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THE REPRESENTATION OF FAMILY IN DORIS LESSING'S FICTION

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Abstract

This thesis examines Doris Lessing's social and political reappraisal of the family. It explores Lessing's attempt to overcome the restrictions and limitations of the family as an ideological construct through her engagement with three political movements and one mystical philosophy in her fiction: communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism. In Chapter One, the impact of communism on the family is explored in *The Good Terrorist* (1985) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001). A revolutionary movement that challenges normative family arrangements in theory is shown to be ultimately unable to change women's traditional roles in practice. Chapter Two looks at female discontent and shows how women reformulate their roles within the family in *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) and *The Fifth Child* (1988). Chapter Three focuses on *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1971) and *Ben, in the World* (2000), and suggests that Lessing employs Sufism to transform family and introduce non-normative kinship. Lastly, environmental exploitation is the subject of Chapter Four, which examines how Lessing's concern for the environment initiates changes in her representation of the family in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (1999). The thesis highlights Lessing's broadening vision of family by comparing and contrasting two novels from different periods of her career in each chapter. It also illustrates that Lessing's representation of family develops in three phases: political, mystical and environmental. Overall, the thesis demonstrates that Lessing celebrates rather than rejects the family. Her fiction envisages alternative family structures and non-normative kinship without being anti-family.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Lessing and the Family

Family has been a central concern in the work of Doris Lessing since she published her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1951). This thesis explores the treatment of family in selected fiction by Lessing. It looks at how Lessing's relationship to political and mystical philosophies shapes her representation of the family and considers the ways in which she problematises the family and celebrates alternative families. In her fiction, the family is represented as an ideological construct rather than a biological relationship, and through her work she reveals this ideology by illustrating that the family shapes and is shaped by the interests of the wider society in which it is found. Lessing's fiction challenges the promotion of traditional family values, presenting them as concepts that 'discipline', in a Foucauldian sense, individuals into gendered roles and hierarchal relations.[1] Performance of gender roles, specifically men as breadwinner and women as homemakers, heterosexual marriage, raising children as obedient individuals are some of the traditional family values. These values are equated with social stability, shaping the ways in which wider society is organised. However, Lessing's fictional family challenges this stability, celebrating individual demands and choices.

Debrah Raschke, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, and Sandra Singer argue that 'Lessing's fiction and non-fiction demand a reformulation of some of our most taken-for-granted assumptions about the contemporary world and how we relate to that world'.[2] In this thesis, I argue that family is one of the taken-for-granted institutions that Lessing seeks to reformulate in her fiction. Overall, the thesis suggests that Lessing celebrates varied forms of family. In this way, Lessing's fiction challenges the limitations and a single meaning of 'the family'.[3] I will demonstrate that Lessing is preoccupied with family in her fiction not as an institution to be discarded, but rather as a social concept to be critiqued and reconfigured for the benefit of individuals and society. Thus, this thesis establishes the importance of the family in Lessing's fiction,

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1. Michael Foucault defines family as 'the hinge, the interlocking point, which is absolutely indispensable to the very functioning of all the disciplinary systems'. See his *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collége De France, 1973-1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 81.

2. Debrah Raschke, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis and Sandra L. Singer, *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2010), p. 1.

3. The term 'the family'—in inverted comas—was employed by the radical family critic R.D. Laing in his *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1966), referring to distorting effects of 'the family' on humans' mental health.

and proposes that Lessing introduces non-normative families without being anti-family. I employ the term non-normative family to refer to the ways in which Lessing's family deviates from the established norms of the traditional family such as biological connectedness, gender and hierarchal relations.

The thesis considers Lessing's literary explorations of the family in the context of communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism. It is divided into four main chapters that address these themes. The chapters are arranged in a thematic order that chronologically reflects Lessing's relationship with political movements, mysticism and the environment. I will discuss the theme of the family in relation to issues of class (communism), gender (feminism), mysticism (Sufism), and the environment (postcolonial ecofeminism) by focusing on two novels per chapter. Chapter One on communism analyses *The Good Terrorist* (1985) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001); Chapter Two on feminism examines *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) and *The Fifth Child* (1988); Chapter Three on Sufism considers *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and *Ben, in the World* (2000); Chapter Four on postcolonial ecofeminism explores and *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (1999).

The novels examined in each chapter share common themes but were written in different decades. This pairing enables me, firstly, to follow changes in Lessing's representation of family over time; secondly, to explore if her standpoint in relation to communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism also changes between the two texts; and, thirdly, to demonstrate how these changes affect her treatment of the family. I look at a novel from the period in which she first engages with a set of ideas, or a philosophy or a political movement, alongside a later novel. My approach to studying Lessing's work is in line with Roberta Rubenstein's argument that '[e]ach of Doris Lessing's novels is both a movement forward and a return to the concerns of her earlier fiction at deeper levels of meaning and complexity'.[4] I will move 'forward and backward' between the early and late novels to explore the evolution of Lessing's treatment of family. The selected texts cover the period from the early 1950s, when Lessing published her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, up until the late 2000s when she produced one of her last novels, *The Sweetest Dream*. The eight novels analysed in the

4. Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing*: *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 13.

dissertation reflect developments in Lessing's representation of the family, covering a fifty-year period of interest in this concept. Together, they demonstrate how Lessing reflects and anticipates socio-historical and political developments in the history of the family, and suggest how her fiction extends theories and views of family rather than just mirroring them.

