

**The 20th Century Zeitgeist in Doris Lessing's Fiction:
A Reading of the *Children of Violence* series**

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The 20th Century Zeitgeist in Doris Lessing's Fiction: A
Reading of *The Children of Violence* series

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Dedication

Schizophrenia is a psychological condition that runs in my family. I spent my growing up years believing it to be an illness. I spent the larger part of my childhood watching doctors pump sedatives into my aunt and grandmother, till they became machines that walked, talked, ate and slept. I always wondered where the women of strength and imagination disappeared. I also remember feeling afraid and angry at myself for identifying with them. I feared that one day, I would become like them.

Now I'm not so scared anymore.

This is dedicated to those women of strength and imagination.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapters:	
1. Escaping the Imperial Mother.....	5
2. The Makings of the Zeitgeist.....	24
3. Experience and Being: Beyond the Zeitgeist.....	42
Conclusion.....	64
Works Cited.....	66

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the forces that defined the twentieth century through a reading of Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series and the *Golden Notebook*. Each century is defined by the mass consciousness of the time, and the twentieth century has seen through the greatest changes in history. Each chapter attempts to explore different changes and its impact on the individual. The first chapter describes change occurring in the most basic institution of an individual's social life, that is, family. The second chapter describes the individual in collaboration with her society and the roles she is expected to play. The third chapter outlines the psychological impact of change on the individual. The stories and the author's autobiography span from 1919 to 1997, telling us the story of an era, thus capturing the twentieth century zeitgeist.

Introduction

Doris Lessing was born on October 1919, a time when the world was on the verge of great change. The author was born just as the First World War ended, and witnessed the Second World War during her early twenties. Her novels, particularly *The Children of Violence* series and *The Golden Notebook*, describe the complex changes that were happening in society. Although the novels are classified as fiction, they are a commentary on the actual state of affairs, and the impact it had on the population as a whole as well as on individuals. Doris Lessing had also written a two volume autobiography that describes her life beginning from childhood to the 1990's, highlighting experiences that run parallel to events described in the aforementioned narratives. *Martha Quest*, which is the first novel in the *Children of Violence* series, describe a teenage girl in a battle of will with her mother. Doris Lessing states in her autobiography that her relationship with her mother had compelled her to leave home, thus setting the course of her life. This brings us to the concept I try to analyse; the relationship between the parent and child and how it sheds light on the bigger picture; the relationship between previous and current generations, the old and the new, the study of change.

Doris Lessing describes the personal development of a girl into a woman in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, which covers the time from when the protagonist leaves home, creates a new life for herself in the city, settling down with a husband and children, before eventually leaving them in order to escape the tight confines of the life of a suburban wife and mother. The following two books, *A Ripple From The Storm* and *Landlocked* outline her experience with politics in Southern Rhodesia, as well as the state of affairs during the Second

World War and the next few years after the war, and its effect on people and their interactions with each other. The last novel in the series, *The Four-Gated City* follows her life in London, ravaged by war, and the years that followed describing its recovery; and the changes that had created the "Swingin' London" of the sixties. Through each novel, Mrs. Quest's presence lingers, and in the final installment of the series, she travels to England to be with her daughter, which becomes the source of Martha Quest's descent into "schizophrenia". Doris Lessing had published *The Golden Notebook* in 1962, seven years prior to the publication of *The Four-Gated City*, and in both novels, themes as well as characterization of the protagonists, overlap. Through each novel, the author reveals to us the institutions that limit the capacities of the individual regarding politics, family, schools, hospitals, marriage, and most importantly, psychiatry.

There are three chapters in this dissertation, each of which discusses two novels in relation to each other and the concepts they address. These chapters also refer to the author's autobiography where comparisons between the factual and fictional texts are made. My first chapter discusses *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, and the construction of motherhood in relation to Imperial history, the First World War, and the protagonist's development as an individual. Also highlighted here is the struggle involved in change; Martha Quest leaves home to secure a life for herself that would cut her off from her parents' lifestyle, only to find marriage and motherhood as institutions that have powerfully withstood the torrent of change between the Victorian period to the turn of the twentieth century.

"Chapter Three" discusses politics-how people got involved in it, and why. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed two world wars within a few decades, and the birth of new ideologies that offered people a hopeful certainty of the future. Communism affected the way people thought, and a "zeitgeist" or a collective form of thinking and believing, was formed.

It also discusses the fall of the Communist ideal, and the impact that it had on the people around them.

The third chapter, which is the most crucial, discusses psychotherapy, and the relationship between the individual and the society in which she is placed. Here I have largely drawn upon Ronald D. Laing's work on schizophrenia, as his ideas were very influential during the 1960's, and highly relevant to Martha Quest's and Anna Wulf's experience with schizophrenia. In context, it is not the study of the mental illness of a single person, but of an era. Doris Lessing repeatedly calls the forces that dominated her time a "mass psychosis". Laing's definition of schizophrenia is not what psychiatry deems as an illness, but the natural state in which society we live in, thus providing a commentary on social phenomenon.

To round off, Doris Lessing is, in my opinion, the first writer of her kind. Her clarity of prose and subject matter provide lessons in history and sociology, which combined with her fictional ability, capture an era. Her unique background and upbringing gives her novels an insight that enables her to cover the "zeitgeist" of an entire era.

Chapter One

Escaping the “Imperial Mother”

Martha Quest and *A Proper Marriage* are the first two novels in the *Children of Violence* series that are autobiographical in nature. Connections between these two novels are made with the life of Doris Lessing in her memoir, *Under My Skin*. The life of Martha Quest in the *Children of Violence* series begins with the protagonist in her early teens. The years prior to this are described in *Under My Skin*, which describe events that culminated in the fictional character's significant decision in leaving home. This decision marked the start of the ‘quest’ in the life of Martha Quest, the struggle to find herself in the world of politics and change, while trying to shake off her mother's colonial maternal presence. The novels, *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, when studied in relation to the author's memoirs, become an exploration of the self and the larger roles it plays in society. In the case of the woman, it is being a woman and a mother, two roles that are highly sexual that determine a woman's life. The former is deemed to be highly sexed and physical whereas the other exists in instinct or emotion.

The memoir begins with a more or less historical account of her family history. The setting is a rigid Victorian tradition into which her parents were born. The grimy London atmosphere with buildings that marked the family's class position contrasts greatly with the empty African landscape where the only dominating force is the bush-life outside. The difference in the setting, between Mrs. Quest's determination to not leave the household that surrounded her with white middle-class values, and Martha's love of the bush that surrounded her home outside first mark the physical struggle of the young girl from the mother. The young girl is forced into a dress made of English Liberty fabrics and a sun-hat by her mother before she is allowed to go outside. As the girl grows, she is warned to stay at home because she will risk rape by the natives if she dares venture out alone. This argument, of whether “they would do any harm” occurs in almost every argument between mother and daughter.

Victoria Rosner describes in her essay titled, "*Home Fires: Doris Lessing, Colonial Architecture, and the Reproduction of Mothering*"¹ how the colonial pamphlets and advertisements, particularly of the Great Exhibition, were responsible for the structures of family and homes in the colonies. The pamphlets contained instructions on how to live their lives, how to deal with the natives, how to build their homes, what to wear, what to eat, etc. Wives were instructed on how to rear children in the 'savage' landscape. To attain the standards required, they were encouraged to build their homes with cheap, local materials, but the interior of the house should be kept as different and separate as possible. To retain English values and cultural differences means to have the upper hand over the natives. By warning the women of the dangers in the bush as well as the natives women were encouraged to stay at home. And although they played no actual physical role in the colonial establishment, they symbolized the place they came from, of white values and judgments. This brings about the question Victoria Rosner has raised in the essay, is motherhood constructed or is it an eternal force?

The most famous theory in child psychology and development is Sigmund Freud's 'Oedipal Complex.' This theory was promulgated in the early twentieth century and was greatly popular for decades to come. The child passes through five psychosexual stages in his infancy; the Oral phase, the Anal, the Phallic, the Latent and the Genital phase. The Oral phase denotes the first human contact, the child being breast fed by the mother. This bond has both nutritional and emotional connection. The duration of nursing a child depends on society. The oral phase marks the first psychosexual development of the child, and Sigmund Freud stated that if the child's breastfeeding is tampered with, his or her adulthood will be followed by anxiety or neuroses².

In *A Proper Marriage* and *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing describes how mothers had to endure a strict feeding routine, as a way of disciplining the child:

¹ Rosner, Victoria. "Home Fires: Doris Lessing, Colonial Architecture, and the Reproduction of Mothering." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol. 18, No.1. Spring, 1999 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464347> >

² Freud, Sigmund (1956). *On Sexuality*. Penguin Books Ltd

“In my case, as my mother cheerfully told me, again and again, I was starved for the first ten months of my life since, because she could not feed me, being too run-down after the war, she fed me cows’ milk, diluted to English standards...’You just screamed and screamed all day and all night.’ ” (*Under My Skin*, P23)

The other form of discipline described by Lessing in her memoir is toilet-training. This ritual is described as “that key to character building.” (*Under my Skin*, P24). Doris Lessing stresses on the importance of such a ritual playing a key part in the psychological development of children, and when applied to every child in a society, might be responsible for the outcomes of greater things : “Just imagine it, from one end of the British Empire to the other, wherever the map of the world was colored pink, British matrons or their nurses were ‘holding out’ tiny infants.” (*Under My Skin*, P24). She analyses her personality and habits according to this ritual “I am untidy, tolerate disorder, but am obsessive in small useful ways, like keeping a diary.” (*Under My Skin*, P24).

The third stage, the phallic stage occurs between 2-4 years old when children are aware of their bodies, and the bodies of others. They start to realize the marked differences between the male and female body. In *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing does not compare her body with that of her brother. Instead she is curious about adult bodies, and is filled with repulsion when she watches her mother or other parents bathe (*Under My Skin*, P19), and when she watches Miss Steele, the woman who takes care of children of visitors to England in a certain hotel the Tayler family stayed in during their short stay in England before leaving for Rhodesia.

The fourth stage, the Latent phase, is more of a period rather than a phase, and takes place before puberty. It is the stage when the Oedipal or Electra complexes are resolved, and it leads to the formation of the ego and super-ego. The last stage, the Genital phase, is the stage adults experience for the rest of their lives. The latent phase depends on how long the child is kept with the mother, in cases where the children leave home and integrate in other social circles early, sexual maturity will come early and this stage is shorter. Doris Lessing, confined inside the home in the veld at first, is then released to attend a boarding school at the age of eight until fourteen. The first novel in the series, begins with the protagonist home from school at the age of fourteen, when the conflicts with her mother were at then strongest. Doris Lessing mentions in *Under My Skin* that the first two novels in the series are largely autobiographical.

The novel opens with the adolescent girl reading a book about sex on the porch while her mother and neighbours are chatting at a little distance. The girl's action is deliberate, to be noticed by the adults around her, particularly her mother. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. Doris Lessing describes in *Under My Skin* how she had spent her entire life running away from her mother:

I was in nervous flight from her ever since I can remember anything, and from the age of fourteen I set myself obdurately against her in a kind of inner emigration from everything she represented. Girls do have to grow up, but has this battle always been so implacable? (P15)

Near the beginning of the novel, a scene is described where Martha Quest, after speaking to her provocatively-dressed friend Marnie Van Rensberg, stands in her parent's bedroom undressed down to her knickers, holding a pair of scissors to her dress. Her father comes into the room for his medicines, but the conversation that followed was without any emotional provocation. Her mother arrives shortly, and reacts with alarm at her daughter's body, instead of what she was doing to her dress. She walks over to her daughter and presses her hands into Martha's sides, as if "trying to press her back into girlhood." Martha reacts violently at this, and "moved backwards, and involuntarily raised her hand; she was shuddering with disgust at the touch of her own mother, and had been going to slap her across the face." (*Martha Quest*, P23)

Doris Lessing draws a parallel with another scene in her autobiography. When Lessing begins to make her own bras, her mother Maude Tayler, shocked at the sight of her daughter's growing breasts, lifted up the dress she was wearing for her father to see. Doris Lessing was filled with the same hatred and disgust as described in *Martha Quest*, and she follows that incident with this account:

Years later I was living next to a demented old woman whom half the street was trying to keep out of a lunatic asylum. She had no physical shame, or even ordinary sensitivity. She would thrust her filthy smelly feet at you and demand you wash them, or sit picking bits of skin off them and putting them, with relish, into her mouth, or sit scratching herself all over her body with her tongue protruding and a look of voluptuous pleasure. She lifted her great flopping breasts to examine the rash...inviting you to have a look, or

rubbed her crotch as vigorously as if toweling down a wet dog...if the pimple or sweat soaked underarm hair is part of a parent's body, the child shrinks away, silent...full of disgust...It is not tactful for a mother to whip up her fifteen-year old daughter's dress to expose her breasts to the father, but it is hardly a crime.

