

## THE PATRIARCHAL IMPLICATIONS IN *THE CLEFT* BY DORIS LESSING

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### Abstract

In her novel titled *The Cleft*, Doris Lessing reverses the Creation myths by depicting women as the first humans. Although Lessing presents women as the first humans, a close reading of the novel displays that the writer uses to a great extent traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles. The aim of this paper is to discuss the patriarchal implications in *The Cleft* to determine the writer's views concerning the gender role development theories in the last decade of her life. In the novel, the writer presents three periods at the beginning of the history of humans. In the first period, the laziness of the Clefts, the first women, is emphasized. During the presentation of the second and the third periods the reader witnesses the establishment of gender roles and gender role differentiation. This gender role differentiation is presented as a consequence of different innate natures of females and males. The characteristics of the females and the males depicted in the novel are the same with patriarchal gender stereotypical traits. By doing so, Lessing may have indicated that gender stereotypical traits and roles are not culturally constructed, and they are not learned, but they are the inherent characteristics of females and males. This may imply that Lessing may have adopted the sociobiological accounts of gender role development, at least in the last decade of her life-span.

**Keywords:** Lessing, *Cleft*, gender roles, gender stereotypes, patriarchy.

## DORIS LESSING'İN CLEFT ADLI ROMANINDA ATAERKİL İÇERİMLER

### Öz

Doris Lessing, *Cleft* başlıklı romanında kadınları, ilk insanlar olarak betimleyerek Yaratılış mitlerini tersine çevirmiştir. Kadınları ilk insanlar olarak sunmasına rağmen, roman dikkatlice okunduğunda, yazarın büyük ölçüde ataerkil cinsiyet kalıp yargılarına ve cinsiyet rollerine yer verdiği ortaya çıkar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, yaşamının son on yılında, yazarın cinsiyet rolü gelişimi kuramlarıyla ilgili görüşlerini belirleyebilmek için, *Cleft* adlı romandaki ataerkil içerimleri tartışmaktır. Bu romanda yazar, insan tarihinin başlangıcındaki üç dönemi okurlarına sunar. İlk dönemde, ilk kadınlar olan Cleftlerin tembellikleri vurgulanır. İkinci ve üçüncü dönemlerin sunumu sırasında, okur cinsiyet rollerinin oluşumuna ve farklılaşmasına tanık olur. Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin bu farklılaşması, kadın ve erkeğin doğuştan gelen karakter özelliklerinin farklı olmasının bir sonucu olarak sunulur. Kadınların ve erkeklerin romanda betimlenen özellikleri ataerkil cinsiyet kalıp yargısal özelliklerle aynıdır. Böylelikle, Lessing cinsiyet kalıp yargılarının ve rollerinin kültürel olarak oluşmadığını ve öğrenilmediğini; bunların kadın ve erkeklerin doğuştan gelen özellikleri olduğunu göstermiş olabilir. Bu da Lessing'in, yaşamının son on yılında, cinsiyet rollerinin oluşumuyla ilgili sosyobiolojik açıklamaları benimsemiş olabileceğini anıstırabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Lessing, *Cleft*, cinsiyet rolleri, cinsiyet kalıp yargıları, ataerkillik.

## INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing was labelled as a feminist writer after the publication of *The Golden Notebook* in 1962. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007 on the ground that she is the “epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny” (nobelprize.org). However, Lessing rejects the label “feminist”, and in an interview with Hermione Lee, Lessing criticizes the Nobel Prize committee’s describing her as the “epicist of the female experience” as follows: “I don’t understand. What do they mean about the ‘female experience’? I have written quite a lot about men, too, it seems to me, quite well” (Lee 2009: 22). In the same interview, Lessing explains her views about the 1960s’ feminists as quoted below:

*I did not admire 1960s’ feminists in any way and I still don’t. I thought they screwed it all up and lost every possible opportunity they had. Because I’ve never admired them or said how wonderful I think they are, they now hold it against me. That’s what I think it is. And feminists ... I have never ever in my life met a woman who is not a feminist. Feminism goes back a long way. I’m sorry if this is tedious – feminism goes right back, it doesn’t start in the 1960s with a few girls saying ‘My God, look we’ve got a new idea!’ They know nothing of their history, nothing at all, or what their possibilities were. I just thought it was all totally deplorable, the bloody 1960s’ feminists. What opportunities they missed. So that is why they don’t love me. I don’t love them either (Lee 2009: 22-23).*

In the quotation above, Lessing declares that she hated the 1960s’ feminists as they were ignorant of the struggles of women for liberty and equality in the past. In another interview, she clarifies her views about the 1960s’ women’s movement as follows:

*Women’s movement, to me, has been such a disappointment. It had energy. I have said this before. It had so much energy in the ‘60s and to my mind most of it was wasted talking. Perhaps there will be another wave of energy, but I look back on it and feel ashamed actually that it was such a waste. It benefited white, middleclass young women. It hasn’t done much for others. If you go to (I hate the phrase) a third world country or see the women in a Muslim country fighting - now these women I admire very much- fighting about the law or bringing up ten kids on forty pounds a month. This I admire very much, but I think most of the Women’s Movement has been hot air (Rountree 2008: 74-75).*

Declaring her hatred of the 1960s’ feminists, Lessing, in her novel titled *The Cleft*, attempts to change the Creation myths which assert that the first human is a man. Although the novel seems to be a feministic one at first glance due to its attempt to present women as the first humans, a close reading of the book reveals that the novel is full of gender stereotypes and gender roles assigned to women and men by patriarchal societies. Thus, the aim of this paper is to discuss the

patriarchal implications in *The Cleft* in order to display Lessing's views concerning the theories of gender role development and gender, at least, in the last decade of her life-span. By doing so, this paper attempts to determine whether she adopts the sociobiological accounts of gender development or she supports the theories asserting that gender is culturally constructed and learned.