The thesis focuses on texts in which family emerges as a central theme. Thus it focuses on Lessing's literary fiction rather than her science fiction and short stories. It also focuses on novels that have received relatively little scholarly attention in relation to communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism, especially compared to the *Children of Violence Series* (1952-1969) and the novel for which Lessing is most famous, *The Golden Notebook* (1962). I aim to illustrate that each of the chosen novels offers an equally strong engagement with these political and philosophical movements. In Chapter One, I offer a reading of *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream* within the context of communist/Marxist theories of family, as these novels feature communes as alternatives to the traditional family. In Chapter Two, I show how *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child* present a vigorous critique of women's oppression in society and the family, yet they have not received attention from feminist critics to the same extent as *The Golden Notebook*. In particular, *The Fifth Child* shows that the oppressiveness of the family extends beyond women to children. In 1987 – two years after the publication of *The Fifth Child* – Barrie Thorne observes that 'children remain relatively invisible in most sociological *and* feminist literature'.[5] She further argues that 'our ways of thinking about children reflect adult interest and limit understanding of children's experiences and actions.'[6] The fact that the novel is not only about a mother but also about a child contributes to re-visioning feminist scholarship, acknowledging children's agency and subordination in the family. While *The Fifth Child* foregrounds women's ongoing oppression in relation to domestic and childrearing responsibilities, *The Summer Before the Dark* illustrates how domestic oppression is translated into wider society, making women invisible in the relative absence of their domestic responsibilities.

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5. Barrie Thorne, 'Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where Are the Children?', *Gender and Society*, 1.1 (1987), 85-89 (p. 86).

6. Ibid., p. 98.

The Memoirs of a Survivor has been referred to as one of Lessing's first Sufi-themed novels. However, in Chapter Three I introduce *Ben, in the World* as another essential Sufi novel to expand discussions on Lessing and Sufism. Even the title of this novel evokes the Sufi teaching 'Be in the world but not of it' that warns individuals against the falseness of social roles and materialism. In Sufism, the human being is considered to be limited by the particular dimension and conventions they live in. 'Be in the world but not of it' is a way of illuminating the mind of its potentials and of the existence of multi-layered dimensions that the human mind if not the physical body can travel to. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the act of penetrating through the walls, as practiced by the unnamed narrator, can be an example of this. Reading Lessing's early and late Sufi novels in relation to the family reveals what I call the 'Sufi family' and 'Sufi parenthood'. These terms denote non-normative families, as the Sufi relationships deviate from mainstream definitions of the family and gendered parenthood. The ways in which these terms contribute to the emergence of Sufi theories of family illustrate how Sufism benefits from Lessing's fiction.

Lastly, Chapter Four offers a postcolonial ecofeminist reading of Lessing's early and late postcolonial novels, *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann,* in terms of the family. Such an analysis asserts the significance of the environment in Lessing's fiction, as these novels have benefited from postcolonial criticism in relation to issues of race, gender, and colonialism at the expense of an analysis of the effect of the environment on Lessing, who lived in close contact with the natural world.[7] A postcolonial ecofeminist reading illustrates that the changes in Lessing's attitudes towards the environment initiate changes in her representation of the family. This chapter shows that Lessing's treatment of family moves from dystopia (in *The Grass is Singing*) to utopia (in *Mara and Dann)*. With this move, Lessing transforms the oppressive family ideology into an egalitarian and non-normative one.

Lessing and the Family: From the Personal to the Political

Lessing's critique of the family was shaped by her childhood and adulthood long before it became one of the core themes in her novels. The familial problems Lessing experienced in her personal life influenced the ways in which she problematized the

7. The African bush, a space forbidden for white women represents Lessing's early interest in exploring the natural world.

family in her fiction. Lessing experienced different forms of family at different stages of her life. The first one was the biological family into which she was born; the second was her conjugal family established via marriage, divorce, and the bearing of children; the third was her political family, created through her involvement in communism; and the fourth was the family created by her decision to become a single and adoptive parent. In each of these families, Lessing faced different problems in various roles, including daughter, wife, mother, and single parent. On a personal level, Lessing transgressed family conventions, and traditional family values by not being what was considered a proper daughter, nor later a good mother and wife, and even within her political family she was not a communist enough.

The family into which Lessing was born was an ideal example of a traditional 1950s family, one marked by a gendered division of labour: her father, Alfred Taylor, was the breadwinner, whilst her mother, Emily Taylor, was the homemaker. Lessing, was not happy in her own biological family, as she explained in an interview: 'My position in the family was such that I was very critical, and fairly early on'.[8] She contested traditional family as practiced by her parents: 'I cannot remember a time when I did not fight my mother. Later, I fought my father too'.[9] During her childhood, Lessing witnessed that gender dynamics introduced two different images of family, firstly as a haven for men from the outside world, and secondly as a domestic prison for women, resulting in two unequal experiences. Whereas Alfred and Lessing's brother, Harry, benefited from the privilege of exploring the outside world, her mother was confined to the domestic sphere and denied the same privilege enjoyed by men. Lessing, too, was exposed to sexism early on, as she mentions in her autobiography: '[W]hat I remember is hard, bundling hands, impatient arms, and [my mother's] voice telling me over and over again that she had not wanted a girl, she wanted a boy. I knew from the beginning she loved my little brother unconditionally, and she did not love me'.[10] Therefore, Lessing not only experienced sexism as part of women's assumed inferior status in the settler society of Southern Rhodesia, but she also encountered it from another woman, her mother.

