throughout the world.

Mr Quest calls her as a pacifist. “All you pacifists, there were pacifists before the last war, but when it started, you all fought. You’ll fight too, you will see” (Lessing, 1952, p.40). Because she believes that nature and other living things are the most vulnerable beings, Martha is opposed to the idea of war as a care. She defends that “there should be equal rights, there should be rights for both languages (Africans and English)” (Lessing, 1952, p.103). Considering the moral judgment, “she believed in equal rights for all people, regardless of race and-...” (104).

As the anthropologist Marvin Harris stated, “men don't care about other living creatures at all since they are more concerned with dominating the earth and gaining power” (1978:5). As men put money and power first, they have gradually become less concerned about the environment and other elements of society. “Most of this anthropological fieldwork was carried out after warfare was suppressed by colonial authorities and thus may lead to false inferences” (*New York Times* 5). In colonial periods, men are less concerned about the environment and other living things as they prioritize money and power. For example, whenever Martha and Adolph come together, Adolph's wishes are always prioritized and fulfilled.

When she had turned sullen and uncommunicative, he asked her what she would like to do that evening. This always confused her; she looked back appreciatively at Donovan, who simply informed her what they were going to do. She would reply to Adolph that she did not mind; there was always a long moment of indecision, which was like a conflict between them, while they both assured the other, they did not mind in the least what they did. At last, she assented hurriedly to the first challenging proposal he made: Did she want to go to McGrath's and drink? Did she want to go to the night club? This manner of his, putting himself at her disposal, offended her, as if it were an insult. (Lessing, 1952, p.252).

This makes Martha feel insignificant and humiliated because she thinks that Adolph disregards her existence and thoughts as a woman. Like Donovan, he simply issues orders without taking into consideration Martha's emotions and ideas, much like how they treat nature. Adolph and Donovan both represent patriarchal power systems that prioritize power and monetary gain above all else. Adolph gets together with Martha not out of love or respect, but because he is Jewish and excluded from society. Martha, being white and British, can provide him with a sense of visibility and status. He has the same attitude towards nature. He sees nature and its beauties as insignificant and worthless objects, just as he views women. “The big oval of the racecourse, fringed and tasselled by rich green grass, banked by trees in full leaf, was a little way out of the town; and outside the clubhouse strolled a crowd of people dressed like those in the magazines from England. Adolph kept pointing out important personages, whose commonplace appearance naturally disappointed Martha” (Lessing 254). In a region full of natural beauties, Adolph directs his attention towards people with important identities and positions, rather than appreciating and enjoying nature.

This indicates that he is a symbol of the patriarchal power system as he chooses to prioritize individuals with power over nature. Because he views nature as weak and insignificant hence it is something that can be oppressed. Conversely, women seek to foster healthy relations with both the human and non-human worlds. These women are willing to invest more time and creativity in order to find solutions that align with their values. Men tend to favour swift decisions, often with a focus on achieving a sense of neat justice, even if it may result in negative impacts on individuals and global ecosystem. In contrast, men appear to fail in understanding the importance of nature for our existence. To put it differently, if there is no nature, there will be no planet. Since men are not fully aware of this, they are unable to preserve natural resources.

However, from past to present, she pinpoints that women have always been intertwined with nature and have protected it very well so that we can continue our lives. She adds that women have lived in harmony with nature, recognizing it as the only way to survive. Mrs. Quest thinks that Mr. Quest doesn't know how to run the farm, and asserts that "for heaven's sake, pull yourself together, and run the farm properly..." (Lessing, 1952, p.83). As a matter of fact, due to the gender roles assigned to them by the society, women, as nature's nurturers, shoulder more than half the responsibilities which include taking care of both natural environment and humans.