## DISCUSSION

The novel begins with a scene in which a Roman senator and historian watches two slaves, Marcus and Lolla, flirting with each other, and then goes to study some manuscripts. The manuscripts on which the Roman historian has been studying are about the early humans, the Clefts, the ancestors of the peoples. The story of the Clefts had been memorized by chosen young Clefts called the Memoirs, spread by word of mouth from one generation to the other, and written down much later (Lessing 2008: 8). Beginning her novel with such a scene, Lessing suggests that the novel will present the relationships between women and men both in the Roman Empire and at the very beginning of history. Thus, the reader will have a chance to see and compare the relationships between the woman and the man in different periods of history.

The early humans, the Clefts, living near the sea, calling themselves as “sea people” (Lessing 2008: 8), believing that “*The sea made*” them (Lessing 2008: 8) consist of only females, and they do not need a man to give a birth. The Cleft-narrator explains the birth of a baby as follows: “*And, of course the babies being born. They were just born, that’s all, no one did anything to make them. I think we thought the moon made them, a big fish, but it is hard to remember what we thought, it was such a dream*” (Lessing 2008: 11). Similarly, in another page, it is pointed out that the early Clefts have the “...*capacity to become impregnated by a fertilising wind, or a wave that carried fertility in its substance*” (Lessing 2008: 144). The Cleft's capacity for becoming pregnant and giving birth without the contribution of a man ends with the first babies born after the first sexual intercourse following the Clefts' coincidence with the males whom they call either “the monsters” (Lessing 2008: 11, 12, 31) or “the Squirts” (Lessing 2008: 34). Here it should be noted that the Clefts give birth to the males, and the birth of the first male babies whom the Clefts call the “monsters” changes radically both the lives of the Clefts and the history of humans.

The peaceful life of the Clefts goes on until the birth of the first male baby. When the first male babies are born, thinking that they are deformed (Lessing 2008: 12), the Clefts kill the baby-boys. The Cleft-narrator named Maire explains how they killed the first baby-boys whom they call the monsters: they put the babies on a rock which they call “the Killing Rock” and thought that the eagles would kill them. Maire emphasizes that they “*did not kill the babies, the eagles did it*” (Lessing 2008: 12). She adds as well that they left not only the monsters, but also the other deformed babies and twins on the Killing Rock so that the eagles

came and killed them (Lessing 2008: 12). She explains the reason behind this cruel act as follows: “*We were careful to limit our numbers...*” (Lessing 2008: 12). They have to limit their numbers as they do not want to leave the beach where they have been living for ages and to find other places to live in. They do not leave the beach because, according to Maire, “*that’s how it has always been, and we never thought to change things*” (Lessing 2008: 12). In other words, they regard the beach as their home and they do not want to leave their home as they do not like the changes, and they are lazy. The following quotation describing the life of a Cleft exhibits the laziness of the Clefts as well.

*She was one of a species which for long ages had lived on the edge of that warm sea, never moving from it, and the horizon of her mind was limited by the mountain that bounded their world... For all her life this creature had not done more than sag from her sleeping cave to the rocks where she lay sunning herself, and from there to loll in the sea, and from there back again; she had scarcely moved in her life... (Lessing 2008: 107-8).*

The quotation above displays that Lessing depicts early women as the lazy creatures who are not curious about the world outside the beach, beyond the mountain surrounding the beach. It may be inferred from the discussion above that women in the past did not leave their homes and did not work outside home for ages as they enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere of their homes. This inference contradicts with the prevailing feministic assumption that women were confined to homes by men for ages as it may indicate that women do not inherently like leaving their homes.

Since the old Clefts do not wonder about the other parts of the island, and they have never left the place where they have been living, they are not aware of the fact that the male babies have not been killed by the eagles. Instead of killing the babies, the eagles have taken the babies to a safe place on the other side of the mountain, and they have protected them there. It is noteworthy that the eagles have not taken the twins or the deformed female babies, though they have been left as well. Besides when the Clefts decide to keep the monsters as pets or playthings, and torment them, cutting the thing in front (Lessing 2008: 18), the eagles hover over them. Then, when the eagles notice a male baby crying, they struggle with the Clefts to take the baby away. The Cleft-narrator calls the struggle between the Clefts and the eagles as the “*war*” (Lessing 2008: 22), and narrates this ‘war’ as demonstrated in the quotation below:

*Something like a war developed between the eagles and the first females, who could not possibly win. Not only were they unused to fighting, or even aggression, they were unused to physical activity. They lay around on their rocks and they swam. That was their life, had been for – ages. And suddenly here were these great angry birds, who watched every move they made, and tried to wrest the Monsters from them as they were born. Some of the females, the young ones attending to the Monsters, were killed – swept into*