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8. Minda Bikman, 'A Talk with Doris Lessing,' *New York Times Book Review*, 1980, cited in Gayle Green *The Poetics of Change* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 9.

9. Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 97.

10. Lessing, *Under My Skin*, p. 25.

In the patriarchal, colonial settler society of Southern Rhodesia, where Lessing lived both as a child and adult, women were discriminated against through gender dynamics in the family. As both family and colonialism are sustained through male hegemony, giving birth to a male won women social approval. While her brother was loved unconditionally, Lessing's acceptance in the family and society was conditional upon her adoption of feminine traits such as passivity, care, nurture, tolerance and compassion. Emily tried hard to mould Lessing into the image of a 'proper' daughter, but she refused to be an extension of her mother. Lessing initially did this by exploring the African landscape during her childhood, a privilege denied to women. The African bush, a space forbidden for white women represents Lessing's early contact with the natural world and rebellion against gender limitation. She writes: 'I used to prop the door with a stone, so that what went on in the bush was always visible to me'.[11] She then dropped out of her girls' school at the age of fourteen in Salisbury, and finally left her biological family behind at the age of fifteen for an independent life. These departures indicate that Lessing was willing to contest the limits of gender in practice, which was later reinforced through her writing. Lessing could not change the biological condition of being a woman, but through her writing she could subvert the familial and social conditions that make women inferior in family and society.

Lessing deviated from the conventions of the traditional family in her marriages, too. At a time when divorce was understood as evidence of a woman failing to be a proper wife and mother, and therefore threatening social stability, Lessing nevertheless survived two family breakups, successively in 1943, leaving her children Jean and John with their father, Frank Wisdom, and in 1949 from her communist husband, Gottfried Lessing, becoming a single mother forever.[12] These years also marked the golden age of the traditional family, which defined women in relation to their roles as wives and mothers, homemakers and responsible for raising obedient children. Her divorces can be read as indicative of her challenge to prevailing ideas about gender. Moreover, her radical decision to leave her two small children behind while moving to London in 1949, which she defined as 'committing the unforgivable', also revealed that what is promoted as a haven was indeed a prison for women. Lessing, as she mentions in her

11. Ibid., p. 70.

12. While moving to London in 1949, Lessing took her son, Peter from her second marriage with her.

autobiography, had no choice other than to escape from this prison in order to achieve freedom as a writer:

> For a long time I felt I had done a very brave thing. There is nothing more boring for an intelligent woman than to spend endless amounts of time with small children. I felt I wasn't the best person to bring them up. I would have ended up an alcoholic or a frustrated intellectual like my mother.[13]

Unlike her mother and the majority of women who accepted family as their fate and motherhood as their reward, Lessing resisted convention and chose instead to pursue a career. She escaped from the dominant ideologies of family and motherhood to 'recreate herself as a writer'.[14] As such, her concern was not to protect the family ideology and properly raise children in a family situation, but instead to create a family liberated from traditional ideologies and establish a more equal society for all in her fiction. She states:

> It was the way of life I had to leave … I explained to the babies that they would understand later why I had left. I was going to change this ugly world, they would live in a beautiful and perfect world where there would be no race hatred, injustice and so forth … I carried, like a defective gene, a kind of doom or fatality, which would trap them as it had me, if I stayed. Leaving, I would break some ancient chain of repetition.[15]

This passage is key to following Lessing's critique of family ideology and her celebration of non-normative families, which would later emerge in her fiction. Although Lessing literally left her children behind, the passage clearly indicates that her intention was to leave 'the way of life' in which power dynamics of race, class, and gender distorted individuals' lives and created an unjust society. The irony of the 'defective gene' she mentions implies a social construction of motherhood, which functions as the key determinant of children's lives, with daughters positioned as extensions of their mothers and sons of their fathers. Family ideology promotes mothers as a means of shaping the future in accordance with societal expectations, yet Lessing

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13. Gaby Wood, Doris Lessing: 'A Woman Ahead of Her Time' (2013) <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10455882/Doris-Lessing-a-woman-ahead-of-her-time.html> [accessed 30 December 2016].

14. Jenny Diski, 'Jenny Diski on Doris Lessing: 'I was the cuckoo in the nest''

(interviewed by Tim Adams for *The Guardian*) (7 December, 2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/07/jenny-diski-doris-lessing-cuckoo-in-nest> [accessed 2 July 2018].

15. Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin,* p. 262.

leaves this ideological responsibility behind to assume a new responsibility: changing the world and family for the better, not as a mother but as a writer.