(*Under My Skin*, P94)

The battles in the Quest household were about clothes and Martha's wandering in the bush on her own. Victoria Rosner observes the difference between the mother and daughter in relation to how they see their home:

If Lessing loved the house for its connections to the bush, her mother's view of the house was the opposite. Lessing's love of the bush enabled her to thrive in it, but she recognizes that her mother's feelings were closer to the typical white female settler's story of depression and eventual nervous breakdown. (*Home Fires*, P75)

This tension about the white female settler comes from her supposed role in the colony in relation to what was actually around her. The pamphlets stress on the importance of keeping the interior of the home as separate as possible from the bush-life around it. Doris Lessing explains how the first settler home is made from local materials, but then if the farmer is successful, he rebuilds his house using bricks. A brick house is the sign of true success, but it also deepens the gulf between the native and colonial.

Alfred Taylor was quite unsuccessful in his attempts to farm due to his wooden leg and his general impractical nature. The Taylors were unsuccessful in remodeling their ramshackle hut into a brick house. The brick house symbolized a greater security and resistance to the forces of nature around them, and the reaffirmation of faith in traditional Victorian values. Maude Taylor, who spent her life attempting to remind her family of their white middle class status, or "nice" values, lived only to see her house disintegrate into the bush, and her daughter run free and become successful in her own endeavors.

Children are quick to see the irrelevance of the English customs in the wild African velds. In "*The Story of an African Farm*" by Olive Schreiner, the first chapter, "Shadows from Child-Life" describes a German overseer who preaches Christianity to the black servants during the

day and reads the bible to his son at night. The son, moved at first by the doctrines, sets out to seek god for himself by placing his lunch meat on a stone slab, and asking god to cook the meat. The boy lies face down on the ground and waits for a long time for a miracle, but all that he sees are flies settling on the now spoiled meat. Taught by his elders to love god, the child goes off far into the bush and declares aloud, "I hate god."

The young Doris Lessing read Olive Schreiner in her house in Southern Rhodesia, and she describes the former author as an older sister who helped her understand things she could not describe with words. Doris Lessing and her brother were comfortable in the bush. Her mother repeatedly warned her of the dangers in the bush, and how lustful natives lurk there in wait for young white girls they could rape. Doris Lessing states, "All those years I had wandered about sometimes miles from home, and had tactfully not said how far I went, but now it was Principle, it was the Truth, and we fought. "If they are not so dangerous why is it no one has ever attacked me?" (*Under My Skin*, P155)

Ironically the only man who had made such advances to Martha Quest was a white man, Mr. McFarline, an affluent farmer who is notorious for engaging in sexual relations with the natives and impregnating them, and then making his children work on his land. Martha's mother only let her travel to market if someone gave her a lift in a car, fearing her daughter would be raped if she would walk by herself. When Martha told her mother about McFarline trying to touch her, "Mrs Quest said hastily, 'Nonsense, you're imagining it, he couldn't have done.'" When Martha told her how he had given her money to cover his attempt, Mrs. Quest reacted by saying, "He knows better, he's too nice." (*Martha Quest*, P70).

Doris Lessing's upbringing in Rhodesia contrasts interestingly with the nursery in Kermanshah. The furniture and the commanding presence of nannies and the enigmatic mother who is often away at parties in her gowns mean that children are deprived of maternal love and care. Their house in Rhodesia in the middle of an empty farm is spatially isolated not only from the nearest town, but also from other farms. We can only imagine a child wondering why it was so important to be a 'nice girl' when there was nobody around to care about such things. The literature Doris Lessing and Martha Quest read fed their young minds with ideas of the colour bar, of liberty, of cities far and beyond. The open space of the farm and the open mind offered by

the books clashed violently with the role of the white settler female who had to keep the servants at heel and protect her children from the 'savages' the Exhibition had warned them about.

Maude's reminders of her English past are the furniture, the silverware, the Persian carpets, and the Liberty curtains and fabrics. The only way she could impose them onto her children is through the means of dress, enforcing naptimes, meals, and so on. Thus the battle was physical, and as the child grew, it became sexual.

Doris Lessing describes in her autobiography a scene of herself as a child in bed during naptime. She props the door open against her mother's wishes, and lies in bed looking at her body and feeling different points, trying to create new sensations. She describes herself lifting the blanket and sniffing the scents of her body with pleasure, and later on, as an older child, standing in the bush with a rifle in her hand. She looks at her legs and then looks up her skirt at her body. She describes how she feels, "There is no exultation like it, the moment when a girl knows that *this* is her body, *these* her fine smooth shapely limbs." (*Under My Skin*, P173). A similar scene occurs in *Martha Quest*, where she lies in the bathtub, looking at her legs while a storm rages around her. Doris Lessing discovered these secrets not within the comforts of the home, but in the wilderness of the bush.

The bush has many sexual connotations in the memoirs. The architecture of the white settler's home had a rectangular dining room, and three rooms were built across one side of it. There was no hallway, so the doors of the rooms opened into each other. This meant privacy was invaded, and most importantly, monitored. The bush was forbidden territory, just as exploring the functions of the body are forbidden to children. The girl standing in the bush, a forbidden territory, looking into the forbidden regions of her own body creates a secret no one, especially her mother, can invade. This happiness at looking at her body gives Martha Quest a sense of control and will as she realizes she can lose or gain weight as she pleases. This was at a time when there were no social conventions for beauty in terms of weight, and Doris Lessing's and Martha Quest's successful attempts at losing weight is a way of rebelling against the mother, refusing the nutrition she provides. Refusing to eat was Doris Lessing's first attempt at separating herself physically from her mother, cutting the oral bond that had once tied them together.

Shortly after Martha Quest runs away from the farm, she is introduced to a new world of sex and alcohol. Martha finds herself at the centre of things, and lives a strenuous life where she works as a typist by day and parties at sundowners all night, finally going to bed in the early hours of dawn. This new world was finally a template onto which Martha, the rebellious daughter, can apply her ideologies and personality, which was the very reason she had run away from home. However, upon reaching the city, she finds herself bored with the Left Book Club, even though they share similar political beliefs. The bigotry in the farm was no different from the bigotry in the city, where the young white men often made the native workers the butt of their jokes. Torn between her desire to blend in this new crowd while being unable to identify with them, Martha Quest, once taking pleasure in her body and the promises it held, is now filled with resentment towards the men who notice her sexually, and finds herself homesick for the bush, but not of the home and her parents. When Maisie, a colleague remarks "So our Donny-boy's got hold of you, has he?" Martha quickly replies, "My mother knew his mother." (*Martha Quest*, P139).

Martha Quest is torn between the ideologies instilled by her books and the reality of her life. She meets Adolf, a Jewish musician who is subjected to social marginality in the city. He taunts her for being with him, and to prove to herself that she is not like the others or her parents, she loses her virginity with him. She goes as far as to tell him that she loves him, which he is able to see as the pretence it actually is. Towards the end of the novel she meets Douglas, a man to whom she is finally able to relate what she reads and therefore herself. She agrees to marry him, though she never really wanted to. Shortly before her marriage, she goes back to the farm to introduce her fiancé to her parents.

In the bush she comes face to face with the magnitude of her decision and the effect it has on her:

"She looked over the landscape of her childhood, lying dark and mysterious, to the great bulk of Jacob's Burg, and tried to get some spark of recognition from it. It was shut off from her, and she could feel nothing. There was a barrier, and that barrier (she felt) was Douglas." (*Martha Quest*, P306).

Suddenly feeling empty and lonely in the veld that had once been a part of herself, she clings to Douglas which leads to their lovemaking, but not before observing her parents shut the door and reflecting on memories of how her father had asked her mother to close the door, and denied her the excuse of keeping an eye on the children even as they slept:

The 'act of love'- that fatally revealing phrase- was no act at all tonight...For both these people were heirs, whether they liked it or not, of the English puritan tradition, where sex is something to be undergone (heard in the voices of innumerable chilled women, whispering their message of endurance to their daughters) or something to be shut out...for both Martha and Douglas, making love when and how they pleased was positively a flag of independence in itself...waving in the faces of the older generation. (*Martha Quest*, P307).

The maternal role of a woman is also a very sexual one, but the mother is supposed to have very little or no sexual drive. In *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing describes conversations between her parents and people having marital problems, where men complain of their wives lack of interest in sex. Martha Quest notes the non-sexual relationship between her parents, proven by her father who hints at it whenever the topic arises. The ability to conceive is often the reason why girls are kept virgins until their marriage, when they "give themselves" to their husbands. The maternal instinct of females is equated to the male sex drive. Sensuous women who enjoyed the creative act of sex were deemed fallen women. Linda Gordon in her essay "*Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States*" describes how women were protected from the world of sex by being confined in their homes, "lest they fall and become depraved, lustful monsters."³ However, the reality of the 'sexless woman' is unknown, and women both identified with the sexless matron and the lustful monster, thus creating a "Self" and the "Other". The sexual freedom of the early twentieth century created

³ Gordon, Linda. "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States." *Feminist Studies*. Vol.1, No. ¾. Winter-Spring, 1973.

a crisis in identity as women were caught in the roles of themselves being a mother and being mothered. could the modern women could not identify themselves as mothers, and mothers could not become one of the Sports Club girls, the women Martha had seen in sundowner parties, drinking and dancing from dusk to dawn.

The invention of contraceptives changed the scales between sex and reproduction. Voluntary motherhood had been advocated by suffragettes during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Since the time people could have sex without the worry of pregnancy, the exercise of women's sexuality became freer. But, as Linda Gordon explains, women's social roles as caregivers and mothers had not changed, and when people started having sex for pure pleasure, the image of women became highly sexualized. The mother remained the sex-less female, and the New Woman found it difficult to put the roles of womanhood and motherhood together.

A Proper Marriage, the next novel in the *Children of Violence* series, examines Martha Quest's married life in detail from the honeymoon to the birth and care of her child. The novel reveals that Martha Quest had been pregnant around the time she got married, and the beginning of the novel finds Martha a woman who had stopped taking physical care of herself. During her married life she became associated with friends of Douglas, one of them being the Talbots who had a daughter near her age.

Elaine Talbot, unlike the young girls of the city, lived under her mother's shadow for her entire life. Mrs. Talbot, a vivacious woman who was having an affair with Mr. Maynard, the city magistrate, was a beautiful woman who shone with good health and vigour. Elaine Talbot on the other hand, was a sickly, pale girl whose good looks were only a faint echo of her mother's. Elaine is described as frail and delicate. Elaine Talbot had grown up in Southern Rhodesia as a girl might in a nursery in England, and this draws us back to Doris Lessing's nursery life in Tehran, where children had been held over pots in order to toilet-train them. In *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing describes how she and her brother were "delicate" until they struggled free from their house and their mother and escaped into the bush. Earlier in *Martha Quest*, shortly after returning from high school because of an eye infection, we hear Mrs. Quest protesting at Martha's accusations that she was making her sick. Doris Lessing draws upon a similar experience where she suddenly found herself listless and tired, and was sent away to Granny

Fisher's retreat in the mountains for recovery. As soon as she was away from her mother, Doris Lessing once again became a vigorous young girl. Years later in London, Martha Quest again finds herself in bed, tired and listless upon hearing the news of her mother's imminent arrival.

Elaine Talbot is the antithesis of Martha Quest. Her home in the suburb reflects English aristocracy and imperial superiority, just like Martha's mother's silverware and Liberty curtains in their house on the farm. When Martha visits Mrs. Talbot, she finds Elaine Talbot tending to her flowers. This scene could be taken out of a Jane Austen novel describing the Victorian feminine sensibility and its comical scenes of fainting women and smelling salts. Soon after this visit Martha comes to the decision to leave Douglas and make her own life, and soon after Elaine Talbot takes over her past life as Douglas' wife and Caroline's mother.

Once married, Martha Quest found herself in the role of a dutiful wife who cooked and tended to the house while her husband was away at work. Her husband, previously a man with debts and no property, suddenly turned into an ambitious husband who disapproved of what Martha believes in. In *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing describes her husband Frank Wisdom, who is also a civil servant, as a man who did not encourage public expressions of their liberal views for fear of losing his job and reputation, yet she admitted that they paid their servants higher wages than any other household in the neighbourhood.

