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## **Masculinity in The Black Madonna**

A Paper

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا  
أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ  
وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ  
وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنِ اطَّعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا  
كَبِيرًا [سورة النساء: 34].

صدق الله العلي العظيم

النساء (34)

## **Dedication**

The trail has not ended and no effort has been sealed except by your grace, Lord, so I thank Allah for his success in completing my academic career, and therefore I dedicate my graduation to me. From his words, they were stars that guided my dear father, who had the greatest role in my arrival to this stage, and to those whose prayers illuminated my path, who made God heaven under her feet My mother, and to my brothers (Hussein and Muhammad), and to my sisters (Aliea, Marwa, Janan), and to the little roses (Jannah, Shams, Qamar) ...

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## **Abstract**

Masculinity refers to the roles, behaviors and attributes that are considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society. Masculinity is constructed and defined socially, historically and politically, rather than being biologically driven. This research paper discusses the concept of masculinity in the story of *The Black Madonna* by Doris Lessing. This research paper consists of four chapters, the first chapter is about the biography of Doris Lessing, while chapter two tackles the concept of masculinity and chapter three is about masculinity in *The Black Madonna* by Doris Lessing, the research paper ends with a conclusion that sum up the research.

# Chapter One

## 1.1 Masculinity

Masculinity is the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man. The plural ‘masculinities’ is also used in recognition that ways of being a man and cultural representations of/about men vary, both historically and culturally, between societies and between different groupings of men within any one society.

Masculine qualities and roles are considered typical of, appropriate for, and expected of boys and men. Standards of manliness or masculinity vary across different cultures, subcultures, ethnic groups and historical periods. Traits traditionally viewed as masculine in Western society include strength, courage, independence, leadership, and assertiveness. When women’s labor participation increased, there were men who felt less comfortable in their masculinity because it was increasingly difficult for them to reconfirm their status as the breadwinner. (Donaldson 1993, 644). People regardless of biological sex may exhibit masculine traits and behavior. Those exhibiting both masculine and feminine characteristics are considered androgynous, and feminist philosophers have argued that gender ambiguity may blur gender classification.

Inclusive masculinity is an approach to thinking about masculinity in the context of social changes that have undermined traditional hegemonic masculinity and its associated homophobia, which each have driven men to avoid certain behaviors in order to avoid being publicly perceived as gay; it holds that there are increasingly societal spaces in which men no longer need to behave in hypermasculine ways in order to be accepted. When this occurs, men can engage in a variety of previously feminine practices without the fear of being perceived gay or weak. (Donaldson 1993, 645). Raewyn Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) serves as an analytical instrument to identify those attitudes and practices among men that perpetuate gender inequality, involving both men’s domination over women and the power of some men over other (often minority groups of) men. The concept has been widely used and debated, and over the years refined (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), with the basic idea that hegemonic masculinity is ‘a culturally idealized form’ and ‘is both a personal and a collective project’ (Donaldson 1993, 645). In a recent review, a ‘usual’ conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity is described as a set of values,

established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy.

Masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic and hegemonic positions are not the only masculinities available in a given society. They may also be seen as positions that are occupied situationally, in that the position occupied, practices and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another. A core element of the construction of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, and to a greater or lesser extent hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a gender position that is as much 'not gay' as it is 'not female'. The notion of hegemony has its roots in the writing of Gramsci and is an essentially a position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular force, even if underpinned by force.