*the sea and then kept from climbing out because the eagles hovered above them and pushed them under until they drowned (Lessing 2008: 22).*

The quotation above displays two crucial facts: first the females are not used to fighting and physical activities. This is important since the males are often depicted while they are either fighting or doing physical activities throughout the novel as will be discussed in detail below. Second, the males are guarded by the eagles. Considering the eagles' struggle for saving and protecting the Monsters, we can call the eagles as the protector of the males. That the males are protected by the eagles is emphasized through the following comment by the Roman narrator: "*Those eagles, . . . , the persecutors of the first females, the saviours of the first males*" (Lessing 2008: 27). Thus the monsters or "*the Very First Men*" (Lessing 2008: 27) are aware of the fact that they have survived due to the struggles of the eagles for protecting them, and they express their gratitude to the eagles in their dancing song given below:

*We are the Eagles, the Eagle, the Children of the Eagle. The Eagles bore us on their wings, they bear us on their breath, they are the wings of the wind, the Great Eagle watches us, he knows us, he is our Father, he hates our enemies, he fights for us against the Clefs (Lessing 2008: 27).*

Creating such a song, Lessing emphasizes the role of the eagles in the emergence of the very first men. In other words, she may have implied that though the first men were born by the first women, the men would not have survived and existed if it had not been for the eagles.

Therefore, it will be convenient to discuss what the eagles stand for in the novel. The eagle known as the "*KING of birds*" (Biedermann 1996: 108) has been associated with gods in different cultures. Hans Biedermann points out that "*In Palmyra in ancient Syria the eagle was associated with the sun-god*" (1996: 108). He adds as well that "*... indeed, the eagle generally has only positive associations (energy, renewal, contemplation, acuity of vision, royal bearing), which made it for the Ancients the attribute of JUPITER*" (Biedermann 1996: 108). Similarly, George E. Mylonas points out that

*Among scholars it has become a common practice to associate the eagle intimately with Zeus, and to consider the King of birds as an inseparable companion and attribute of the Father of Gods and Men. And this practice is justified by the many representation of Zeus in which the eagle is present... Moiro of Byzantion, a writer of ca. 300 BC., tells that a great eagle brought nectar to the baby Zeus lying in the cave, while Aglaosthenes in his Naxiaca states that Zeus in the form of an eagle arrived at Crete... (1946: 203).*

Taking the above-given explanations concerning the eagle into account, it may be inferred that the great eagles mentioned in the novel may represent Zeus or the other gods such as the sun-god in other cultures.

The beginning of the community of the males is mysterious, and the mystery is emphasized through the comments by the Roman historian narrator of the novel. Roman historian narrator first expresses his astonishment as displayed in the following quotation: “*There is a part of this tale that has to remain dark. Yes, yes, previous attempts at solving the mystery have offered solutions more like myths than probabilities. How did the community of males begin?*” (Lessing 2008: 34). Although the Roman historian narrator ponders the problems which the first male-children had to struggle with, he cannot solve the mystery in the beginning of the community of the males as exhibited in the quotation below:

*This was an easy climate; they did not have to fear cold. But let us not forget the beasts in the forests that stood at a distance on either side of the great river. How they escaped the beasts has to remain a bit of marvel. Did some god or goddess aid the little things? But in their records is never the mention of divine intervention. Yes, they were the children of the Eagle, but that is as far as divinity went, for them* (Lessing 2008: 36).

Although the Roman narrator tells that there is no record of “divine intervention”, considering the discussion above concerning what the eagle is associated with, we may infer that the first males were protected by Zeus or some other gods such as the Sun-god in different cultures. Therefore, it is possible to assume that Lessing, instead of mentioning explicitly the gods protecting the first males, may have preferred implying it; depicting the scene after the scene showing the role of the eagles in the constitution of the first male community, she may have asked her readers to find or remember what the eagle stands for. The reader who knows that the eagle is associated with Zeus or the sun-god will become aware of the divine intervention in the constitution of the first-male community. By implying that the first-males are protected by Zeus or the sun-god, Lessing attributes sacredness to the males. Thus, though the males are created after the females in the novel, as a sex protected by the gods, the males become superior to the females.

The Clefts are not aware of the existence of the community of the males until one day they notice a monster on the seashore. The Cleft-narrator tells that moment and what has happened afterwards as follows:

*A long time after the first Monster was born, we saw down on that part of the seashore nearest to the Eagles’ Hills one of the Monsters,... It had tied around its waist one of the fish-skin cloths we wear at the time of the red flower. We could see that under the skin was the lumpy swelling thing we thought was so ugly. This was a Monster we had given birth to, grown up. How had that happened? The Old Shes said we should lie in wait and kill that Monster next time it appeared on the shore. Then there was disagreement among the Old Shes, and some said we should climb up to the hills where the eagles lived next time we put out a Monster to die, and watch where the eagles took it. And some of us did that. They were very afraid, that is in the story we make the youngsters learn. We were not in the*

*habit of roaming about and certainly never as far as the Eagles' Hills. No one had gone so far before* (Lessing 2008: 14).