A Proper Marriage is set during and at the wake of the Second World War. The First World War, which had been over only a few decades earlier, still haunted the homes of the young soldiers whose fathers had fought in the previous war. Martha Quest and her brother, as well as Doris Lessing and her brother, describe the uneasiness they felt as they listened to their father's reminiscing about the war. Years later Doris Lessing meets a soldier who told her that he had enlisted to become a pilot to escape the atmosphere of the war that pervaded his house. "Don't you see?" he insisted, "I've never had my own thoughts. I've been thinking *their* thoughts all my life... And you are the same." Doris Lessing describes her own reaction as "I didn't like this. I argued. I joked." (*Under My Skin*, P144)]

The pilot, like other men of their generation, joined the army to make his mother's and aunt's experiences and accounts of the war his own, while women found themselves quickly marrying and having babies before their men were drafted. Meanwhile these were the same men

and women who had looked at their parents with contempt and made it their mission in life to never become like them. In her analysis of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Evelyn Reed illustrates an interview with 28 suburban women, who were educated, well read, and liberal, but living as suburban wives reported:

"Sixteen out of the 28 were in analysis or analytical psychotherapy. Eighteen were taking tranquilizers; several had tried suicide; and some had been hospitalized for varying periods, for depression or vaguely diagnosed psychotic states. (You'd be surprised at the number of these happy suburban wives who simply go berserk one night, and run shrieking through the street without any clothes on,' said the local doctor, not a psychiatrist, who had been called in, in such emergencies) ... Twelve were engaged in extramarital affairs in fact or in fantasy."

(A Study of the Feminine Mystique, 1964)

To explain the changes, Friedan's quote states

What happened to women is part of what happened to all of us in the years after the war. We found excuses for not facing the problems we once had the courage to face. The American spirit fell into a strange sleep; men as well as women, scared liberals, disillusioned radicals, conservatives bewildered and frustrated by change—the whole nation stopped growing up. All of us went back to the warm brightness of home ...

(A Study of the Feminine Mystique, 1964)

While fighting against her mother, Doris Lessing notes how her mother had rebelled against the mores of Victorian society and had become a nurse during the First World War. Her mother had been described as a young, energetic woman who did what she had believed in, until marrying Albert Tayler (*Under My Skin*, P4). The young women of Martha Quest's society rebelled against their lifeless mothers while also acknowledging that their mothers had once been as lively as they were.

Once again the girl who had run away from the farm found herself within the confines of another home, in which she is to become the white colonial wife and mother.

After marriage, Martha Quest meets Dr. Stern who plays a crucial role in the lives of the women. Dr. Stern, a gynecologist, advises women on the best contraceptives and aids them during childbirth. Social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology (where humans come from, how humans live, how humans think) had been used to convince women that the home is their place. The institution of patriarchy, weakened by the war and the disillusionment that comes with shell shock and failed political ideologies, now relied instead on the cold, hard "truths" of science. The role of a mother, who had once been the only person who knew what was best for her child, now rested on male doctors who gave advice on when to breastfeed, toilet train, etc. Shortly after giving birth, Martha Quest finds herself in a hospital where she lies in bed in a ward with other mothers, denied of her right to hold her baby. The exhausted women had no choice but to lie in wait for their children who would be brought in for their milk by the nurses, and while they could not their milk flowed from their breasts and soaked their beds. (*A Proper Marriage*, P169-171).

Pregnancy and motherhood in *A Proper Marriage* are described as two very different things. During the nine months of pregnancy, Martha and her friend Alice, who was also pregnant, read numerous books on childbirth and childcare to prepare themselves for the day they would go into labour. Martha, not knowing her child, loved her child intensely as an extension of her body, the body which she also loved. Pregnancy was a time where she was allowed to spend her days by herself without any interruptions from her husband or other interfering visitors. In a scene shortly before Alice's birth, Martha and her friend strip off their clothes and wade into a muddy pool to cool themselves. The scene of women ripe and swollen with pregnancy wading in a dirt pond signifies an existence that is outside their conventional social structure.

The arrival of a new child means that the community has now a new member, who is received with great ceremony and rituals. The birth of Caroline was followed by Douglas and his friend's drunken visits, who had once left her alone while she was pregnant. As soon as the child was born, the first stop before entering their homes was the Club.

“Willie remarked that there were dozens of aunts and so on waiting to welcome Alice home...Douglas had just told Martha that she must expect a similar ordeal. That it would be an ordeal was an axiom with them all.” (*A Proper Marriage*, P175).

The time that followed childbirth found Martha trapped within a new social boundary. The child who she had considered her flesh and blood during pregnancy and childbirth now became distant as the baby learned to stand in her crib. These years Martha followed the footsteps and instructions of other mothers and advice of doctors, feeding the child as per instructions. Martha Quest and Doris Lessing, who had imagined herself as a child during the ordeal were now following these instructions as their mothers once had.

The new mother feels very uncertain in her new role and relies upon the advice of experienced mothers. The First World War was a time when people broke away from traditional Victorian ideals and relied on new theories that were part of the new thinking of those days. Maude Tayler had defied her family to become a nurse, chose to start a new family outside England, hoping to find a niche for herself as well as her children.

Linda Gordon outlines the difference “voluntary motherhood” had made in the lives of women in her essay by describing the rigid lives of Victorian women:

The concept of maternal instinct helped to smooth the contradictory attitudes about woman’s sexuality. In many nineteenth-century writings we find the idea that the maternal instinct was the female analog of the male sex instinct...Thus to suggest, as feminists did, that women might have the capacity for sexual impulses of their own automatically tended to weaken the theory of the maternal instinct.

(*Voluntary Motherhood*, P8)

However, it is clear from the other marriages described in the novel that despite the advent of contraceptives which allowed couples to enjoy sex in itself, the lives of women in marriage and motherhood were not different from those of their predecessors. The birth of the child thus not only alters the lifestyle of the mother, but also her consciousness. Martha was transformed into the maternal figure she had struggled against her entire life, thus being drawn

further away from her self as the young girl who used to run about the bush and swim in a muddy pond while she was pregnant. Martha, since she is unable to identify herself as a mother, is unable to recognise the child as hers:

“And yet, during those three days while Caroline had been with her grandmother, Martha had slept, waked, gone about living as if Caroline did not exist, had never existed. Not for a moment had Martha felt anxiety...She came home; and again Martha was caught up into the rhythm of this other small life. Her long day was regulated by the clock to Caroline’s needs...” (*A Proper Marriage*, P224)

Thus it made no difference to her if Caroline was being raised by her mother, or any other mother for that matter for as long as the “book” dictated things. Martha, if not able to love her child, was able to finally see her mother in her:

“She was forming the habit of talking to the child as if to herself... “My poor unfortunate brat, what have you done to deserve a mother like me? Well, there’s no help for it, you’ll just have to put up with it. You bore me to extinction, and that’s the truth of it, and no doubt I bore you. But as far as I can make out, one of the most important functions of parents is that they should be suitable objects of hate: if psychology doesn’t mean that, it means nothing...you and I are just victims, my poor child, you can’t help it, I can’t help it, my mother couldn’t help it, and her mother...” “ (*A Proper Marriage*, P225)

Martha Quest however found her role as a mother more bearable than being a wife. Thoughts of leaving Douglas and her child did not transpire while he was drafted at the beginning of the war. As soon as her husband was gone, Martha sought Solly Cohen, one of the two brothers who had influenced her intellectual beliefs as a young girl, and William, a young RAF officer from England who was located at an airbase in Rhodesia. Martha soon became romantically involved with William, and this was the beginning of what would be the long years of Martha Quest’s political involvement. Douglas’ return home only made clear the charade they were playing. When Douglas is reunited with his wife, he “was gazing proudly at her. He was thinking that this was a wife and child to be proud of. He even glanced around to see if anyone was watching.” (*A*

Proper Marriage (P262). The emptiness of her married and maternal life, compared to her political activities that had brought her friends who share the same beliefs bolstered her decision to leave.

Martha's decision to leave not only cracked the surface of her marriage, but that of others as well. When other ladies began to learn of it, they all went to Martha and called her over for advice. The older women told Martha how important it was to stick through it, and to endure the flaws of the husband, and that sex should not be the focus of a relationship.

Martha's decision to leave Douglas is inevitable as the reader knows from the first novel that it is not a marriage that she really wants. Martha's decision to marry had been accepted and celebrated by others, although it was not sincere on her part, and her honest decision to leave was met by scorn and shock. This reaction reflects the times and how much, or how little they have actually changed. Martha Quest was not only struggling against her mother, but also the colonial history her parents brought to Southern Rhodesia.

Doris Lessing had two children from her marriage with Frank, on whom the character of Douglas was based; "When John was nine months old...we decided to have another baby. Yet with half of myself I knew I was not going to stay in this life...Was it I who decided first to have this second baby? Probably. But it was the *Zeitgeist*. All around us young couples were saying, 'Let's have another, we'll get it all over with while we're still young.'" (P234). Shortly after the birth of John, Doris Lessing had looked at the body of a woman who had her third child and thought, "I will never be like that, I will never have another baby." (P220). Many years ago as a little girl, when she had walked out of the bush and saw her parents smoking on the hill, she had looked at them and thought

"I am never going to be like them. I shall never sit drawing disgusting smoke into my lungs holding cigarettes with fingers stained orange...*Don't be like them.*

Meaning, never let yourself be trapped. In other words, I was rejecting the human condition, which is to be trapped by circumstances." (*Under My Skin*, P68)

This trappings of the human condition is what the *Children of Violence* is about. It is why Martha Quest had gotten married, had children, and became a Communist. As a Communist she scorned Solly Cohen for being a Trotskyist, but he had been the first person she had gone to join a political organization. If Solly had let her in, Martha would have been a devoted "Trotskyist" just as she had been a dedicated Communist. In the *Four Gated City*, Martha Quest circles back to the instances of childhood, this time, they were of a different generation. She watches them grow and have children and become involved in leftist affairs. She once again plays the role of a mother to this new family, but in this instance it is impossible to simply 'follow the book'.

In *A Proper Marriage* we find Martha Quest trapped in something she had run away from. She had watched her parents dormant marriage and had run away from it once she began to discover passion and heat in herself while wandering about in the bush. Married to Douglas, she begins to live only for social expectations, much to her chagrin. This meant she would raise her children the same way, thus reinforcing the trap, making it stronger and impossible to escape from. Doris Lessing describes how she had read a passage written by Bernard Shaw at age fourteen:

"...He says the human race is over-sexed. I must be over fourteen...for I am conscious of every minute of my delicious body, that fits me like a new and longed-for dress. I am outraged. I am furious...Even at the time I knew my reactions were out of all proportions. I felt as if Shaw was taking away something that was my right. Now, this was the spirit of the time all right, pure extract of Zeitgeist. No one had promised me sex, love, as a *right*, as my due. Yet I had already learned to define myself in this way."(*Under My Skin*, P102)

Thus the ambivalence of motherhood is caused by two things, the maternal instinct, that eternal feminine spirit, the wise, ageless woman, and motherhood, the construction of society. Doris Lessing writes about how, as a young girl, she had been obsessed with children:

"I begged my mother to have another baby. She was a maternal woman all right, and it must have been painful, when that little girl's pleadings reinforced suppressed instincts..."
 "But we can't afford it," she said...The strength of my yearning for that infant mingled

with my homesickness...I lay on my mother's bed, studied the stages of the foetus's growth, pored over the enlarging slopes of the stomach, and, in imagination, went into labour and gave birth." (*Under My Skin*, P57)

This homesickness began when she had left home to go to school as a young girl, and shortly after "Baby", the nickname for her younger brother, had left to go to school. "I had realized that he was as much my baby as hers" (*Under My Skin*, P57). When she left home in between holidays from school, she visited other babies and helped look after them.

Brought up in wide and empty spaces, Doris Lessing's only cultural and social influence were her books and her mother. Her mother, an attentive maternal figure who had never denied her children precious lessons was the only other woman on the farm the author could ever compare herself to as a child. The white settler homestead which was a symbol for white purity and maternal goodness were imitated by her during periods of homesickness. This maternal feeling and what it alludes to, the house, etc, is one where she had felt whole. Salisbury, an alien town to a teenager who does not speak the same way as the people of the Sport's Club, whose scenery was devoid of the wilderness of the bush, had broken Martha's and Doris' personality in fragments as they let other men take them out to the cinema or dancing and drinking, and the women who were there for company seemed to share none of the author's or the character's upbringing.