In the Sweden-South Africa collaboration, there were a number of major debates. One was about whether the masculinity of men who are structurally subordinated in society, for example working-class men in Sweden or poor African men in South Africa, could be regarded as 'hegemonic', as these men do not perceive themselves to be 'in power'. In this respect, there can be more than one hegemonic masculinity within a society and it can pertain within sub-groups is helpful. It resonates with the experience of gender activists in the group about the utility of the concept in intervention work in subordinated communities (Messner,1994:99)

However, the debate emphasized a challenge for those seeking to change masculinities, which lies in recognizing that not all harmful masculinities are hegemonic. Some forms of destructive and exaggerated masculinities often develop among socially marginalized men in urban slums and emphasis power and force. They are not entirely separate from hegemonic masculinity to the extent that they emerge out of the relationship between hegemonic ideals and (some) men's ability to meet them. Their origins lie in adversity, including in violence experiences in childhood that have enduring psychological impact, manifesting in a lack of empathy and remorse, which enable acts of violence while positioning the male actors as themselves victims (Messner,1994:99)

Masculinities are constructed in ways that reflect poverty or power, regional cultures and neighborhood dynamics. From Hindu understandings of violence in India to bonds between men in Mexico and youth understandings of sexuality and



male control in South Africa, it is evident that subordinated men across the world are actors as well as acted upon. Moreover, there may be a conflation of individuals who are prone to violence because of childhood experience, peer cultures that exert peer pressure to commit violence, and social norms within the gender regimes, which legitimate violence. The confluence of these factors poses a formidable challenge to gender activists seeking to intervene. (Messner,1994:99)

The question about whether the use of violence was inimical to hegemonic masculinity was keenly debated. Hearn and others have argued that men's violence against women has not been a major focus in the development of the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity, At the same time the use of violence diminishes men, and so other approaches, such as hypermasculinity, may be more useful than hegemonic masculinity to refer to men who use violence, since they do not conflate a hegemonic process with a gender stereotype. Violent and sexist masculine values and practices may be, but are not, necessarily hegemonic in a given culture. The counter argument is that men who use violence and threaten violence often have a considerable repertoire of everyday acts of low-level violence, particularly directed against their partner at home, and this does not diminish their public stature. Indeed, this may even serve indirectly to enhance it to the extent that they may be seen as 'in control' of their homes. Given the private nature of intimate partner violence and frequent reluctance of women to talk about it, a considerable amount of its use is never known about by those outside the intimate relationship (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005:109)

In South Africa, there is a considerable body of research on hegemonic masculinity, that elaborates on the situated 'contents' of hegemonic masculinity and argues that demonstrating strength, toughness and the capacity to use and often actual use of violence are very much part of hegemonic masculinity there. This is different from Sweden, and highlights the need to understand the content of hegemonic masculinity in different settings, masculinities are context-specific and bear the imprint of history (Cornwall, Edström, and Greig 2011:67)

The relationship between gender norms, social collectivities and the individual is complex, with each impacting on the other, with different force and effect at different times. Hegemonic masculinity has been largely utilized as a social structural concept to explain the legitimization of masculinities through social institutions and social groups. It can also be used in this way in interventions that seek to impact on social norms related to masculinity, but when interventions are

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with individual men or groups of men, its value is to surface (and then shift) values and attitudes and provoke reflection on behaviour (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger (2012:99)

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 The Black Madonna

The Black Madonna by Doris Lessing considered one of Doris Lessing's best African stories because of the formal aesthetic elegance of "The Black Madonna" coupled with its political content. It offers a biting sociopolitical and cultural commentary on the social structure and British colonial attitudes in Zambezia, once part of Southern Rhodesia, now the independent nation of Zimbabwe. Modern-day politics are very different from those of the 1940s when the story takes place and the 1960s when it was first published. Nonetheless, this story stands up very well over time. Lessing's control of the narrative voice, her very considerable descriptive skills, and her ability to meld fact and invention to create a plot that carries the weight of her sociopolitical commentary all manifest her extraordinary talent. Initially Lessing's progressive critique of apartheid contributed to the popularity of both her novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) and her stories of Africa collected in *The Black Madonna* (1966). Recently the critical response to her ideological views has been more mixed, in part reflecting the dramatic changes in the geopolitical world. An understanding of her subject position as an author helps to explain the mixed responses her story produces. (Spark 2022:44)

