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**BREAKING BOUNDARIES: DORIS LESSING'S EXPLORATION OF FEMALE INDEPENDENCE AND SEXUALITY IN THE 20th CENTURY**

**AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

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**THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN THE 20th CENTURY: ANALYZING DORIS LESSING’S WORKS ON SEXUALITY AND FEMALE INDEPEDENCE**

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14/06/2024

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# ABSTRACT

 The 20th century witnessed profound shifts in the roles and perceptions of women across the globe. This paper explores the evolving role of women in various contexts throughout the century, with a specific focus on the literary works of Doris Lessing. Providing a general overview of the 20th century, it examines the changing societal norms and women's positions in different countries. Furthermore, it delves into the life and works of Doris Lessing, offering insights into her portrayal of female characters and themes of sexuality and independence.

The analysis zooms in on three of Lessing's short stories: "A Woman on a Roof," "Our Friend Judith," and "To Room Nineteen." These stories serve as poignant illustrations of women grappling with societal expectations, exploring their sexuality, and asserting their independence in various ways. Through straightforward and accessible language, this paper investigates how Lessing's characters navigate the complexities of gender roles and expectations, shedding light on the broader discourse surrounding women's experiences in the 20th century.

By dissecting the nuances of female characters and their journeys in Lessing's narratives, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of women's roles and experiences in the 20th century. Ultimately, it highlights the significance of literature in capturing and reflecting upon the evolving dynamics of gender and society, offering valuable insights into the struggles and triumphs of women throughout history.

**Keywords:** gender dynamics, women's empowerment, feminist literature, women’s liberation, Doris Lessing

# ÖZET

20. yüzyıl, dünya genelinde kadınların rollerinde ve algılarında derin değişimlere tanıklık etmiştir. Bu makale, Doris Lessing'in edebi eserlerine özel olarak odaklanarak, kadınların yüzyıl boyunca çeşitli bağlamlarda değişen rollerini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, 20. yüzyıla genel bir bakış sunarak, değişen toplumsal normları ve kadınların farklı ülkelerdeki konumlarını incelemektedir. Ayrıca, Doris Lessing'in hayatını ve eserlerini inceleyerek, kadın karakterlerin tasviri ile cinsellik ve bağımsızlık temaları hakkında içgörüler sunuyor.

Analiz Lessing'in üç kısa öyküsüne odaklanıyor:"Çatıda Bir Kadın", "Arkadaşımız Judith" ve "On Dokuz Numaralı Odaya". Bu öyküler, toplumsal beklentilerle boğuşan, cinselliklerini keşfeden ve bağımsızlıklarını çeşitli şekillerde ortaya koyan kadınların dokunaklı örneklerini sunmaktadır. Bu makale, Lessing'in karakterlerinin toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve beklentilerinin karmaşıklığı içinde nasıl yol aldıklarını açık ve anlaşılır bir dille inceleyerek, 20. yüzyılda kadınların deneyimlerini çevreleyen daha geniş bir söyleme ışık tutmaktadır.

Bu makale, Lessing'in anlatılarındaki kadın karakterlerin nüanslarını ve yolculuklarını inceleyerek, 20. yüzyılda kadınların rollerinin ve deneyimlerinin çok yönlü doğasının daha derinlemesine anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Nihayetinde, edebiyatın toplumsal cinsiyet ve toplumun değişen dinamiklerini yakalamak ve yansıtmaktaki önemini vurgulayarak, tarih boyunca kadınların mücadeleleri ve zaferleri hakkında değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** toplumsal cinsiyet dinamikleri, kadınların güçlendirilmesi, kadının özgürleşmesi, feminist edebiyat, Doris Lessing

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#  INTRODUCTION

The 20th century stands out as a time of profound transformation, particularly in the roles and perceptions of women across the globe. This era witnessed remarkable shifts in societal norms, political landscapes, and economic structures, all of which contributed to the evolving status of women. From gaining the right to vote to entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, women began to challenge and redefine their roles within both the private and public spheres.

This thesis explores these dynamic changes, starting with a general overview of the 20th century, highlighting key historical events and social movements that influenced women's roles. The century began with women largely confined to domestic roles, but as the decades progressed, wars, industrialization, and feminist movements catalyzed significant changes. By examining these shifts over time, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drove the evolution of women's roles.

The role of women varied greatly across different countries, influenced by cultural, political, and economic contexts. This thesis presents examples of women's roles in various countries, illustrating the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women worldwide. This comparative approach underscores the universal struggle for gender equality while acknowledging the unique contexts that shape women's lives.

A key focus of this study is the examination of women's roles in the short stories of Doris Lessing, a prominent 20th -century author. Lessing's works, including "A Woman on a Roof," "Our Friend Judith," and "To Room Nineteen," offer deep insights into the complexities of women's lives and their quest for identity and autonomy. Through detailed literary analysis, this thesis explores how Lessing portrays women's roles, the societal expectations they confront, and their journeys toward self-discovery.

The concept of sexuality is also integral to understanding the changing roles of women. This thesis delves into the definition of sexuality and its portrayal in literature, highlighting how sexual liberation and feminist ideologies intersect. The women's liberation movement, which gained momentum in the mid-20th century, played a crucial role in challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's rights. By examining the impact of this movement, the study sheds light on the broader context of women's liberation and its influence on contemporary gender dynamics.

Gender dynamics and feminist literature are central themes throughout this thesis. The exploration of feminist literature provides a lens through which to analyze the changing roles of women, offering critical perspectives on gender relations and societal expectations. Doris Lessing's contributions to feminist literature are particularly significant, as her stories encapsulate the struggles and triumphs of women seeking to redefine their identities.

In summary, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the role of women in the 20th century, drawing on historical context, literary analysis, and feminist theory. By examining the works of Doris Lessing and the broader societal changes, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of women's evolving roles and the ongoing quest for gender equality.

CHAPTER I

THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN 20th CENTURY

## 1.1. Navigating the Twists and Turns of the 20th Century: A Comprehensive Overview

The 20th century in Britain was marked by significant developments across various spheres, profoundly shaping the nation's social landscape. Commencing with the aftermath of World War I, the country experienced a seismic shift as traditional hierarchies were challenged, and societal norms began to evolve. The interwar period witnessed the emergence of new cultural movements, technological advancements, and economic instability, exemplified by the Great Depression (Lengyel 2021). World War II further catalyzed social change, fostering greater inclusivity and solidarity as the nation mobilized for the war effort. Postwar reconstruction under the Labour government introduced transformative policies aimed at building a more equitable society, including the establishment of the National Health Service (NHS) and the nationalization of key industries. Concurrently, Britain confronted the realities of decolonization, reshaping its global identity and prompting reflections on race, imperialism, and national pride (Eke , Uysal 2019)

Throughout the century, shifts in gender roles, attitudes towards sexuality, and the decline of traditional institutions underscored the evolving nature of British society. Economic transformations from heavy industry to service-based sectors brought both opportunities and challenges, accentuating disparities in wealth and opportunity. Britain's increasing integration into Europe, culminating in its entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, further influenced its social dynamics, sparking debates over sovereignty and national identity (Nelson 1995). Despite these changes, cultural diversity burgeoned with immigration, enriching British society while also posing questions about multiculturalism and integration. The 20th century witnessed a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic forces that left a lasting impact on the fabric of British society, reflecting a dynamic and evolving nation.