In *Under My Skin*, after the imagined ordeal of childbirth, Doris Lessing notes that "...This fantasy was also erotic, but in flavor, not in physical fact. Who was the male? One of the little boys in the District with whom I was in love and with whom I was making a family." (P102)

The young girl in the bush thought none of these thoughts as she stands with her rifle and looks at her body with erotic pleasure. Her home, although not of the bush, was constructed from the bush. She describes how the wilderness invaded her home, with trees and plants growing through the linoleum floors, and the insects and snakes that were found in her house. She identifies her body, which she identifies with the exterior of the house and the surrounding, and she identifies the maternal presence with the interior of the house made up of Persian carpets and English silverware. The girl who leaves home in *Children of Violence* is obsessed with her body

and its health, and maintains it as she would maintain a house, trimming it and dressing it in new clothes. We only get under Martha Quest's skin during her pregnancy with Caroline. These two layers of the self allude to the title, *Under My Skin*, which explores the facets of identity in relation to the, as Doris Lessing had said about the series, larger, public roles in society.

Chapter Two

The Makings of the Zeitgeist

A Ripple from the Storm and *Landlocked* describe the next phase of Martha Quest's life after she left the home of her husband. The two volumes describe Martha Quest's political career, her affairs and her identity as a Communist, and thus, another attempt at freedom from her ties with her mother. The novels are less autobiographical, and they focus on the events that were taking place in the world and in Southern Africa. She describes the experience of writing both novels along with *The Golden Notebook* in the second volume of her autobiography, *Walking in The Shade*. Communism in the 1920s was geared towards youth, and according to its ideology, they were "destined" to live under communism, and unlike the older generation, to be free from exploitation. Political involvement, most importantly, created a gulf between the generation that had fought in the First World War and their children. Communism offered an ideological space that was attractive with its message of equality and freedom. Its anti-capitalist viewpoint gave the oppressed classes – women, African, the working class- hope for a better life. The idea of equality regardless of race, gender or class enabled people to live outside the confines of their status, as well as giving a critical analysis of the structure of society, where "facts of Nature" or "God's law", such as marriage, childbearing, obedience to parents, were exposed as capitalist myth⁴.

Doris Lessing was born in 1919, in Kermanshah, Persia. Persia, now Iran, had relations with Britain since the thirteenth century, which dwindled over the years. Since then, Persia had been caught in the contest for domination between Britain and Russia, a period of time known historically as "The Great Game". However, the Anglo-Persian wars over Herat had given

⁴ Dixon, Marlene. "*The Subjugation of Women Under Modern Capitalism: The Bourgeois Morality*" (1977) <
<http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/dixon-marlene/morality.htm#n1> >

England a strong foothold in the Persian Empire. Iran had wanted to acquire Afghanistan, which the British intended to keep independent to prevent the Russian expansion into India. This had resulted in the Anglo-Persian wars which had taken place from 1856-1867. Defeated, Persia had to allow British intervention in the border control between Persia and India. In 1919, the year Doris Lessing was born, a treaty was signed that allowed the British exclusive rights to use Persia's roads and railroads, as well as authority over military and financial institutions. Persia, a nation weakened by domestic struggles, especially during the Qajar dynasty, continued to be made vulnerable by the "Great Powers", even more so once the alliance between Britain and Russia was signed in 1907. During the Second World War, both Russian and British armies dominated Persia.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain's privilege of free trade across the seas and its reputation for being isolated from the political affairs of other parts of Europe had ended. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, formed in 1902, as well as alliances with its old enemies Russia and France (the Triple Entente Alliance), had forged the political background that caused the outbreaks of the First and Second World Wars. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought great changes to the way people act or think. During this time, the Empires of the West had stretched all the way to the Far East. By the time the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, the British Empire had stretched to its farthest reaches, covering distances of 1,800,000 square miles and 13 million subjects. Colonization had spawned a number of disciplines including ethnography, racial theories, anthropology, which involved the Western representation of the colonized⁵. Edward Said drew a distinction between "imperialism" and "colonialism" stating that imperialism is "the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" where as colonialism was the "implanting of settlements on a distant territory".

⁵ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994

Doris Lessing includes "A Note on Population" at the beginning of her autobiography *Under My Skin* which describes the change in African population over the years:

"It is believed that when the whites arrived in the area that later became Southern Rhodesia there were a quarter of a million black people. By about 1924 there were half a million...In 1982 the estimate was nine or ten million....Some demographers believe that there will be thirty million by 2010. Now, in 1993, ninety percent of the population are under the age of fifteen."

Doris Lessing describes in *Under My Skin* how her parents were excited at the prospect of moving to a foreign land during their visit to the Great Exhibition, which displayed the strength and power of the Empire. Any white man who followed the instructions as written down in the pamphlets that were in circulation would make himself a fortune. One can only imagine the power of the propaganda and the effect it had created on people, and especially Alfred Taylor, who had only one good leg and very little farming experience. As Lessing describes, "The Empire exhibition of 1924, which lured my father out to Africa...changed my parents' lives and set the course of mine and my brother's. Like wars and famines and earthquakes, Empires shape futures." (*Under My Skin*, P46).

Homesteads of the white settlers were designed specifically to separate the interior from what lies outside. Africans were forbidden to venture into the spaces of the home, and the white woman was forbidden to leave the house. This ensured nothing would penetrate the white middle class home, where traditions and white social rules are kept alive in the home. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* quotes Leroy-Beaulieu to describe the essence of colonization to the white men:

The social order is like the familial order in which not only generation but education is important...It gives to virility a new product from its entrails...The formation of human societies, any more than the formation of men, must not be left to chance...Therefore colonization is an art formed in the school of experience...The goal of colonization is to place a new society in the best conditions for prosperity and progress.

(*Culture and Imperialism*, P107)

The statement also describes how industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century was seen as a new hope and even freedom for the people. Capital enabled people to exist outside the social class, which they were born in feudalistic England. Most importantly, it describes how “education” plays a significant role in creating and maintaining this social order creating barriers between white men and the natives. Colonization enabled capitalism to reach regions outside the West, and was kept in place through various institutions such as religion, industry, and education. According to Marlene Dixon, “...capital leaves not the tiniest corner of society free from its domination.” She describes in her essay “*The Subjugation of Women Under Capitalism: The Bourgeois Morality*” how it was responsible for shaping families, and therefore motherhood:

To capital, the family is the economic unit charged with the production and reproduction of labour power. Women’s labour power and reproductive power – the bearing and rearing of children – have economic meaning in the necessary production of capital’s essential commodity. It is clear that capital views motherhood purely in terms of commodity production, as the source of the future labour pool. Women’s reproductive capacities are supervised by the state because capital needs to regulate population, to control production of the product, children. These future proletarians exist only to be exploited, to labour for the entire span of their productive lives to increase capital accumulation, and to be discarded into impoverished old age when they have been used up.

Doris Lessing’s confrontations with her immediate surroundings begin from the time she was a child. The nursery room in Kermanshah, decorated in the conventional Victorian style, is paired with her mother’s powerful presence. She describes her mother’s comings and goings, which were largely impulsive and uncontrolled by her children’s needs, as they had nurses in attendance. One of the nurses described is Marta, who had doted on “Baby” as her younger brother used to be called, but had only rough treatment for the infant Lessing. She describes the intensity of these figures, paired with the infant’s experience that fades with memory: “...our lives are governed by voices, caresses, and threats we cannot remember.” (*Under My Skin*, P20)

Doris Lessing had been exposed to the might of the Empire since infancy; her father had been a government employee at the Imperial Bank of Tehran, a branch which was first established in 1885 and continued operating with its legal centre in London, till 1979, after which it became the HSBC Bank Middle East Limited. Maude Taylor had led the life of a socialite, all glitz and glamour, frequenting banquets and dinner parties. Doris Lessing describes her first childhood memory of when she was under two years old:

...it is of an enormous dangerous horse towering up, up, and on it my father still higher, his head and shoulders somewhere in the sky. There he sits with his wooden leg always there under his trousers, a big hard slippery hidden thing. I am trying not to cry, while being lifted up in tight squeezing hands, and put in front of my father's body...I am inside the heat...the smell of horse, the smell of my father, all hot pungent smells.

(*Under My Skin*, P18)

Doris Lessing, before the age of two, is already confronted with her father's presence as the ultimate authority, as an Imperial authority striking a classic figure on his horse, an animal of transport that was necessary for many of the conquests of the British Empire. Of her parents' recollection of the incident, they declare Lessing had "absolutely loved it". Lessing's recollections of early childhood are vivid and largely unpleasant, which contradicts those of her parents about her – "Small children are always trying to keep things in their proper places, their world is always coming apart, things in it move about, deceive, lie." (*Under My Skin*, P19)

The "lies" and "deceptions", administered by the voices which "govern their lives" is expressed through Lessing's protagonist, Martha, as the anger and feeling of betrayal causes her to leave home. The adolescent Martha (the novel *Martha Quest*, is autobiographical where the character is based on Lessing at that age) is not too different from the infant in Kermanshah as she cries in protest, and struggles to be free from the grips of her domineering mother. Simone de Beauvoir describes this physical presence of a domineering world in her essay, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947):

The child's situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees.⁶

The child can pursue his own goals and be taken seriously by his peers, but his actions and feelings have no relevance to the adult world outside him. The child's life, as illustrated by the essay, thus becomes a waiting period until the time comes where he is allowed to be part of the world and help shape his own life.

In regard to the Freudian development of the child, the 'id' is fully developed at birth. Doris Lessing's first memory is one that explains the course of the author's life and her actions. The reaction and reason is expressed in its simplest form at this stage; disgust and fear of the towering man and the horse, as well as the invisible hands that push her towards them. Fear, in its simplest definition, is caused by the representation of the object. The representation of this fear is expressed in numerous other forms throughout the author's brief life in Kermanshah; the invisible hands holding her up against her will during potty training, with the voices coaxing her to obey; the potty that remains throughout her life as a testament to the surrender of her will; the same insistent voice that commands her to 'love' her brother. "An intense physicality," explains Lessing, "that is the truth of childhood." (*Under My Skin*, P 18)

The violence in recollection and memory in Lessing's childhood is reflected throughout her life, and the feelings they evoke are not different from those when she was a child. Her feelings for her mother that induced her to leave home, came up again through relating parallel incidents to her memories: the voices of the members of the Left Book Club, associated with their age, is comparable to the floating voices that dominated her childhood. The title of the series, "*Children of Violence*" indicates this tone set for an entire generation. As Doris Lessing

⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. New York: Citadel Press, 1949

explains the purpose of the novels in the series, she states that it is:

A study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective. The fact that no critic has seen this does not, of course, surprise me. as long as critics are as "sensitive", subjective, and uncommitted to anything but their own private sensibilities, there will be no body of criticism worth taking seriously in this country. At the moment our critics remind me a lot of Victorian ladies making out their library lists...⁷

Towards the end of *A Proper Marriage*, Martha Quest's marriage with Douglas Knowell dissolves. Having led a short life of a wife, mother, and suburban housewife socialite, she breaks free from these confines and immerses herself into a life of politics, or more aptly, ideological discussions. A child who had battled against her colonial mother's beliefs and way of life, her political struggle enabled her to not only free herself from her mother's points of view, but also to continue to fight a battle against them on a larger scale. According to Lynn Sukenick in *Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction*, Martha Quest's personality is shaped "out of her sense of difference from the woman who hovers uselessly in the margins of her life. Although it is in Martha's nature to behave sensibly, her common sense is reinforced by her desire to avoid the manipulative histrionics, the mindless tabulations of inconsequential matters, the cruel helplessness, which seem to inform repeatedly the older woman's behavior."⁸ (P518.)

Martha Quest is repeatedly faced with an inner conflict where her reasoning and feeling are detached from each other. This dichotomous relationship between intellect and irrationality is not necessarily one of ideals and theories, and feelings, but rather one of self awareness against the way the world perceives her. In the first novel of the series, Martha Quest did not solely identify the problems around her as one of capitalist oppression, and in fact had no words to express her thoughts.

⁷ Lynn Sukenick, "Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction, (1973<) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207470>>

⁸ Ibid.

During such moments, the protagonist is filled with a feeling of hatred and contempt. Her life on the farm had exposed her to the numerous problems pervading South Africa, such as the treatment of the whites of the Africans. Doris Lessing describes in *Under My Skin* how as children, an African boy would fetch their shoes for them, and how she herself had bid them to do so (*Under My Skin* P73). The servants were addressed as “boy” even when they were adult or elderly men. The only one in the family opposed to this system was her father, who treated the servants in a friendly manner, as evident in his relationship with Old Smoke (*Under My Skin* P74). Her clashes with her mother led her to believe the opposite of what her mother did, gathering ideas from the books that were available at home. However, once Doris Lessing had left home at the age of fourteen, she lived the life of an average city girl in Salisbury; going to work during the day and attending parties in the evening. This life has also been illustrated in *Martha Quest*. Thus, both writer and character had undergone a process of conforming to social pressure, before rebelling against the social values around them.

