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Colonial Issues in *Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing

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Na základě relevantní sekundární literatury autorka v první části objasní otázku kolonialismu, teoretická východiska a termíny s nimi spojené. V druhé části bude studovat zobrazení života v koloniích ve zvoleném díle, zaměří se nejen na vztah mezi původním obyvatelstvem a vládoucí rasou, ale také na komplexnost vzájemných vztahů mezi britskými farmáři a na očekávání společnosti. Na konci práce autorka své závěry přehledně shrne.

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## **ANNOTATION**

The work deals with the issues connected to the colonial life depicted in the novel *Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing. It provides the analysis of the specific issues concerning the relationship between the British ruling class and the native population as well as the mutual relationships among the white farmers. Further, the issues of racial and gender stereotypes are discussed since both these stereotypes shape the lives of the main characters in the novel.

## **KEYWORDS**

colonialism, society, colonial discourse, race, gender, Lessing

## **NÁZEV**

Prvky kolonializmu v díle *Grass is Singing* britské autorky Doris Lessing

## **ANOTACE**

Práce se zabývá otázkou kolonializmu a diskutuje problémy spjaté s kolonializmem vyobrazené v díle *Grass is Singing* autorky Doris Lessing. Pozornost je věnována vztahu britské vládnoucí společnosti s domorodými obyvateli stejně jako vzájemným vztahům mezi farmáři v britské komunitě. Dále se práce zabývá rasovými a genderovými stereotypy a jejich vlivem na život hlavních hrdinů románu dané v koloniální společnosti.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

kolonialismus, společnost, koloniální diskurz, stereotypy, Lessing

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## Introduction

The European colonial expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century aimed to explore and dominate new territories for benefits of colonising country. Newly discovered markets in colonies served either as sources of raw materials and other products for homeland or as new areas for the actual settlement of colonisers.

Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was colonised by the British Empire and became a settler colony. British colonisers invaded the land and established themselves as the ruling class over the native population. This creation of a biracial society brought up many changes and issues for both the indigenous inhabitants and British colonisers and thus, the colonial period and related issues occurred as themes in writings of many authors of that time. British author Doris Lessing's depiction of the colonial life is based on her own experience of spending childhood in Southern Rhodesia.

Lessing's first novel *Grass is Singing*, published in 1950, portrays the life of Mary and Dick Turners – the British white colonisers struggling in Rhodesian colony. In the novel, Lessing highlights the issues of racial discrimination of *the blacks* as well as complex relationships of British farmers as the members of the *white* society, bounded with strict rules and expectations causing personal tragedies of the main characters, ending with Mary's murder by her black servant.

The work consists of three main parts. The first part focuses on the theoretical framework of the colonial life. Since the colonial setting is the crucial element of the characters' depiction in the novel, colonialism as a system of domination is explained as a system that operates his power through political domination, expansion and racial inequality. The colonial system in Southern Rhodesia is based on colour bar policy – the separation of the blacks from the white colonising community that is considered superior to native population. The colonial society is determined by *the colonial discourse*, a set of the rules interfering into all spheres of life.

The discourse's rules fundamentally define the relationship between the whites and the blacks. The colonial society is expected to conform to these rules, and every sign of unconformity or disobedience to the discourse is considered as a failure and therefore a threat for the system of domination, where the member of British society must uphold the superior position over the blacks. Racial and women discrimination determined by prejudices

represents another integral part of the discourse, influencing especially Mary's character, and thus gender and racial issues are foreshadowed in this part of the work as well.

For understanding the characters behaviour in the novel, the second part of the work describes Lessing's unique writing. Doris Lessing can relate in many aspects to the main character of Mary; they both lose their identities, belonging nowhere. Lessing's extraordinary portrayal of the blacks being superior to whites represent her different point of view - she refuses to write didactic novels with strict definitions and judging the *blacks as wrong* and *whites as right*. She owns the same complex viewpoint about the issue of women discrimination. Through her novels she aims to show her disapproval with any kind of personal oppression, which is proved by the characters of Mary and Dick.

The last part of the work analyses the issues of the colonial life depicted in the examined novel. Firstly, the focus is put on Mary and Dick Turners' conformity with the rules of the colonial discourse in relation to the white community. The Turners as members of the British society are expected to comply with the British standards of the living conditions and prosperity, which separates them naturally from the native population and indicates a sign of their superior race. The Turners, living in poverty, failing in farming break the basic rule of keeping a distance from the black population and therefore Mary and Dick, representing society's threat, put themselves into complicated relationship with the white colonisers in the area.

Secondly, in this part, the character of Mary is further examined to exemplify the impact of the restrictions and rules of the discourse on the individual. The male – female relationship is analysed through Mary's role as a woman among the white men and through her marriage with Dick. Finally, a decisive factor for Mary's tragic destiny is her lack of knowledge on handling the interaction with the black population, which is argued through her relationships with the black servants and workers. Moreover, her ultimate and fatal failure as a member of white society – the establishing of a relationship with the black servant Moses – results in her personal demise.

The aim of the analysis is to prove that it is the society's oppression for its own members bringing the unbearable life for the Turners in *Grass is Singing*.

## 1. Colonial system of domination

The defining aspect for this analysis is the setting of the novel – Southern Rhodesia during the 1930s and 1940s, colonised by British people. The main protagonists' lives are shaped by the colonial settlement and colonial society based on the colour bar system (Norval 1996, 120). This policy works on the separation intruding white colonisers from black native population. As Norval further states, the system, supported by the law, is designed to control the black majority and prevent the native population to gain freedom and independence from the white British minority (1996, 15). For example, due to the colour bar policy, a black person is forbidden to own the piece of a land or lay a hand on a white person (Lessing 1989, 12).

The basis of *colonialism* as a system of domination is explained for understanding the living conditions of the colonial society. This term is defined in several forms according to a research field. For the purpose of this study, the definitions focused on the mutual interactions among people in this biracial society are mentioned.

For example, according to Osterhammel, colonialism is described as “a relationship between two collectives in which all important decisions concerning the life of the colonised are made by a culturally different and alien minority of colonisers unwilling to adapt to local customs. External interests (be the economic, political or ideological) are the main criteria in such decisions” (2005, 4). Wolfgang Reinhard's similar definition emphasizes the importance of the colonisers' cultural alienness and the difference in the development of two collectives; according to him, both these features are essential for society that is identified as the colonial one (2011, 1).

There are two terms closely connected and often confused with colonialism: *colonisation* and *imperialism*. Michael Watts further explains the definition of colonialism with the help of these terms. He defines colonialism as “the establishment and maintenance of rule, for an extended period of time, by a sovereign power over a subordinate and alien people that is separate from the ruling power” (2000, 93). Anyway, *colonisation* is the action of the actual physical settlement of the people coming from the imperial centre to the colony. Colonisation is frequently associated with colonialism, but it is not a necessary feature of it. The imperial centre is bounded with the ideology of *imperialism*, which fundamentally produces colonialism in order to achieve goals and does not necessarily need colonialism for its existence (2000, 373). Essentially summarized, the colonial domination system is generally

constituted by political and legal domination, relations of economic and political dependence, imperial exploitation of colonies, and racially based inequality (Watts 2000, 94).

All these definitions of colonialism characterize general features of colonialism and the basis of the relation and interaction between colonisers and colonised. This study focuses on issues that arise with living in a colonial society determined by *a colonial discourse* (Mills 2004) and therefore this term is further developed.

## 1.1 The power of the colonial discourse

Southern Rhodesia used to be a typical example of *settler colonialism*. It means that colonisers make their stay in a settled colony permanent with an intention that this newly settled territory becomes their home while still continuing to enjoy metropolitan living standards. A distant metropolis exemplifies the level of lifestyle for all members of the colonial society (Watts 2000, 679). This obvious assumption about the living conditions actually creates one of many rules for a coloniser's existence. These rules of the *colonial discourse* interfere into all aspect of colonial life starting with a strictly defined relationship between the whites and blacks.

According to Sara Mills, the most accurate definition of the discourse in connection with colonial societies is the one provided by Michael Foucault (2004, 94). Foucault is convinced that different discourses existing in the world are all constructed and supported with the help of a society in which the specific discourse exists (Mills 2004, 94) and therefore the society's obedience of the colonial discourse is fundamental for its function. As well, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin present in their work that it is the discourse that forms the reality in the colonial environment: "as social formation it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends" (2007, 37). The discourse restricts not only activities of colonised people, but regulates actions of colonisers as well.

Michael Foucault further distinguishes *discourse* from *discourses*. Whereas *discourse* "is the set of rules and procedures for the production of particular discourses" (Mills 2004, 55) *discourses* on the other hand "are sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalised force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think" (Mills 2004, 55).

‘These rules and procedures’ of the discourse are created with the help of different social areas. The significant social sector contributing to discourse’s establishment is the educational system. Foucault points that education of the population in the environment of the given discourse ensures, that people grow up recognizing this discourse as the only *truth* of the world (1980, 125). It can be compared to the education that European people were given about Eastern oriental world, and how this schooling “consolidated certain ways of seeing and thinking which in turn contributed to the functioning of colonial power” (Loomba 1998, 44). Schooling people in the truths created by the discourse ensures the power of the system. If certain things are taught and perceived as true, they are not challenged since it is general knowledge that the truth is not questioned. According to Foucault, there are three main key true elements for a discourse to have an impact on society - *truth*, *power* and *knowledge* (1980, 109-133).