*The Black Madonna* is set in Zambezia at the end of World War II. It explores the relationship between Michele, a feckless Italian prisoner of war who paints to while away the time and gain favor during his period of imprisonment in a Zambezian internment camp, and Captain Stocker, a military figure assigned to supervise him. When the story starts, Michele is the benefactor of Italy's swift transformation from the status of enemy to honorary ally. Free in Zambezia with little to do but paint for the leisured wives of the military, he is fetched into labor by the general, who is planning a Military Tattoo to lift the morale of the civilian population and boost the war effort. Captain Stocker is to supervise Michele while he constructs an artificial city that can be spectacularly bombed in the climax of the Military Tattoo. Captain Stocker, with his Northern temperament, prejudice against the Italian enemy, secret admiration for Hitler, and military precision, stands in stark contrast to Michele, with his indolent, sensuous Southern temperament and his capacity to feel. (Spark 2022:45)

Michele is ordered to use his artistic skills (actually he is a bricklayer) to construct this artificial city. While a prisoner in the camp he had assisted in the decoration of the interior of a church, painting sensuous murals. His murals depicted the swarthy Italian peasantry gathering grapes with dancing Italian girls and dark eyed children playing. In the midst of the happy Italian scene, he painted the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus. The turning point of Lessing's story comes when a drunken Michele paints Captain Stocker's bush wife, giving her the appearance of a black Madonna completes with a halo and rendering her every bit as appropriate to Captain Stocker's black world as the Madonna is to the Italian people. Captain Stocker and Michele are each complicit in the other's transformation and undoing in ways not unfamiliar to those who have studied the relationship between captive and oppressor. Captain Stocker initially chastises Michele for his careless dress, his lack of respect, his drunkenness, and his easy talk. Later, the captain is found seated on the campground, careless of appearance and drunk himself. The two men, who initially loathe each other, bond in a drunken camaraderie, confessing to each other their private lusts and loves. Lessing's description of Michele and the words she gives him to utter call forth images of Christ and his last words on the cross. With deep irony, Lessing's story reveals how Michele's inherent goodness and the innocence that lies behind his depiction of women as Madonnas are misunderstood both by Captain Stocker and the colonial institutions that have shaped him. In the misunderstanding lies Lessing's condemnation of a culture that has produced a Captain Stocker with his schizoid life and the civilization that fails to understand the right relationship between art and ethics, wantonly playing at imperialistic fantasies of domination and militarism. (Spark 2022:45)

## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Masculinity in The Black Madonna

What is considered masculine in one country might be considered feminine in another. So too do constructions of masculinity vary between different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in a given society. This speaks to the fact that gender, masculinity, and femininity are all social constructs that vary across time, space, and culture.

It is known in all civilizations that the strong man who is called the ideal man is the man who possesses all the qualities of masculinity, does not fear or fear anything in performing his work and is not tempted by anything about his performance. In this story, we find the lost man who is weak in front of his instincts when his work requires separation between sexual instincts and the nature of his work as a captain in the army, but he had a relationship with the white captive Michelle and fell in love with her because he was of black skin and the captive was of white skin. When he saw the white skinned woman, he forgot that he had a wife and children, and he became afraid to say or confess to his wife that he had a lover, that he was an unfaithful man to his wife and a traitor, and a traitorous man was not considered a man.

As in our society men consider talking about their wives as a forbidden thing in front of others, we see that the captain was surreptitious, and cognizant of imparting his private affairs, but with lapse of time, they are dovetailed to the extent, the captain never stops short of divulging himself through some periphrastic expressions the narrator elicits:

"Yet he spoke of her to Michele, and of his favorite bush wife, Nadya. He told Michele the story of his life, until he realized that the shadows from the trees, they sat under had stretched right across the parade-ground to the Grandstand"