This feeling of the need to conform is described by Doris Lessing in a quote adapted from Idries Shah at the beginning of *Walking in the Shade*:

The individual, and groupings of people, have to learn that they cannot reform society in reality, nor deal with others as reasonable people, unless the individual has learned to locate and allow for the various patterns of coercive institutions, formal and also informal, which rule him. No matter what his reason says, he will always relapse into obedience to the coercive agency while its pattern is with him.

Having read newspapers that dealt with contemporary problems such as *The New Statesman*, Martha Quest was able to organize her dilemma into the jargon of the newspapers, which slowly moulded itself into Communist vocabulary. Politics, helped her to deal with ideas she had harboured since childhood. Her attitude towards Africans was unprejudiced, and Doris Lessing describes the women's parties in her suburban home with her first husband as such:

When I did go to a women's party I found myself unable to keep quiet about what I thought. It was known I had all these dangerous ideas...but what ideas? They were more a welter of emotion. Sometimes, when I am interviewed, I am asked, How was it, brought up as you were, that you understood the society you lived in? The reply is, I didn't...I still did not know how to describe what I was living in, only knew what I felt...

(*Under My Skin*, P244)

Thus the *Children of Violence* series is a sociological continuous novel that explains, as she repeatedly claims in her autobiography, the *zeitgeist* of the times. *A Ripple from the Storm* and *Landlocked* describe the political situation that had gripped society and dominated people's lives. Conservative people had been dominated by fear directed towards the Africans and what they were capable of; anger and disgust at the Reds who were traitors to the white society; while younger people directed hope towards communism; and over every thing there was the war. Doris Lessing writes in *Walking in the Shade*:

I have been tempted to write a chapter headed "Politics", so that it could be skipped by people who find the whole subject boring, but politics permeated everything then; the Cold War was a poisonous miasma. And yet it is hard from present perspectives to make sense of a way of thinking I now think was lunatic...I am talking of a generation, and we were part of some kind of social psychosis or mass self-hypnosis...a generation or so later, people must say, But how *could* you believe...whatever it was? (P60)

Doris Lessing describes Communism as a "religion" that people had clung onto during the 1930s-

What communism inherited was not merely the fervours but a landscape of goodies and baddies, the saved and the unredeemed. We inherited the mental framework of Christianity. Hell: capitalism; all bad. A Redeemer, all good – Lenin, Stalin, Mao. Purgatory: you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs (lagers, concentration camps, and the rest). Then paradise...then heaven...then Utopia.

(*Walking In The Shade*, P61)

A Ripple from the Storm, which marks the first few years of Martha Quest's involvement in politics, during the Second World War, brings a change to the protagonist's bearing. In *Martha Quest*, she is observed to be an irate, hostile girl in the first chapter, and *A Proper Marriage*, reveals a Martha tired from the unpleasant heat, and "unresponsive...not so much from listlessness as from a stubborn opposition." However, the third novel in the series opens to a composed environment where the protagonist is "affectionate" and "devoted", as a result of her "service in public causes of one kind or another." Another scene takes place in the novel, where

...Jasmine and Martha...both their minds were so occupied with visions of the future that the fact that their lovers were leaving them in an hour seemed unimportant, even proof of their belief that the time was coming soon when pain would cease to exist...Each saw an ideal town, clean, noble and beautiful, soaring up over the actual town they saw...The ragged child was already a citizen of this ideal town, co-citizens with themselves; they watched him out of sight around the corner smiling: it was as if they had touched him with their hands in friendship."

-*A Ripple from the Storm* (P40).

This image of the ideal town accompanied by the feeling of exaltation is reminiscent of paintings of saints, content and beatific. The sufferings of the present evil only makes them purer and elevated, and ideologies of togetherness, equality, and brotherhood regardless of race and class is quite similar to the basic ideas found in religion. Martha, who had previously been easily ruffled by other people's comments, is now rarely irritated. Living with an interfering old woman named Mrs. Carson who is senile, possibly schizophrenic, and an extreme bigot, Martha doesn't seem to be perturbed by the old landlady's attitude:

Collecting herself to face Mrs. Carson was not an effort, for charity's sake, to sink herself in the sick woman's private world, but rather an effort to test her own vision of the world against the other. Mrs. Carson, she told herself, was the product of a certain kind of society, and the Mrs. Carsons would cease to exist when that society came to an end.

A Ripple from the Storm (P32)

In *Under My Skin*, shortly before joining the Communist Party, Doris Lessing describes an encounter with Dorothy Schwartz, the woman after whom the character Jasmine was modeled, about how she “hated her life, ‘white civilization’, women’s tea parties. I did not say I hated my husband, only that he was reactionary.” The term “reactionary” has been applied to the bourgeoisie regardless of their stature, from Frank or Douglas, the parents, to the Maynards and the people in the judiciary and other positions in the government. It is used in a condescending manner, critical at the same time forgiving. It also divides the society into the external from which they are separate, like the two towns they often dream about, one idyllic, and one sordid; one existing in ideas, the other in reality. It operates in their speech rather like a curse word, like calling someone a “Trotskyite” (*A Ripple from the Storm*, P49-50).

When Doris Lessing wrote *Under My Skin* and *Walking In the Shade*, she had fallen out with Communism and had become more of a humanist. She describes the phenomena of “organization” and why people join political parties despite having no inclination to do so. In England, years after her stint with the “homemade” Communist party in Southern Rhodesia, she joins the British Communist Party. She describes this move as the “most neurotic act of her life”, as by then her doubts were “a steady, private torment” because of the unveiling of truths of the horrors of the Stalin regime, the crimes and deaths which had put Hitler’s Holocaust in the shade (P43 *Walking in the Shade*). She had joined as a blind follower of the “zeitgeist” of the times, when capitalism was ‘evil’ and communism was the ‘only answer’.

Doris Lessing describes her recruitment, and also those of other people, in the following words:

Seldom can the whirligigs of time have brought about, so fast and so completely, such a re-shaping of ideas. Above all, behind it is the assumption that people became Communists after studying half a dozen party programmes, side by side on a table in front of them: ‘Shall I join the Labour Party?’ ‘No, I think Huggins’ United Party...’...People became Communists because of cynicism about their own governments- that, first. Because they had fallen in love with a Communist- as Gottfried Lessing did. Because they were taken to a Party rally and were swept away by mass emotion...Because they had a taste for heroics or suffering...In my case it was because for the first time in my life I was meeting a group of people who read everything, and

who did not think it remarkable to read, and among whom thoughts about the Native Problem I had scarcely dared to say aloud...I became a Communist because of the spirit of the times, because of the Zeitgeist.

-*Under My Skin* (P259)

In the beginning of *A Ripple from the Storm*, Doris Lessing inserts a quotation by Louis Aragon, a French Communist who staunchly remained one all his life:

There is no passion for the absolute without the accompanying frenzy of the absolute. It is always accompanied by a certain exaltation, by which it may be first recognized and which is always working on the growing point, the focal point of destruction, at the risk of making it appear, to such as have not been warned, that the passion for the absolute is the same as a passion for unhappiness.

This 'focal point of destruction' is associated with a number of meanings at the time; on a political scale, it is the idea of revolution- to destroy the existing system and replacing it with a new, better one. On a humanistic scale, it is the sudden natural disposition towards suffering, a destructive state of mind that is closely tied with the environment. This passion for unhappiness revolved around Martha Quest's, as well as the author's life, starting with the parents who had experienced the First World War, and subsequently the generations that followed. Doris Lessing describes in *Walking in the Shade* how the First World War had brought about a disdain for government:

The children of the soldiers of the First World War were brought up not only on bitter disillusion, and loss of respect for their own governments, but a feeling of being participants in an understanding denied to an unheeding, ignorant majority...it is likely that when young people became communists in the late thirties, flinging themselves into the war in Spain, it was because a pattern was being repeated. They were joining soldiers who were being betrayed. For the democratic governments, France and Britain, refused to come to the aid of the beleaguered Spanish democratic government.

(*Walking In The Shade*, P266)

This bitter disillusion and loss of respect is an echo of Lessing's childhood feelings of betrayal, which recurred throughout her adolescence and early adulthood as violent emotions without explanation or words. Her father describes how the English and German soldiers were "fooled" and betrayed. After a visit to Germany after the Second World War, after years of associating Germany with Nazism, Doris Lessing describes her experience as

...full of conflict. I had been brought up on the First World War, and a good part of that was my father's passionate identification with the ordinary German soldiers, who were victims of their stupid government, just like the Tommies. I had been married to a refugee from Hitler's Germany. I had been brought up to believe that Hitler and the Nazis were a direct result of the Versailles Treaty...I believed- and still do- that the Second World War would have been prevented if we, Britain and France, had had the guts to stand up to Hitler early and had supported the anti-Nazi Germans, whom we consistently snubbed...I was divided, sorry for the Germans, and yet...still reminded me of the fear I felt in the war, though I believed this reaction to be stupid and irrational...standing on a railway platform in Berlin and realizing that every person on it was a cripple from the War-I said to myself, Enough, stop tormenting yourself...What good does it do to me-or the Germans?

(Walking in the Shade, P58-59)

The Communist Party in Southern Rhodesia had been set up with the help of Jackie Bolton, while attending a general annual apolitical meeting that dealt with various organizations involved in helping countries affected by the war. Jackie Bolton had stood up to ask why a particular Marxist magazine should not be published. The members in charge of the meeting were challenged and forced to resign, and thus the Communist party was formed as a means of giving their group a purpose in a place made of many other individual groups. The other members of the group, with the exception of Anton Hesse and Andrew McGrew, who had been members of the Communist Party, were inspired to join, despite having no knowledge of Communism and its policies. The organization included instruction in Communist ideas.

This Communist group is different from the British Communist Party Doris Lessing describes in her autobiographies and in *The Golden Notebook*. The lack of political experience enables questions to be asked more from a humanistic point of view rather than intellectual. The members raise questions about issues around them, even everyday and commonplace ones. Jimmy criticizes his female comrades' appearance:

"All of you- lipstick and red nails and fashion magazines. That's not communist. Women should be respected and not behave like...well, I can't bring myself to say like what... You think it's enough just to smile and put lipstick on...I've got no time for any girl who messes herself up with paint and plaster." (*A Ripple from the Storm*, P158)

The group, who had found an alternative family in this organization of shared ideas, eventually begins to break up. The group's leader, Anton Hesse, admired for his experience and integrity, slowly becomes the butt of group member's jokes, for his dedication and adherence to strict Communist ideas. Jimmy begins to rebel against Anton by presenting ideas which confuse the entire group:

"He lowered his paper slightly and gazed about him aggressively: "We're all the same as each other," he said.

"Well, go on," said Anton calmly, Everyone looked puzzled.

'Well,' said Jimmy, frowning at his piece of paper, momentarily at a loss, as if he had expected them to disagree. 'That's not all. That's not all by a long chalk.'

'But I don't see the point,' said Marjorie. 'I mean, we all know that, so what's the point of passing resolutions?'

(*A Ripple from the Storm*, P152)

The other members of the party begin to follow suit and Elias Phiri, an African member who had joined the Communist Party, stops Jimmy in the middle of his declarations to ask, " "You are saying...that racial prejudice is created by capitalism...?...I just wanted to be sure: the communists say racial prejudice is created by capitalism." He had said, 'the communists' as if he wasn't one of them".

Tommy, the youngest member of the group criticizes them for being a discussion group instead of a group who act on what they "believe": "There's something wrong. We say, we don't believe in inequality, we don't believe in the colour bar and all that. But when it gets down to it, we take a decision to behave like everyone else. We say, Don't let's upset people...when Comrade Jimmy there...likes a girl from the Coloured Quarter, then we say no. Because it would make people say bad things about communists. But it seems to me there is something wrong with it all.'