*Truth* is created by ensuring that the majority of the population considers an opposing thought not to be true (Foucault 1980, 132). Through convincing the majority to believe a certain statement, this statement becomes true and competing thoughts on the matter naturally become untrue. In Southern Rhodesia, the white population needs to uphold the truth of their superiority over the native black population. Therefore, the discourse is operated on the idea of the whites’ exclusion (Mills 2004). According to Sara Mills, exclusion is “one of the most important ways in which discourse is produced” (2004, 60) and the difference between the natural and unnatural is recognized. As a result the unnatural is treated unequal and unacceptable (Mills 2004, 17). This interpretation of exclusion and unnatural justifies the colour bar system in Southern Rhodesia.

Anyway, this theory of exclusion can be applied as well on the Turners, the main characters of the analysed novel, who are depicted as failed white British farmers. Dick and Mary Turners are excluded from the white society, since it is unnatural for the British to be poor and unable to improve financial situation and living standards.

*Power*, according to Foucault, is the second key element for the preservation of the discourse (1980, 119) because specific behaviours and manners of thinking are established through institutions. People, who stand in power positions, form ideas of a discourse. Moreover, these people have to make sure that the discourse is not challenged in order to remain the power structure the same (Foucault 1980, 110 – 112). Power is one’s ability to prevent people from doing what they want and it occurs in every society and in all forms of relationships: “it needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the

whole social body” (Foucault 1980, 119). As well Loomba agrees with Foucault when discussing Foucault’s statement about power: “it is part of daily action, speech and everyday life” (1998, 50). Again, power creates and restricts behaviour at the same time. Even though, the discourse puts the colonisers in a favourable position over the black population, at the same time, it restricts how they as British colonisers are allowed to live.

The Southern Rhodesia discourse dictates that the Turners are not allowed to live as they do. They represent a danger for the power system by their disobedience of it. These power systems might be unstable and function thanks to the allegiance of the people living in the system. This obedience is based on the power structure created according to the colonial discourse. It is stated by Ashcroft, that “the growth of empires, was accompanied by the capacity to confirm European notions of utility, rationality, discipline as truth” (2007, 64).

The system might easily collapse in case that sufficient number of people stops following the power system structure and its rules. It is important for such a power system to eliminate these people that are not conformed to the system. For example, Dick’s behaviour of being undisciplined and irrational in his farming, not making any profits, endangers the whole white society in by setting a bad example to the others.

The last key element for discourse’s function in the society, pointed out by Foucault, is *knowledge* (Mills 2004, 17). People in power positions are also producers of knowledge and thus, knowledge is spread in order to control potentially dangerous people for the power system. Foucault’s belief, that knowledge comes from the fight over the power, points to the connection between power and knowledge (Mills 2004, 119). The same, Loomba believes in this powerful connection, she claims that “knowledge is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power” (1998, 43). The presented true nature of discourse that people are familiar with, is based on knowledge produced by people in power. To conclude this idea about interconnection of these two elements, it is stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin that “a discourse is a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known” (2007, 62).

The depiction of Mary and Dick in the position of the white superior ruling class representatives predetermines them to be the ones in the exclusive power position, believing in truth of their superiority and producing related truthful knowledge. Anyway, being at the same time, failing farmers, the Turners are rather restrained by their superior power position. As Foucault states, the people by themselves do not fully execute power and they might be considered “the effects or instances of power relations” (Mills 2004, 19).

## 1.2 The specific issues of gender and race in relation to the colonial discourse

To explore the impact of the colonial discourse on life in colonies, the attention needs to be paid to the specific issues that form the discourse and therefore are essential for mutual relationships among colonial society. In this study, gender and racial issues are further developed because both these factors significantly define the depiction of the main characters' existence in Southern Rhodesia, especially the character of Mary Turner. The issue of gender might be perceived as the insignificant matter to discuss in comparison with racial issues. In fact, these two issues are connected more closely than it might seem.

Firstly, a background defining the racial issues in Southern Rhodesia is explained. The crucial elements forming race discrimination are prejudices about the native population. These prejudices are described by Jordan, who claims that there are established three recognizable prejudices about the African race. When British colonisers invaded the land, they paid the greatest attention to the skin colour of the indigenous population (1968, 254-257). Even though, not all African people were *black skinned*; this perception of 'blackness' was immediately implied to all Africans: "blackness became so generally associated with Africa, that every African seemed a black man" (Jordan 1968, 256).

As Jordan further states, colonisers were keen on creating the idea of the black skin colour with only negative connotations. They characterized a black skinned person with worst personal qualities. The black person is considered impure, immoral, sinful and vicious. Contrary to the white person, who is regarded as a pure, clean and moral creature of God. These prejudices appeared already in the Middle Ages when Christians identified the black people with similar beliefs about their wicked and evil souls (1968, 6-12).

Another prejudice defining racial stereotypes is the perception of indigenous people as *uncivilized* (Jordan, 1968, 24). Of course, the indigenous African people are different from English colonisers in many aspects. Having a different nationality than British is considered wrong:

Africa, moreover, teemed with strange and wonderful animals, and men that killed like tigers, ate like vultures, and grunted like hogs seemed indeed to merit in comparison with beasts. In making this instinctive analogy, Englishmen unwittingly demonstrated how powerfully the African's different culture - for Englishmen, his savagery - operated to make Negroes seem to Englishmen a radically different kind of men. (Jordan 1968, 28)

In the eyes of British colonisers, the black population survives in primitive conditions and cultural lifestyle. All uncivilized manners are apparent in the way they speak, dress, fight, build their homes; even their eating habits differed from civilized eating. All these deviations from standards make blacks dangerous monsters and beasts only for reason that they are not like the British (Jordan, 1968, 28) and therefore discriminated and perceived as inferior.

The idea of racial discrimination is used even more radically by Edward Long, who states that the black people were a separate species competent only for slavery. He also points out that in the black population's behaviour there is no capability of reasonable thinking or sense of morality. The inability to think or develop ethical values causes that Africans only need food, drink, sex, leisure and amusement in their lives. Long mentions that Africans have not been capable of any progression for two thousand years (1774, 374 – 376) and have stayed “a brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, and superstitious people” (376, 1774).

According to Jordan, the last reason for racial discrimination of the blacks is their difference in disbelief in Christ, representing another deviation from the British standards. Christianity is considered the only true religion and the blacks' ignorance of this true belief was another sign of their blackness and savageness. A typical Englishman is given this religion as a national recognition of his own kind – a heritable quality in the white British society (Jordan, 1968, 21-25). The Africans are not Christians and therefore “a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion, or common wealth” (Jordan, 1968, 24) and these qualities are considered inherent for their race. The British colonisers settle this racial stereotype and thus justify treating the indigenous people as inferior even though all these prejudices about Africans are established without apparent proofs that their differences from the white society must be unconditionally wrong.

Not only are created prejudices about the native black inhabitants, the discourse of white colonisers' society operates on a certain stereotypical perception of female as well. The issue of gender is further examined because the development of Mary's character is significantly affected by society's expectations about her as a woman.

As it already has been mentioned, the colonialism of Southern Rhodesia is founded on the actual settlement of colonisers and farming the confiscated land as. This lifestyle determines naturally a man to be the one in power over the native population and a provider for the family. Therefore, the discourse and the power system are both encouraged by the use of race as well as gender in forms of *racism* and *sexism*. The thoughts about sexism and

racism are expressed by Blanche Radford Curry in the collection of essays *Overcoming sexism and racism*, where she states that these ideologies ensure the superior position of the white men over the natives and their women (1995, 19-21). This oppressive position of woman can be applied to the colonial society where the woman is expected to be subordinate to her husband.

The term sexism is defined by Suzanne Pharr as “an enforced belief in male dominance and control” held by power and control systems and that ultimately keep women subordinate to men (1998, 8). Another definition of sexism, similar though, is provided by Audre Lorde in her essay in *Overcoming sexism and racism* as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance” (1995, 19). She describes racism on the same basis as sexism. It is defined as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (1995, 19). These definitions explain the common background of sexism and racism.

A stereotypical perception of a woman in the Rhodesian colonial society is explained by Jean Pickering, who presents her ideas of colonial society in her study of *Grass is Singing*. According to her, there are three main issues of class, race and gender. She explains the man – female relationship as follows:

Although the white settlers grew up in a class society, the class attitudes of the collective have simplified into consideration of us, the Whites, and them, the Blacks. But there is another value system that complicates the issue. In white settler society men outrank women even more than they do at “home” in middle-class England. (1990, 19)

Similarly, Mill states that men naturally expect women to be devoted to them and moreover behave voluntarily as their servants. Women’s task is to be subordinate completely to their men, women’s feelings and needs have no importance (1869, 35). With marriage to a man, a woman becomes his property and the mission of woman’s life is completed. All that used to be hers is suddenly man’s possession but nothing that belongs to the man could never become woman’s possession (Mill 1869, 74).