In the world of Martha, males not only fail to connect and form close bonds with women and nature but also, they oppress and marginalize the two. In the novel, it is patriarchal thinking in the first place that leads men to think of themselves as superior. Men are also motivated to hold positions of power. This reinforces the belief that they are the primary building blocks of the world. Their actions are generally viewed more important than women. Based on this misconception, they expect women to adapt to this order. Therefore, women are under pressure to conform to the male supremacy, also known as andropocentrism. Men depend on this supremacy establish and maintain this order. However, it comes with a huge cost: the oppression of women and the environment. Regarding this, Paul Elam, the founder and editor of the *An Ear for Men*, a YouTube Channel devoted to the rights and well-being of men claims that "it is men, and pretty many men only, who draw power from accomplishment, who invent technology, build nations, cure disease, create empires and generally advance civilization. Women depend on men for all of that". (Elam 2017). However, as widely discussed in

the first chapter, all these scientific, academic, and technological discoveries were, to a large extent, made by men doing all these for the sake and enjoyment of men to the exclusion of women. In contrast, throughout the novel, Martha believes that women and men (including natural environment) should have equal rights.

In addition, his father, like Donovan, sees women as restless creatures that bring nothing but always “damned fight, fight, fight” (Lessing, 1952, p.78). He also thinks that it is generally him who maintains order in the chaotic household. He also believes that this sense of order can only be maintained through the efforts of a man, and he works to address the challenges and issues facing his family. Unlike her father, Martha thinks that men are disruptive to order and not integrative. According to her, men disrupt rather than maintain social norms and structures. She sees men as disruptive to social order by challenging or breaking them. When she and Donovan go downwards at Kaffirtown, Donovan despises this neighbourhoods and calls it a cemetery. Martha's social consciousness opposes her acceptance of this situation, “her social consciousness was troubling her, pointing out that she should remonstrate with Donovan” (Lessing 146). She cannot accept the idea and practice of isolating people based on their race and denying them equitable access to resources on earth, known as racial segregation of land by men. She claims that this has had devastating effects on the impacted communities. Segregated land policies are often justified using racist beliefs and were enforced through discriminatory laws, violence, and intimidation. These practices have contributed to the perpetuation of systemic racism and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. In this context, she refuses to discriminate. According to Martha, just as women accept the man as a partner, the child as a friend, and nature as a home, she thinks men should have the same mentality. She finds it important for males to respect nature and women. Because it is only by fostering a culture of respect towards both that a more just and equitable world for all can be created.

In addition to the women-nature relationship discussed above, the oppression of women and nature by men, their freedom being taken away, and being ruled by men can be exemplified as in the following. Because men want to control and rule both women and nature, the world has evolved in line with their wishes and demands. And women have no place either in nature or in society as aforementioned in the first chapter. In such a system,

men are often viewed as being in positions of power and control, while women are seen as inferior and relegated to secondary roles.

Martha can be considered the best representation of the oppression of women and exploitation of nature. The reader sees her journey as she struggles to overcome the limitations imposed by patriarchal laws and taboos in her society. Naturally, she wants to overcome these limitations imposed on her. Throughout the novel, this struggle is reflected in various instances. Also, the oppression of nature is presented when her desire for independence and self-discovery makes her start questioning the society's exploitation and domination of the natural world for their own sake. By showcasing the experiences of Martha, the novel draws a strong connection between the oppressions of women and nature. It also manifests that these two distinct yet connected forms of oppression should be challenged and eradicated together. In this context, it would be no exaggeration to view the novel as a critique of patriarchal power system and a call for action for women like Martha to stand against the gender stereotypes.

Martha advocates that women should live freely and that their rights and roles in nature should not be restricted. She argues that men should not separate nature from women and women from nature in order to use nature's resources and riches comfortably. She even argues that this view and such practices make nature worse and worn out, and that nature, whose structure has been distorted by men, can be corrected by women, not by men. According to her, women can bring fresh perspectives and new values to environmental protection and sustainability efforts.

Martha believes that men who have not historically recognized the rights and roles of women who, as the healers of the sick and carers of the household, have a close relationship with nature and know nature (e.g. knowledge about medicinal plants in fighting human health diseases and knowledge about the types of soil texture and structure for healthy plant growth) do not, in fact, put society in order but rather corrupts it. In contrast, women heal nature and nature heals women. When Martha quarrels with her mother and gets angry in the novel, she walks “miles and miles all over the farm... I often walk over to the Dumfries Hills or even to Jacob’s Burg, I’ve been doing it for years” (Lessing, 1952, p.56-57).