 The 20th century marked a period of significant social and economic change, particularly in post-World War II England. Traditional class structures underwent a profound transformation, with the old system giving way to a more fluid social order. Previously rigid class distinctions, where one's social class was largely determined by birth, were replaced by a system where individuals could determine their own class based on factors such as education, occupation, and economic status. However, despite efforts to create a more egalitarian society through social welfare legislation and expanded educational opportunities, many challenges persisted. Economic instability, uncertainty about the future, and a decline in traditional values contributed to widespread social alienation. Particularly affected were the younger generation, who felt increasingly disconnected from society and struggled with identity issues.The aftermath of World War II brought about a sense of disillusionment and discontentment, leading to expressions of protest and rebellion against the established social order. Literary movements such as the "angry young men" in 1950s England reflected the frustration and alienation experienced by many young people, while also highlighting the broader societal changes taking place (Aydoğan and Uygur 2017).

 The 20th century was a turbulent time for Britain, marked by significant internal and external challenges. Internally, the Irish question loomed large, with the Easter Rebellion of 1916 leading to the formation of an independent Irish Republic in 1919 and subsequent guerrilla warfare. The Irish Free State was established in 1922, while Ulster remained part of the UK. The Catholic minority in Ulster faced discrimination, leading to civil rights movements in 1968 and decades of conflict, only resolved with the establishment of power-sharing mechanisms in 2007. Politically, the Labour Party replaced the Liberals as a dominant force, while women gained the right to vote and the powers of the House of Lords were curtailed. Socially, the Welfare State was introduced in 1948, and significant nationalization occurred under the Labour government in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Economic prosperity in the late 1950s and 1960s gave way to challenges in the 1970s, exacerbated by strikes and economic downturns.

On the international stage, Britain's policy shifted from "splendid isolation" to engagement, particularly through alliances like NATO. Britain fought in the World War I and, despite pursuing appeasement, found itself standing alone against Nazi Germany in 1940s before ultimately prevailing. The British Empire evolved into the Commonwealth of Nations, and Britain joined the European Union in 1973. Economically, Britain faced decline due to the impact of two world wars, the loss of its empire, and structural issues in traditional industries. The discovery of North Sea oil in the 1970s provided a boost, but the country's global economic standing shifted, with financial services becoming a key sector. Overall, the 20th century saw Britain grapple with profound changes domestically and internationally, reshaping its society, economy, and global role (Nangonova 2008).

 "The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991" by Eric Hobsbawm (1994) offers a comprehensive overview of the 20th century, covering a tumultuous period marked by wars, revolutions, economic upheavals, and ideological shifts. Hobsbawm's insightful analysis delves into the key events and trends that shaped the century, including the World Wars, the Great Depression, the rise and fall of empires, the Cold War, and the struggle for decolonization. Through his engaging narrative, readers gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics and forces at play during this transformative era. Hobsbawm's book serves as an excellent resource for gaining insight into the intricacies of the 20th century, making it a valuable reference for anyone seeking to explore this pivotal period in human history (Hobsbawm 1994).

 "A People's History of the Twentieth Century" by Howard Zinn (2010) offers a unique perspective on the events of the 20th century. Unlike traditional history books that focus on political leaders and major events, Zinn's book highlights the experiences of ordinary people and marginalized groups. Through the lens of social movements, protests, and grassroots activism, Zinn explores how everyday individuals shaped the course of history. By giving voice to those often overlooked by mainstream narratives, Zinn sheds light on the struggles for justice, equality, and human rights that defined the century. His engaging storytelling and thought-provoking analysis make "A People's History of the Twentieth Century" a compelling read for anyone interested in understanding the broader social and cultural forces at play during this tumultuous period (Scott 2014).

 In summary, the 20th century witnessed profound shifts in social structures and values, with the post-war era in England marked by a breakdown of traditional class distinctions and a growing sense of social alienation, especially among the younger generation. Despite efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable society, challenges remained, highlighting the complexities of social change in the modern era. The 20th century stands as a pivotal era in human history, characterized by remarkable advancements, profound challenges, and transformative changes across the globe. It witnessed the rise and fall of empires, two devastating World Wars, the spread of democracy, the struggle for civil rights and equality, several rapid technological innovations, and the dawn of the digital age. The century saw humanity reach unprecedented heights of progress, yet also grapple with the darkest depths of conflict and oppression. Its legacy continues to shape our modern world, serving as a reminder of the resilience, ingenuity, and enduring quest for justice that define the human experience.

### The Role of Women in the 20th Century

 As human civilization evolved, so too did the establishment of social structures to uphold it. This resulted in gender divisions and a continual struggle for dominance. In ancient societies, matriarchal systems were prevalent due to the associations between fertility and polytheistic religions. However, with the emergence of monotheistic religions and a shift from agriculture to trade-based economies, societal integration became inevitable, leading to the rise of patriarchal structures. Patriarchy sought to limit women to roles centered around fertility and sexuality, perpetuating gender stereotypes. Women were expected to conform to the male dominance to be accepted in society, relegating them to secondary status. The Industrial Revolution marked a turning point as women entered the workforce, sparking feminist movements. During the Industrial Revolution, women entered the workforce in large numbers, particularly in textile mills and factories. This shift transformed the nature of work and family life, as women juggled their roles as wage earners and caregivers. However, working conditions were often harsh, and women faced the discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. Following the Industrial Revolution, capitalism emerged as the predominant economic and political framework within society, closely intertwined with patriarchal structures. As women began advocating for their rights and challenging inequality, their actions also amounted to a critique of capitalism. This led to the emergence of new economic and political ideologies aimed at promoting equality. Another significant factor contributing to the rapid transformation of women's roles in the 20th century was the influence of feminist movements on women's political rights. During the first wave of feminism, women sought to secure their political rights to have a voice in governance, as they were often overlooked even in official population counts. In the early 20th century, black women protested against the disparities between white and black citizens. However, once black men gained political rights, they attempted to confine women to domestic roles again. This led white and black women to empathize with each other's struggles and unite in a common cause: advocating for women's rights and challenging political inequality. This phenomenon was widespread globally, as women increasingly felt stifled within patriarchal structures amidst changing economic and political landscapes. Industrial capitalism relied heavily on physical labor for factory production, whereas the service sector's productivity was determined by the quantity of labor rather than the gender of the workers. This circumstance motivated women to engage in the workforce and attain economic autonomy, thus challenging the patriarchal system.