Lessing's interest in communist politics instilled in her a new sense of family, both on fictional and non-fictional levels. Her new family meant a unit of people who gathered for a common cause in a non-hierarchal manner. Contrary to the taken-for-granted definition of the family, which implies the legal union of a heterosexual couple who live in a common residence with their genetic offspring, this new family was not restricted by any residence, legal union, or biological ties. Lessing had experienced this new type of family when she assumed responsibility for Jenny Diski, the classmate of her son, Peter. This relationship was later represented in Lessing's novel *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, which introduced the idea of non-gendered parenthood in place of gendered motherhood. In this novel, Emily Cartright is left as a teenager with an unnamed narrator, who assumes responsibility for her. The pair have a non-biological, non-hierarchical, and non-gendered relationship, reflective of the non-normative mother/daughter relationship between Lessing and Diski. This illustrates that it was the ideology of motherhood, not parenthood, which Lessing abandoned when she left her family, which is eventually reconfigured in her fiction.

Once free from the traditional family on a personal level, Lessing was able to critique its ideology and promotion of inequalities. Through her writing, Lessing explores the ways in which family ideology can be subverted and reconstructed to the benefit of individuals and society. Writing about the family signalled Lessing's shift from being a subject of the family to making it a subject of her work. Therefore, Lessing's fiction not only mirrors the troubles of her own personal family life but also shows how family relates to wider social problems engendered by patriarchy.

The Family in Lessing's Fiction

By focusing on the family, this thesis illuminates Lessing's wider themes, concerns, and broader social critique. It is through the family that Lessing comments on social inequalities and environmental degradation in her fiction. For example, the families in *The Grass is Singing*, the Turners and the Richards, reveal how hierarchies of gender and race sustain the patriarchal systems of colonialism and the family. Single parent families in *The Golden Notebook* illustrate that women can find diverse means of

personal fulfilment beyond the family, such as in a career. The family in *The Summer Before the Dark* suggests that the situation in the 1970s still has not improved for women who participate in wider society as they are still not released from the oppression of domesticity. Alternative family arrangements are employed in *The Good Terrorist* to counter the New Right's call for a return to 'family values' during the 1980s. The Lovatt family in *The Fifth Child* reveals the ideological interconnectedness between family and educational and medical institutions in stigmatising and oppressing individuals through bodily norms and gender roles. The novel also explores societal expectations of what is considered normal and abnormal. *Mara and Dann* details how patriarchal systems not only distort the human mind but also cause environmental degradation. The Lennox family in *The Sweetest Dream* explores the inadequacy of left-wing politics to represent womanly concerns. A comparative reading of these novels illustrates that family not only relates to social problems, but also becomes a means of exploring solutions to these problems in Lessing's fiction.

The significance of the family needs to be appropriately established in order to follow Lessing's shifts at various stages of her writing between the political and mystical movements of communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism. It is through the family that Lessing tests the capacity of these movements in bringing real change. At the same time, Lessing explores the gaps in these movements and suggests the ways in which they can intersect to create equality and a more just society. For example, a focus on the family demonstrates that Lessing's feminism and Sufism intersect in a way that challenges gender oppression, and creates what I term 'Su-feminism'. The identification of intersections between these movements enables Lessing's fiction to be read anew in relation to family, gender and her wider concerns.

The trends and changes in Lessing's social vision can also be followed through the family. Cornelius Collins suggests that Lessing's vision 'grew more radical and her analysis of global conditions more severe'.[16] This becomes particularly evident in the context of the family. For example, while Lessing critiques traditional family arrangements in her early writing between the 1950s and 1970s, her evaluation of the

16. Cornelius Collins, 'A funny thing laughter, what's it for?: Humour and Form in Lessing's Fiction', in *Doris Lessing and the Forming of the History*, ed. by Kevin Brazil, David Sergeant and Tom Sperlinger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2016), 97-110 (p. 98).

family becomes more radical as she explores non-normative kinship from the late 1970s onwards. A focus on family illustrates that Lessing's vision expands from women to humanity (including men) and then to the environment; she achieves this by revisiting her earlier concerns. While women's oppression in the family was among Lessing's earlier preoccupations, this concern, thanks to her involvement with Sufism, expanded towards a consideration of the oppression of humanity in the family and society. The late 1990s, with the publication of *Mara and Dann*, witnessed Lessing's increasing environmental concerns. In the novel, the irresponsible occupation of land and exploitation of natural resources threaten all living organisms with extinction. Lessing protests human exploitation of the environment and challenges patriarchal systems to introduce a new family in her utopian continent, called *Ifrik*.

Critical and Theoretical Approach

Lessing's ongoing interests in issues of class, gender, mysticism, and the environment justify chapters on communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism, respectively. In the early 1940s, Lessing was a member of the Communist party as part of her anti-racist activism in Southern Rhodesia. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed Lessing's ambivalent relationship with feminism. Although her work, *The Golden Notebook*, anticipated and promoted the Women's Liberation Movement before key feminist texts such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Lessing refused it to be labelled a feminist text: 'But this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation'.[17] The late 1960s witnessed Lessing's dissatisfaction with political movements for their limitations, as she later explained: 'I have long recognised that the salvation of this world cannot lie in any political ideology'.[18] The blind spots in political ideologies led her to explore a non-political philosophy, Sufism, which demonstrated a wider concern for humans as a species rather than particular groups. For Lessing Sufism was a way of escaping from the prisons of conventions, dogmas, and prescribed behaviours to bring about real freedom from and change in the family. The idea of the family as a prison parallels Sufi belief, as Lessing mentions: 'Well, the Sufis say we live

17. Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, pp. 8-9.