When we look again at the appealing of both Martha and Mrs. Quest to Mr Quest in the novel from another angle, it can be seen that a man is portrayed as a problem solver and mediator. However, as was discussed in

the first chapter, it is the patriarchal mindset behind this social structure that gives rise to these problems. The patriarchal norms have reinforced this order so that they can exploit women and nature as they wish. And quite paradoxically, men also perceive themselves as the solution to the problems created by this social order. In other words, terms, they are presented as the solution to the problems despite being the cause of them.

Another example of patriarchal oppression over the lives of women can be seen through the role and position of Martha's older brother in the household. Martha's older brother, Jonathan Quest, is the only member of the family who studies at an expensive school and gets everything he wants owing to the high levels of parental tolerance. "Why, Martha asked herself, was it that he, with half her brains, should be sent to a 'good school', why was it he should inevitably be given the advantages?" (Lessing, 1952, p.41). Her parents aim to send Martha to a good school only to save her from the influence of her Dutch neighbour's, the Van Rensburg's, and the Jewish neighbours' sons, the Cohen brothers. Because their chief goal is to raise their girls in accordance with social expectations, thus they do not make any special effort to ensure that their daughters receive a quality education and training. This can be exemplified in the following excerpt from the novel when Mrs. Quest says, "we can send Martha to a good school which will undo the bad effects caused by the Van Rensbergs and the Cohen boys" (Lessing, 1952, p.83). However, if they had preferred to invest in the education of Martha and favored long-term positive returns, they would not have benefited Martha only. It would also have brought positive impacts on, their family, society, and environment as a whole. Because, education is one of the best investments for women to take control of their own lives. By a quality education, they can make decisions concerning about their well-being as well as the environment. Educated women are more likely to become environmental stewards, who can transform communities, countries, and the world. From this perspective, the education of Martha is crucial for promoting not only gender equality but also environmental sustainability.

Martha's thoughts and actions are always devalued and underestimated by her family members. When Martha and her brother Jonathan comment on the same subject at the same time, even if Martha's interpretation is reasonable and scientific, the family members support unconditionally and non-judgementally Jonathan's views, even if they are meaningless or absurd. The only reason they do this is because Jonathan is always prioritized over

Martha and is seen as more important, a common manifestation of gender bias and discrimination in the family. As it can be seen in the novel, Martha's family prioritizes the education and well-being of their son over her and allocates more resources to their son's future prospects than Martha. For instance, when Martha gets into some sort of argument with Jonathan about Adolf Hitler, the dictator of Germany, her family always outwardly projects that Jonathan is right, even though Martha knows that her views are correct and that she is secretly supported by her parents because what she says is logical and acceptable. During this argument about Hitler, because of his illogical beliefs and opinions, "Jonathan was embarrassed" (Lessing, 1952, p.42). He feels embarrassed because in his inner world, he knows that Martha's thoughts are rational and logical. And even though Martha is right in her argument, this is not accepted by her parents since the male thoughts are always accepted as the only truth in the family.

After having examined the women-nature relationship in the novel, the next section will focus on the exploration of the Western development and capitalism as they relate to ecofeminism. Various ecofeminist scholars contend that both the capitalist system and Western development models have contributed to the degradation of environment.

## ***2.2. Western Development Models and Capitalism in Martha Quest Through an Ecofeminist Lens***

As discussed above, the rise of modern capitalism has been described by those who dominate workers and the market economy. In the novel, it is made obvious that the essential characteristic of capitalism lies in its patriarchal nature. Re-connecting humans with nature, and modelling communities and self-actualisation on the patterns and webs of nature has vast political and structural implications, and, in itself, is inherently spiritual. These ecofeminists wish to break the hierarchies that have been created around difference to re-immense humans in nature.