Feminist economics, to reiterate, is not female economics, to be practiced only by women, nor feminine economics that uses only soft technique and cooperative models. Feminist scholarship suggests that economics has been made less useful by implicitly reflecting a distorted ideal of masculinity in its models, methods, topics, and pedagogy (Nelson 146).

According to the author's portrayal, following the second wave of feminism and the expansion of the service sector, patriarchal norms diminished in significance, leading to greater gender equality in economic participation between men and women.

The 20th century witnessed profound shifts in women's roles, primarily driven by changes in family dynamics, feminist movements, and economic structures. As societies transitioned from patriarchal norms to more egalitarian frameworks, women increasingly moved from domestic spheres to public spaces, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Feminist activism played a pivotal role in advocating for women's political rights and economic empowerment, leading to significant advancements in gender equality. Additionally, the rise of capitalism and the expansion of the service sector provided women with opportunities to participate in the workforce, thereby undermining patriarchal structures that relegated them to domestic roles. Overall, these multifaceted factors contributed to the rapid transformation of women's roles in the 20th century, marking a crucial period in the history of gender dynamics (Karadeniz 2023).

###  Changing Roles of Women over Time

The 20th century witnessed significant transformations in the societal, political, and cultural landscapes worldwide, and perhaps one of the most profound changes occurred in the realm of gender roles and women's rights. Throughout this tumultuous century, women challenged traditional norms, fought for equality, and reshaped their roles in society. From the suffragette movements demanding the right to vote to the feminist waves advocating for reproductive rights and workplace equality, women across the globe embarked on a journey towards empowerment and liberation. The 20th century marked a pivotal era where women's voices grew louder, their aspirations soared higher, and their contributions to every facet of society became increasingly evident. However, this journey was not without its obstacles, as women faced systemic discrimination, entrenched stereotypes, and persistent barriers to full participation in public life. Despite these challenges, the resilience and determination of women throughout the 20th century paved the way for remarkable progress in the pursuit of gender equality and social justice. Throughout history, women's roles have experienced significant transformations, showcasing the complex interplay of cultural norms, economic structures, and political dynamics. Spanning from ancient civilizations to the contemporary era, the evolution of women's roles provides a valuable framework for analyzing broader changes in societal attitudes and structures.

 The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries ushered in a new era of transformation for women's roles. As industrialization spurred urbanization and technological advancements, women increasingly entered the workforce, particularly in textile mills and factories. This shift challenged traditional notions of gender roles and reshaped familial dynamics, as women's economic contributions became essential for household survival. However, it is crucial to note that working-class women faced grueling conditions and meager wages, highlighting the intersecting inequalities of class and gender during this period (Nangonova 2008).

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the emergence of the women's suffrage movement, which sought to secure political rights and representation for women. Figures like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the charge for suffrage, arguing that women's enfranchisement was essential for achieving full citizenship and equality. The ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 marked a significant milestone in the struggle for women's rights, granting women the right to vote and laying the groundwork for subsequent feminist activism (Flexner and Ellen 1996).

 In the latter half of the 20th century, the feminist movement gained momentum, advocating for reproductive rights, workplace equality, and an end to gender-based violence. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sex, paving the way for greater workplace opportunities for women. Additionally, landmark Supreme Court decisions like Roe v. Wade affirmed women's reproductive autonomy and right to privacy, catalyzing debates over reproductive justice and bodily autonomy (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996).

Today, women continue to navigate complex terrain, balancing professional aspirations with familial responsibilities and societal expectations. While progress has been made in many areas, persistent gender disparities continue in areas such as pay equity, political representation, and access to leadership positions (World Economic Forum 2020). Moreover, intersecting forms of discrimination, including race, class, and sexuality, compound the challenges faced by marginalized women, underscoring the ongoing imperative for intersectional feminist advocacy (Crenshaw 1989).

The 20th century marked a significant period of transformation for women in America, particularly in terms of their economic independence and political rights. Following the end of World War II, women's participation in both the workforce and political life saw a notable increase. Economic changes during this period, such as the doubling of average real weekly salaries for black women and the narrowing of income gaps between working women, were instrumental in shifting societal perceptions of women's roles. Moreover, some advancements in formal education enabled women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields, further challenging gender norms. On the political front, the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 granted women the right to vote, a milestone achieved after decades of advocacy by organizations like the National Woman's Party. Despite initial challenges, women made significant strides in political representation, with a notable increase in the proportion of women serving in state legislatures. Throughout these advancements, government support and legislative measures played a crucial role in encouraging women's participation in economic and political spheres. Overall, the 20th century witnessed a profound shift in societal perceptions of women's roles, moving from traditional domestic roles to active participation in both the economy and politics, ultimately contributing to the pursuit of gender equality (Evans 1989).

In traditional Indian society, deeply entrenched gender roles relegated women to the domestic sphere, while men were assigned the roles of breadwinners and decision-makers. However, with the dawn of independence, a gradual shift began to challenge these rigid stereotypes. R.K. Narayan's novels, "The Dark Room" and "The Painter of Signs," offer glimpses into this evolving landscape, portraying female protagonists who navigate societal expectations to carve out their own identities. In "The Dark Room," Savitri symbolizes the plight of countless Indian women confined to oppressive domestic roles, while Daisy in "The Painter of Signs" emerges as a beacon of change, advocating for women's rights and embracing independence. Shashi Deshpande's "A Matter of Time" further delves into the struggles of modern, educated women like Sumi and her daughter Aru, who defy patriarchal norms to assert their autonomy and seek economic independence. Through these narratives, the gradual transformation of women's roles in Indian society unfolds, reflecting the ongoing journey towards gender equality and societal progress (Mohanti 2016).

## Examples of Women’s Roles in Different Countrıes

Women's roles in different countries have been shaped by a multitude of factors including historical context, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, economic structures, and political systems. Examining these roles across various societies provides valuable insights into the complex and nuanced nature of gender dynamics throughout history.

In ancient Egypt, women enjoyed a relatively high status compared to other ancient civilizations. They held various positions of authority and influence, such as queens, priestesses, and even pharaohs. Egyptian society valued women's contributions to both religious rituals and political affairs, with some women exerting significant power and influence (Yılmaz 2020).

 Similarly, in ancient Greece, women's roles varied significantly depending on the city-state and social class. Athenian women were largely confined to the domestic sphere and had limited rights, while Spartan women enjoyed greater freedoms and played active roles in society, participating in athletic competitions and receiving education (Pomeroy 1998).

In ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, women occupied diverse roles within their societies. While some cultures embraced matrilineal traditions and revered goddesses, others adhered to more patriarchal norms where women's agency was often circumscribed. For instance, in Mesopotamia, women could own property and engage in trade, albeit within certain familial and societal constraints (Harriet 2004). Meanwhile, in ancient Greece, women's lives were largely confined to the domestic sphere, where they managed households and raised children under the authority of male guardians (Pomeroy 1998).

 During the medieval period in Europe, women's roles were largely determined by feudalism and the Christian Church. Noblewomen wielded power and influence through their marriages and connections, often managing estates and engaging in political maneuvering. Meanwhile, peasant women worked alongside men in agricultural labor, contributing to the household economy (Bennett and Judith 2006).

 In the United States, women have played pivotal roles in shaping the nation's history and development. From the colonial era to the present day, women have contributed to various fields including politics, literature, science, and activism. Figures like Abigail Adams, Harriet Tubman, and Susan B. Anthony have left indelible marks on American society, advocating for women's rights and challenging traditional gender norms (Milkman 1983).

 In the 20th century, American women fought for and won important legal and political rights, including the right to vote and equal access to education and employment. The women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement propelled women's rights to the forefront of national discourse, leading to landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision (DuBois 2024).

In modern times, women's roles continue to evolve in response to changing social, economic, and political dynamics. Countries like Sweden and Iceland have implemented gender equality initiatives that have led to greater opportunities for women in the workforce, politics, and academia. These countries boast high levels of gender parity and are often considered leaders in promoting women's rights and empowerment (Moghamadam 2013).

 Similarly, in the United Kingdom, women have played significant roles in shaping the country's history and culture. From the suffragettes of the early 20th century to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s, British women have been at the forefront of efforts to achieve gender equality and social justice. Figures like Emmeline Pankhurst, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Thatcher have left lasting legacies in British politics and society (Purvis 1995).

 In contemporary Britain, women continue to make strides in various fields, although challenges such as the gender pay gap and underrepresentation in leadership positions persist. Efforts to address these issues include legislation promoting gender equality in the workplace, as well as initiatives to encourage girls and young women to pursue careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Lengyel 2021).

 During the Renaissance period, women's roles varied across Europe, with some regions witnessing greater opportunities for women's education and artistic expression. Italian city-states like Florence and Venice boasted prominent female artists and writers, challenging traditional gender norms (Brotton 2006).

 In the Islamic world, women's roles have been influenced by both Islamic teachings and cultural practices. While Islamic law grants women certain rights, such as the right to inherit property and seek divorce, interpretations of these laws have varied across different societies and historical periods. Cultural norms and patriarchal traditions have often restricted women's autonomy and opportunities for education and employment (Ahmed 2021).

However, challenges continue in many parts of the world where women face barriers to education, employment, and political participation. In countries like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, women's rights are still restricted by conservative social norms and legal frameworks. Efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment remain ongoing struggles in these and other societies (Michael 2019).

 In conclusion, the examples of women's roles in different countries underscore the diverse and complex nature of gender dynamics throughout history. While progress has been made in many areas, there is still much work to be done to achieve full gender equality and empower women worldwide.

# CHAPTER II

# EXPLORING WOMEN’S ROLE IN DORIS LESSING’S SHORT STORIES

## 2.1. The Definition of Sexuality, The Women’s Liberation, Gender Dynamics and Feminist Literature

Understanding sexuality requires acknowledging its complexity and diversity, recognizing that it is not solely determined by binary categories but exists along a continuum. It encompasses dimensions such as sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual), gender identity, sexual behaviors, desires, and relationships. Moreover, sexuality is a dynamic aspect of human experience that can evolve over time and vary across different contexts and cultures. Therefore, any comprehensive definition of sexuality must embrace its fluidity, diversity, and the interplay of various factors shaping individual and collective sexual identities (American Psychological Association (APA) 2021).

Sexuality is a concept that encompasses many aspects of who we are: values, bodies, desires, relationships, gender, and thoughts and feelings about these topics. Each individual’s understanding of sexuality is personal and constantly evolving because this concept is composed of many different elements.

Sex has no history (Princeton 1990). While it itself is a biological fact, sexuality is a cultural construct. Sexuality refers to how societies interpret and use sexual practices, whereas sex is a biological function. This idea challenges the notion that sexuality is inherent and unchanging, instead proposing that it’s shaped by historical and cultural forces. This view is influenced by Michel Foucault’s work, which emphasizes the role of power and discourse in constructing notions of sexuality (Halperin 1989).

Sexuality forms a large part of the psychophysical nature of human beings. This is an area that is distinctly separated and isolated from other areas of personal and social life, such as lust, sexual intercourse, attraction, masculinity, passion, love, eroticism, intimacy and emotional connection. Sexuality constitutes the sexual identity of the individual, gives each of us a personal sexual nature and proposes the idea that people are different from each other and belong to different types of being because of their sexuality (Halperin 259).

During the latter half of the 20th century, Western societies underwent significant transformations in sexual and gender relations, leading to the increasing commercialization and commodification of the sexual sphere. Although the heterosexual couple remains fundamental to social life, the cohesion within such relationships has become more fragile than ever. This vulnerability has been exploited by conservative factions in the United States, who seek to impose their own definition of ‘appropriate’ sexuality through legislative means. The centrality of sex to public discourse, evident in discussions on teen pregnancy, sex education, pornography, abortion, and, most notably, AIDS, underscores its role as a key political issue and a significant aspect of social relations. Despite the growing public discourse on sex and its recognition as a legitimate area of sociological inquiry, the prevailing view continues to emphasize the biological and psychological aspects of sexuality, overlooking its social dimensions. This perspective, rooted in nineteenth-century sexology’s quest for a scientific understanding of sex, portrays sex as an innate, instinctual force subject to cultural and social regulation. While Freud’s attempt to distinguish between biological instincts and culturally shaped drives hinted at a more sociological interpretation of sexual behavior and identity, his libido theory ultimately leaned towards a deterministic view, positing a fixed sexual drive largely independent of social influences. Consequently, reductionist interpretations have dominated American discourse. Sociology, however, offers insights that challenge the inadequacies of the drive model in explaining sexual behavior. While acknowledging the role of biological drives in shaping sexuality, sociologists argue for the importance of social structures, particularly family and religious institutions, in influencing sexual behavior.

**The women’s liberation**

“The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own” (Friedan 346). The essential point is that for women to find fulfillment, they require more than just a spouse, children, and a household; they need freedom and creative opportunities free from societal constraints. Historically, women have faced challenges against the restrictive roles assigned by society. Persistent stereotypes have been fueled by the notion that women are intellectually lesser, physically weaker, and excessively emotional. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, women began to defy the traditional roles of “happy little housewives” (Friedan 1963).