18. Margarte Von Schwarzkopf, 'Placing the Fingers on the Wounds of Our Times' in *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing*, *1964-1994*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll, (London: Flamingo, 1985), p. 105.

in such a prison, and it is their concern to give us equipment to free ourselves'.[19] In her collection of essays *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (1986), Lessing recalls her interest in different ideas: 'examining ideas, from whatever source they come, to see how they may usefully contribute to our lives and to the societies we live in'.[20] Sufism was one of these ideas in which Lessing became interested, and she employed it in her fiction during the 1970s for the creation of less oppressive families and society.

In the 1990s, Lessing expanded the scope and criticism of this 'prison' to include environmental problems in her fiction. Contrary to her early depiction of environment as passive and controlled by men in *The Grass is Singing*, she empowers environment in such a way that it pays back to human exploitation. The duration between the two novels points at her increasing environmental concern, and it is in line with her expanding vision, namely, a shift in focus from human concerns to planetary ones. At that time, when environmentalism was the concern of critical debates both in the US and Western Europe, Lessing wrote *Mara and Dann*, exploring corresponding environmental problems and debates. Lessing's interest in communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism, along with aspects of her dissatisfaction with each, can be explored through a focus on the family as she employs these theories and philosophies in her critique of this institution.

Communism and the Family

In her fiction, Lessing tests the capacity of communism in eradicating social injustices and bringing real change to families. The communist vision of the future family was adopted by Lessing during her active membership in the Communist Party and later in her writing. In *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, she mentions her enthusiasm for a new form of family: '[M]y first duty is to my new family, my real one, and they really care for me, they understand me, but my former family did not really love me and understand me.'[21] Here, Lessing makes a distinction between her biological family and her 'new' family. While the former represents a prison to escape, which Lessing viewed

19. Doris Lessing, 'Introduction', in *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* (London: Arkana Press, 1996), 7-13 (p. 10).

20. Doris Lessing, *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), p. 78.

21. Ibid., pp. 36-7.

as collaborating with evil systems of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, her new family is a way of fighting against these systems.

Lessing's views on the family are more in line with those of Karl Marx than Friedrich Engels. Marx is in favour of a realigned family, whereas Engels seeks the abolition or dissolution of the family through a communal way of living in the communist society. In her fiction, Lessing neither abolishes nor dissolves the idea of the family, but rather imagines its reconfiguration in the best form possible. While Alice Mellings in *The Good Terrorist* abandons her own bourgeois family in the hope of creating a new type of family in a political commune, the Lennox family of *The Sweetest Dream* is gradually transformed into a commune, accommodating individuals and political figures to create a new sense of family. In 1982, Ferdinand Mount argued that 'the appearance of communes, squads and kibbutzim is a new development which may bring about the collapse or transformation of the family'.[22] Lessing's novels, those that I call her communist texts, present communes as alternatives to the traditional family. In *The Good Terrorist*, Alice, the squatter, tells her mother: 'we are going to pull everything *down*. All of it. This shitty rubbish we live in. It's all coming *down* (italics original)'.[23] The pronoun 'we' stands for Alice's new friends, while 'it' denotes the traditional family and the 'shitty rubbish' women's traditional roles in it. Like Lessing, Alice abandons her biological parents and pursues the dream of a new family through communism.

The ways in which communism offers an alternative form of the family also calls its limitations into question. The idea that a communist family would follow the overthrow of the existing economic system means ignoring ongoing women's oppression in the family and inequalities in wider society. Lessing, rather than waiting for this overthrow, experiments with the communist family in her fiction by exploring whether a woman's condition would differ in new family arrangements. Engels writes about the situation of women in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), suggesting that 'the modern individual family is founded on the open or

22. Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family: An Alternative History of Love and Marriage* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 9.

23. Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist* (1985, repr., London: HarperPerennial, 2007), p. 354.

concealed slavery of the wife'.[24] In this slavery, while the husband represents the bourgeois, his wife stands for the proletariat. Man's control of woman, 'is rooted in the fact that he, not she, controls the property'.[25] Lessing is quick to see the gap between theory and practice in the communist view of the family. In *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream*, she highlights how communism fails to put theory into practice when it comes to women and family. Both Frances and Alice, the protagonists of the respective texts, are burdened by heavy domestic responsibilities for the sake of 'revolution'. Their conditions confirm the concerns of feminists in spotting the gender blindness of communism. Citing Margaret Benston, Rosemarie Putman Tong states that a 'change to communal eating arrangements […] might simply mean moving a woman from her small, private, individual kitchen into a large, public communal one'.[26] *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream* illustrate that gender roles remain unchanged in what is supposed to be a radically new household that is not controlled by men in the form of private property. Lessing highlights the gender-blind aspect of Marxist/communist theory, suggesting that the new family remains a utopia, or 'the sweetest dream', as the title of the later novel hints. In this way, she problematises both the traditional family and communist theory. Lessing critiques the bourgeois family and imagines new forms of kinship in her fiction. However, her critique of communism also presents the communist family as hypocritical, as it recognises the plight of women yet fails to liberate them from domesticity.