Capitalism has driven women further away from nature. Men, who prioritized increased production with the desire of more economic growth, led women to be removed from formal economy and the means of production and replaced them with machines and tools that provide faster production. This has relegated women from a secondary position to even worse situations in society. This exclusion of women from work life and assigning them the role of housewife and caregiver have indeed had a confining effect on

women. The more they are excluded from the society, the more limited access they had to education, employment, and economic independence. This exclusion has also strengthened the stereotype that women's primary role is confined to house and household tasks. As echoed by the capitalist patriarchal power system in society, women's economic contributions are generally seen less significant than those of men. Therefore, it has been regarded inappropriate for women to work. On the other hand, men have always been assigned the role of breadwinner and provider. As exemplified in the novel, Mrs. Quest, Martha's mother, a woman, opposes her employment because she has, as was previously indicated, absorbed the capitalist-patriarchal system. She always discourages her from earning her own money and becoming a self-sufficient individual. By limiting Martha's access to employment and economic opportunities and thus making it almost impossible for her to achieve economic independence and self-sufficiency, her mother wants her to live constantly economically and socially dependent on them. Therefore, they can exercise their economic and social power to control and oppress her. Her mother says "Until you're twenty- one, you've no right to own money, and if we took it to court, the judge would ... I mean, I mean to say . . ." (Lessing, 1952, p.93). Contrary to her mother, Martha wants to stand on her own feet. All she wants is nothing but to become financially independent and self-sufficient Yet, this seems quite unacceptable for both the social structure in which she was raised and the family members who benefit from it.

As for the ladies, they sometimes allowed their eyes to rest on the girl with that glazed look which excludes a third person, or even dropped their voices; and at these moments, she lifted her head to give them a glare of positive contempt; for they were seasoning the dull staple of their lives - servants, children, cooking - with a confinement or scandal of some kind; and... (Lessing, 1952, p.9)

As it can be seen here, Martha's mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg have internalized these gender norms and expectations since they may not be fully aware of the ways in which they are limited by them or may not have the same resources, support, or opportunities to pursue alternative paths as Martha does. Martha challenges and rejects 5 Cs of cleaning, catering, clerical work, cashiering, and childcare when she expresses "I will not be like this; ...the undemanding women of the district, who left their men to talk by

themselves while they made a world of their own with cooking and domesticity” (Lessing, 1952, p.159).

The capitalist system, which emerged after the industrial revolution with the goal of making more money by producing more products, joined forces with pre-existing patriarchal system and colonial oppression. Ultimately, it removed women from production and replaced them with machines. Considering the production and reproduction roles of men and women, women's reproductive labor is typically excluded from the formal economy, resulting in a significant proportion of women experiencing an alternate world. Unlike males, whose labor is frequently measured by the clock, women's labor is not seen or appreciated, with their work remaining unvalued or undervalued. However, women's work is actually a non-stop activity that encompasses life-affirming practices such as caring for children, cleaning, cooking, and more importantly building homes and communities. On account of gender-based social norms, men are paid for every minute of their work, while women are likely to engage in unpaid household tasks. Plus, women who are working outside homes disproportionately cluster in low-paying jobs, and they earn lower wages compared with their male counterparts who perform the same tasks with them. This, in turn, creates gender-based disparities such as gender pay-gap or gender wealth-gap. What is even worse, women's unpaid labor at home is often not recognized or valued at all since such tasks are often expected of them simply because of their gender. As a passionate and idealistic person, Martha criticizes this oppressive social order in which she has no place. She is deeply committed to the idea of social change since she has a strong sense of social justice. Deeply dissatisfied with the traditional gender roles and societal expectations placed on women in the novel, Martha yearns for escaping all the limitations. Throughout the novel, Martha is a vocal advocate for women's liberation and encourages other women to resist, too. Unlike her mother who associates the word career with “being well-known” while giving advice to Mrs. Van Rensberg about career, Martha associates the word career with “being an independent woman with a strong desire to have a place in the world”. As such: “Mrs Quest used the word 'career' not in terms of something that Martha might actually do, such as doctoring, or the law, but as a kind of stick to beat the world with, as if she were saying, ‘My daughter will be somebody’.” (Lessing, 1952, p.12). Here, her use of the word “career” is intended as a form of criticism and disapproval. Mrs. Quest, who embodies

many of the patriarchal values and attitudes despite being a woman herself, views Martha's ambitions to establish a career for herself as a rejection of her responsibilities as a daughter, and as a threat to the established order.