The quotation above displays both the Clefts' first encounter with the Monsters, and reveals the difference between the Clefts, the first females, and the Monsters, the first males. While the females are lazy enough not to leave the beach where they have been living for ages, the males, as soon as constituting their community, have begun to explore the island. The presentation of the males as the explorers is consistent with traditional gender stereotypes. Thus, John Ruskin in his book titled *Sesame and Lilies* first published in 1865 points out that "*The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision*" (1906: 144-145). Similar to the traits mentioned by Ruskin, the males in the novel are active and progressive.

Besides being active, the males are presented as the explorers, the discoverers. After the first encounter, some of the young females visit the community of the males. They have sexual relationships with the males, become pregnant and give birth. In the course of time, two communities are constituted on the island: the community of the males and the community of the females. The leader of the males is Horsa, while the leader of the females is Maronna. Horsa is an adventurous young man who is desirous of exploring other shores and bays. He prepares his 'fleet' "*consisted of rafts, tied together with forest rope, logs, some hollowed out, round boats made of hides stretched over enlaced circles of wood, bundles of reeds, canoes made of bark*" (Lessing 2008: 193). While the females have never fancied to explore other shores, Horsa has created a fleet to explore the other parts of the island. Therefore, it is possible to assert that Lessing depicts Horsa as not only an adventurous explorer, but also a doer, a creator. Furthermore, as the epigraph to the novel, Lessing quotes the title of a book by Robert Graves: "*Man does, woman is*" (Lessing 2008: n.p.). This epigram supports our idea that Lessing attributes the gender stereotypes concerning men mentioned by John Ruskin as early as the nineteenth century to the males in this novel.

Indeed, beginning with the constitution of the community of the males, traditional gender stereotypes used to describe the first males get the reader's attention. The narrator describes the first males as exemplified in the following quotation:

*They were brave and strong and healthy...  
They were wild and restless, those first males, our so distant ancestors, and their nature took them long distances into the forests, and they began to know at least one part of their island, which was large, though they had no*

*idea of that. They found great airy forests, deep and swift rivers and their tributaries, the little streams, pleasant hills, peaceful shores – this was what those earlier explorers found. They learned the ways of the wild animals and how to avoid them, and then, soon, how to kill them for food (Lessing 2008: 41).*

As seen in the quotation above, the first males soon become hunters. By doing so, Lessing may have implied that males are inherently hunters. Besides, the adjectives used to describe the first males are 'brave' and 'restless'. These adjectives are different from the ones used for the first females since, as we have discussed previously, the first females are depicted as lazy creatures. Moreover, just after the above-given quotation, Lessing writes another paragraph emphasizing the laziness of the Clefts as displayed in the quotation below:

*For the Clefts the walk to the Eagles' Hills was impossible because they had never thought of doing it. The idea of simply walking there, climbing, and seeing what was on the other side had never occurred to them. They did not know that on the other side of the mountain was the wonderful valley where the Monsters were living. It had never come into their heads to wonder. Out of sight, out of mind; and never has this been better exemplified (Lessing 2008: 42).*

While the Clefts have never walked to the Eagles' Hills, the Squirts have explored one part of the island. Describing the characteristics of the Squirts' and the Clefts' successively, Lessing emphasizes the differences between them. Thus, she enables her readers to see the laziness of the Clefts. Thence, it is possible to assume that Lessing may have implied that though the females were created first, they could not keep the high ground because of their laziness.

Nevertheless, Lessing indicates that young females are different from the old ones. After the encounter of the Clefts with the Squirts, one of the Clefts goes to the area of the Squirts. She is the first female who is courageous enough to leave the beach where the Clefts live for ages. In other words, she is the first woman who dares to leave her home. However, the world outside home is dangerous. She is raped and murdered by the Squirts. While expressing the murder, the writer accentuates that the Squirts did not kill her deliberately (Lessing 2008: 47). We do not know the name of the murdered Cleft since the Clefts did not use to name the babies. However, one day suddenly a young Cleft says "My name is Maire" and then another young Cleft says her name is Astre (Lessing 2008: 68). This may be regarded as the beginning of individualization as previously they were called such names as the Cleft Watchers, the Memoires, the Water Carers showing their responsibilities in the community, and they obey the rules of the Old Shes. This may indicate that in the past, the Clefts' individualities were not important; how they functioned in the community was more important than their individualities. Thus choosing names for themselves, Maire and Astre may mean that they do not want to be regarded as the entities in the community,

they are individuals and they do not want to obey the rules of the Old Shes' anymore. Maire is the second woman visiting the Squirts. Maire is not murdered as the Squirts remember what they did previously. They have sexual intercourse and then she goes back to her community. The fact that Maire has chosen a name for herself and visited the Squirts may indicate young Clefts' desire for the novelties in their community. In this sense, Maire and Astre may represent the pioneer women struggling for the changes in society.