Generally, a woman in the colonial society is seen as an object, inseparable part of a man. She is considered a man’s property. The men of native population are regarded as vicious, wild, cruel and sexually dangerous for the white women (Walsh 1983, 7). These assumptions steal the white women’s individuality and turn them into the sexual objects that are in endangered position and require permanent protection. This approach to the natives also

comforts the white men when they feel envious for the black native men that threaten them with the possible higher sexual potency. Walsh confirms in his statement that whites put “all of those qualities and characteristics which it most fears and hates within itself” on the natives creating therefore “a wholly negative cultural identity” (Walsh 1983, 7).

The colonial society, based on superior position of white men is classified as the patriarchal one. According to Bell Hooks, *patriarchy* is defined as:

The political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (2004, 18).

Mary Turner is depicted as an example of a wife suffering in such a society and at the end of the novel; she becomes a victim of psychological terrorism and violence. Even though Mary ending as the patriarchal society victim, she has attempted to eliminate her female discrimination, trying to act and be treated equally among the white men as well as the black men (see chapter 3.1. of the analytical part) Therefore, hints of *feminism* can be found in her behaviour.

Feminism is a movement that seeks for equality between both genders. Feminists fight for freedom of women’s choice and empowerment of women’s position. According to Tandon, feminists call for equality not only in social area but also in political and economic areas where women should be appreciated for their work the same way as men are (2008, 26). As well, an equality of both sexes is stated by Kirst-Ashman and Hull in their definition; feminism is “the philosophy of equality between women and men that involves both attitudes and actions. Feminists call for equality by appreciating the existence of individual differences and personal accomplishments regardless of gender” (2006, 448). The same equality is fought by Mary through her independence attempts. Otherwise, she never succeeds to be perceived equally and with respect.

Moreover, male negative and superior perception of women in relation to Mary’s tragedy is best explained by Austin, who claims that women are considered as the catalyst behind brutal treatment inflicted on them. In case that a woman is murdered or suffers, these crimes committed on her might be justified by saying that woman deserves this because of her behaviour (1990).

This theoretical framework of gender and racial issues above is included in this work for understanding the characters depiction in the novel – Mary’s complicated relationships with men and her difficult position as a woman in the colonial society (Lessing 1989). The racial and gender stereotypes build an integral part of the discourse since these prejudices represent common knowledge and truth of the colonial discourse.

## 2. Lessing's depiction of the colonial life

After the general overview of crucial issues forming the colonial discourse in Southern Rhodesia, the Lessing's specific depiction of the colonial community is explained according to her perception based on her own experience of spending childhood in colonial Africa.

Patricia Louw states in her study that the special attention should be paid to Lessing's extraordinary depiction of the white colonial society regarding that stories actually include certain elements of protests against the colonial discourse (2010,18). In the interview with Eve Bertelsen (1986), Doris Lessing explains that the "colour bar problem" that she is writing about is not limited only to African colonial society:

About this colour bar thing: the point I was making was that it's not just the white man's attitude towards the black, but people's attitudes to each other in general – all over the world you'll have a dominant group despising the rest. This is the pattern. This is what interests me more and more. I've found it very limiting when people say 'you are a writer about colour bar problems'. I wasn't writing only about colour bar problems. Not even my first volume was only about colour bar problems, there were a lot of other themes in it. (1986, 138)

Bertelsen is concerned with this explanation and warns about overgeneralisation of the colour bar problem. She objects that this broad understanding might leave out the importance of historical background of these problems in colonial society, she points out that "there were specific policies that caused the suffering and problems in Rhodesia at that historical time" (1986, 138).

Lessing responded to Bertelsen objection with the words that it would have been more acceptable at that time to write didactic novels (1986, 139), where the definition of racism would have been provided simply and straightforward for the reader. Anyway, Lessing's refuses this narrow attitude. The depiction of her characters is complex, she presents the relationships among blacks and whites differently than it is expected. In contrast to didactic novels, in Lessing's novels, the criticism of racism is slightly shadowed and even when there is a depiction of racist behaviour against the blacks, there still prevails the feeling of a certain unreadable disturbance (Louw 2010, 19). In Lessing's writing, there are no right and wrong situations or characters. As it is mentioned earlier, Lessing refuses the narrow viewpoint and therefore characters depiction is complex and cannot be simplified to black – wrong and white – right relations.

The extraordinary art in Lessing's novel is that she manages to create a portrayal of the black people to be superior over the white people. This can be exemplified by relationship of Mary and her black servant Moses (see chapter 3.2 of analytical part). Obviously, the colonial discourse and power system eliminate this superior power of the blacks. The whites still remain arrogant, mean and defensive, but at the same time, there can be found signs of respect to the native population. Despite trying to absolutely separate these two coexisting races, the mutual influence on each other is unavoidable (Louw 2010, 21).

The specific Doris Lessing's writing is based on her perception that the land occupied by whites is possession of blacks, and yet they are still considered outsiders. Anyway, as she writes, the colonisers ruling the land remain forever "outsiders in spirit" (Lessing 1997). Her feelings are much alike as those of Mary's in *Grass is Singing*. They both identify themselves as belonging to nowhere, living in an exile as strangers to the culture of indigenous people. Mary is the same culturally traumatized as Lessing is in Rhodesia. However, contrary to Mary's depiction in the book, Lessing considers Africa her home. She grew up here and "her heart wanders in a place far from the imperial centre of culture and any other cultural influences for good" (Lessing 1997). This brings Lessing the feeling of an imperial outsider as well. For her coming back to England does not mean coming home, Lessing only escapes from the racial discrimination and political injustice in Rhodesia, and also from oppression of her family. Her feelings are apparent in her writing: "I was still that, six, seven, eight years after my arrival, for I was always trying to come to terms with it, take it in" (Lessing 1997, 181). It was not an easy task to adapt in the British imperial society after many years she spent in Rhodesia: "I was still so much on the edge of life in London, just clinging on with my fingers" (Lessing 1997, 134).

Again Lessing identifies with the character of Mary, who could come back home from the African colony, but she knows that the assimilation into the city life would be impossible after her experience. Mary and Doris both end up with feeling of lost identity. The home is nowhere for them. As Lessing says, her soul is wandering between two cultures for being the colonial invader and imperial outsider simultaneously. Thus, in her stories, she presents her disgust with colonial society's discourse oppression full of racism, compassion with black people and absolute identity confusion (Lessing 1997).

Another significant issue in Lessing's writing important for this work, since it defines the character of Mary, is the subordinate role of a white woman to a man. Doris Lessing agrees that women are discriminated in their lives. Anyway, in the interview with Bertelsen

(1986), she talks as well about the complexity of the gender issue. She comments on sexism and feminism and even though in her books these issues matter, her books cannot be simplified as the feminist works. As she points out, the lazy and malicious culture immediately related to a feminist general approach to all men being regarded as condemned. Lessing refused that oversimplifying point of view on her stories either, exactly the same as she rejects the restricted point of view on racial issues.

As Lessing claims in the interview, she is not a radical feminist. Her novels are not about justifying or judging certain behaviours. She rejects any kind of oppression towards the personal liberty (1986, 134).

### **3. The analysis of the colonial life depicted in *Grass is Singing*: the Turners' conformity with the colonial discourse**

In the analytical part of this work, the depiction of colonial life in *Grass Is Singing* is discussed. In this chapter, the focus is put on British colonisers - Mary and her husband Dick Turner. Firstly their position in the colonial power system and conformity with the colonial discourse is examined, including the analysis of the relationship between the white colonizing society and black indigenous people.

The colonial discourse creates the rules for living in colonies. Dick and Mary are supposed to live according to the expectations of the white society. They live on the farm like other colonisers in the area since farming represents the usual lifestyle there. The black indigenous people are used as manpower. Usually, they work in the fields or as servants in the households. Mary and Dick attempt to conform to this typical picture of living. Anyway, their unsuccessful attempts only break the social expectations and the colonial discourse. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, colonisers are supposed to stand by and elevate the colonial power (2007, 194). Mary and Dick due to the unintentional failures not elevate but rather challenge the discourse.

Considering the Lessing's choice for the last name of Dick 'Turner', it might be interpreted as a symbol of a potential danger to the colonial society. Since they are not able to conform to the discourse, values of the colonial society are many times 'upturned' by them. Dick, who is not able to make a decision about crops to grow, always 'turns' from one idea about his farming to another. Thinking about Mary, before she gets married she does not represent any threat to the white society. When she becomes a Turner, for the first time she 'turns' into a threat for the society. Moreover, Mary and Dick are forced to 'turn away' from the other white colonizers in the area since they are not able to play their part in the society and uphold the position of proper colonisers.

In fact, the Turners build for themselves an unbearable situation by fighting persisting failures in farming. Furthermore, they have to deal with the unpopularity among the white colonisers in the area. Their position in the colonial system is intolerable for the other prosperous farmers and therefore Mary and Dick are despised by others. This position of the Turners is commented at the beginning of the novel: "Long before the murder marked them out, people spoke of the Turners in the hard careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws and the self-exiled" (Lessing 1989, 10).