Unlike uneducated, uncultured, and ignorant women like her mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg, who equates career with fame, Martha is interested in books about women's liberation and aspires to bring what she read in the books to life. Through her reading, she becomes increasingly aware of the limitations and constraints that are placed on women and the environment in her society and begins to question and challenge these limitations. Martha often borrows books from her Jewish friend Joss, once "She also sent a note saying: 'I wish you would let me have some books about the emancipation of women'" (Lessing, 1952, p.80). Martha believes that women's economic liberation is crucial towards gender equality. In order to achieve this, they need to earn their own money. Because what are behind women's economic dependence on men are traditional gender roles. Therefore, Martha posits that her own money is critical for breaking free from these limitations. From an ecofeminist perspective, it is not only about the emancipation of women that Martha struggles for. She also challenges the system that dictates women in rural areas should be isolated from agricultural work like growing crops, cultivating trees, and raising livestock, and confined to a narrow set of expectations and roles such as getting married and bearing children. In such a patriarchal-capitalist order, whenever she sees a pregnant woman, she thinks that "the swollen bodies of the pregnant women she had seen, with shuddering anger, as at the sight of a "cage" designed for herself" (Lessing, 1952, p.80). For Martha, the sight of a pregnant women symbolizes the ways in which women are often seen as vessels for male desire and reproduction, rather than as autonomous individuals with their own goals and aspirations. According to her, bodies of women are used as tools for male pleasure and reproduction without their full consent. In a broader sense, the exploitation of women's bodies is intimately connected to the exploitation of the natural world as propounded by the ecofeminist theory.

In the capitalist system created by the patriarchal order, where only marriage and childbearing are expected of her, Martha feels like she is in a cage. And Martha wants to break out of that cage through her own choices and her own ways. And she starts working as a first step. She leaves the system in which women are kept away from natural life and agricultural work and moves to the city where women are represented in the work life. In the

city, she is exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking and is able to gain a greater degree of freedom and autonomy than she would have had on the farm. "And a door had closed, finally; and behind it was the farm, and the girl who had been created by it. It no longer concerned her. Finished. She could forget it" (Lessing, 1952, p.110). All the above-mentioned points refer to women's exclusion from certain aspects of nature, such as farm work or outdoor labor, as expounded in the ecofeminist theory "as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature" (Gaard 1992, p.32).

Another example of this from the novel is Mr. Cohen, a wealthy person who has a firm of lawyers, poses the following question to Martha after hiring her as a secretary: "It is obvious you are intelligent, and - well, if I may put it like this, you're not considering getting married next week, are you?" (Lessing, 1952, p.130). As an employer with a patriarchal-capitalist mindset, Mr. Cohen also tells Martha that as a working lady she should not marry but instead she should focus on her work. He accuses women of not working productively at work due to their reproductive labor at home. Then on, he remarks: "But my policy - our policy - is, I think, rather unusual: that we do not believe married women make bad workers. Some firms dismiss women as soon as they marry..." (Lessing, 1952, p.130).

The issue of women's position in this complex and difficult area is often addressed through the rejection of differences rather than their acceptance. Throughout history, women have been marginalized and undervalued since they are seen inherently different from men. In the present era of refining human identity through modernism, women still continue to face various obstacles and restrictions despite the illusion of freedom brought about by modernism (Çiloğlu, 2014, p.93). If we take all these details into consideration, women, who are excluded and segregated in every aspect of society, including within the family, are separated from men in a variety of ways and methods, both explicit and implicit, in the work life.