After her visit to the community of the Squirts, Maire gives birth to a Squirt, and she decides to give the baby to the Squirts. Therefore Maire and Astre go to the valley where the Squirts live, they copulate, and decide to stay there for a while. The narrator tells what these two women do during their visit to the Squirts' community as follows:

*The girls looked inside the shelters and found a filthy mess of bones, fruit rinds, discarded weed bandages. They tore branches from the trees and used them as brooms. This was in itself remarkable since there were no trees near the Clefts' shore. The rubbish was swept into a big pile and added to it were the bones and bits of flesh from the place where fish was brought to the eagles. This pile was swept to the river's edge, then into the cleansing flow.*

*The males caught fish, cut it up with knives made from shells, looked for fruit in the trees, made sure the girls, and the baby when it cried, were fed (Lessing 2008: 74-75).*

The quotation above is of great importance since it reflects Lessing's stance concerning the theories of gender role development. As mentioned in the quotation above, although there is no tree near the Clefts' shore, Maire and Astre intuitively use the branches of the trees as the brooms. They clean the shelters of the males while the males bring food. This scene exhibits typical patriarchal gender roles. Depicting such a scene, Lessing implies that gender roles are innate, they are not learned. This implication contradicts with the theories of gender role development asserting that gender roles are culturally constructed and learned.

Furthermore, this scene may reveal the fact that Lessing adopts the sociobiological accounts of gender role development. Kevin Durkin summarizes the sociobiological accounts of gender role differences as follows:

*...the essence of these approaches is that gender roles have emerged in the course of evolution as humans have adapted to survive and reproduce in a competitive natural environment. The most efficient distribution of human capacities allegedly proved to be one in which males, as the physically stronger partner, took on responsibility for the more vigorous roles of hunting and fighting ... while females, having natural advantages in the abilities to give birth to and breastfeed the young, took on the greater share of domestic responsibilities. These patterns evolved and were consolidated*

*over countless generations, gradually being written into the species' genetic code* (2005: 138).

This novel without a plot is, in fact, about the evolution of humans. The Roman narrator's following comment supports our idea: "*When the first baby Monster was born, Male and Female was born too, because before that were simply, the people*" (Lessing 2008: 78). In the novel, the writer presents two important milestones in the evolution of humans. The first one is the birth of the monster, since the birth of the first Monster (Squirt) indicates, as pointed out by the Roman narrator, the emergence of the two sexes, namely male and female. The other cornerstone is the birth of Maire's baby. Thus, the Roman narrator calls Maire's baby "*...this very first member of the race to come, our race, the human race ...*" (Lessing 2008: 85) while he looks on Maire as "*our first mother ancestor*" (Lessing 2008: 118). He regards the baby as "*the very first member of our race*" (Lessing 2008: 85) since the baby is the fruit of the mating of a Cleft with a Squirt; after the birth of that baby, first Maire and Astre, as displayed in the quotation above, then the other Clefts often visit the Squirts since the Clefts lost their capacity for giving birth without men. After the birth of Maire's baby, the reader witnesses the emergence of both the human race and gender roles. The scene above is the very first example of the patriarchal gender roles. Throughout the novel, on the one hand while we see the emergence and evolution of the human race, on the other hand we witness gender role differentiation. By doing so, Lessing may have indicated that gender roles are not culturally constructed; males and females innately act their gender roles, and this may lead us to conclude that Lessing may have adopted the sociobiological accounts of gender role development, at least in the last decade of her life span.

While the novel progresses, after the constitution of the two communities on the island in particular, gender roles and stereotypes become apparent. After the death of the Old Shes who are the enemies to both Maire and the other girls mating with the Squirts and the Squirts themselves, a strong wind which is called "the Noise" by the Clefts and the Squirts causes the Squirts to leave their valley since their shelters have been destroyed by the wind and to come to the beach where the Clefts live. Neither the Squirts nor the Clefts enjoy sharing the same place as the following quotation exhibits:

*It is recorded that they could not stand the supervision and the regime of the women. And they felt unappreciated too. When the Noise was at its height, and no one had eaten for days – weeks, perhaps – the boys crept on their bellies down to the shore to collect the fishes flung up by the violence of the waves. They built great fires in empty caves and cooked the fish. Some animals running before the wind arrived on the shore, frantic and fearful, and the boys killed enough with their bows and arrows to feed them all. The women did not seem to admire them for this cleverness. And, as always, came the complaints about messy and smelly caves* (Lessing 2008: 141).

The fact that the males do not want to live under the supervision and the regime of the women are consistent with stereotypical male characteristic of patriarchal societies. Thus, the study conducted by Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel show that the two of the descriptors used for men are “*very independent*” and “*almost always act as a leader*” (1970: 3). Similarly, Deborah A. Prentice and Erica Carranza referring to the Bem Sex Role Inventory at the beginning of their article titled “What Women and Men Should Be, Shouldn’t Be, Are Allowed To Be, And Don’t Have to Be: The Contents of Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes” point out that “*act as a leader*”, being “*dominant*” and “*independent*” appear on the Bem Sex Role Inventory as masculine characteristics (2002: 269-270). Therefore, it is possible to deduce that men could not live under the supervision and the regime of the women since they are independent, dominant and enjoy acting as leaders.

In the above-given quotation the narrator mentions that the boys make fires and cook. It may be asserted that cooking is regarded as a feminine role. However, in the novel the males discover making fire and using it for cooking and enlightenment as exemplified in the following quotation: “*She [Maire] and her band of girls lived in these tall, airy caves, with their clean sandy floors, and outside the great fires they had learned from the boys to build and keep burning, they who were so skilled at making and tending their fires*” (Lessing 2008: 116). Besides discovering fire or as the narrator puts it when the males “*took possession*” of fire (Lessing 2008: 104), they discover cooking as well (Lessing 2008: 104). As the discussion displays, the girls have learnt making fires from the discoverers, and being a “*discoverer*” (Ruskin 1906: 144) is considered to be a masculine trait.