Doris Lessing describes in *Walking in the Shade* how major literary works were often ridiculed or dismissed for being bourgeois. Writers and poets such as T.S. Eliot, George Orwell, and so on were dismissed on this ground. The attitude towards literature is prominent in *A Ripple From The Storm*, as the comrades had to "study, study, study" in order to become true Communists. Writers and books such as Tolstoy's "War and Peace" were given to those with no prior experience of literature. Tommy in particular, struggles to understand the vocabulary used in the book, and understands even less the ideas in it. This creates another outburst in the meeting, as Tommy's lack of experience and understanding causes him to believe his group members, particularly the women, who have come from colonial, white middle-class backgrounds are too bourgeois:

"...I watched Jasmine the other day, reading, I thought about the way she reads books. It was just another book to her. Because she's read so many books, don't you see? I asked her about the book she was reading and she said: It's a useful description of reactionary circles in Paris. Then she said: But it's a bad book. Don't you see, I wouldn't know if it was bad or not. It's just a book. When I read this stuff here...it makes me feel...I couldn't say: This is a useful description...it's just snobbish where you and Jasmine say things like that."

(*A Ripple from the Storm*, P 94)

Relating to the characters in the book on a humane level, Tommy realizes he would be as "reactionary" as some of the characters if he had been there. His feelings towards the colored people in Africa do not change, despite his logic telling him they are people, and ought to have equal rights. Another group of people with different attitudes towards communism are the British

working class. Their accents separate them from the other British classes alone. Doris Lessing writes about how during her first years, she was able to speak to any working man and attend their pubs as freely, just because of her Rhodesian accent. As the years went by and she had adapted to the English accent, her interactions with the people around her also change. She describes an incident that took place years after moving to England:

With another man, also ex-RAF, I went into a pub in Bayswater. It was the public bar. We stood at the counter, ordered drinks. All around the walls, men sat watching us. They were communing without words. One got up, slowly, deliberately, came to us, and said, 'You don't want to be here (rather, 'ere). That's your place. Pointing at the private bar. We meekly took ourselves there, joining our peers, the middle class. Foreigners, returning natives, complain about the class system, but the British say- both classes- You don't understand us, and continue as before. The working classes, the lower classes, have internalized their station in life.

(*Walking In The Shade*, P62)

This "internalization" of social class is integral to Marxist understanding of society, leading to the use of the phrase, "class system" and "capitalism" which dominates Marxist thought. Lessing's experience with the class-system drove her to join the Communist Party in Britain, despite her doubts. The "mind-set" of the times drove people to believe Communism would be the cure of all evils. In 1933, Sigmund Freud delivered a lecture on the concept of *Weltanschauung*, which is, in a nutshell

...an intellectual construction which gives a unified solution of all the problems of our existence in virtue of a comprehensive hypothesis, a construction, therefore, in which no question is left open and in which everything in which we are interested finds a place. It is easy to see that the possession of such a *Weltanschauung* is one of the ideal wishes of mankind. When one believes in such a thing, one feels secure in life, one knows what one

ought to strive after, and how one ought to organise one's emotions and interests to the best purpose.⁹

Weltanschauung is essentially a world view, and how we perceive and comprehend things. The language, philosophy, norms, etc, are what helps us understand the world around us, and what we depend on. Freud asserts that *Weltanschauung* has a purely emotional basis, upon which intellectual theories and systems are formed. In Martha Quest's time, that is the early twentieth century, was a time that rejected old ideals and searched for newer meanings. Thus comes in the power of the *zeitgeist*, or, how people thought.

In her autobiographies, Doris Lessing inserts small extracts titled, *How We Were Thinking: The Zeitgeist*, which consists of factual accounts of the conditions of the time. The autobiographies span the author's life from childhood to adulthood, into the 1990's. She describes how issues that had gripped nations as a whole, ceased to exist towards the end of the fifties or the beginning of the sixties. In *Walking in the Shade*, she describes this as "turning into their opposites"- people who were once communists became very good businessmen later in their lives, after suffering through the breakdown of their beliefs. Ruins of war and decades of bad food were replaced by Indian restaurants and cafes, and London now is a hubbub activity and trade.

Towards the end of *A Ripple from the Storm*, Martha meets Mrs. Van der Bylt, who had headed the formal left Socialist Democratic Part in Southern Rhodesia. *Landlocked* describes in detail Martha's participation with Mrs. Van, and the fall of Communism. Communism, which had failed as an ideological movement in *A Ripple of the Storm*, was completely finished in the next novel of the series. Another problem persisted which was ignored by the Communists- it was necessary for the Africans to learn who their white "masters" really were, and how they fell under centuries of subjugation, to erase the generations of beliefs instilled in them by the Imperials. Unlike other colonies occupied by England, Africa did not have its own documented

⁹ Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1933

<<<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/at/freud.htm>>

history or literature. The Socialist Democratic Party decided to undo the past by a retelling of events that had occurred in their region. Johnny Lindsay, a member of the party who was sickly and dying, took it upon himself to describe his experiences as a boy fighting in the Rand, with Martha Quest given the responsibility to transcribe the events on paper. The group later fell under suspicion- to the Africans, they were just another group of white people preaching their policies. Later Rhodesia became an independent state, called Zimbabwe. Doris Lessing describes in *Walking in the Shade* how African leaders had their own way of becoming noted political figures in their own countries:

For a time I saw a good bit of Joshua Nkomo, now a leader of Zimbabwe. He was putting in that obligatory term in London, for future African leaders, of hand-to-mouth living and fearful thoughts for the future. In his case with good reason, for he was to spend ten years in Southern Rhodesia in an internment camp as bleak and as awful, without books and newspapers, as a prison sentence on the moon.

(P279)

Doris Lessing had continued to be active in the Communist Party until the late '50s. The last novel in the series describe her move to England and her new life there, which continues with a close observation of world events as described in *Walking In The Shade*. Communism made a re-emergence during the 1960s, when it became fashionable rather than dangerously political to declare oneself as a Communist.

Chapter Three

Experience and Being: Beyond The Zeitgeist

The *Four-Gated City* is the last installment of the series that describes Martha Quest's move to England. The novel describes the whirlwind of change during the post-war period up to the 1990s. The novel, published in 1969, contains a lot of science fiction elements regarding its feelings about the future, as well as the changes in the protagonist. The setting is comparable to Doris Lessing's novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), which describes the life of Anna Wulf, a writer and single mother, living in London through the 50's. Doris Lessing had worked on both novels at the same time, and had set them both in the contemporary London she was living in. *The Four-Gated City* bears no relation to the author's life, and is a vessel that portrays the writer's perceptions of the time and people around her. Martha Quest had left Rhodesia, after parting amiably with Anton Hesse. Doris Lessing too settled in London after parting from Gottfried Lessing, but the two bore a child together, Peter Lessing. Doris Lessing had taken Peter along with her after her second marriage ended, and lived her life in London as a writer and single mother. This turn in her life is quite similar to that of Anna Wulf, the protagonist of the *Golden Notebook*. The novels, particularly the *Four-Gated City*, are quite different in tone and matter from the other novels in the *Children of Violence* series, and the character undergoes a dramatic transformation.

In the beginning of *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing states the purpose of her autobiography: self defense (P11). She describes the impact and the magnitude first memories can have on a person's life- in the case of Martha Quest, those first impressions were what governed the course of her life, and what she had continued to react against for much of her adult life. She opens with a historical background of her family, beginning with her grandparents,

constructed from the memories of her parents. The purpose of the autobiography is also one that is born out of urgency, a need for the retelling of events. *Walking in the Shade* is more a historical account of England and Africa, the political changes in the world as seen through the writer's eyes and experiences. History, as she describes in the second chapter of *Under My Skin*, is born out of memory, and important people and events have been dropped from history because they have been "rejected by memory." Doris Lessing also explains another way memory is used to alter history:

Often, reading histories, there are events which stick out, do not make enough sense, and one may deduce the existence of some lunatic, male or female, who was equipped with the fiery stuff of inspiration-but was quickly forgotten, since always and at all times the past gets tidied up and made safer.

(*Under My Skin*, P12)

And most importantly:

Women often get dropped from memory, and then history.

(*Under My Skin*, P12)

The art of memory and forgetting in Doris Lessing's second volume in her autobiography appears as a series of destruction and re-constructions. The rubble from the war, the poor food and unfashionable clothes and the importance of survival over involvement in politics in Britain were replaced by the new metropolitan London, multicultural restaurants and youngsters who were obsessed with fashion. Things once feared became chic and fashionable from the '60s

onwards. The later generation, labeled the “angry young men,” was talked of in the media and newspapers. Television was invented during the fifties, and celebrities and stars found a new platform for their stardom.

The *Four-Gated City* finds Martha a woman in her thirties, trying to find a place to live in war-struck London. The people she had associated with in the beginning were all survivors of the war, concerned about nothing except the next meal on the table. The working class, for whom Doris Lessing, as well as her Communist protagonists, had fought for, had compromised and were enjoying the new wealth. Doris Lessing and her protagonist Martha Quest found shelter with the working class, living with them as one family, and it was clear it didn't matter if they wouldn't leave. This strikes a different picture from the way the small communist group in Rhodesia perceived them; Doris Lessing mentions in *Walking in the Shade* that many of these working class families still voted for the Conservative Party, and were as much class conscious as the upper class citizens (P62). Doris Lessing lived her own rooms and flats London, paying her own rent and providing her own food. She had help from nobody. This is the independence which is missing in Martha Quest's life in London.

Throughout the series, we observe a number of men who had a direct influence in Martha Quest's life. The first being Solly and Joss Cohen, who had lived nearby on the farm, and who were responsible for “educating” Martha. Her life in the city involved a string of affairs, which gradually led to her marriage with Douglas Knowell. Her introduction to politics began with the arrival of RAF soldiers, one of whom she was romantically involved with, and later introduced to the organizations that were active at the time. Her stint at the Communist Party involved another marriage with Anton Hesse, the leader of the group, and her arrival in London led her to Jack, an amorous sailor who treats sex as a way of life. Martha's development throughout the

novels has been shaped by men. This influence kept her from identifying with other women, particularly her mother. She was critical of overt emotional expression:

Martha watched herself in the growth of an extraordinarily unpleasant and upsetting emotion, a self mockery, a self parody, as if she both allowed herself an emotion she did not approve of, allowed it and enjoyed it, but at the same time cancelled it out by mockery. "...It's as if somewhere inside me there was a big sack of greasy tears and if a pin were stuck into me they'd spill out..."

(A Ripple from the Storm, p226).

This aversion towards emotional feeling had made it possible to stay away from her daughter, having convinced herself that she was doing it for her good. Succumbing to a feeling is tantamount to losing one's sanity, the opposite of rationality and the exercise of the intellect. This is seen throughout Doris Lessing's novels: Martha Quest coldly witnesses the breakdown of the characters around her, strangely distant from herself, and she notes how women "who are at twenty the liveliest, the most intelligent, the most promising" (*Landlocked* P205) become neurotic in their thirties, thus losing their personalities. In *Landlocked*, Martha thinks of a "lit space on to which, unless she was careful...emotions would walk like actors and begin to speak without (apparently) any prompting from her. (P28). Later she thinks of this stage again, the threatening "emotions she could not give soil and roots within herself." (P113).

A similar process of understanding one's self is seen in the *Golden Notebook*, where intellect is a sort of defense mechanism for Anna Wulf: "She could....feel that intelligence there at work, defensive and efficient-a machine. And she thought: this intelligence, it's the only barrier between me and...cracking up." (*The Golden Notebook*, P395).

Martha's mother, Mrs. Quest, is a woman given to bouts of Victorian sensibility. Her reactions and emotions to Martha become overly-dramatic, and feared by her. Martha Quest continuously freezes herself against her mother's litanies, and get satisfaction for her work. Her new life in Salisbury at first needed no intellectual motive as the lifestyle, and the initiative it had taken for her to move seemed adequate to remove herself from her mother. In the first novel, *Martha Quest*, the battles between her and her mother had been about clothes and appearance; once she had moved to the city, she applied great pains and effort to dress herself in the way she desired. However, further interaction with the colonials around her enabled her to see her mother was a product of a certain time, and therefore her "enemy" had taken new shape. Her attractions towards Communism, although having little understanding of it, was that it had been a way of life, a way of thinking and feeling, which would destroy capitalism, the world her mother had been brought up in.

In *A Ripple from the Storm*, Martha Quest comes across Mrs. Van, a woman who leads the Socialist Democratic Party in Southern Rhodesia. Mrs. Van, an upper class woman married early to a rich lawyer, decides early on that "it was emotion...she must ban from her life. Emotion was dangerous, it could destroy her." (P194). Mrs. Van later becomes a mentor for Martha, who finds it comforting to be in the presence of this woman old enough to be her mother. In *The Four-Gated City*, one of the few possessions Martha had with her was a thick coat which had been given to her by "Mrs. Van der Bylt, out of concern (so Martha accepted it) because of Martha's refusal to believe just how terrible the English climate was. But really the old woman was giving Martha much more than a coat when she handed the young woman about to leave, the thick black matronly garment..." (P14). Martha's admiration for this woman is thus

not unfounded, finding similarities in each other, as well as the older woman's competence which had certainly made great changes in African history.