Another significant aspect of the price of existence is the gender wage gap faced by women. As depicted in the novel, women face big gender pay gaps. Just as the existence of women in the novel is devalued by the men, so is the work done by them. Thus, men believe that women deserve very low wages. This persistent problem concerning the devaluation of women's work can be observed throughout the novel. In the novel, women are seen mentally and physically inferior than men. Therefore, they might be exploited by men. On the basis of work-life, employers believe that they should be paid less

than men despite doing the same job. This is again ingrained in the stereotype that they are inferior. This appears to be, yet another form of discrimination enforced by the patriarchal-capitalist society. As a result, women cannot afford to buy what they need.

As was indicated above, one can adopt a Western perspective whilst examining the historical evolution of the issues related to women, society, and the environment. The concepts that we use today to describe the position of women in society have indeed their origins in the history of the West. Depending on the assumption that Western practices are the major determinants of women's roles in society, it can be seen throughout the novel that Martha and women like her attempt to break these taboos and oppose the social norms dictated by Europe. For instance, in the novel, the Sports Club, established by a group of women, begins as a weekly bridge party where these women gather to play cards and socialize. These women later realize that there is no sports club in the city. For this reason, they want this community to continue as a sports club and serve people. In the next meetings, this women's group start talking about and organizing other sporting events. As the time passes, it turns into a place where women can question gender stereotypes and participate in activities that are typically associated with men such as running, swimming, and cycling. What is more, they even organize a netball tournament. By creating the Sports Club, the women are able to create a sense of community and solidarity among themselves, and they gain a sense of empowerment through their participation in these activities. These women offer every open space in the city through the Sports Club, and “from half-past four until sundown, every open space in the city was crowded with young people engaged in violent activity” (Lessing 179) What is meant by violent activity here is a tough team of sports activities. The Sports Club also connects people, particularly women, with nature. The Club is depicted as a means for the women to reclaim their connection to the natural world and assert their agency within a patriarchal-capitalist society that seeks to dominate and exploit both women and the environment. By engaging in activities such as running, swimming, and cycling, the women in the Sports Club are actively connecting with and appreciating their physical bodies and the natural world around them. In this way, they are reclaiming their agency and rejecting the Western outlook that prioritizes taking the natural areas under its own control by ensuring that women stay at home, take care of children, and be isolated from natural

world. Moreover, the Club stands as a symbol of resistance to the exploitation of the natural world. By bringing women together with nature through physical activities, it aims to create a healthier, safer, and less biased community.

Unlike men, who only make it their principle to earn more money and power, women care about having a job by contributing to society by doing some work in this Sports Club and reintroducing natural areas into people's lives. This club is not established by men who prioritize male hegemony and materialism, which emerged because of Western development and capitalism. It is established by women who believe in gender balance in society. As reflected in the novel, it is a non-profit organization which primarily aims to promote physical activity for all. And everyone in society is welcome to join, whether they are male or female, Christian or Jewish, black, or white, etc. However, it does not make any money. It is completely dependent on donations from the wealthy people. For instance, it can cover the expenses of the construction of a golf course through these donations. It is also worth noting here that such donations raise questions about power dynamics between the rich and the poor. The way that the Club is structured might help to establish a kind of rich-poor balance between classes in society. It brings together all walks of life in society and serves as a great unifier. And women play the main role in this. By making this Club an open space, women emphasize a connection between the human and non-human worlds. Through their efforts to establish the Sports Club, they promote physical activity and a closer connection to nature.

In fact, it might be said that this club had come into existence simply as a protest against everything Europe stood for. There were no divisions here, no barriers, or at least none that could be put into words; the most junior clerk from the railways, the youngest typist, were on Christian-name terms with their bosses, and mingled easily with the sons of Cabinet ministers (Lessing, 1952, p.190).

From an ecofeminist point of view, the establishment of the Club can be viewed as a challenging action against the values and power structures that exist in the European Society. Because the role of the Club transcends beyond a traditional sports organization. It serves as a medium that challenges social hierarchies and divisions, which, in turn, reflects an ecofeminist emphasis on the importance of intersectionality. The Club's renowned strategy and approach that includes all to break down social

barriers aligns with the basic tenets of ecofeminism to create more egalitarian social system as illustrated in the previous chapter. People from diverse backgrounds can come together equally in the Club that challenges the social stratification based on wealth.