Beginning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women began to voice their demands for the right to vote. The Women’s Suffrage movement paved the way for the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted women this right. This movement marked the beginning of a broader equal rights struggle aimed at providing equal opportunities to women across the country. The Women’s Liberation Movement aimed to create better opportunities, demand respect, and increase women’s participation in the workforce. This movement gained momentum from the late 1950s, starting with the acquisition of the right to vote. The core focus of the Women’s Liberation Movement was inspired by the Civil Rights Movement.

The Women’s Liberation Movement in America developed with the recognition that women were not limited to childbearing. However, we do not sufficiently consider the social effects of this change. Feminist Marlene Dixon states that although women have taken important steps to end oppression, the oppression still continues psychologically. “Opressive attitudes and personalized struggles between men and women around sexual and social privilege” are the result of psychological pressure on the minds of men and women who are oversexualized for attention, Dixon says (1). Given the importance placed on women’s sexual attractiveness, Dixon’s views are important. Even though women are becoming more present in the workforce and men are reducing their needs in relationships, women still market their bodies to prove that they are desirable and to gain confidence in the opposite sex. By allowing ourselves to be used as sexual objects in advertising, we send the message to men and other women that women are only desirable when they are physically attractive.

The women’s liberation movement has achieved numerous victories that have significantly improved the lives of women. One of the most significant accomplishments is the increased participation of women in the workforce. Legislative measures like the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 aimed to address wage disparities and employment discrimination based on gender. These laws have helped open doors for women in various professions, contributing to greater economic independence.

In the realm of education, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was a landmark development that prohibited gender discrimination in federally funded educational programs. This legislation led to a notable increase in opportunities for women and girls in academics and athletics, enabling more women to pursue higher education and professional careers.

Reproductive rights have also been a central focus of the women’s liberation movement. The Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade (1973) affirmed a woman’s right to choose abortion, granting greater autonomy over reproductive choices. Despite being a controversial issue, this decision marked a significant step toward ensuring women’s control over their bodies and reproductive health.

Despite these achievements, the struggle for women’s liberation continues. Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue, with many women experiencing domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and assault. The #MeToo movement, which gained prominence in 2017, highlighted the widespread nature of sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the workplace. This movement has sparked important discussions and led to increased accountability, but more work is needed to ensure safety and justice for all women.

Economic inequality persists, with women often earning less than men for similar work. The gender pay gap is influenced by factors such as occupational segregation, discrimination, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid caregiving responsibilities that women often bear. Policies like paid family leave and affordable childcare are crucial for addressing these disparities and supporting women’s economic empowerment

Political representation remains a significant challenge. Despite progress, women are still underrepresented in political leadership roles. Greater representation is essential for ensuring that women’s perspectives and needs are adequately represented in policy-making processes.

The women’s liberation movement has made significant strides in advancing gender equality, but there is still much work to be done. As society evolves, addressing the remaining challenges and working toward a future where women can fully realize their potential without facing systemic barriers is essential. This requires collective efforts from individuals, communities, and institutions to challenge stereotypes, promote equity, and uphold the rights and dignity of all women The legacy of the women’s liberation movement serves as a powerful reminder of the progress that can be achieved through persistence, solidarity, and unwavering commitment to justice.

**Gender dynamics**

Gender dynamics are among the crucial factors that shape opportunities and interactions in the workplace. According to the study by Smith and Doe (2023), these dynamics can significantly affect the barriers and opportunities that male and female employees encounter in their career journeys. Specifically, the higher representation of men in managerial positions is an indicator of the structural barriers women face in career advancement. This presents a major challenge in achieving gender equality in the workplace (Smith and Doe 123-125).

The predominance of men in leadership positions is one of the most prominent examples of gender inequality. According to Smith and Doe’s findings, men have an easier access to senior management and leadership roles than women. This can be explained by phenomena such as gender discrimination and the glass ceiling syndrome. The glass ceiling refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing beyond a certain point in their careers (Smith and Doe 126-128).

Another significant aspect of gender dynamics is wage inequality. Smith and Doe’s study reveals that there are notable differences in the wages of men and women working in the same positions. Women earning lower wages than men highlight the presence of economic gender inequality in the workplace. This situation can negatively impact women’s economic independence and job satisfaction (Smith and Doe 129-130).

Gender dynamics also influence daily interactions and communication patterns in the workplace. In Smith and Doe’s (2023) study, it is noted that men tend to have more say and speak more often in meetings. Women, on the other hand, generally take less floor time and are more hesitant to voice their opinions and suggestions. This restricts women’s visibility and influence in the workplace (Smith and Doe 131-133).

To achieve gender equality in the workplace, a range of strategies can be implemented. According to Smith and Doe, it is essential to establish and enforce policies that prevent gender discrimination. Additionally, mentorship programs and career development support should be provided to facilitate women’s access to leadership positions. Transparent pay policies should be adopted, and regular gender-based wage analyses should be conducted to ensure wage equality (Smith and Doe 134-136).

Gender dynamics are a critical factor to consider in ensuring equality and fairness in the workplace. Smith and Doe’s study comprehensively addresses the various dimensions of gender inequality and offers solutions to address these disparities. In this context, understanding workplace gender dynamics and developing strategies to address them are vital for creating a fair and equitable working environment.

**Feminist Literature**

Feminist literature encompasses a diverse range of writings that address issues of gender equality, women’s rights, and the portrayal of women in literature and society. The evolution, themes, and impact of feminist literature, highlighting its role in shaping cultural attitudes and advancing gender equality require a meticulous analysis.

Feminist literature has evolved significantly since the early feminist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman laid the groundwork for feminist thought through their critiques of patriarchal structures and advocacy for women’s rights. Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792) is a foundational text in feminist philosophy, arguing for women’s equality in education and society.

The first wave of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries focused primarily on women’s suffrage and legal rights. Figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony played crucial roles in advocating for women’s right to vote and legal equality in the United States. Their writings, including “The History of Woman Suffrage” (1881), provided intellectual and strategic foundations for the movement.

The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, expanding the scope of feminist literature to include issues such as reproductive rights, sexuality, and workplace discrimination. Betty Friedan’s “The Feminine Mystique” (1963) critiqued the limitations of traditional gender roles and sparked widespread debate about women’s roles in society.

Many feminist texts challenge traditional notions of gender and explore how gender identity is constructed and performed. Judith Butler’s “Gender Trouble” (1990) argues that gender is a socially constructed performance rather than an inherent identity. Writers such as Margaret Atwood (“The Handmaid’s Tale,” 1985) and Audre Lorde (“The Cancer Journals,” 1980) explore the politics of the female body and advocate for reproductive rights. These works critique patriarchal control over women’s bodies and promote bodily autonomy.

Intersectional feminism, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, examines how overlapping identities such as race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender to shape women’s experiences. This perspective is essential for understanding the diverse challenges faced by women from marginalized communities. Erica Jong’s “Fear of Flying” (1973) and bell hooks’ “Ain’t I a Woman?” (1981) challenge societal taboos surrounding female sexuality and advocate for women’s right to sexual pleasure and autonomy.