As well as discovering fire, the males attach a special importance to fire as exhibited in the following quotation:

*Something else happened, which is hardly mentioned in the old chronicles. It was taken for granted, and that means fire must have been there for a long time.*

*In the valley a fire burned always, not far from the log, and it was kept alive, with special attendants (Lessing 2008: 103).*

The writer puts a special emphasis to display to what extent fire is important for the males. To this purpose, the writer devotes a few pages to explain how fire has become an important part of the lives of the males. Moreover, it is presented that the girls mating with the males begin to use fire as the following quotation displays:

*The scenes she [the Old Female] and her forebears had known for always had changed. Outside the caves where Maire and Astre and others of the new kind lived with their infants the great fires burned. She and her kind had seen fire flick over the crests of waves, strike across skies, burn in chains*

*along the tops of the little hills behind the shore, but fire as a familiar – never... The light of the fires running in the hollow of the waves told the Old Ones that nothing they knew was the same, and that the new held dangers for them they had learned already* (Lessing 2008: 108).

For the Old Females, fire symbolizes the changes, and these changes begin with the copulation of the Cleft with the Squirt since the baby born as a consequence of the first sexual intercourse is regarded as the first human in the novel.

The fact that the writer describes the beginning of the use of fire in the males' community in detail, and that the girls mating with the males build great fires outside their caves make us curious about what fire symbolizes in the novel. Therefore, here it may be convenient to discuss what fire stands for. Biedermann points out that "*Fire is generally considered a "male" element (in opposition to "female" water) and as an image for vital force, the HEART, potency, enlightenment, the SUN*" (1996: 130). Consequently, it is possible to assert that fire in the novel represents masculinity, vital force, since after the birth of Maire's baby the Clefts lost their capacity for giving birth without the males. Similarly, the great fires outside the caves of the girls who mate with the males may imply that these girls have accepted the potency of the males.

Before mating with the girls, during the period when the eagles brought the baby-squirts, the males looked after the babies. Mysteriously a doe fed the babies, and the babies somehow survived. When the babies of the Clefts and Squirts were born, the Clefts gave the babies to the Squirts at first. However, the Squirts could not look after the babies since the doe got older. Due to the fact that the girls' breasts were full of milk, they asked the girls to feed the babies. First, the girls stayed in the valley for a while to breed the babies. Later, they often visited the males' community to feed the babies and to copulate. Although the Clefts left the babies in the community of the Squirts, the Squirts were careless, a toddler crawled into the fire and another one fell in the river. Maire and Astre learnt these accidents during their visits, and they scolded the Squirts but they did not take the babies to the beach since they were afraid of the Old Females (Lessing 2008: 106). In the course of the time, when most of the Old females died and the new girls begin to hold the power, the babies are brought up in the caves in the community of the females owing to the fact that the river near which the Squirts live is dangerous and the males neglect taking care of the babies. Though most of the females have taken the babies to the beach, some of them preferred living in the community of the males at first; however these girls were sent back to the beach of the females "*because they were pregnant, and as their bellies swelled were told they were not wanted, even though they were useful, cutting up carcasses, making fire, clearing away rubbish and the remains of feasts*" (Lessing 2008: 162). As seen in the quotation, women gradually become responsible for child-rearing and household chores on the ground of their natural abilities.

After the story of Maire who is the mother of the 'first human', there is a lapse of time in the novel, and the narrator begins to tell the story of a new period when Maronna is the leader of the females, and Horsa is the leader of the males. During the presentation of the story of the males' and the females' in this new period, we become aware of the fact that gender roles have been well established as displayed in the following quotation:

*On one occasion, when Maronna arrived in the men's camp, very angry, it was because some small boys had been killed in the fighting, when the fighting still went on, and she, speaking for all the women, was pointing out that it was easy for them, the men, who never took on the boys when they were small, but always when they had stopped being demanding children, and the women had done all the hard work of rearing them, feeding, nurturing (Lessing 2008: 177).*

Creating such scenes, Lessing implies that in the course of the emergence and the evolution of the human race, gender roles differentiated due to the different biological characteristics of the man and the woman.

Lessing emphasizes the view that the reason behind the differentiation of gender roles is the biological characteristics of the man and the woman by means of the Roman narrator of the novel as well. The Roman narrator thinks of his own life while reading the manuscripts. He says that he married twice. During his first marriage, his ambition was to become a senator, so he worked hard and their two sons were brought up by his wife. His sons were killed at the war. After the death of his first wife, he got married to Julia. He made an agreement with Julia before the marriage, and he explains the agreement as follows: "*She would give me two children, and I would ask nothing of her beyond that, and she and the children would be well provided for*" (Lessing 2008: 57). In the story of the Roman narrator as well, women are depicted as the persons responsible for giving birth and child rearing. Through the stories of the Clefts and the Roman narrator, Lessing may imply that gender is not culturally constructed, but gendered societies have been constituted because of the different biological characteristics of the man and the woman. All these discussions may point out that Lessing adopted sociobiological accounts of gender role differences.