Women are still being marginalized by men. They face unique challenges in their attempts to find a sense of belonging. Contrary to the promises of development and modernization, women were paradoxically reduced to second-class status in society. Women feel excluded and marginalized both in the old order and in the context of modernization movements (Western development attempts). They continue to face significant barriers to feeling like they belong and fully participate in society. The reason for this is the belief that women and non-humans cannot have a place and a position next to men, as propounded by the patriarchal order. This order assigned a central and privileged role to men at the expense of women, other marginalized groups, and the environment. Women feel a sense of not belonging in any environment they are present. For example, in the novel, when Martha and her friends Ruth Manners, the couple Stella and Andrew Matthew, and Perry who makes love to Martha, go dancing in the Sports Club, they decide to go to Matthews' flat. Since Stella is Jewish and Andrew is British, their flat was organized by tracing Andrew's father's modern way of thinking. It is also worth noting here that the order was established according to a patriarchal mindset, valuing, and prioritizing masculine traits, behaviours, and roles. When Martha and her friends enter this flat, they notice that: "The flat was bright, modern, compact. The small living room had striped curtains, pale rugs, light modern furniture... To what must I adapt myself?... There are enough claims on us as it is, tugging us this way and that, without considering fittings and furniture" (Lessing, 1952, p.218-19).

Here, too, it can be clearly seen that even within the family environment that we believe is sustained by women, women do not feel like they belong or have equal standing. Even in what we call home or nest, a woman does not feel like she belongs to it. While this situation existed before the modernization movements, as can be seen in the example, it increased after the modernization movements and led to increased marginalization of women under the pretext of Western development. This patriarchal capitalist development process has often forced women to belong somewhere and someone, without allowing them to fully participate in society and belong in a broader sense. Therefore, it has put women in a difficult position, often

leaving them in a state of dilemma and nothingness. This is because the system has forced women into specific roles while simultaneously limiting their opportunities and freedoms. Because of the capitalist and modernist lifestyle, women have often been removed from nature and society, with their traditional knowledge and practices related to these domains being constantly devalued. Feelings of isolation and disconnection from their communities and conventional ways of life followed as a result. But more importantly, it made women feel confused about their identities as they navigated conflicting expectations and limited opportunities for self-expression. In a nutshell, the capitalist-modernist system not only had negative impacts on women but also on natural resources. Under this destructive structure, women and natural resources have often been treated as disposable objects.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, Doris Lessing's world-famous novel *Martha Quest* can be considered a timeless piece of ecofeminist literature for its profound investigation of topics that lie at the heart of ecofeminism. The novel successfully interlocks the themes of ecofeminism with its storyline and highlights the interconnectedness of gender and environmentalism. It offers a vivid portrayal of the oppression of both in the context of capitalist and patriarchal power structures as well as racial and colonial relations. Due to its intersectional nature as discussed in the first chapter, the primary objective of ecofeminism is not to concentrate solely on women and nature while disregarding other important matters. As Douglas Vakoch and Sam Mickey (2018) point out,

The point is rather to focus on the interconnections and Networks of coexistence, which include the entangled categories of race, class, age, ability, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and many others, along with species, gender, and sexuality. In other words, the point of ecofeminism is fundamentally intersectional, attending to the multitudinous ways in which the various aspects of coexistence interconnect (p. xvii)

Through the character of Martha, and from an intersectional perspective, Lessing explores how the exploitation of nature, and the oppression of women are deeply intertwined with these systems of exploitation. These issues are also heightened and exacerbated by the books that Martha reads in the novel, which reflect the socio-cultural context of her time.

