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Feminism in *The Conquest of Gola*

Feminism is the idea that all sexes should be regarded as equal in society. Specifically, feminism seeks to advance women's rights as they have been subjected to oppression from society for much of history. Since the 1800s, feminism has been a central topic in society and continues to make strides for equality to this day (Rampton). Over the course of the century, many advocates have expressed feminist ideals and the threats to society that could emerge if we do not give them attention. One of these advocates is the science fiction writer Leslie Stone. In her story, *The Conquest of Gola*, she takes an extreme approach at demonstrating what a sexist society devoid of feminism may look like. Though the work is without a doubt a projection of feminists' concerns, the world portrayed in it eliminates crucial portions of the feminist ideal. Like the gap between the two sides of a canyon, Stone's world shows a large divide between sexes rather than a unification of them. For this reason, Stone's story is not feminist in terms of content, but it demonstrates the wrongs committed when there is a lack of feminist ideology.

One element of feminism is the elimination of gender roles. Gender roles are the roles that individuals play in society based on their sex at birth. They can extend to all elements of one's character. A common example of such a thing is the idea that men do not cry or show emotion, because they take the role of the stone walls that experience no such thing. In *The*

Conquest of Gola, Stone elaborates on gender roles to describe the Detaxalans from the Golans' perspectives. In their view, the Detaxalan, "ignoble male creatures, breed for physical prowess, leaving the development of their sciences, their philosophies, and the contemplation of the abstract to a chosen few" (Stone 98). To further demonstrate this view, according to the Golans, the interests of the opposite sex are "commerce and trade, business propositions, tourists, and all of their evil practices" (108). Throughout the entirety of the story, Stone consistently expresses this Golan view with explicit statements, putting all Detaxalan under a single banner. But what of the Detaxalan? Stone gives us little insight into their ideas, but a few splashes of dialogue paint a picture. In their words, "'Women are alright in their place, but it takes men to see the profit in a thing like [Gola]'" (104). Clearly, they are also prone to categorizing the opposite sex using gender roles. This labeling is analogous to the challenges that Stone faced in the 1930s during her strive to become a science fiction writer (96). Like the Detaxalan and their "business propositions", men were thought to be ones that gain employment and maintain income for their family. Similar to how the Golans "'...are alright in their place...'", women were typically thought to take the responsibility of managing home and family life (Miller). The Golan's view of the Detaxalan and in turn, the Detaxalan's view of the Golan, are not feminist because both sexes subject the other to gender roles.

Since its beginnings, feminism has acted as a movement supported by both men and women to take down a patriarchal society. This is important for women and men because it promotes the equality of both sexes socially, economically, and politically. The Golans in Stone's story have a different take on this ideal that goes against the equality that is so widely supported by feminists. In the Golan society, we do not see a patriarchal one, nor one where sexes are

treated as equals, instead, we are given a matriarchy. Stone does not choose to allude to this. She makes the status of the society clear with her first words. "Hola, my daughters (sighed the Matriarch)" (Stone 97). Is it really a complete matriarchy though? Stone does not hide this either when she writes on the male population of Golan. The narrator's words indicate that the men of Golan are indeed exposed to oppression from Golan society. "Shut in, as they are, unable to grasp the profundities of our science and thought, the gentle, fun-loving males were always glad for a new diversion..." (103). This sounds vaguely reminiscent of our own society's past. Before the Great Depression "many women did not pursue higher education by enrolling in college courses". Most "planned to marry [and] would not be permitted to work thereafter" (Flannery). It seems that Stone is creating a metaphor for women's lack of education during her time. In the story, she decides to twist it around and put men in the shoes of women by subjecting them to the same thing. This puts them on an uneven playing field with the women of Gola, supporting their matriarchy. Whilst the Golan provide a change in perspective for us humans, their choice to oppress is not a feminist one. In the eyes of feminism, a patriarchy is not good, but that does not mean a matriarchy is either. Both introduce a bias where one sex overpowers another and that is not the goal of sex equality.

The existence gender roles and a patriarchal society were prominent during the 1930s and still exist today in some sense. Stone didn't want to create just a mere reflection of the society she was exposed to. She aimed to widen the canyon between female and male to a degree that extends beyond and into another world. To do this, Stone's imaginative race take the most extreme approaches to rejecting ideologies consistently professed by feminism. For one, there are the Detaxalans. When told they cannot have their way by the Golans, they announce that they

"will have to take [Gola] forcibly" (Stone 105). They proceed to do so, disregarding the decisions of the Golan and ignoring their lack of aggression. Then there are the Golans. After stopping the Detaxalan, a captured male was "to act as [the narrator's] slave or in what capacity [she] desired" (107). When both the Golan and the Detaxalan perform such extreme actions, can either societies really be considered feminist? Detaxalan force themselves onto Golan without their consent and a Golan enslaves a Detaxalan. These decisions reflect reality on a global scale. Is the Detaxalan use of force not similar to a male disregarding female consent? Is the Golan enslavement of a Detaxalan not an extreme inversion of the sexist idea that women are subservient to men. Both sexes, Golan and Detaxalan, share a dark quality. They are not respectful to each other and hence directly contrast the foundation on which feminism was built: equality of the sexes.

Stone's *The Conquest of Golan* provides us with many insights into what a gender divide could look like without feminism. The story uses Golan society to represent a reflected reality of what life may have looked like for women and men during the 1930s. It proceeds to go even further by bringing the traumatizing events that occur between the sexes to a larger stage. The content of Stone's story is not feminist, instead, it shows a high degree of sexism. Stone took the canyon that separates sexes and made it as wide as she could, creating a gap so large that when looking from one ledge to the other, the edge of the high ground is not visible. She did this with the hope that we as readers will acknowledge this divide and be willing to descend to the bottom where both sexes can respect each others differences and become equals on level ground.

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