Feminism and the Family

Lessing's ideas about family became more radical through her gender-based critique of the institution in the early 1960s. Her exploration and analysis of the family coincides with the rise of second-wave feminism. Although Lessing was ambivalent towards this movement, her novels align with a feminist critique of women's oppression in the family and exclusion from politics and society. Her long-celebrated novel, *The Golden Notebook*, was regarded as a key feminist text in terms of illustrating that women can

24. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884, repr., London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1943), p. 79.

25. Rosemarie Putman Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1988), p. 103.

26. Margaret Benston in Rosemarie Putman Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1988), p. 107.

contribute to politics and have a career, and they can sustain a family without needing men. The novel was also an important text in terms of reflecting Lessing's ideas about non-normative family arrangements, as it details the lives of two single parents, Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs. Such families were considered to be deviant and even a threat to social stability at that time. The novel explores educated, middle class women rejecting the image of the happy housewife, a myth that was further subverted the following year when Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*.[27]

Feminist theory presented a systematic critique of the family by analysing multiple overlapping factors such as marriage, reproduction, child rearing, domesticity, parental roles, and childhood. Lessing, too, is critical of family as a patriarchal institution that reproduces conservative gender roles. Like feminists such as Friedan, she takes traditional family as the main source of inequalities in society. The link between family and society in regards to the equality that Lessing persistently represented in her fiction early on was later pronounced by contemporary feminist family critics such as Susan Moller Okin: 'Without just families, how can we expect to have a just society?'[28] Lessing's ambivalence towards feminism is also reflected in her view of the family that at some points contradicted radical feminists. While Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Germaine Greer focused on opting out of family and asserted separatism as solutions to the problems of patriarchy, Lessing writes about the liberation of the family from the patriarchal ideology and social politics, rather than the liberation of women from the idea of the family altogether.[29]

Sufism and the Family

Unlike communism and feminism, Sufism does not have an established theory of family. Therefore, Lessing's representation of the family benefits from Sufi thought indirectly, hinting at ways in which Sufi principles and tenets could be employed to critique traditional family arrangements and to introduce non-normative ones. For example, gender plays a significant role in creating and sustaining the family ideology. It is due to gender that women and men are regarded as two different beings in a

27. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

28. Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 135.

29. See, for example, Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), and Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).

hierarchy. In contrast, Sufism suggests that although 'in this world of duality we may find ourselves in different forms, ultimately there is no male or female, only Being'.[30] The ultimate point one can reach in Sufism is to recognise one's own capacities as a Being regardless of social roles and constructions. In Sufism traditional family, political parties, parenthood, and group minds of all kinds are regarded as the 'constrictive collective'. Humans experience the loss of identity in these roles, what Sufis call 'the false self'.[31] Sufism stresses the importance of individualism in order to reach the real self, and in this regard, women are no different from men. Just as 'male attributes of strength and determination also belong to women', so too do 'the feminine attributes of receptivity and beauty also belong to men'.[32] The non-hierarchical and non-gendered nature of Sufism inspires Lessing's creation of non-normative families.

Lessing's novels highlight the intersection of feminist and Sufi concerns. This intersection gives rise to what I refer to as Su-feminism.[33] In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Germaine Greer talks about the 'organic family', which destabilises the relationship between biological parents and children to critique the role biology has in sustaining the traditional family: '[t]he point of an organic family is to release the children from the disadvantages of being the extensions of their parents so that they can belong primarily to themselves'.[34] Lessing represents this 'organic family' in her personal life with Jenny Diksi, and her Sufi themed novels, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Ben, in the World*. In the first novel, protagonists, Gerald and Emily establish a commune where they raise unrelated children, destabilising the tie between child and parent. The sense of 'organic family' is hinted at through their deviations from social conventions. There are not any hierarchies or gender divisions between these children as they have not lived within traditional family arrangements before. She introduces Ben as a Sufi in the latter novel. As a victim of the traditional family as represented in *The Fifth Child* (1988), Ben's journey towards self-actualisation is accompanied by Mrs.

30. Camille Adams Helminski, *Women and Sufism* (2018) <https://sufism.org/sufism/writings-on-sufism/women-and-sufism-by-camille-adams-helminski-2> [accessed 1 June 2018].

31. Jean Pickering, *Understanding Doris Lessing* (Colombia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 63-4.

32. Helminski, *Women and Sufism* (2018).

33. Su-feminism is a term I coined to explain the intersection of Sufism and feminism in Lessing's fiction.

34. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (1970, repr., London: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 266.

Ellen Biggs, standing as a non-biological parent in his life. Therefore, Lessing's fictional children in these novels do not internalise the gender roles of their parents, as highlighted by Greer. To borrow a phrase from Greer, Ben and the children in Gerald's commune 'initiate their own capacities', which is in line with Sufi teaching. This is an example of the intersection of Lessing's Sufism and feminism.