Feminist literature has had a profound impact on both literary culture and society at large. It has expanded the literary canon to include voices and perspectives that were previously marginalized or ignored. By challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality, feminist literature has inspired social and political movements, influencing public discourse and policy-making. In academia, feminist literary criticism has enriched the study of literature by offering new interpretations of texts through a feminist lens. Scholars such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (“The Madwoman in the Attic,” 1979) have reexamined classic works to uncover hidden meanings and challenge traditional interpretations. This type of literature has empowered women readers by providing narratives that reflect their experiences and validate their struggles. By depicting diverse female protagonists and exploring their inner lives, feminist authors have inspired readers to see themselves as agents of change and to challenge societal expectations. The literature of women’s empowerment continues to be a powerful force for social change and cultural critique. By amplifying marginalized voices, challenging patriarchal structures, and advocating for gender equality, feminist writers have shaped our understanding of identity, politics, and society. As the movement evolves, feminist literature will continue to play a vital role in inspiring activism and fostering solidarity among women worldwide.

## 2.2. Doris Lessing: An Introduction to Her Life and Literary Legacy

Doris Lessing was a British writer and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was born in Persia on October 22, 1919. Her father was a clerk at the Imperial Bank, and her mother was a nurse, both of British descent. In 1925, her family moved to a farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in hopes of improving their income. Doris received her early education at the Dominican Convent High School, a Roman Catholic all-girls school in the Southern Rhodesian capital of Salisbury (now Harare), followed by a year at Girls High School in Salisbury. She left school at the age of 13 and pursued self-education thereafter. At 15, she left home and worked as a nursemaid, while also delving into reading material on politics and sociology provided by her employer, which sparked her interest in writing (Liukkonen 2008).

Her upbringing in Rhodesia greatly influenced her, as she came to understand the harsh limitations of colonial society (Knapp 1984). Most of her childhood was spent in Rhodesia, where she witnessed discrimination against the natives, a theme reflected in her early novels. In 1937, she moved to Salisbury, where she worked as a telephone operator for a year. At nineteen, she married Frank Wisdom and had two children. However, in 1943, her marriage ended, and Lessing left the family home, leaving her two children with their father. She was married twice and had three children in total (Ceylan 2023).

In 1949, Lessing moved to London with her youngest child, Peter. There, she became involved in politics and social issues, actively participating in campaigns against nuclear weapons. She began her literary career with poetry and short stories but later focused on writing novels. In 1994, she published the first volume of her autobiography, "Under My Skin," followed by a second volume, "Walking in the Shade," in 1997. A master of the short story, Lessing wrote notable works such as "The Story of an Unmarried Man" (1972) and his African stories "This Was the Country of the Old Chief" (1951) and "The Sun Between His Feet" (1973) (“Doris Lessing”). Most of her work is set in Africa and London, where she spent most of her life. Her first novel, "The Grass is Singing," published in 1950, is set in Southern Rhodesia during the 1940s and deals with issues of colonialism, racism, and the post-war period. Lessing often explored themes of feminism, politics, and psychology in her works, with her novel "The Golden Notebook" being considered one of the most important works of feminist literature (Zengin 2013).

Lessing's works delved into women's experiences and their roles in society, particularly evident in "The Golden Notebook," where she examined women's personal, political, and emotional experiences in depth. She questioned political systems, social changes, and the effects of ideologies. In "The Good Terrorist," she explored characters and politics with radical political views, while other works examined the mental and emotional experiences of characters, such as "The Fifth Child," which focused on different psychological states and family relationships. Lessing challenged conventional notions of motherhood in "The Fifth Child," offering a thought-provoking exploration of the sacrifices and struggles faced by mothers. Her keen interest in gender dynamics evolved over time, reflected in her works (Ceylan 2023).

Additionally, Lessing's works explored the changing dynamics of society and how individuals adapt to these changes. Her works featured complex and profound characters, demonstrating a strong literary effort to understand the human experience. Throughout her career, Lessing underwent significant transformations in her writing style and perspectives, from communist social realist to reluctant feminist, and from Sufi quest to cosmic anthropologist (“Doris Lessing”). She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007 for creating "the epic emotion of our time and an ideal story of the social immunity of women." Lessing passed away in London on November 17, 2013, at the age of 94, but her works continue to hold an important place in literary heritage (Lee 22).

## 2.2. Analysis of A Woman on a Roof, Our Friend Judith, and To Room Nineteen

Doris Lessing, a prominent figure in the 20th-century English literature, is celebrated for her incisive exploration of societal norms, gender dynamics, and the complexities of human relationships. Throughout her career, Lessing's works have provided profound insights into the struggles of women navigating societal expectations and their quest for personal freedom and identity. This thesis analyzes three of Lessing's short stories—“A Woman on a Roof,” “Our Friend Judith,” and “To Room Nineteen”—focusing on the themes of sexuality, female independence, and gender roles differences. Each story offers a unique perspective on these themes, revealing how women in different contexts confront and negotiate their roles within society. By examining the nuances of these themes across the selected works, this study aims to shed light on the enduring relevance of Lessing's exploration of gender and identity in contemporary discourse.

**A Woman on a Roof**

"A Woman on a Roof" is a short story by Doris Lessing that explores themes of gender, power, and perception. The story is set during a hot summer in London and follows three construction workers: Stanley, Tom, and Harry. One day, the men notice a woman sunbathing on the roof of a nearby building. She is wearing only a bikini, and her presence immediately captures their attention. Each man reacts differently to her. Stanley is irritated and feels that her behavior is inappropriate. Tom is curious and somewhat admiring. Harry, the youngest, is shy but intrigued. The woman continues to sunbathe daily, and the men become increasingly obsessed with her. They start to make comments and gestures, trying to get her attention, but she ignores them. The woman's indifference frustrates Stanley the most, and he begins to take her actions personally. As the days go by, the men argue among themselves about the woman. Stanley's anger grows, and he eventually confronts her. He shouts at her from their building, demanding that she cover up and stop sunbathing. The woman, however, remains calm and does not respond to his aggression. This story highlights the different ways men perceive and react to women's independence and autonomy. The woman on the roof symbolizes freedom and self-confidence, challenging the men's traditional views on gender roles and behavior (Song 2021).

Doris Lessing's short story "A Woman on a Roof" explores the dynamics of gender, sexuality, and societal norms through the perspective of three male workers who observe a woman sunbathing on a nearby rooftop. The story unfolds during a heatwave, amplifying the tensions and desires of the characters. The men initially view the woman as an object of desire. Their voyeuristic gaze objectifies her, reducing her to a source of entertainment. Lessing critiques this behavior through the men's reactions: "They could see the top part of her: black hair, a flushed solid back, arms spread out. 'She's stark naked,' said Stanley, sounding annoyed "(Lessing 1). This quote illustrates Stanley's annoyance at the woman's nakedness, indicating his discomfort with her unabashed display of her body. It highlights the men's immediate reduction of her to her physical attributes.