In the first place, the Turners are criticized for the terrible living conditions on the farm. According to discourse, the whites are not allowed to be poor and live in the similar conditions as black people. It is dangerous for the power structure to show any kind of weakness and give the impulse to the blacks to challenge the order of the colonial power system. The white society's attitude towards the Turners is expressed below:

Turners were disliked, though few of their neighbours had ever met them, or even seen them in the distance. Yet what was there to dislike? They simply 'kept themselves to themselves'; that was all. They were never seen at district dances...It was not right to seclude themselves like that; it was a slap in the face of everyone else, what had they got to be so stuck-up about? Living the way they did! That little box of a house – it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not live in permanently. Why some natives (though not many, thanks heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way. (Lessing 1998, 10)

Another discourse's feature – being wealthy and own assets – naturally separated the whites and blacks. For this reason, the Turners' poverty upset the neighbouring colonisers. According to the society, they brought themselves into misery. The others despise the Turners, but also fear that they might possibly end up the same - living at the level of the blacks. The illusion of the invincible coloniser is broken.

It is understandable that white colonisers must be intolerant to the Turners' situation. In the system, the whites have to be at a higher level than the blacks in every aspect in order to claim the superior position. Any deviation from the system represents a threat to it, no matter if this threat is a black person who disobeys the rules of colour bar system, or a British married couple, who live in unacceptable way. Further, the Turners' inability to get back on their feet, as proper members of the colonial society would, is considered abnormal.

Charlie Slatter, living on the neighbouring prosperous farm, is portrayed as a representative of the white society (Lessing 1998, 14). In comparison with Dick Turner, he manages to uphold the colonial discourse. Being a successful coloniser, with his growing success he builds a great house, expands his farmland and ensures proper education for his children (Lessing 1989, 15). Slatter shows how he is capable to farm his land and improve his living conditions and thus fulfils the expectations of the white society.

In the novel, the depiction of the Turners unfitting into the society can be found in the rejection of all social functions and events held in the area by the white community. They never take part in any social activities even though Charlie Slatter's wife regularly invites

Mary to join her and her friends from neighbourhood (Lessing 1989, 101). Thereby, no wonder that Slatters are upset about their constant negative responses to the invitations.

These rejections are perceived for the white community as the rejection of the whole British national recognition. The Turners create a distance from their homeland by not taking part in these traditional activities and customs, and again break another rule of the colonial discourse. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say, for a colonising society, there is a need to keep connections with a homeland and carry on the heritage from father to son. Keeping in touch with Britain meant in the first place the distance from the black people (2007, 86) and more importantly live in compliance with British standards.

The houses of white settlers must be British – different and better just as British people are considered in general. These ideas about houses and standards of living of the whites are described by Rosner (1999), who summarizes in the settler guidebooks the main features of the ideal living in South Rhodesia. She states that a household of a British settler should be maintained in “a British style” (1999, 65) and “that the house should provide a solid barrier between the settler family and the unfamiliar landscape” (1999, 67).

At the beginning of the novel, the picture of the Turners’ living conditions is delivered through the character of Tony Marston when he comes from England to work on the farm:

He looked up at the bare crackling tin of the roof, that was warped with the sun, at the faded gimcrack furniture, at the dusty brick floors covered with ragged animal skins, and wondered how those two, Mary and Dick Turner, could have borne to live in such a place, year in year out, for so long. Why even the little thatched hut where he lived at the back was better than this! Why did they go on without even so much as putting in ceilings? (Lessing 1989, 32)

Tony could not understand how the Turners managed to live in that house for such a long period of time. He even compares his shack on the farm where he lives with the house, regarding his hut to be in better conditions. The whole house delivers a message that Mary and Dick fail to keep the distance between the British and indigenous culture. In the eyes of the white society, the Turners are not interested in being the British and neglect the importance of colour bar policy, fundamental to uphold the colonial system and the discourse.

The white society perceives their behaviour full of ignorance as an insult and something that they should be ashamed of. Indeed, Mary and Dick are ashamed of being ‘poor whites’ (Lessing 1989, 10) unsuccessful in farming and making any profits. These are decisive factors to become isolated from the community since they are required and at the

same incapable to improve their situation, thus there is not much of a choice left for them than isolation. Moreover, the label of “poor whites” (Lessing 1989, 10) is related to poor white Afrikaners<sup>1</sup>, who lived in small communities and the British ignored them (Lessing 1989, 11) The Turners were after all British and “‘poor whites’ were Afrikaners, never British” (Lessing 1989, 11). British people considered themselves more sophisticated and cultural in comparison with Afrikaners. According to the British, their nation is too good to be considered “poor whites” (Lessing 1989, 10). British national pride does not let them admit any possible disability.

The conviction of this superior position, as Brian M. du Toit states (1970), comes from the fact that Afrikaners inhabited predominantly the country land and the British were settled in cities (538). Thus, Afrikaners are seen unequally and this truth is supported by the colonial discourse. Otherwise, it means that the discourse’s belief in “esprit de corps” (Lessing 1989, 11), on the other hand, forced Rhodesian society to consider Mary and Dick as the part of the white British colonial society, even though their living conditions and attitudes categorized them elsewhere.

The Turners’ existence is based on society’s expectations and judgement and therefore they are constantly compared with Charlie Slatter exemplified as a proper coloniser. The differences in lifestyle between these two families are apparent.

Charlie Slatter is depicted as a successful farmer; he manages to increase profits on all his projects that he decides to start. Unlike Dick Turner, despite his trying to succeed, all his projects are eventually unprofitable. Slatters’ large house is in perfect conditions because as he says, he can never stop making money (Lessing 1989, 14). Slatter also upholds the colonial discourse concerning the relationship with the blacks. He owns a typical racist attitude towards the black population considering them as inferior nation to the whites.

According to Loomba, another feature of conformity with the discourse is being a proper capitalist. Capitalism<sup>2</sup>, as she explains, represents a useful tool to encourage white

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<sup>1</sup>Afrikaners, the ethnic group consisted mainly of the descendant population of the Dutch settlers who arrived to Africa during seventeen and eighteen century. Afrikaners, so called “white trash” suffered from great poverty after the Anglo – Boer War (du Toit 1970, 536).

<sup>2</sup>Capitalism is defined as: “a system of economics based on the private ownership of capital and production inputs, and on the production of goods and services for profit. The production of goods and services is based on supply and demand in the general market (market economy), rather than through central planning (planned economy). Capitalism is generally characterized by competition between producers. Other facets, such as the participation of government in production and regulation, vary across models of capitalism” (“Investopedia - Educating the world about finance”)

colonising society, justifies the colonial rule and dominance over the black population (1998). It relies on the ideology of white supremacy, same as racism, and commands the farmers to keep prosperity in order to the white men to be still in charge (Loomba 1998, 127).

In the novel, Mary and Dick's failure of being proper capitalists is emphasized when Slatter visits their house. He judges Mary's dress, earrings and cheap textile materials used around the house (Lessig 1989, 176). He can see that the Turners use materials of poor quality that are designed for the blacks and sold in the Turners' kaffir store – the next unsuccessful project to make profits. "It shocked Charlie to see it in a white man's house" (Lessig 1989, 176). It is obvious that the Turners are absolutely unfitting between the other whites in the Rhodesian community. Charlie Slatter's perspective is applied to the perspective of the whole community, since he is the one "who from the beginning of the tragedy to its end, personified Society for the Turners" (Lessig 1989, 14). The dreadful situation of the farm is best described, when Charlie Slatter comes to visit the Turners.

As he drove, he kept a sharp eye for signs of neglect. Things seemed neither better nor worse. The fireguards along the boundary were there, but they would protect the farm from a small, slow-burning fire, not a big one with the wind behind it. The cowsheds, while not actually falling down, had been propped up by poles, and the thatched roofs were patched like darned stockings, the grass all different colors and stages of newness, reaching untidily to the ground in untrimmed swathes. The roads needed draining: they were in a deplorable state. The big plantation of gum trees past which the road went, had been burned by a veld-fire in one corner; they stood pale and spectral in the strong yellow afternoon sunlight, their leaves hanging stiffly down, their trunks charred blacks. (Lessig 1989, 171)

For the incapability to conform to the required lifestyle and lowering beneath the level of the British society, Mary and Dick represent a threat to the white community. Immediately, at the beginning of the *Grass is Singing*, there is a statement about "Charlie's special fear" (Lessig 1989, 10). This fear is understood as an uncertain and unsettling apprehension about the rising power of the blacks that might attempt to weaken the position of the white ruling power. Slatter obeys the dictate of "the first law of white South Africa: 'thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are'" (Lessig 1989, 178). Charlie feels responsible and guilty for Dick's situation, "he always considered himself as Dick's mentor" (Lessig 1989, 17) and even though he despises him, he likes him (Lessig 1989, 169). The meaning of the white community togetherness is expressed in the statement by Slatter, who feels: "the strongest emotion in a strongly

organised society” (Lessing 1989, 179) and therefore Mary and Dick find themselves unintentionally dangerous for their ‘fellows’.

Dick’s softness towards the black workers on his farm neither contributes to the success in farming nor to gain respect in the white community. Slatter, in comparison with Dick, plays his role according to the discourse. He treats the black workers as hard as he supposed to. He is as successful, reasonable and purposeful as a proper coloniser is expected to be (Lessing 1989, 15). According to the discourse, there is a need to be hard on the black workers; otherwise they might feel a chance to neglect their tasks and thus, the productivity of the farm decreases. The essential idea is to preserve the thought of the blacks being inferior to the whites, and believe that the whites are justified to exploit and occupy Rhodesian land only for the reason that the black person is not as good as the white British person (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, 38).