Throughout the novel, Martha's passion for reading leads her to explore various literary works that address issues of social injustice. Her reading is not limited to one author or genre. She reads books from a wide literary canon. She is particularly an admirer of Marx, Engels, and Jane Austen. All these authors help her understand the world and her place in it. They also reinforce her awareness of the patriarchal society where women are often treated as inferior. In particular, her reading of Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State*, which intertwines capitalism with the subjugation of female and the environment, highlights the links between capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

In the novel, the patriarchal norms and values are chiefly epitomized by Martha's mother, Mrs Quest. She is certainly a product of the patriarchal system. This is because patriarchal systems are deeply ingrained in the societal structures and cultural practices. And the novel successfully demonstrates how men as well as women can be socialized to uphold and perpetuate patriarchal values. She exercises these power mechanisms onto her daughter and constantly discourages her from pursuing her own ambitions and desires. As Kaosar (2014) points out, Patriarchy, a common enemy of women all over the world, does not offer any masculine counterpart to make Martha's life a hell. Rather it is a woman who acts like a cruel patriarch in her life. Mrs. Quest tries to project herself upon Martha and tries to model her daughter according to her own wishes. Martha revolts against her and asserts her independence but Mrs. Quest feels betrayed. (p.34)

While patriarchal values are often associated with men, the novel demonstrates that women can also embody and perpetuate them. Women like Mrs. Quest may even uphold these patriarchal values more rigidly than male characters. For this reason, Martha "would not be like Mrs. Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy housekeeping woman; she would not be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied, like her mother. But then, who was she to be like?" (Lessing 20). The paper reveals that Martha's rejection of the stereotypical models of femininity and womanhood ingrained in the character of her mother indicates Martha's desire to forge her own path. Her rejection of her mother's persona is also an attempt to reject the gendered disadvantages and limitations that come with being a woman. According to Chodorow (1978), "daughters frequently seek to differentiate themselves from their mothers by utilizing rejection and negative identification in their mother-daughter relationship"

(p.136). This is the case with Martha. Throughout the novel, she endeavours to become something that is different from what her mother is.

In today's world, where climate change and biodiversity loss are major environmental problems, the ecofeminist model of development that *Martha Quest* develops can potentially offer a way forward. This model emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the interdependence of human and non-human world, and the environment. Through its ecofeminist themes, *Martha Quest* makes a powerful contribution to contemporary discourse on social and environmental justice, offering a compelling example of how literature can inspire change.

The most important conclusion drawn from this analysis is that Lessing uses Martha's journey to critique patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation, and to advocate for a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Through the ecofeminist lens, the novel also shows how women's subjugation and ecological exploitation are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

Another significant finding is the role of language and storytelling in shaping our understanding of nature and gender. Lessing's use of vivid imagery and metaphors, as well as the characters' dialogues, reflect and reinforce the dominant discourse of nature as passive and feminine, and women as inferior and submissive.

Comparing our results with other studies in the world, it is worth noting that this paper is one of the scarce researches on Doris Lessing from an ecofeminist perspective. Nonetheless, our analysis aligns with previous research on ecofeminism and literature, which highlights the potential of literary texts to expose and challenge oppressive ideologies and to promote ecofeminist justice. We also found resonance with other ecofeminist studies, and how they inform our ethical and political responsibilities towards the environment and its inhabitants.

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### تحليل نسوي بيئي عن مارثا كويست لدوريس ليسينغ

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#### مستخلص البحث :

كشفت القراءة النسوية البيئية لمارثا كويست كيف تعمل الرواية كنقد قوي للرأسمالية والاستعمار والنظام الأبوي. لقد أظهرت بوضوح دورهم في إدامة أنظمة اضطهاد المرأة والطبيعة. ومن خلال تسليط الضوء على هذه الترابطات، أظهر البحث أن هناك حاجة إلى نهج أكثر شمولية لكل من العدالة بين الجنسين والعدالة البيئية كما ينعكس في الرواية. في الختام، توصل البحث إلى أن رواية ليسينغ مارثا كويست تقدم نقداً قوياً للأنظمة الأبوية والاستغلالية وترسم رؤية لمستقبل أفضل للجميع.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** دوريس ليسينغ، النسوية البيئية، مارثا كويست، التقاطعية، البطريكية.