The final line of Lessing's story offering a sudden illumination of the "whatness" of the thing. It reveals Captain Stocker, a man in the midst of a breakdown, weeping silently at the loss of his friend, Michele, the artist of sorts who has painted him a native, young, plump woman with her dress falling off her shoulder, a black Madonna with her black baby slung in a band of red cloth. Michele, sensing Stocker's harsh disapproval of the image, strips the woman of the halo

and poignantly offers him the gift of the revised painting. At the same time, however, he apologizes for it, saying it's a black Madonna for a black country. But Captain Stocker cannot acknowledge the gesture, nor the innocence of this Christ like Michele, and he sinks back into the role of a lost man, unable to assimilate the parts of his life, ordering Michele to leave, taking the gift away. Dumbly, Captain Stocker hears the soulbreaking words—"yes, Sir"—as Michele salutes and leaves, mocking the unfeeling military values that the captain cannot abandon. The unbearable burdens of the irreconcilable ironies of colonial life undo Captain Stocker. The story ends with an indictment of colonialism, militarism, and the senselessness of war.

At the end of the story, we find him in a bad state while he is drunk and does not know how to act, especially when he discovers his truth that he does not know how to act, and he refuses to admit that there is something inside him that represents the innocence and purity that Michele mentioned in him when she painted her picture next to the picture of the black Madonna. He preferred to release the prisoner in exchange for not confessing. With the light inside him, as if he was afraid and did not know how to take a stand as in the following except: "Get out, he said suddenly.

You wish me to go  
 You saved my life; I was a fool that night. But I was thinking of my offering to the Madonna-I was it myself. I was drunk; we are fools when we are drunk.  
 Go out of here,  
 And take that bloody picture with you.  
 Yes, sir"

We find also that the writer who tells the story is a woman, but she tells it under the name of a man because it is a patriarchal society that respects and appreciates only men, whether he has the right or not. All men are allowed to write and do whatever they like, except for women. More than men, not in the sexual sense, but in the qualities that represent courage, effort, standing in the face of injustice, and others. throughout Lessing's works, she has shown that relationships with men can influence her heroines' identities considerably. Usually, men are not welcomed by those heroines who want to form or regain their own identities.

The end of the relationship between Stockers and Michael is foreshadowed by Michele's pronouncement, "It is finished" Jesus's words meant that the end of his task, to offer mankind salvation, was near. Michele means that he has the job assigned him, fabricating

a village for bombardment during a military show. But his words abound in thematic significance. It is finished." he says, and though captain Stocker "never spoke about his private affairs" (17), now he "talked, talked endlessly". The captain, in fact, dreads the end of his association with Michele. "This holiday from, for he is on the point of emotional salvation. Thus, he asks—begs, really—that Michele extend his labor.

"Three more days," he says, "and then it's finished" Also, he is the captain and his rank so high but he can nothing without woman but he can't say that directly for her.

Man, always wants to control woman and they considered this control as a paradise to woman, like that of the other last words, the allusive strength of Jesus's utterance, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" derives from Stocker's final rejection Of Michele, whose mission is thus brought into ironic juxtaposition to that Of Jesus. The paradise Michele offers, to be sure, forces on Stocker a hard choice, for though "he was attracted only by the North and by Northern people" now as he listens to Michele, ' 'it seemed to him.

In *The Black Madonna*, The male characters that appear attempt to control the female characters sexually by making a relationship with her

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusion**

Lessing has shown the relationships with men can influence her heroines' identities considerably. Usually, men are not welcomed by those heroines who want to form or regain their own identities. Masculinity has become the major feminist issue. Historically enormous efforts, from chastity belts to property laws, have been made to control female sexuality and to tie women to individual men through monogamous heterosexual relationship. The double standard of morality has entitled men to sexual freedoms denied to women. It has also divided women themselves into two categories: the respectable Madonna and the reparative whore. Women's sexuality has been policed and regulated whereas men's has not been subjugated to repression in the same way. It is the woman prostitute who is stigmatized and punished, not her male clients. In "The Black Madonna", The male characters, who is stereotypical character for the men in African societies, attempt to control the female characters sexually by making a relationship with her who is also stereotypical character for the women in African societies.



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