Furthermore, traditional gender stereotypes are widely used in the novel. Whereas the males make weapons (Lessing 2008: 90, 122) and utensils such as knives from the sharp shells (Lessing 2008: 65), the females make combs from the skeletons of fish (Lessing 2008: 126), necklaces and adornments, attaching the stones smoothed by the sea (Lessing 2008: 159). The reason behind the presentation of the males making weapons and the females making comb and adornments may be the fact that being "*interested in own appearance*" is regarded as a feminine trait (Broverman I.- Broverman D. *et al.* 1970: 3), while the descriptor "*aggressiveness*" is associated with men (Broverman I. & Broverman D. *et al.* 1970: 3; Prentice & Carranza 2002: 274). As well as the

weapons which they make, their games display the aggressive nature of the males. After the constitution of the community of the males, the narrator often mentions the fights among the males (Lessing 2008: 172, 241). The Cleft-narrator describes the daily life of the males as follows: “*They fought each other, for no good reason, and invented games where they competed, sometimes dangerously*” (Lessing 2008: 88). These scenes display that the males are aggressive and competitive. Along with aggressiveness, being competitive is another masculine characteristic appearing both on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (cited in Prentice & Carranza 2002: 269), and on the inventory developed by Broverman I. & Broverman D. *et al* (1970). Moreover, the association of aggressiveness with males is highlighted when the Roman narrator mentions the games of the little Roman boys as follows: “*... they played soldiers and the miniature legionnaires tested their strengths*” (Lessing 2008: 154). To us, the fact that little Roman boys imitate the soldiers indicates the aggressiveness in the nature of the boys. Depicting the Squirts fighting and the little Roman boys imitating the soldiers, Lessing accentuates the aggressive nature of males.

Throughout the novel while the physical skills of the males are emphasized as exemplified in the following quotation: “*They [the males] made platforms in the trees, and all kinds of pulleys and swings and walkways. The life trained them in self-reliance and in physical skills*” (Lessing 2008: 180), the emotional aspects of the females are foregrounded. The fact that Lessing foregrounds the males’ physical skills and the females’ emotional aspects are consistent with gender stereotypical traits. Thus, Mary E. Kite, Kay Deaux and Elizabeth L. Haines point out that “*Women, ..., are viewed as more emotional, gentle, understanding, whereas men are seen as more active, competitive, independent, and self-confident*” (2008: 207). Whereas the narrator mentions a weeping female, we cannot see any scenes in which a weeping man is depicted. Furthermore, the weeping female (Lessing 2008: 164, 189) is the leader of the Clefts. That Maronna, the leader of the Clefts, is depicted as a female who cannot control her feelings is noteworthy, and it may imply that women are weak. Besides, the study conducted by Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz in 1972 show that “*Does not hide emotions at all*”, “*Cries very easily*”, “*Feelings easily hurt*” (cited in Basow 1999: 5) are regarded as stereotypic feminine traits. Moreover, Maire and Astre are called “*affectionate*” (Lessing 2008: 98), which is another characteristic attributed to females (Coon & Mitterer 2007: 434).

When the males (Lessing 2008: 172) or the little boys (Lessing 2008: 160, 180) or even the eagles are hurt (Lessing 2008: 142), the males ask the females to heal them. In other words, the males regard the females as healers, caregivers. Concerning the relation between healing role and femaleness, Carol Shepherds McClain points out that “*In other feminist anthropological (and social anthropological) writing, healing is seen to embody cultural images of femaleness as nurturing or as mediating between realms of existence (e.g. nature and culture,*

*the living and ancestors, purity and pollution*)” (1995: 2). While McClain indicates that the relation between femaleness and healing is cultural, Francesca M. Cancian and Stacey J. Oliker mention the natural and sociological explanations about the relation between gender and caregiving as follows:

*The natural perspective explains that caring comes from inside an individual, not from the outside social institution. Normal females have the hormones or instincts that make them good providers of hands on physical and emotional care; most men do not.*

...

*In contrast with natural explanations, a sociological perspective leads us to examine how caregiving is shaped by particular social patterns such as cultural ideals of care or economic opportunities for women and men caregivers if caring confirms their identity as a “real man” or “good woman” and if it fits prevailing cultural beliefs about gender (2000: 6).*

Taking the females healing the males and boys in the novel into consideration, we may assert that Lessing adopts the natural perspectives about the relation between sex and caregiving, and implies that females have inherently healing skills.

The last but not the least, the writer depicts the scenes in which the females complain of the behaviours of the males (Lessing 2008: 146, 155, 158, 249). The narrator emphasizes to what extent the females complain as follows: “*The females were associated, for the boys, with criticism and complaint...*” (Lessing 2008: 167). “*Being talkative*” is considered to be a female stereotypic trait (Broverman I. & Broverman D. *et al.* 1970: 3). The fact that Lessing depicted continually complaining females in this novel may be related with this stereotypic feature. The discussion so far exhibits that Lessing in *The Cleft* depicted the females and the males who have stereotypic gender traits.