The Four-Gated City is a different novel in the aspect that later on in the book, Martha consciously forces these suppressed emotions to surface, and allows them to drive her mad. The suppression of feelings had made her body mechanical; a tool used for efficiency; in *A Ripple from the Storm*, Martha falls ill and was unable to attend some of the Communist meetings, an impediment of great distress as sickness called the attention of one's mother. In *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing describes how, when ill, she would plead for her mother's attention "come cuddle me, mummy!" (P126). In *Martha Quest*, we observe the protagonist accusing her mother for making her ill. Doris Lessing describes in the first volume of her autobiography how, in the wilderness of Southern Rhodesia, her mother had tried to keep both children indoors, particularly her son, and one of the ways for doing so was to convince them they were not well. Being healthy was a way of not needing her mother, and emotions were something that affected the body physically. In *The Four-Gated City*, her "experiment" with Linda resulted in her starving herself of food and drink for days, as making herself weak that way was necessary to make herself vulnerable to emotions and irrationality.

Anna Wulf in the *Golden Notebook* describes her life and thoughts in four notebooks separated by color; an attempt to rationalize her life and thoughts, a process of compartmentalising her life. All these notebooks add to the golden notebook. The *Golden Notebook* led to widespread fame and attention for Doris Lessing amongst feminists, and women found the book emotionally harrowing to Doris Lessing's immense surprise, who had written the novel deliberately, rationally. The author states clearly in her autobiography that she had never endured a breakdown in her life, but had witnessed others, such as her parents, friends, and so

on, go through it, and these were what had inspired some of the details in her novels. She also says that she considers *The Golden Notebook*, hailed as a feminist bible and one of the greatest novels written, an utter failure as it was received quite differently from what she had meant it to be.

The two novels were being written at the same time, and Doris Lessing had completed and published *The Golden Notebook* first, seven years before *The Four-Gated City*. Thus many things in the two novels overlap thematically, while being completely different in terms of the elements being used. Martha Quest finds a job as a secretary/housekeeper in a mansion owned by Mark Coldridge, whereas Anna is a writer in London, financially independent and raising a child. Both novels explore the mental condition of schizophrenia. Martha Quest's irrationality was triggered by the arrival of her mother. Anna Wulf's breakdown was a result of being disconnected from her surroundings, and eventually her work. Both women been to a psychiatrist to explore the cause of their mental breakdown and to learn how to deal with them best; Martha Quest's therapist attempted to help work out her issues with her mother, and Anna Wulf's therapist determined one of the factors of Anna's state is writer's block. Doris Lessing, who had gone to a therapist, a Mrs. Sussman (Anna Wulf's therapist is Mrs. Marks, based on Mrs. Sussman), had helped her deal with both issues, which, when combined, gives a more complicated menu of causes and effects. However, when each is separated into its own component, the results are different, and lead to different narratives.

This thus raises the question, how separate is the author from her works? Out of the two volume in her autobiography, the first (*Under My Skin*) bears a strong resemblance to the novels written about that time – *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, and *A Ripple from the Storm*. The

second volume in the autobiography series bears no resemblance to the most powerful of her novels- *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four Gated City*.

One of the most remarkable things about the *Golden Notebook* is its structure. Anna's "schizophrenia" is contained in the four different notebooks, separated in an attempt to rationalize disparate experiences and emotions. Another is, as pointed out by Joseph Hynes, the relationship between Anna as the writer-editor, and Doris Lessing as the writer-editor, thus the question of "who" addresses the reader becomes a mystery and is open to multiple analysis. Another aspect about the novel that brings about more complications are the "four Annas" in each notebook. The black notebook, which contains details about her career and her book, *Frontiers of War* uses her own voice to address herself, but changes the names of other characters. For example, she does not give the real name of her husband, Janet's father, in the black notebook. In the yellow notebook, she projects a fictional version of herself, Ella, a writer in London like herself, who is working on a novel about a man about to commit suicide. In the red notebook, she describes her political experiences, her interactions with people involved politically, and her disillusionment with the British Communist Party. The blue notebook, which is a journal, describes Anna's day to day activities, her sessions with Mrs. Marks, her therapist, her passionate love affair with Michael, and raising her child, Janet. The four selves cannot reconcile with each other, and we see how there were only two paths Anna can see herself taking: a path of madness and schizophrenia, and one of apathy, not caring whether the identities meet.

It is only in *the Golden Notebook* that Anna finds, a "cure", or a "middle path". Her relationship with Saul enabled her to put all of herself in one notebook. Joseph Hynes raises the question of precisely who writes the "golden notebook":

When we ask who writes the golden notebook the answer is slippery but I think honest and inevitable, given the course of the later stretches of yellow and blue books: Anna and Saul both write the golden notebook- as Anna-author shows us by leading off that notebook under Saul's epigraph, and as Anna-editor tells us, bracketedly, in closing out the notebook telling us that the handwriting changes from here to there...and summarizing the plot of Saul's novella together with information on how well it sold.¹⁰

If Saul contributed to the writing of the golden notebook, then he and Anna become the same self, each recognizing a cure in the other.

Doris Lessing speaks of Clancy Sigal, a young American tenant who lodged in her house for quite a while when she was living in Warwick Road, Doris Lessing describes how he had disturbed her, that he "was a mirror of everything I was beginning to be uneasy about in myself. Only beginning- and that is the difficulty." (*Walking in the Shade*, P170). Clancy Sigal, was also quite ill when he had first arrived, and Lessing subsequently became a sort of psychotherapist for him. Clancy Sigal was much younger than Lessing, and he was a diligent Trotskyist who adhered to his ideals, even during a time when old members of Communism and other Left Politics were questioning their ideals and beliefs. The house in Warwick Road, was the place she had written *The Golden Notebook* in, and the living room where she worked downstairs provided the setting for Anna's working space. The details of the room are identical. Doris Lessing had decorated the

¹⁰ Hynes, Joseph. "The Construction of "The Golden Notebook". *The Iowa Review*. Vol. 4, No. 3.(Summer, 1973), pp. 100-113, < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20158084>>

place using unconventional methods for her time, such as white paint, dark floors, and the black trestle table. Clancy Sigal had come into her life at a time when she was beginning to be fed up with the romanticism attached to Communism, despite the Twentieth Congress, and found herself agreeing with Clancy's political beliefs. He also had, she describes, an understanding for women, "not as females, but of our situation, our difficulties. This was because of his mother's long ordeal, bringing him up, very poor, without help from his father... Women easily responded to him. In the *Golden Notebook* I call it 'naming'. He 'named' us. Every woman he ever met he got into bed, or tried... when he left the next morning they would feel themselves supported..." (*Walking In the Shade*, P173) Despite his influence over the author's life, to her he was just a man "passing through" (P174). This aspect is different in *The Golden Notebook*, where the author's schizophrenia is concluded in the golden notebook, which makes it difficult to understand if it was a transient phase or the culmination of all the fragmented pieces.

The notion of reality in the *Golden Notebook* is distorted and confusing- reading about each character, we never know what really happened as the facts seem to change throughout the novel. In fact, slight discrepancies were also found in some instances in the *Children of Violence* series. For one, the author sometimes calls the character Jackie Bolton "Jackie Cooper" a couple of times, including the first paragraph of the opening chapter in *A Ripple from the Storm*. In the *Golden Notebook*, which covered a time period from 1951-1957, the first part, titled "Free Women", Tommy is twenty years old, whereas in 1950 he is seventeen in one of the notebooks. At the end of the "Free Women" sections we are told that Tommy goes to Sicily with Marion, his step mother, whereas in the notebooks, he is married to a girl. Doris Lessing describes the *Golden Notebook* as a 'carefully structured' narrative which is entirely fictional,

despite many readings of the novel as a disguised biography. The divisions between art and reality, fact and fiction, has barriers that are blurred and indistinct.

The Four-Gated City, the last novel in the *Children of Violence* series features its protagonist who has no associations with the Communist Party in Britain, having fallen out of it in Southern Rhodesia by the end of *A Ripple from the Storm*, after which she had joined the Socialist Democratic Party with Mrs. Van. She finds a home in Mark Coldridge's residence, an aristocratic man well known in London, who published a couple of novels later in the course of the narrative. Mark Coldridge, who was struggling to keep his marriage together, and be a father to his son, employed Martha to be his housekeeper and secretary. This alliance went on to last for years, and Martha became a surrogate parent for his and his brother's child, and became a matronly figure in the home, and her only appearances in public were as Mark's associate.

Martha Quest as a literary protagonist undergoes vast changes in this novel. In it, we recognize the changes of the time that had taken place during the 50's and 60's through the characters around her. Through Mark Coldridge we see the process of an artist at work as well as the changes he had undergone from an English aristocrat to being a Communist. Through his children Martha shows us the rise of a new generation. Through Lynda we come across the "experts" people had so much faith in at the time. *The Four-Gated City* contains the theme of change described by Doris Lessing in her autobiographies. However, unlike *The Golden Notebook*, which is a novel about finding identity in an environment of change, the *Children of Violence* series takes an entire society into perspective.

Lynn Sukenick in her analysis titled "*Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction*" describes how Martha ceases to become a character by the last novel in the series, and that the

“times” have taken over to become its own character. Doris Lessing states how writing autobiographies become problematic because while it is easy to write about oneself, it is hard to define oneself in relation to society. Doris Lessing justifies this by stating “I have been involved in a small way with big events”. Thus the *Four-Gated City* finds the protagonist split into many parts, while the character herself, Martha, becomes a void. In the beginning of the novel we encounter a man called Jack, a sailor who built himself a house in one of the ruins by the docks shortly after the war. His close brush with death enabled him to live a life of debauchery, where sex becomes a meaningful ritual that reveals to him the secrets of his life:

Martha, do you know what I've discovered-making love? I understood what hating is. You say all your life “I hate” “I love”. But then you discover hatred is a sort of wavelength you can tune into. After all, it's always there, hatred is simply part of the world, like one of the colours of the rainbow. You can go into it, as if it were a place. Well, right at the beginning when I was using sex to beat me hating my father, then I suddenly understood. If you can get beyond “I hate”-then you can find- there is hatred, always there. You can say I am going into hatred now, it's just a force. That's all...

(*The Four Gated City*, P69).

Jack's philosophical musings are not too different from Martha's projections during her time with Lynda in the basement of the Coldridge home. For each, schizophrenia is something undergone through physical means. For Jack it is sex, and when Martha meets him later in the novel upon deciding to leave the Coldridge home, she finds Jack who is neck deep in sadistic, exploitative sexual acts that involve luring innocent girls from the streets into his home, before “breaking” them to become prostitutes. Martha finds her way into places within herself she had

never known existed, through starving herself and not sleeping. Martha's mother, who had persuaded her daughter to take her in, despite knowing she had never got along with her daughter, was found in a dark room babbling curses about the "filthy whore" of a daughter shortly before she disappeared.

Martha Quest's schizophrenia is a radio transmitter where she receives signals from the world around her. In the end it allows her to hear other people's thoughts, and to know instinctively what happens in the world. Through deliberate exercises where she forces her memory to come back to her, she becomes one of the phases in time, between past present and future.

R.D. Laing¹¹ defined schizophrenia as how we experience the world, rather than how we react to it. Experience, as described in his book "*The Politics of Experience*", is the only evidence, the source of all theories, which therefore makes everything around us implausible and fictional, because 'experience' is invisible to us, and is manifested only in behavior. Psychology thus is a study of a person's behavior, rather than experience:

I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience used to be called The Soul. Experience as invisibility of man to man is at the same time more evident than anything. *Only* experience is evident. Experience is the *only* evidence. Psychology is the

¹¹ Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967

logos of experience. Psychology is the structure of the *evidence*, and hence psychology is the science of sciences.

If, however experience is evidence, how can one ever study the experience *of the other*? For the experience *of the other* is not evident to me, as it is not and never can be an experience of mine.