In comparison with Charlie Slatter, Dick also owns a different view on farming land. His point of view is enormously romantic and idyllic: “he loved it and was part of it” (Lessing 1989, 81). He does not see the land purely as a property - the mean for the purpose of prosperity, as Slatter does (Lessing 1989, 81) and thereby Dick is again criticized for his irrational behaviour concerning farming projects. He admits his desperate situation, anyway still in change for the better and thus cannot decide for a specific project in his farming. He tries a little bit of everything. Firstly, he keeps bees, then raises pigs and rabbits and finally opens the kaffir store (Lessing 1989, 83-91) His tactic to avoid growing a large amount of a specific crop brings the farm only poor earnings, there are no significant seasonal profits to survive (Lessing 1989, 186).

Moreover, the Turners’ farm is located on the site where the farming land is unfertile, and mostly useless for planting the crops. While Dick is looking for that one miraculous project bringing him the prosperity, he only supports his and Mary’s miserable poor life. Paradoxically, he refuses to focus on growing the one - generally prosperous plant in the area – tobacco. Mary efforts to persuade him to grow this plant, something that lasts for more than one season and could bring them real fortune (Lessing 1989, 86). However, Mary’s idea is not Dick’s project fulfilling his idea of farming the land with certain love and therefore growing of the tobacco is not an option for him. In his heart, he is a proud man. He refuses to borrow the capital for an investment into the specific meaningful project, as growing tobacco would be; instead he still believes that saving money from his little projects would help the situation

on the farm. Anyway, there are no miraculous changes happening and Dick as a farmer never succeeds in the idealistic way he hopes.

This inconsistent farming without a specific focus is considered highly irrational by the white society, and as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) state, a good coloniser and prosperous farmer at the same time, should act rationally because this rationality differentiates him from the native person: “the will of European nations to exercise dominant control over the world, which led to the growth of empires, was accompanied by the capacity to conform European notions of utility, rationality, discipline as truth” (64).

Dick’s actions, character qualities and opinions are clearly not in compliance with the portrayal of a proper white coloniser. He constantly fights with the rules of the colonial society and through this depiction of the Turners failing, Lessing shows that presumed differences between the black indigenous population and the white ruling colonisers in Southern Rhodesia might not be that certain, definite and true, as the discourse and power system suggest; and additionally, the whites are afraid that the black population might see it one day as well.

### 3.1 Mary as a woman in the colonial society

In this chapter, the depiction of discourse’s effects on life in colonies is further examined, with the focus on the individual - the character of Mary as a woman and her place in the society. It comprehends the analysis of Mary’s character, who attempts to conform to a women stereotype in white society; her complicated relationships with men in general, the elements of feminism in her behaviour and most importantly the relationship with her husband Dick, which portrays the female and male relationship in white society.

As Rubenstein accurately writes, the character of Mary is depicted as “a conventional white South African woman, with her personal vulnerabilities that intersect with the repressive social and psychological pressure of her environment” (1979, 18) and therefore, the impact of these society’s pressures on Mary is detailed examined.

Mary, who lives for many years in the city, and moves to the colonial rural area has difficulties to understand the system of this society, she is literally “trapped in colonial preconceptions” (Roberts 1993, 73). Mary is being violently incorporated into this colonial community by marriage with Dick living on the farm. Nevertheless, her integration is never

successful. It could be said, that partially she causes this to herself since she never accepts any invitations to social events from Charlie's Slatter wife (Lessing 1989, 10). After many years on the farm, living in misunderstanding of the whole colonial structure (Roberts 1993, 73), Mary still keeps in her mind the memories of her perfectly happy life in the city before getting married, her hateful attitude and thinking about leaving her new home are described in following lines:

She was tense with hatred. Then she began to picture herself walking there up and down in the darkness, with the hated bush all around her, outside that pigsty he called a house, having to do all her own work – while only a few months ago she had been living her own life in town, surrounded by friends who loved her and needed her. (Lessing 1989, 88)

Her memories might be idealized, anyway she remembers herself back there in the city, having the place in the social structure. In the city, Mary represents a single independent woman, who does not care for marriage. She leads a “smooth” and “comfortable” life (Lessing 1989, 36), working as a secretary, enjoying a social life, never feeling lonely without boyfriends. There is no need for a husband in her life. Nevertheless, Mary is surrounded by men friends, who see her as “a good pal”, do not care about “this silly sex business” (Lessing 1989, 40). Through these statements about men, her indifferent attitude to men in general is expressed.

Anyway, the moment she overhears her friends gossiping about that “she will never marry, she is just not like that, something missing somewhere” (Lessing 1989, 40), Mary suddenly doubts all her attitudes and convictions, her whole personality. She cannot bear the thought being judged behind her back by her friends. Consequently, after this incident, she unconsciously starts to look for a husband and recreate herself into a “normal” woman, who is acceptable to the social standards and expectations: “If her friends were thinking she should get married, then there might be something in it” (Lessing 1989, 43).

With the marriage, Mary suppresses her real personality in order to conform to the women stereotype and her personal disintegration slowly begins. Dick considers Mary to be a “wonderful” and “unique” person, which returns her in a certain way that “feeling of superiority to man” making her feel safe and protected. For Mary, after all, the marriage also represents the escape from her friends' judgement about her life that becomes pointless and irrelevant in her eyes (Lessing 1989, 44 - 49).

Her rejection of the man as a life partner stems from her childhood experience. Mary hates her father for his drunkenness and his inability to provide for the family. Over the years, love between her parents has disappeared completely. Her mother treats her husband with “cold indifference” (Lessing 1989, 33) and therefore Mary lacks a role model of the man in the family to be proud of. She sees her father as a failure and the reason for her mother’s life disappointment, her bitterness. In her eyes, marriage symbolizes only the memory of “her father coming home red-eyed and fuddled” (Lessing 1989, 39). Thus, there is no wonder that Mary “inherited from her mother an arid feminism” (Lessing 1989, 35) and contempt for all men to protect herself.

As the colonial discourse dictates, in the patriarchal Rhodesian society, a woman is required to manage given tasks only to fulfil the idea of a proper wife, nothing more than submissive behaviour to her husband is expected from her. At the beginning of Dick and Mary’s relationship, the situation might seem quite opposite. Dick, a poor unsuccessful farmer, marries a woman who, from his point of view, used to be a busy, popular woman with a social standing. It puts him in a submissive position to Mary, even though he was the one taking care of the farm and making living. The conditions on the farm, placed in African veld, are horrible and Dick realizes after bringing Mary there that “He had no right to marry, no right, no right” (Lessing 1989, 55). Discussions between them constantly result in Dick’s apologizing and abasing. He even calls her “boss” (Lessing 1989, 92).

Mary needs her husband to be stronger than her, she needs to see by her side a man who does not pity himself, so she could love him and not hate herself for being married to a failure. “It was a condition of the existence of their marriage that she should pity him generously, not despise him” (Lessing 1989, 92). Anyway, Mary contributes to make living with her own activities on the farm. Her capability to make little earnings with the chicken business, even though only temporarily, proves that Mary as a woman is able to manage male activities equally and thus she demonstrates her feministic emancipation attempts.

In spite of Mary’s trying, she realizes not only has changed her life into the one she always despised, but that she has changed, knowing that she cannot come back to her own life in the city, “the thought of facing them again, with her record of failure”(Lessing 1989, 97) fears her. Nevertheless, “her desire to escape becomes so insupportable, that she pushed out of her mind the idea of her friends” (Lessing 1989, 97) and comes to the city, where surprisingly to her, she indeed is not accepted. Anyway, with her effort to escape from “the conventionality of her ethics, which had nothing to do with her real life” (Lessing 1989, 97),

she rebels against the whole idea of the woman stereotype and social expectations of her role as a wife. It is society to blame for Mary's unhappiness, as she claims: "people made her get married" (Lessing 1989, 97).

She fails to gain her independence and freedom back and gives up. As her last attempt to bring peace and hope into her relationship and save their life from inevitable disaster, Mary would even accept the possibility of having a child, which was always unimaginable to her. As Dick believed, their problems could be "healed, and they would be happy" (Lessing 1989, 126). Anyway, for their poverty, having children was not an option for them.

Mary's inherited feminist attitudes cause a conflict between her real self and the social role. Persistent marriage difficulties demonstrate her complete inability to conform to the woman stereotype, and thus to the colonial discourse in another aspect. Despite her effort, she adopts also her mother's destiny. This difficult position of the woman in society of that time and impossibility of personal realization is expressed by the term "suffering female" (Lessing 1989, 79). Eventually, her initial superior position in her marriage and all her emancipation attempts are suppressed by the power of the discourse. She is forced to act against her will and therefore Mary faces the oppression of her individual personality.

### 3.2 Mary's incapability to handle the native population leading to her personal disintegration

The last chapter of this work deals with another issue causing Mary's difficult integration into society structure - her absolute inexperience in dealing with the black population in everyday life. Mary's interaction with the black population is examined, focusing on her relationship with her black servants, specifically with Moses. The factors contributing to Mary's personal disintegration are discussed.

Mary, a member of white colonising society is expected to handle the blacks in predetermined manners. However, she is not familiar with anything including the life of local farmers including the living among the black population. It is apparent in the moment she comes to Dick's house for the first time. She wears fancy high heels and is not pleasantly surprised with the condition and smell of the farm (Lessing 1989, 61) and more importantly, she is not accustomed to live among the blacks. Being in the town, blacks "were outside her orbit" (Lessing 1989, 42). However, now she has to be in everyday contact with them. Black servants and workers become inseparable part of her life.