Although the females were first created, and a self-sufficient community for a long time, later they feel that they need the protection of the males; thus when Horsa decides to explore the island, Maronna often asks Horsa if he does not care for them (Lessing 2008: 164, 190) or the females complain that the males are “*careless of*” the lives of the females (Lessing 2008: 173). The reason behind the Clefts’ conversion from a self-sufficient community into a dependent one may be that the females have become aware of the fact that the males’ physical skills are better developed than theirs. Besides, “*being dependent*” is regarded as a stereotypic feminine trait (Broverman I. & Broverman D. *et al.* 1970: 3). By depicting such scenes, Lessing may have indicated that females are inherently dependent since they are physically weaker than males.

While going to the expedition, Horsa takes some of the volunteer girls. The girls are taken to the expedition so that they can meet the sexual needs of the men and give birth. Similarly, these girls are, in fact, neither desirous for adventure nor curios about foreign lands. They want to go just because they want to be with the

men. What makes this expedition significant for the purpose of this study is that the writer presents the sample of society consisted of men and women for the first time in the novel. Before this expedition, as we have mentioned above, the females and the males live in their own communities. Nevertheless, during the expedition what the readers witness is a typical patriarchal society. These girls cannot mingle with the men; for example, they have meals somewhere far from the men. The following quotation exhibits the position of the women in the early society of females and males:

*Some kind of central command or authority, it seemed, the girls were demanding and when they tried to assume control of the young boys, they were told they were just Clefts, and must shut up.*

*Another babe had been born and the young men told the girls to keep to themselves with their noisy infants, and so the girls were always at a little distance from the general community (Lessing 2008: 221-222).*

The quotation above displays that the girls are considered to be inferior by young boys in the early society of females and males. The sentence in which the females are told ‘they are just Clefts and must shut up’ reminds us of the status of women in patriarchal societies throughout history.

At the end of the novel, the return of Horsa and the others from the expedition is presented. Horsa tells Maronna that they cannot go on living on the shore where they have been for ages. Although Maronna objects him at first telling that everyone was born there, she obeys him finally, and they leave the shore where the human race emerged. The fact that the females have done what Horsa has asked may indicate the submissiveness of the females, and submissiveness is regarded as a stereotypic feminine characteristic, the roots of which go back to the ideal of true womanhood of the nineteenth century. Saskia Lettmaier explains the ideal of nineteenth century womanhood as follows: “*The true woman was a passive, domestic and submissive...*” (2010: 73). It is interesting to see that Lessing assigns an attribute of the nineteenth century ideal of womanhood to the females depicted in this novel.

Submissiveness is not the only attribute of the nineteenth century ideal of womanhood ascribed to the females in the novel. The following quotation exhibits both how the females leave the beach and what the females mean for the males.

*With his arm round Maronna, Horsa led the company, quite a large one we have to deduce, of the mateable women, who would soon be mothers again, and just behind them were the little boys rescued from the cave, as close to Maronna as they could get: they had forgotten, in all those months of being so much with men, that women did mean comfort, warmth, kindness. Behind them came the three girls who had run here from the forest: ...All the women wept and looked back at their desecrated shore (Lessing 2008: 255).*

The quotation above is of great significance as it displays both the females' acceptance of the man's leadership and the meaning of the women for the men. It is possible to deduce from the scene that the females have accepted the man's leadership since the company is led by Horsa. Besides the terms "comfort, warmth and kindness" the men use to describe what the women mean for them remind us of the term "home". Here we should remember that women were regarded as the "soul of the home" (Basch 1974: 26) during the Victorian Period, and it was believed that keeping a warm and comfortable house for her family is the duty of a true woman. Depicting such a scene, Lessing may have indicated that comfort, warmth and kindness are not the culturally constructed associations of womanhood, but being warm and kind, providing comfort for the others are the innate characteristics of women since before the constitution of society in modern sense women were known to be kind, warm and the providers of comfort.

## CONCLUSION

In this novel in which the creation myth is re-created, Lessing presents three phases in the beginning of the history of the human race. In the first phase in which society consists of only females, the Clefts, and when the first male babies whom the Clefts call the Monsters are born, the Clefts are presented as the lazy creatures who have never left the shore where they live. In the second phase the readers witness the constitution of the community of the males and the emergence of gender roles. Moreover, while in the first phase, the women are presented as the first created sex, in the second phase, the writer depicts the scene in which how the males are protected by the eagles. The mythological association of the eagle with Zeus may trigger the idea that Lessing attributes some sacred meanings to the males. During this period, the females are exhibited while they are rearing children and cleaning the shelters of the males, whereas the males are depicted as hunters. By doing so, she indicates that gender roles are not culturally constructed, and they are not learnt, but they are the consequences of the intrinsic characteristics of males' and females'. Besides, while the males' physical skills, their love of independence and of fight are emphasized, and they are presented as doers, inventors and explorers, the emotional aspects of the females are highlighted, and such characteristics as being affectionate, easily weeping, complaining are attributed to the females. The characteristics of the males and the females discussed in this study are consistent with the patriarchal gender stereotypic traits. In the third phase, what the reader witnesses is a male-dominated society. This may imply that although women were created first, as men are physically superior to women, male-dominated societies have been constituted. This may lead us to think that Lessing advocates the sociobiological accounts of gender stereotypes and gender role differentiation in the last decade of her life, instead of the theories asserting that gender stereotypes and roles are culturally constructed and acquired.

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