The woman's actions challenge traditional gender roles and expectations in this sense. She sunbathes topless and ignores the men's attention, asserting her right to occupy public space on her terms. Her defiance of norms is evident in her choice of attire and her refusal to engage with the men's attempts to provoke a reaction. "She sat smoking, and did not look up when Stanley let out a wolf whistle "(Lessing 1). These lines from the novel demonstrates the woman's deliberate disregard for the men's attempts to draw her into interaction. Her act of smoking and ignoring the whistle signifies her assertion of independence and autonomy in the face of male attention. Lessing explores the power dynamics between men and women in the story. The men's attempts to control the woman's behavior—through whistling and yelling—are met with indifference. This indifference undermines the men's authority and exposes their insecurity. "Harry said, facetiously: 'Better be careful on those slippery ladders, love.'" (Lessing 3). Harry attempts to intervene, ostensibly to protect the woman, but also to save her from the men's persistent harassment. It underscores the men's discomfort and frustration at their inability to assert control over her.

In conclusion, "A Woman on a Roof" serves as a powerful critique of gender inequality and male dominance, illustrating how women can resist and defy these structures through subtle acts of resistance and independence (Uçar 2018).

**Our Friend Judith**

"Our Friend Judith" is a short story by Doris Lessing that explores the themes of independence, friendship, and societal expectations. The story centers around Judith, a strong and independent woman who has chosen a lifestyle that sets her apart from her friends. Judith is admired by her friends for her intelligence and independence, but she is also viewed with a certain degree of curiosity and misunderstanding. The narrator of the story, who is one of Judith's friends, provides insight into Judith's character and her interactions with others. Judith's independence is the central theme of the story. She lives alone and values her solitude, which is unusual for the time and society in which she lives. Her friends often speculate about her choices, particularly her decision to remain single and not have children. These discussions reveal the societal pressures and expectations placed on women to conform to certain roles. The story also touches on Judith's relationships with her friends, who have different views on life and relationships. Through these interactions, the story highlights the complexity of female friendships and the ways in which women support and judge each other. "Our Friend Judith" presents a nuanced portrayal of a woman who challenges societal norms and expectations, living life on her own terms and inspiring both admiration and criticism from those around her (Lessing 2005). It provides a profound exploration of the themes related to sexuality, female independence, gender roles, and the role of women in society. Through the character of Judith, Lessing challenges traditional societal expectations and offers a complex portrayal of a woman who values her autonomy and challenges conventional gender norms. She is depicted as a woman who values her solitude and independence. The narrator observes, "Judith valued her solitude, finding peace in her own company more than she ever did in the presence of others (Lessing 179)." She prfers solitude and she is fond of her independence. She is self-sufficient in her solitude. This contrasts with societal expectations that often define women by their relationships and social interactions.

Judith's appearance and demeanor have a significant impact on those around her. The narrator notes, "We had both too often caught each other, and ourselves, in moments of envy when Judith’s calm and sever face, her undemonstratively perfect body, succeeded in making everyone else in a room or a street look cheap*"* (Lessing 180). This passage illustrates Judith's confidence and the envy she incites in others due to her beauty and self-assuredness. It challenges traditional gender roles that expect women to be modest and self-effacing.

The story also explores Judith's personal choices and how they shape her identity. The narrator observes, "Neither Betty nor I said a word, since Judith was examining herself in a long mirror, and must know she looked magnificent"(Lessing 180). This scene highlights Judith's self-awareness and confidence in her appearance, which defies societal norms that often dictate women should be modest and self-critical.

Judith's ability to make decisions about her living arrangements further emphasizes her independence. The narrator remarks, "I had a choice either to let someone use my flat, or to leave it empty" (Lessing 181). Judith is autonomy and has the freedom she exercises in her personal life, which challenges traditional gender expectations that confine women to domestic roles. In addition, her views on relationships also challenge the conventional gender roles. When asked about marriage, Judith replies, "on the whole the role of a mistress suited her better” (Lessing 183). She further states, "And then she said that while she liked intimacy and sex and everything, she enjoyed waking up in the morning alone and her own person" (Lessing 184). Judith prefers the relationships that allow her independence and personal freedom. She challenges societal expectations that women should prioritize marriage and family over personal fulfillment.

The story concludes with a reflection on Judith's unique personality and the role of women in society. The narrator reflects, "Can you see me married to an Italian barber?’ ... ‘Well, yes,’ I said, ‘you’re the only woman I know who I can see married to an Italian barber’" (Lessing 185). Judith's unique identity and her ability to maintain her independence regardless of societal expectations are apparent in these words. Her attitude challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the evolving role of women in society. Judith's character embodies independence, self-awareness, and a rejection of societal expectations, making her a powerful representation of female agency and identity complexities of women's roles in society.

The article titled “A Reading in Feminist Discourse’’ by Al-Hajaj, Jinan F. And Ala H. Sharhan (13­­­-27) examines Doris Lessing's short story "Our Friend Judith", focusing on ideological themes, language techniques, and character portrayals. It discusses the narrator's ideological stance, particularly regarding gender roles and female identity through the character of Judith. The analysis highlights language techniques like epistemic adverbials, verbs, and modalities that reflect characters' self-assurance and worldviews. It also explores the naming of characters, such as Judith's name, which draws from Virginia Woolf's feminist ideas. Overall, the article delves into how language and characters shape gender and ideology in Lessing's work (2005).

## To Room Nineteen

"To Room Nineteen" is a short story by Doris Lessing that explores the themes of identity, mental health, and societal expectations. The story centers on Susan Rawlings, a woman who appears to have an ideal life with a successful husband, Matthew, and four children. Susan and Matthew have a seemingly perfect marriage, living in a nice house in London. However, as their children grow older and start going to school, Susan begins to feel a sense of emptiness and loss of purpose. She finds herself struggling with her identity beyond her roles as a wife and mother. In an attempt to regain her sense of self, Susan rents a small hotel room, the Room Nineteen, where she can be alone and think without distractions. This room becomes her sanctuary, a place where she can escape from the pressures and expectations of her daily life. As Susan spends more time in the Room Nineteen, her mental state begins to deteriorate. She becomes increasingly isolated and detached from her family and friends. Her husband, Matthew, does not understand her need for solitude and interprets her behavior as irrational. Susan's struggle with her identity and mental health culminates in a tragic conclusion. Overwhelmed by her internal conflict and unable to reconcile her desire for independence with societal expectations, Susan takes her own life in Room Nineteen (Dicu 1-7).

Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" explores the complexities of gender roles, female sexuality, and individual freedom. The story follows Susan and Matthew Rawlings, a seemingly happy couple with four children. Despite their outwardly perfect life, Susan begins to feel suffocated by societal expectations and her roles as a wife and mother. This suffocation leads her to seek solace in solitude, eventually renting a room where she can be alone. Susan is portrayed as a woman who conforms to the societal expectations of a perfect wife and mother. She plays the role of the nurturing and caring mother, as well as the supportive and loving wife. However, as the story progresses, Susan begins to question these roles and the expectations placed upon her. This internal conflict is evident in her increasing need for solitude and independence, away from her family and societal duties. Lessing also explores the theme of female sexuality and repression through Susan's character. Susan's desires and emotions are repressed due to the societal norms and expectations placed upon her. Her sexual desires are also repressed, as evidenced by her increasing distance from her husband and her eventual withdrawal into the solitude of Room Nineteen.

The story highlights the theme of individual freedom and alienation. Susan's need for solitude represents her desire to reclaim her individuality and freedom from societal roles. The Room Nineteen symbolizes a space where Susan can escape from the constraints of her roles as a wife and mother, and explore her true self. "She found herself reluctant to enter her big and beautiful home because it was as if something was there waiting for her that she did not wish to confront" (Lessing 4). As can be seen in the previous lines, Susan’s discomfort and alienation within her own home has grown. This room symbolizes her increasing sense of entrapment in her domestic role, where societal expectations restrict her freedom and agency. It foreshadows her desire for isolation as a means to escape from the pressures and expectations of her family life. "There was only one thing to do, and of course these sensible people did it: they put the thing behind them" (Lessing 2). Typical of the male-dominated and hypocrite modern society and its pretencious marriages, Susan and Matthew initially respond to Matthew's affair like this. This quotation reflects the societal expectation for women to endure emotional pain silently, despite feeling deeply hurt. Susan's reaction reveals the internal conflict caused by traditional gender roles, where women are expected to maintain a façade of composure even when facing betrayal. "She was possessed with resentment that the seven hours of freedom in every day (during weekdays in the school term) were not free, that never, not one second, was she free from the pressure of time, from having to remember this or that" (Lessing 6).

Susan is frustrated with the constraints of her daily life. The relentless demands placed upon her as a wife and mother, and on her supposed "free time" is overshadowed by responsibilities. This resentment fuels her longing for genuine solitude, away from the societal pressures that confine her. "She dreamed of having a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was" (Lessing 8). Susan's ultimate desire for freedom and isolation can be easily inferred from this line. She yearns for a space where she can escape societal expectations and obligations. The image of her dreaming of anonymity and solitude stresses her desperation to reclaim her sense of self and autonomy, away from the societal roles that have stifled her. "‘Miss. Townsend, my four children and husband are driving me insane, do you understand that? Yes, I can see from the gleam of hysteria in your eyes that comes from loneliness controlled but only just contained that I’ve got everything in the world you’ve ever longed for. Well, Miss. Townsend, I don’t want any of it’” (Lessing 9). In this imaginary conversation, Susan expresses her frustration and longing for independence and solitude. It also emphasizes the societal pressure on women to conform to domestic roles and the judgment faced when they desire something different. Susan's fabrication of illness to justify her rental of the hotel room reflects the stigma against women who seek solitude and independence. These quotations and analyses highlight how Doris Lessing critiques traditional gender roles and societal expectations, and how they impact Susan's mental state and her tragic fate. In "To Room Nineteen," Doris Lessing masterfully portrays the struggles of a woman caught between societal expectations and her own desire for freedom and individuality. Through Susan's character, the story delves into the themes of gender roles, female sexuality, and the search for individual freedom. Susan's journey to Room Nineteen symbolizes her quest to reclaim her identity and break free from the constraints of societal norms.

Susan, a wealthy woman living in a spacious house with beautiful children, household staff, and friends, finds that everything planned and executed in her life has become ordinary. This leads her to seek a new source of nourishment. Her reflections on her life, her love with Matthew, her privileges, and even the children, whom society sees as the center of a woman's life, revolve around her. She comes to realize that children cannot be the center or the purpose of existence. Despite being well-read and accustomed to thinking logically and acting with moderation, Susan and Matthew accept the stagnant phase of their relationship maturely, even allowing for Matthew's infidelity.

However, such a mentality cannot prevent Susan from feeling her life becoming like a desert, leading her to search for her own life. Susan's search for a room of her own begins with moments alone in the garden and progresses to creating a room in her house that only she can enter. Even though others, including her children, Matthew, and their housekeeper Mrs. Parkes, treat Susan's new room with great importance, Susan still sees herself as directing them like a mother, a wife, and an employer. Even though physically alone in her room, she feels that she hasn't distanced herself enough from her responsibilities, which disturbs her. Feeling like she has given away her life to marriage, she decides she must learn to be herself again. The need for a room of her own is deeply explored through Nihan Kaya's analysis, who suggests that Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" best reflects Woolf's ideas (2010). Susan's search for her own space begins with moments of solitude in the garden and evolves into creating a room in her house that only she can enter. Despite physically being alone in the room, she still feels like she's being watched over by her children, husband, and their maid (Akgün 2018).

#  CONCLUSION

The 20th century was a transformative period for women, noticeable for significant changes in their roles and status across the world. This thesis has explored these changes through a multifaceted approach, examining historical events, societal shifts, and literary representations. The analysis of women's roles in various countries has highlighted both the universal struggles for gender equality and the unique cultural contexts that shaped women's experiences.

The short stories of Doris Lessing, particularly "A Woman on a Roof," "Our Friend Judith," and "To Room Nineteen," have provided valuable insights into the complexities of women's lives during this era. Lessing's portrayal of women's roles, their challenges, and their quests for autonomy and identity reflect broader societal trends and the evolving perceptions of women's place in the world. Through these stories, we gain a deeper understanding of the personal and social dynamics that influenced women's liberation and feminist thought.

The concept of sexuality and its intersection with women's liberation has also been a crucial aspect of this study. The analysis has shown how sexual liberation played a pivotal role in challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's rights. The women's liberation movement, with its emphasis on equality and autonomy, significantly impacted the way women viewed themselves and their potential within society.

Gender dynamics and feminist literature have been central to understanding the evolving roles of women throughout the 20th century. The exploration of these themes has provided a critical framework for analyzing the shifts in gender relations and the ongoing struggle for equality. Doris Lessing's contributions to feminist literature have been particularly significant, offering profound reflections on the societal expectations placed on women and their responses to these pressures.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that the 20th century was a pivotal period for the transformation of women's roles. The combination of historical analysis and literary examination has provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced these changes. The works of Doris Lessing, along with the broader context of feminist literature, have been instrumental in highlighting the complexities and achievements of women's liberation. As we move forward, the lessons learned from this period continue to inform contemporary discussions on gender equality and the ongoing quest for women's rights.

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