Mary struggles with living among the blacks, not capable of treating them properly as the colonial discourse orders. Anyway, as Rubenstein states, Mary's life would not have to be ended in tragedy if only she were able "to handle the black servants" (1979, 20). Apparently, she lacks this knowledge of the colonial discourse and therefore is not able to suit her behaviour according to it. This is well recognized through the character of Tony Marston, who comes from England to the farm and: "Yet Tony, too, wanted to be accepted by this new country. He would have to adapt himself, and if he did not conform, would be rejected" (Lessing 1989, 26). He believes that in Southern Rhodesia, there is a need to get adapted to the structure of the colonial system and uphold the thoughts of the discourse in order to survive among the whites as well as blacks.

Thus, Mary's behaviour towards the blacks should support the discourse's thought of the colour bar system. However, she is not capable to comply with these rules while being in contact with her black servants at house or the workers at plantations. Mary's absolute inexperience with indigenous population is depicted immediately at the beginning of the novel when Mary's indifferent relationship to the blacks is described as followed: "'race', meant to her other women's servants, and the amorphous mass of natives in the streets, whom she hardly noticed" (Lessing 1989, 50).

Mary, who has been living in the colonial system her whole life, although without a direct contact with the blacks, should be familiar with the common knowledge of the discourse since she has been educated in the system with the colour bar policy. It is written by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin that "individual colonising subjects are not often consciously aware of the duplicity of their position, for the colonial discourse constructs the colonising subject as much as the colonised" (2007, 38). This statement is exemplified by the depiction of Mary, who is suddenly forced to interact with the blacks on daily basis and is not familiar with her superior role.

Mary's ignorance of the colonial discourse brings conflicts in her behaviour towards the blacks. She argues with every servant working in for her in the household. She does not realize that even though being a member of the superior race, she still needs the native population to do the work for her, that the livelihood of the whites is dependent on black workforce. She only hears from around, that the blacks are getting more "cheeky" (Lessing 1989, 41) and her behaviour towards them is disrespectful. When Mary moves to the Dick's house, she constantly argues with his houseboy Samson, who is a good servant to Dick for

long years. Dick and Samson have an agreement on sharing groceries for Samson. This favour creates the unwritten deal between them and thus Samson is loyal and hardworking in return.

Anyway, Mary does not understand these unwritten rules and cancel this agreement about groceries; her intimidating attitude to Samson makes him leave the farm (Lessing 1989, 75). As Rubenstein points out, Mary “alters the prior understanding between Dick and his houseboy by cancelling the few unspoken kitchen liberties that guaranteed the latter’s loyalty and efficiency” (1979, 20). Her misunderstanding with the whole Rhodesian society is rooted even before this incident with Samson. At the beginning of the novel, she is angry about Dick’s usage of language when he comments on Samson with words: “He’ll look after you: he is not a bad old swine” (Lessing 1989, 61). Mary does not understand the appreciation in Dick’s statement about their black servant simultaneously the mean of controlling him. Another situation picturing the misunderstanding occurs when Mary does not allow the houseboy a break for dinner (Lessing 1989, 78) or criticizes Dick for his system on the farm, she minds that the workers have a break every hour and are allowed to drink water (Lessing 1989, 128). Dick sees her inability to deal with the blacks: “Mary just could not live in peace with the native servants” (Lessing 1989, 68).

These cases show Mary’s little knowledge of the discourse’s written and unwritten rules leading to unwise decisions in dealing with the blacks, especially with the houseboys. By the time, Mary turns “her distaste for Africans into open hatred” (Rubenstein 1979, 20). Her indifference towards the natives has changed into enormous hatred – an unknown emotion to indigenous population:

She hated them all...She had learned, standing in the sun watching them all day, to hide her hatred when she spoke to them, but she did not attempt to hide it from herself...She hated their half-naked, thick-muscled black bodies...the heavy smell that came from them, a hot, sour animal smell. (Lessing 1989, 115)

Moreover, according to the discourse, Mary as a white woman is supposed to fear black men. Living in the city, Mary actually does not have to deal with this abstract thought of fear. Even though she is raised to be afraid of the black men, she is never explained why. The particular reason justifying the fear has never been defined to her and thereby this fear represents for her only the abstract undisputable truth of the discourse. As she realizes, this truth as well as the other truths of colonial discourse, grow in importance the moment she comes to the farm and face the black population.

As Rosner states, the development of the idea to fear the black men contributed “to unify whites and perpetuate their racist stereotypes” (1999, 72). Mary and the other whites are schooled to believe “that the natives, if left to their own discipline, would rape and murder and in general operate by means of primitive emotions” (Schlueter 1974, 17). According to the stereotype of the woman, Mary is taught throughout the life to keep the distance from the black men. She lacks the knowledge of handling the contact with them. Her perception of the natives is described as follows:

She had never had contact with natives before as an employer. She had been forbidden to speak to her mother's servants, and in the club, she had been kind to the waiters; to her the ‘native problem’ meant other women’s complaints at tea parties. She was afraid of them of course, since every white woman in Southern Africa is taught to fear natives from a very early age. And now she had to face the problem of how to handle them. (Lessing 1989, 58-59)

Regardless the discourse’s schooling theory, Mary’s reluctant attitude to the black men is rooted in her misunderstanding of the white and black master – servant interaction (Rubenstein 1979, 20), which results in the personal disintegration and Mary’s eventual death. As Rubenstein (1979) states, Mary interprets every situation wrongly (20). She sees fraud, dishonesty and danger in behaviour of the black houseboy, who does not look directly into her eyes (Lessing 1898, 68), not understanding that this gesture means “a sign of politeness” (Rubenstein 1979, 20). Mary is not able to manage the role of the master over the blacks without making them leave their house. Mary’s inability causes another financial loss supporting the failure and moreover brings arguments between her and Dick.

Mary lives in the misunderstanding with her husband, with the whole white community and with the black population. All these factors contribute to the development of a mental illness and make her rather turn away from the reality.

‘Mary, listen to me. You are ill. You must let me take you to the doctor.’  
It seemed to her the young Englishman was speaking; from him had originated this concern for her, this belief in her essential innocence, this absolution from guilt.  
‘Of course, I am ill,’ she said confidently, addressing the Englishman. ‘I’ve always been ill, ever since I can remember. I’m ill *here*. She pointed to her chest, sitting bolt upright in bed. But her hand dropped, she forgot the Englishman, Dick’s voice sounded in her ears like the echo of a voice across a valley.

The colonial discourse not only excludes Mary and Dick from the white society as the farmers, it influences the evolvement of their marriage as well as their individual personalities leading into absolute demise of their life.

Mary's gradual madness coming from her existence in Rhodesia is slowly developed since her marriage. The unbearable living conditions, altogether with misunderstanding of the whole colonial system that she is forced to be integrated cause that Mary loses her sanity completely. Further, due to establishing of a relationship with her new houseboy Moses, who is described as "a great powerful man with broad-build body, which fascinated her" (Lessing 1989, 142), she decisively violates the discourse. Moses' distinctive manly physical appearance terrifies and fascinates Mary at the same time. The extraordinary relationship comes into existence when Mary ends an argument with Moses with a whip (Lessing 1989, 119). She feels differently about Moses, who becomes her servant. Her attitude to the black servant is different than to the other black workers on the farm and recognizes that "She was fighting against something she could not understand" (Lessing 1989, 167). Anyway, it is too late to control it: Things were different between them now. The power she had felt over him as his employer had gone. She was helpless before him. Her feelings were confused. She knew she was afraid of him, but she could not admit to herself that she also found him attractive. (Lessing 1989, 166)

The progressing relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is an ultimate Mary's mistake. Moses gains power over her and thus represents a great threat for the white community. She lets him cross the line; starting with the manner that Moses speaks to Mary, as to his 'madame' (Lessing 1989, 156). This unusual and unhealthy relationship is noticed by Charlie Slatter, who is shocked while observing Mary communicating with Moses: "it was the tone of Mary's voice when she spoke to the native that jarred him: she was speaking to him with exactly the same flirtatious coyness with which she had spoken to himself" (Lessing 1989, 177). Slatter's disturbance continues by listening to Moses' reaction, who speaks to Mary with "rudeness" and in "tone of surly indifference, but with a note of self-satisfaction, of conscious power that took Charlie's breath away" (Lessing 1989, 177).

Not only Mary breaks the rules of colonial discourse by an inappropriate manner of communication, Moses is allowed to touch her while helping her to dress and comb her hair that is unacceptable: a black person is strictly forbidden to touch a white person (Lessing 1989, 13). Even though never said in the novel, Mary, by giving Moses this privilege, arouses

a suspicion that they might be involved together sexually. These assumptions are never confirmed and yet, through Lessing's hinting, their sexual relationship seems to be obvious.

In the eyes of the whole white society, Mary could not lower and humiliate herself more. She is a failure in trying to conform to colonial discourse through her actions, the truths and knowledge are challenged and the rules upholding the power system between the blacks and whites are broken.