The term Su-feminism indicates that Lessing's Sufism expands her feminist critique of the family by providing a new form of arrangement in which gendered parental roles are minimised. The labour motherhood involves was considered to be the main source of women's oppression in the family and of their disadvantage in the society. For example, Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) argues that new reproductive technologies and shared childcare would free women from the burden of pregnancy and birth, and a maternal role that guaranteed female oppression. Analysing the traditional family from a Sufi perspective brings a strong critique of hierarchies and parental roles in the family and reveals ways in which non-normative family arrangements could emerge. Sufism prioritises the idea of unity and oneness, without any discrimination. In this way, Lessing's Sufism, I suggest, expands and contributes to her desire to eradicate gender-based segregation in both family and society. This suggests that her ambivalent relationship with the Women's Liberation Movement can be reconciled through exploring the ways in which her feminism and Sufism intersect which I term Su-feminism.

Postcolonial Ecofeminism and the Family

Lessing's increasing interest in environmental politics during the late 1990s also shapes her representation of the family. Growing up in the colony at Southern Rhodesia, she witnesses overlapping connections between unjustified subordination of women and destruction of environment. Both environment and women are controlled and exploited through gender with the former feminised, and the latter's roles naturalised within the patriarchal systems of colonialism and the family. Lessing's treatment of the environment links to her reconfiguration of the family and women's domination. A comparative reading of her early and late postcolonial novels, *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* suggests that Lessing recovers environment from its submissive and exploited position, which in return enables her to challenge patriarchal systems and reconfigure her non-normative family. In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing creates a utopian

continent, *Ifrik, and* looks for reasons for and solutions to environmental problems. Derek Wall, in *Green History*, argues that

> the concept of 'utopia', variously translated as nowhere (utopia) or 'perfection' (eutopia), has powerfully inspired the Green movement. Greens would argue that to solve ecological problems requires the transformation both of institutions and of the individual, resulting in the creation of a new society. [35]

Lessing's fiction mirrors the link between utopia and the Green movement. At the end of *Mara and Dann*, Lessing introduces her utopian family that adopts an eco-centric farming method with its members in neither hierarchal relations nor mastery over the environment. The Empire, which once ruled Africa on behalf of the British Royal Family, as shown in *The Grass is Singing*, is contested and replaced by a utopian environmental family in *Ifrik*. The fact that Mara, the feminist explorer, rejects the idea of getting married to her brother to revive the Royal family implies that she challenges colonial and hegemonic control of the environment in *Ifrik*. Lessing's modifications in her representation of the environment, from *The Grass is Singing* to *Mara and Dann*, are translated into modifications in her representation of the family. Using these two novels, I argue that a postcolonial ecofeminist reading can provide fresh insights that acknowledge the significance of Lessing's representation of the family in postcolonial literature.

Intersectionality in Lessing's Fiction

The combination of postcolonial and ecofeminist concerns in *The Grass is Singing* highlights the intersectionality that characterises Lessing's fiction. The family is a locus where hierarchies of race, class, and gender converge as different but intersecting forms of oppression. Family can then be defined as a complex ideological construction in which various forms of social hierarchies are performed and spread to the rest of society. A single critical approach to the family fails to recognise intersecting power relations that disadvantage particular groups of people. Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 theory of intersectionality suggested that the oppression of black women can only be

35. Derek Wall, *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 235.

understood by looking at the intersection of womanhood and blackness.[36] The intersecting lens, as understood from Crenshaw's perspective, warned scholars and social movements that 'address[ing] injustice towards one group may end up perpetuating systems of inequities towards other groups'.[37] In her 1985 novel *The Good Terrorist*, Lessing addressed the intersection of inequalities long before Crenshaw's theory, highlighting that communist/Marxist theory is gender-blind because it focuses on the oppression of the proletariat, a term used for men. As in the example of Alice Mellings, women are not considered a social class and therefore are excluded from the communist critique of a class-based system, though capitalism benefits enormously from their labour and oppression. The intersectional approach establishes the significance of family in understanding multiple sources of oppression in Lessing's fiction, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, race, and bodily norms. Lessing's fiction intersects political theories of communism, feminism, environmentalism and Sufi mysticism to address if not unpack entwined forms of oppressions in the family.

Exploring the family through the intersections of communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism contests the power dynamics that oppress individuals and exploit the environment. Communism critiques the family for its relation to capitalism and sustaining a class-based society, feminism identifies the family as having created gender inequalities and promoting a patriarchal society, Sufism resists any form of prescribed human behaviour on which the traditional family relies, and postcolonial ecofeminism illustrates how the patriarchal systems of capitalism, colonialism, and family cooperate not only in oppressing people based on colour, gender, and class but also exploit the environment and other living organisms. In the same way that multiple forms of oppression intersect and sustain what we call 'the family', the approaches of communism, feminism, Sufism, and postcolonial ecofeminism intersect in Lessing's fiction to introduce non-normative families. The novelty of my approach lies in the fact that it considers family through an intersecting lens to illuminate the ways in which Lessing critiques and reconfigures the traditional institution of the family.

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36. Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989:1, (1989), pp. 139-67.

37. *What is Intersectionality and What Does It Mean* (2017) <https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/> [accessed in 25.06.2018].