(The Politics of Experience, 1967)

Thus the term “schizophrenia” is just one of the many forms of experience. Schizophrenia similarly can be experienced in a number of ways. Psychology has equated schizophrenia to a state in which a person displays behavior of “split personalities” and is prone to hallucinations. Schizophrenia in *The Golden Notebook* is not an abnormal state that appears not abnormal, but the natural state of a being within the split society he lives in. This leads Laing to propose another question: “Can a man be his actual self with a man or woman?”- what is the result of an interaction where each person’s experience is invisible to the other? How effective is this communication, where none can stand before each other, naked in their entire selves?- “Is a personal relationship possible, or, are *persons possible* in our present situation?...Is love possible? Is freedom possible?” (Laing, 1967)

These questions are found to be explored in each of Anna Wulf’s notebooks. In the yellow notebook, we find a fictional version of Anna, named Ella. Ella’s life runs parallel to Anna’s, except for a few changes, such as the books that they are working on, as well as the sexes and names of their children. “Ella” is not “Anna”, but a manifestation of Anna as Anna experiences herself. Characters become more complex as the fictional Ella, is actually a factual

representation of Doris Lessing, the person who authored *The Golden Notebook* (*Walking in the Shade* P183). Similarly, the names of other characters were interchangeable in the four notebooks, but the protagonist's name is only altered in the yellow notebook. Likewise, Martha Quest is confronted by a shift in herself shortly after her arrival in London:

...she had made a discovery: 'Matty' was reborn...Somewhere early in her childhood, on that farm on the highveld, 'Matty' had been created by her as an act of survival. But why? In order to prevent herself from being-what? She could not remember...For some days now Martha had been shut inside this person, it was 'Martha' who intruded, walked into 'Matty', not the other way about...she felt, someone neither Martha, nor 'Matty.'

(*The Four-Gated City*, P12)

As Martha walks along the river, she stops to see her reflection, which appears to her as a 'blob among other blobs...A tiny entity among swarms: then down, back inside herself, to stand, arms on damp concrete: this was what she was, a taste or flavor of existence without a name.' When asked for her name, Martha had answered with 'Phyllis Jones', and in a train where 'the name did not evoke her', she had become someone called 'Alice Harris' (P26). Martha's alienation from herself is two-fold. The first, as a new-comer to London, there is nobody that knows her, and nobody that she knows. Laing's definition of a person: "I experience myself, identifiable...by myself and others, as experienced by and acted upon by others, who refer to that person I call "me" as "you" or "him", or grouped together as "one of us" or "one of them" or "one of you".'" (Laing, 1967) Thus "Matty" the foreigner, the stranger in England could be Alice or Phyllis or Matty or Martha, yet each personality will be experienced the same way by the people interacting with her, and 'Matty' or 'Alice' or 'Phyllis' or 'Martha' shall reciprocate accordingly.

Martha's alienation from herself at this point can be described as 'normal' in Laing's terms, i.e., the alienation from a normal person being that he acts more or less like everyone else. Lessing describes how her during her first few years in London, she was as part of the working class as much as everyone else, simply on account of her accent (*Walking in The Shade*, P44). Similarly Anna Wulf's alienation is mirrored in other characters around her as well. Whereas Martha's breakdown is gradual, "linear", a slow descent into "schizophrenic madness", Anna's breakdown is non-linear, and beyond what is even said in the novel. This could be due to the former novel being set in a more traditional narrative form, whereas in *The Golden Notebook*, the form of the novel is what gives us clues to the happenings in the story.

The alienation of an individual in society proves the core of many literary theories. Marxist schools of thoughts blamed capitalism for the alienation of man from his labor and society. In other works of literature, we find 'alienation' in other forms. For instance, T.S. Eliot's epic poem "The Waste land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" describe the futility of the individual set in modern society.

The alienation of everyone from everything is emphasized in Lessing's fiction and autobiographies, which, although tries to encapsulate "society-as-we-all-perceive-it", it still fails to incorporate different lives. In 1988 Tsitsi Dangarembga published a novel entitled *Nervous Conditions* which describe the life of a girl, coming-of-age in a village near Umtali, and her "escape" from her rustic farm home through being imparted Western education. The village was also quite close to where Lessing's farm home had been situated. A shadow of the protagonist, Tambu, is seen in *Walking in the Shade* where an African girl stays with Lessing for a short while when she just arrived in London:

Lucy was perhaps twenty, so clever she had attracted attention in some poor mission school in Southern Rhodesia, had been sent on a scholarship to a better one, and now found herself in gold-paved London, in a small room with grey rain slashing at the windows... She had come from a large family, sunlight, warmth, and a culture that did not understand the need for solitude. She was desperate with loneliness... Now my situation was that Peter had just gone to boarding school... I had a clear run of some weeks in front of me, and I planned to finish *A Ripple from the Storm*... and there was this unhappy girl hanging over the banisters... 'Look, Lucy, I spend a lot of time just pottering about, looking out of the window, sleeping a few minutes-do you see? This is how I write. Her wide anxious eyes fixed on my face: Is this the racial prejudice they warned me about? Is this white woman trying to snub me?...

(*Walking in the Shade*, P248)

Thus the nature of alienation is such that one is not only alienated from others, but alienates others from oneself as well.

The experience of feeling alienated is followed by a phase described as a "breakdown". This stage illustrates the process of "breaking down"; recognized as forms of psychopathological disease in the field of psychiatry. Laing's anti-psychiatric analysis identifies the procedure of breaking down into "madness" as such:

"Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest, and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of

mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for *anyone* before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love.”

The ratio of our experience is much higher than our capacity to think, and therefore, communicate. Laing describes “schizophrenia” and other forms of hysteria as “mechanisms” which alter our mode of experience. The human body in its natural state is a mechanism, one that is recognized by the activities of eating, sleeping, sex, excretion, bathing and many more that ensures our biosocial survival. In *The Four-Gated City* the schizophrenic breakdown is deliberate, one that involves the protagonist eschewing the bodily activities as described above, thus breaking down the barriers between the confines of thought and the openness of experience, as a result of which new heights of experience, with extra-sensory perception, can be achieved. Martha Quest locks herself up in the basement with Lynda, and later a house in solitude where she wills herself to break down. Anna Wulf follows through with this process by splitting herself into different fragments of her self into the notebooks. It is clear here that each schizophrenic experience is different though with some common modalities. Anna Wulf describes a barrier, one she identifies as ‘intellect’: “She could...feel that intelligence there at work, defensive and efficient-a machine. And she thought: this intelligence, it’s the only barrier between me and...cracking up” (*The Golden Notebook*, P395). Her breakdown or “depression” is fictionalized in Ella as well, who is working on a novel involving a man committing suicide. Suicide and hysteria recur throughout the book among the characters:

Then he (Tommy) giggled. The giggle was new- harsh, uncontrolled, and malicious. At the sound Anna felt rise in her a wave of panic. She even felt a desire to giggle

herself...He hasn't been here five minutes, but his hysteria's infecting me already. Be careful.

(The Golden Notebook, P236)

Later at a party:

And now suddenly Nelson got up again and launched into an even more violent, self-accusing denunciation. It was hysterical. And everyone was becoming hysterical- I could feel the hysteria rising in myself...It was the feeling or atmosphere that was a prelude to...destruction. *(The Golden Notebook, P423)*.

R.D. Laing classifies hysteria as much an experience as schizophrenia, which may lead to desctructive behavior such as suicide, (as is seen in many instances throughout the book), if our experience is destroyed. Destruction of experience occurs with obstruction, in this case, the limitations offered by the various institutions that control society. Theories, language, politics obstruct.

Martha Quest's descent into schizophrenia is more "involved" in knowledge and in capacity for experience than discordant as in the case of Anna Wulf and her friends. Denying herself food, drink, sex, nor sleep, she deprives her body of numbing pleasures to become extra-sensitive to her environment, thus beginning the process of her de-alienation. Laing defines another form of alienation where one is dissociated from his "infantile phantasy". Shortly after the message announcing her mother's imminent arrival, Martha falls into a stupor of non-existence, where she sluggishly moves about or lies down, remembering nothing, thinking

nothing, and therefore experiencing nothing. Laing brings forth a mode of experience that is one of the ways of relating to the world, “phantasy”, which is:

Phantasy as encountered in many people today is split off from what the person regards as his mature, sane, rational, adult experience. We do not then see phantasy in its true function but experienced merely as an inclusive, sabotaging infantile nuisance. (Laing, 1967).

Although the greater part of her two novels involve “breaking down”, Lessing herself had never experienced one naturally, but grew up watching the people around her, such as her parents, experience nervous breakdowns. However, an incident is prominently highlighted in *Under My Skin*:

I succumbed to Low Fever. Is there such a disease? I ran a temperature day and night of about a degree, and could hardly get out of bed, where I lay with the door propped open with a stone, looking out into the bush...A charity paid for me to go for six weeks to the mountains south of Umtali called the Vumba, to a guest house run by a remarkable old woman famous for miles around...

(*Under My Skin*, P163-164)

This old woman was “Granny Fisher” who ran a guest house in the mountains, and fed her guests free of charge, food that was pure and organic. Lessing immediately became healthy and robust after a few days stay. Granny Fisher, is a symbol of an “eternal mother”, or the “Ancient” that lives long enough to tell stories of beginnings. Granny Fisher is part of the land, and the food that grows, the nurturing, earthy, wise mother. During her stay, fourteen year old Lessing wrote a poem:

...But there comes a time for all
 Men who must follow new ways:
 For will old fevers chill him
 Coming when the sun is low?
 Shall the nights deceive him as the years go?
 He will return to the small unchanging valley
 Learn to talk to children, after all.

...the writer was a fourteen year old girl...but wait, that cannot be true. Some Ancient
 had moved in, taken temporary possession of that many-tenanted young mind.

(*Under My Skin*, P166)

Lessing's alienation from her surroundings as a young girl was physical, inflicted upon by her mother, by restricting mobility and freedom to explore the girl's surroundings. In *Under My Skin*, Lessing describes a situation where during nap-times, they were commanded to close the doors that led outside, for fear of snakes and insects intruding their home. During this particular instance, fourteen year old Lessing was at home while her mother talked of her "brilliant future." (*Under My Skin*, P166). The "future" which most likely consisted of white, middle-class aspirations, is disconnected from the reality around Lessing, thus resulting in her "breakdown" or "depression". Lessing describes a similar reaction in *The Four-Gated City* where Martha in her late thirties experiences a similar depression to that of "Low Fever", where she retreats to bed and is unable to get up and act. Laing has also conducted research which reveals that schizophrenia, and its similar experiences, begin in the home and family. In the opening chapter

of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha describes an “alter ego”, created “Somewhere early in her childhood, on that farm on the highveld, ‘Matty’ had been created by her as an act of survival.”

“Matty”, becoming Martha’s “self defense mechanism”, has obstructed her experience of herself with herself. In Laing’s terms,

“a number of ways in which a person becomes alienated from himself. For example, repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection. These "mechanisms" are often described in psychoanalytic terms as themselves "unconscious", that is, the person himself appears to be unaware that he is doing this to himself.” (Laing, 1967)

Martha only realized the self-infliction of her “self-defense” once her memory wipes out her previous life. This realization enables Martha to break down in order to regain herself wholly – “I must get through the sound barrier. Here is the sound barrier. I must get through it.”(*The Four-Gated City*, P521) While nursing Lynda, who had been lapping milk from a bowl like an animal, Martha had been tempted to join in- “Almost-she hadn’t actually done it.” This is the first test of Martha’s defense mechanism.

Martha’s breakdown had made her extra-sensitive to the world around her, which she was able to eventually control, and thus, experience herself as herself, as well as experience others for who they truly are. Her days in solitude included ramblings- in one instance she was spewing anti-Semitic phrases. This could be an action of “un-learning” everything she had learned, and thereby getting through the “sound barrier.”

Conclusion

It is hard to narrow down and form contextual conclusions for material as diverse as Lessing's. The materials that I have worked with concern an overall mysterious force that move events forward, and make things happen, which in turn make people think a certain way, and this is manifested in more events and happenings, while we. To form a conclusion would be to be able to catch it out of the air, define it, and solve it. Reading her autobiographies, the rise and fall of an era is inevitable, Martha Quest's death at the end of *The Four-Gated City* emphasizes the inevitability of the dynamics of time, and Anna Wulf's "cure" could be just a temporary resolution. And we are powerless to the state of mind that is a result of external events such as wars. We are made more vulnerable by the existence of families, and schools, yet we cannot avoid them. Doris Lessing, despite leaving her children, decided to be a mother in the end for Peter, and sent him to boarding school, as she had once been sent when she was a child his age.

Like the cities that were built anew after the harrowing disasters of war, generations fall and are replaced by new ones. It is a current that runs on its own. T.S. Eliot summed it up best at the end of "*The Waste Land*":

I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon- O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

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