Charlie Slatter blames Mary for her own tragic death at the end of the novel when she is killed by Moses. This murder, according to Slatter, is a result of the unnatural relationship between Mary and her black servant (Lessing 1989, 176). Anyway, Slatter as a proper member of the colonial society conceals true reasons why Mary is murdered, and protects the truth of the discourse by upholding the general perception of the blacks being murderers and thieves: "When natives steal, murder or rape, that is the feeling white people have" (Lessing 1989, 9). He protects this notion about the blacks since the truth is denoted by the discourse and is undisputable (Mills 2004, 16).

To cover up the reality behind Mary's murder, Charlie Slatter, for appearances' sake, organizes investigation by neighbours and colonial officials for reason that he would never admit the failure of the 'fellow'. It has to remain hidden that one of them might have neglected and violated the discourse as severely as Mary has. As Fisburn (1994) writes, "Mary has broken their biracial sexual taboos" (2) and thus represents for the community "a threat to the myth of their own cultural superiority" (2). The white community's reaction to Mary's behaviour, mental breakdown and eventual death proves the society's fear for possible collapse of the system.

Eventually, Mary's murder is used as propaganda to strengthen the community of the whites (Lessing 1989, 9). A potential endangering of the power system is turned into a warning to keep the distance from the blacks: "for other white women in Southern Rhodesia, with Mary's death only serving to document the impossibility of such relationships being started or maintained to the advantage of the whites" (Schlueter 1974, 14).

As it is mentioned by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, it is vitally essential for all members of the white colonial society to conform to the discourse (2007, 38). The depiction of Mary's character exemplifies that the rules of the colonial discourse restrict not only the native population; the superior people have to comply with it the same as the subordinate ones. Therefore, it is the society to blame; the restrictions and expectations create for Mary desperate life situations that eventually become too heavy burden for her.

## 4. Conclusion

Doris Lessing's novel *Grass is Singing* provides a portrayal of the colonial society in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The colonisers from the British Empire settled in South Africa to farm the land and established themselves as the ruling class over the native population. British settlement in colonies brought the specific issues that are analysed on the society's depiction in *Grass is Singning*.

This work examines the depiction of the specific issues concerning the relationship between the *white* colonising society and the *black* indigenous population as well as the mutual relationships among the white farmers. Further, the issues of racial and gender stereotypes are analysed since both these stereotypes shape the lives of the characters in the novel. The special focus is put on the main character of Mary Turner, who is examined as the individual influenced by these issues. The hypothesis that it is the white society's oppression for its own members bringing the unbearable life for Mary and Dick Turners – the main characters of the novel - is argued and subsequently confirmed in the analytical part of the work.

The theoretical part includes the definitions and explanations of the main terms connected with the colonial issues discussed in the analytical part. Firstly the definitions of colonialism are provided, with special focus on *the colonial discourse* that creates the essential rules and expectations for the members of the colonial society. The discourse's main unbreakable rule is the separation the British population from the natives. The British population is required to uphold the British standards concerning the living conditions and national recognition, since the theory of the discourse is based on the exclusion of the whites. This *truth* of superiority is common *knowledge* and is strengthen by the *power system* established by the institutions in order to function as a reality in the colonial society.

Secondly, this part of work provides the theoretical background related to the gender and racial issues. The prejudices about a black skinned person as impure, sinful and immoral prevail since the Middle Ages. Their 'blackness, savageness and uncivilized' culture justifies the *racist* attitude of British people to discriminate and oppress the native people. Another stereotype created in the colonial society is the one defining the position of the white woman. She is expected to be subordinate to her husband and perceived as an object belonging to a man; it sets the basis of *sexism*, where one sex is considered superior to the other. The

definition of *feminism* is also included, since this society's sexist attitude initiates attempts on equality between the sexes, which feminism seeks for.

The second part of the work summarizes the unique features of Doris Lessing's writing with connection to the examined novel. Since the novel is based on her own experience of living in colonial Rhodesia, she expresses her negative attitude to the colonial discourse for reason that she refuses any kind of oppression of personal liberty, no matter if related to race or gender. The characters are complex; she refuses the narrow point of view of the blacks simplified as the wrong and the whites as the right. She can relate to the character of Mary, since both of them suffer from the feeling of lost identities, belonging neither to the white community nor to the African society.

The last part of the work focuses on the specific issues of the colonial life depicted in *Grass is Singing*. Firstly, the issue of conformity with the colonial discourse is examined through the character of Mary and Dick Turners. They are expected to live and act as proper members of the colonial society, which is represented by the character of Charlie Slatter. And therefore Dick and Mary are compared to Slatter and his way of living. Through this comparison, it is obvious that the Turners struggle to live up as the discourse requires. They live in poverty and their living conditions on the farm are closer to those of the black people. They fail to uphold the British standards and are incapable to improve their house and make profits on farming. Mary and Dick become "poor whites" and therefore are hated by the white community of farmers for setting a "bad example" for the blacks. It is required to be able to prove that the white man is superior to the black man and thus, he is entitled to rule the land. Dick's irrationality and failure in farming indicate the opposite. Further, the Turners' refusal to socialise with the community is considered as a resentment of the British national recognition and opposing the British rule. They do not conform to these essential rules of the discourse and thus challenge the British ruling superior position.

The first subchapter focusing on Mary Turner as individual discusses the issue of her conformity to the discourse in relation to her position of a woman in the society. The stereotype of the woman in patriarchal society is created by the colonial discourse and therefore Mary, who is expected to be subordinate to men, attempts to conform to this stereotype with the marriage. Her relationships with men are complicated since she owns inherited rigid feminism after her mother. Anyway, through her marriage she manages to live up according to the standard, otherwise this decision suppresses her 'real self' and slowly initiates her personal disintegration.

Despite Mary's trying to live in compliance with the colonial discourse, she is incapable to handle the contact with the black population. This issue is discussed in the second subchapter of the analytical part. Mary coming from the city is unprepared for the life on the farm, and more importantly, to deal with the black servants and workers on daily basis. She lacks the knowledge of the discourse on this matter and therefore never understands the system of unwritten mutual agreements between the blacks and whites. This ignorance puts her in constant conflicts with the servants. Furthermore, Mary breaks the strict rule by having an intimate relationship with a black person, her servant Moses. Eventually she is murdered by Moses, which proves the ultimate failure as a member of the white community. This affair deeply challenges the discourse and the power structure.

To conclude the analysis, the aim was to prove that the discourse's requirements on the colonisers in Southern Rhodesia cause the unbearable living situation for the Turners. Mary and Dick represent a failure as British colonisers, not able to uphold the truths of the colonial discourse. Both inner and outer society's pressures lead to the Turners' personal destruction.

## 5. Resumé

Období kolonializmu v 30. a 40. letech 20. století v Jižní Rhodesii (dnešní Zimbabwe) přináší výrazné společenské změny a problémy týkající se především soužití domorodých obyvatel a kolonizujících Britů. Do komplikované situace jsou však postaveni právě samotní Britové, kteří jako členové úzce spjaté komunity čelí tlaku očekávání koloniální společnosti svázané pevnými pravidly.

Pro tehdejší společnost jsou rozhodující pravidla *koloniálního diskurzu*, založeného na *politice rasové segregace*. Tato politika v Jižní Rhodesii nařizuje přísné oddělení kolonizátorů od původních obyvatel a byla navržena tak, aby dokázala ovládat původní obyvatel, kteří početně převažují. Jejím úkolem je zamezit případným pokusům o získání svobody, která je s příchodem kolonizátorů omezena. Původní obyvatelé mají například přísný zákaz dotýkat se „*bílých*“ obyvatel.

Kolonialismus jako proces získávání nových území a nadvlády slouží koloniálním státům k podmanění si určitých oblastí z důvodů politických, ekonomických či ideologických. Kolonie představují nové trhy přinášející prosperitu kolonizující zemi. Základní vztah vůči kolonizovanému území spočívá v politické nadvládě, rozšiřování a zabírání území a celkové rasové nadřazenosti. Jižní Rhodesie, stejně jako mnoho dalších afrických států, se stala *osadnickou kolonií* Britského impéria, což představuje fyzické osídlení kolonií britskými kolonizátory, kteří poté žijí jak ve městech tak na venkově, kde si ve velké většině případů obstarávají živobytí zemědělskou činností.

Pro tuto bakalářskou práci jsou podstatné především záležitosti ovlivňující koloniální společnost, která je daná *koloniálním diskurzem* - psanými i nepsanými pravidly určující jednání jedinců koloniální společnosti. Pravidla diskurzu jasně vymezují vztahy mezi kolonizátory a kolonizovanými. Diskurz je závislý na společnosti, ve které existuje, a pro kterou vytvořil pravidla. Proto je jeho funkčnost závislá na dodržování daných pravidel všemi členy společnosti, tedy dodržování pravidel ze strany kolonizovaných původních afrických obyvatel stejně jako ze strany britských kolonizátorů.

Samotné vytvoření diskurzu spočívá v učení, které je vnímáno jako jediné skutečně pravdivé. Jedná se o vytvoření určité reality pomocí předsudků za účelem obhájit a posílit koloniální systém nadřazenosti. Základními prvky, na kterých koloniální diskurz staví jsou *pravda, moc a vědění*. Pravdivá skutečnost je stanovena přesvědčením většiny, čímž se automaticky opačné tvrzení stává nepravdivé. Britská společnost dokázala vytvořit

přesvědčení, že jejich *bělošská* rasa je nadřazená té africké *černošské*. Tato skutečnost o bělošské výjimečnosti se tak stává hlavním nástrojem koloniálního diskurzu. Byl vytvořen rozdíl mezi tzv. přirozeným a nepřirozeným, vztahující se, jak na původní obyvatel, například z důvodu rozdílné barvy pleti, tak na Brity. V rámci diskurzu je nepřirozené nesplnit požadavky řádného kolonizátora - každá forma neúspěchu byla znakem slabosti a odsuzována společností. Stručně řečeno, každá pravda, která je ustanovena diskurzem je nediskutovatelná a členové společnosti jsou nuceni žít v souladu s touto pravdivou skutečností.

Dalším nástrojem pro udržení funkčnosti diskurzu je systém moci stanovený institucemi, který zřetelně odlišuje práva a povinnosti příslušníků dané společnosti. Přestože staví kolonizátory do výhodnější a nadřazené pozice vůči Afričanům, zároveň omezuje jejich jednání, které musí být taktéž v souladu s danými normami. Moc přináší kolonizátorům práva spolu s povinnostmi. Společně s mocí přispívá k zachování diskurzu vědění, které je taktéž ustanovené systémem moci.

Příkladem kolonizátorů, kteří nejsou schopni splnit požadavky koloniálního diskurzu jsou hlavní hrdinové románu *Grass is Singing (Tráva zpívá)*, napsaného a vydaného v roce 1950 britskou spisovatelkou Doris Lessing. Tento román, který zobrazuje problémy koloniální společnosti v Jižní Rhodesii je předmětem zkoumání této práce, která se zaměřuje jak na vztah kolonizátorů s původními obyvateli, tak na vzájemné vztahy britských farmářů v uzavřené komunitě. Dále se zabývá postavením ženy ve společnosti, konkrétně také vztahem muže a ženy. Celá práce se skládá ze třech hlavních částí.

První část práce se věnuje teoretickým poznatkům spojeným s kolonializmem. Kromě již výše zmíněných definic a charakteristik kolonializmu, jehož hlavním společenským nástrojem je specifický koloniální diskurz, tato část práce zahrnuje i teoretická východiska spojená s otázkou genderových a rasových stereotypů, vytvořených na základě neopodstatněných předsudků. Tyto teoretické poznatky jsou do práce zahrnuty a následně zkoumány na díle, protože tyto stereotypy se dají považovat také za součást diskurzu, tím že podstatně určují a ovlivňují jednání postav zobrazených v knize.

Předsudky o rasové nadřazenosti byly zakotveny s příchodem Britů na africkou půdu, kdy jako hlavní odlišnost byla vnímána tmavá barva pleti afrických obyvatel, která už byla od dob středověku spojována s negativními charakteristikami. Osoba s tmavší pletí byla už tehdy považována za hříšné, nečisté, nemorální stvoření s ďáblem v těle. Celá africká populace byla považována za nevypělou a necivilizovanou oproti britské, která neuznávala žádnou jinou

kulturu jako plnohodnotnou. Dle názoru britské společnosti Afričané byli národem nekřesťanských divochů, kteří nebyli schopni žádného pokroku za posledních dvě stě let, což sloužilo jako dostatečný důvod pro utlačování svobody původních obyvatel v podobě *rasismu*.

Druhým stereotypem ovlivňujícím postavy v díle je stereotyp genderový, který určuje především vývoj hlavní postavy Mary Turner. Vztah muže a ženy je daný *patriarchální* společností, kdy žena je vnímána pouze jako objekt a majetek muže. Teorie *sexismu* o nadřazenosti muže vůči ženě je podpořena tím, že žena je vnímána jako ohrožené a slabé stvoření ve vztahu k domorodým mužům a proto její manžel – muž ochránitel – je ve výsadní nadřazené pozici. V patriarchální koloniální společnosti platí nadřazenost mužů nejen nad domorodými obyvateli, ale také nad jejich ženami. Žena se tak ocitá v utlačované pozici, což vyvolává pokusy o získání rovnosti. Ve zkoumaném díle se tak objevují prvky feminismu, který se pokouší o rovnoprávné postavení ženy, ocenění individuálních kvalit osoby neohledně na pohlaví.

Další část práce se soustředí na nezvyklé zobrazení života v koloniích v díle Doris Lessing, kde je objasněn její negativní postoj vůči koloniálnímu diskurzu, což slouží pro pochopení vyobrazení hlavních postav v *Grass is Singing*. Román je založen na autorčině vlastní zkušenosti života v koloniální Rhodesii, kde prožila své dětství. Její tvorba je neobvyklá ve více směrech. I přesto, že se v jejích dílech vyskytují prvky zmíněného *feminismu*, odmítá čistě feministický přístup. Jejím cílem je ukázat nesouhlas s jakýmkoli druhem omezování lidské svobody. Proto její díla nikdy nezobrazují černobílé a přímočaré charaktery, či situace jako striktně správné či špatné, její charaktery se vyznačují komplexností. Častokrát projevuje i pochopení vůči domorodým obyvatelům. Například v *Grass is Singing* přináší neobvyklý obraz černošského sluhy v nadřazeném postavení vůči bělošské ženě.

Poslední část práce se zabývá analýzou koloniálního života v již zmíněném díle. Jsou zde diskutovány problémy spojené s existencí hlavních postav Mary a Dicka Turnerových ve vztahu ke společnosti tamějších britských farmářů, současně jejich vztah k původním obyvatelům. Důležitou součástí analytické části tvoří dvě podkapitoly zaměřené na postavu Mary jako jednotlivce a na očekávání společnosti vůči ní jako ženě a dále pak na její nezkušenost života mezi domorodým obyvatelstvem, která zásadně přispěje k jejímu rozpadu osobnosti.

Pozornost je nejprve věnována hlavním postavám jako členům britské vládnoucí třídy. Mary a Dick žijí ve společnosti dané přísnými pravidly koloniálního diskurzu, který určuje způsob života a jejich jednání. V díle je celá britská společnost zastoupena postavou Charlieho Slattera, příkladného a úspěšného farmáře, který dokáže udržovat standardy vyžadované britskou společností. Ve srovnání s ním je zřejmé, že Dick a Mary neúspěšně bojují s ustanoveními koloniálního diskurzu. Jejich životem v chudobě a podmínkách, které se podobají více těm, ve kterých žijí domorodí obyvatelé se nepřibližují britským standardům, naopak je porušují. Pro bělošskou vládnoucí rasu představují hrozbu tím, že stanovují špatný příklad pro domorodé a tím mohou oslabit pozici celé společnosti. Příkladný britský kolonizátor a farmář, jako člen vládnoucí třídy musí být schopen udržet svou nadřazenost ve všem směrech, čímž prokazuje, že je oprávněn ovládat domorodé obyvatele. Dickova neschopnost zlepšit svoji životní situaci je pro ostatní farmáře nepřijatelná a neomluvitelná. Nesplněním těchto nejzákladnějších požadavků koloniálního diskurzu se Dick a Mary dopouštějí hrubého porušení pravidel a vylučují ze společnosti.

Mary a Dick jsou dále postaveni do pozice nenáviděných sousedů, což je zapříčiněno neustálým odmítáním účastnit se společenského života. Pro ostatní členy komunity tato odmítnutí představují popírání celé britské kultury a příslušnosti, což je opět nepřípustné. Je tedy zjištěno, že Turnerovi nejsou schopni dostát požadavkům koloniální společnosti, což je staví do nelehké životní situace.

Další selhání plnit pravidla diskurzu je odhaleno při zkoumání postavy Mary, jako jednotlivce ve společnosti. Důsledky, které neschopnost žít podle diskurzu přináší jsou pro Mary tragické. Mary, jakožto žena čelí předsudkům, které ji staví do submisivní role manželky, což se neztotožňuje s osobností Mary, která se provdala za Dicka pouze z povinnosti. Tím sice splňuje očekávání svých přátel a celé společnosti, ale naprosto potlačuje svoji identitu, což přináší počátek jejího postupného rozpadu osobnosti.

Fatální slabinou Mary je její neznalost a nezkušenost v soužití s černošským obyvatelstvem. Mary není schopna zvládnout každodenní kontakt se sluhou a pracovníky na farmě, což vede k neustálým rozbrojům. Neporozumění vzájemných nepsaných dohod mezi domorodými a farmáři, na kterých systém a soužití funguje, představuje pro Mary problém, se kterým se není schopna vypořádat, což značí pouze další selhání ve vztahu ke společnosti. To je završeno vytvořením intimního vztahu s domorodým sluhou zakončeného její vraždou. Celá tato záležitost představuje ohrožení celé společnosti a její nadřazenosti nad domorodými Afričany.

Závěrem této práce je, že tlak, požadavky a očekávání tehdejší britské vládnoucí společnosti v Jižní Rhodesii vytvářejí neúnosné životní podmínky pro Mary a Dicka Turnerovi, a jsou příčinou jejich tragického osudu. Turnerovi, neschopní dostát základním pravdám koloniálního diskurzu, jsou vyobrazeni jako odstrašující případ selhání pro celou společnost, která nemá slitování pro slabost a neúspěch.

## 6. Bibliography

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