Overview of Key Thinkers and Theories: 'The Family' and Families

The question of whether the family as a concept is functional or dysfunctional has opened contemporary debate. Discussion has developed from two contradicting views: either accepting a single meaning of 'the family,' or critiquing the existing form of the family as a way to acknowledge diverse human relations within the context of 'families'. Ronald Fletcher named the latter group as 'abolitionists', claiming that they are 'radically […] mistaken' in their view of family and marriage.[38] On the other hand, the functionalists' assertion that the family is an 'unchanging, biological, heterosexual and natural' entity has historically been challenged through revolts by new generations who oppose traditional restrictions on sexual behaviour, protests by women against their imprisonment within the wife-mother role, and gay rights movements.[39] The development of the Marxist critique of 'the family', diverse feminist approaches, and the emergence of radical anti-psychiatry movements have put the functionality of 'the family' into question, critiquing it as an instrument of capitalist and patriarchal oppressions and as destructive of individuality. These approaches and movements have critically analysed family as part of their demand for social change rather than taking its existing form for granted. Such discussions have presented 'the family' as either all bad or neither good nor bad but in need of reconfiguration against the functionalist's promotion that the family is all good. The rise of gay and lesbian movements has moved these discussions a step further to ask the crucial question about what could be considered a family. This question has been key to the emergence of non-normative families, which have occupied the political agendas of a New Right that defends family values and New Labour, which is in favour of alternative families. Although the family has varied in its forms considerably historically and geographically, I am focusing on the family in the Us and the UK in the 20th century because this was the context in which Lessing was writing, and this is where her work is widely read.

The Functionalists: The Stable Family

Changes to the family in the UK came following the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II in the last year of that decade and into the 1940s. Economic hardships

38. Ronald Fletcher, *The Abolitionists: The Family and Marriage Under Attack* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 1.

39. Faith Robertson, *The Family, Change or Continuity* (London: MacMillan, 1986).

caused family breakdowns not through divorces but abandonments when men either chose to leave to live somewhere else or went off to war. Women had to be both the caregiver and the breadwinner, and the number of female employees in the workforce, especially in clerical and service positions, increased. All of these changes signalled women's changing roles and hence the perceived changes in the family to follow in later decades. Therefore, the emergence of functionalist family theories were responses to these changes in an attempt to assuage anxiety about social change and reassert the old order. Functionalist theories associated the word 'family' with the legal union of a heterosexual couple and the production and raising of biological children, and the preservation of this unit has been linked with social stability. The theoretical definition of the family have been systematised and supported by the functionalist school of thought.

Functionalism, having its origins in the writings of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, emphasises the importance of stability and consensus for a society to exist. Each aspect of a society, such as education, media, government, economy, religion, and family, is dependent on the others. For example, religion emphasises the importance of establishing families and promotes seniority of individuals when they assume their roles as husband/wife, and further as mother/father. Schools help families to raise children in accordance with dominant values, and in return children are expected to become good citizens by fulfilling their duties in wider society, such as paying their taxes and contributing to a stable economy. Similarly, mothers are considered good citizens as long as they are occupied with their familial responsibilities, including raising well-behaved children who will go on to be the next generation of a stable society. As such, any problem, dysfunction, or even change in any of these aspects is considered to affect the overall stability and structure of society. Compared with other social institutions, family has been afforded the utmost importance in functionalist theory, as it is where members of a society are reproduced and 'equipped' with their roles before they join the wider world and its institutions.[40]

Functionalist theories of family reached the height of their power during the 1940s and 1950s. During these decades the traditional family was promoted as the ideal

40. Talcott Parsons and F. Bales Robert, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (New York: Free Press, 1955).

form for social productivity, integration, maintenance, and continuity. The writings of Talcott Parsons and George P. Murdock shaped traditional family ideologies both in those and later decades to follow. Murdock defined family as including an 'adult of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted of the sexually cohabiting adults'.[41] For a unit to be called a family, according to his definition, is dependent on a sexual relationship approved by society and the existence of children. For Murdock, the family is a universal human institution and should be the same everywhere, as it meets the basic biological and societal human needs such as protection, reproduction, shelter, socialisation, economic support, and regulating relationships between the sexes. Writing in the 1950s, Parsons theorised the gender division of labour with what he termed the 'expressive' and 'instrumental' roles of women and men, respectively. Occupying the expressive role, women, according to Parsons's theory, are placed at the centre of the family as homemakers, providing love, affection, care, and all other necessary emotional support for family members. On the other hand, men's instrumental role as breadwinners is defined in relation to their presumed strength, leading to their occupation of political, economic, and military arenas. Men's roles, according to Parsons's theory, are considered to be more challenging and stressful as they require involvement in wider society, necessitating a minimal role in relation to domesticity and child care.[42]

For functionalists, gender roles are 'natural' and 'unchanging' as a result of perceived biological differences between men and women. For example, women were expected to be carers because of their ability to bear children. Diverse definitions of the family as 'nuclear', 'traditional', and 'biological' refer to the 'unchanging', 'natural', and 'universal' roles women and men are supposed to perform in their families. Theories emphasising women's role as carers also came into being during this period. In 1953, John Bowlby hypothesized the child's tie to his mother, arguing that infant and mother biologically need to stay in contact with each other. According to his hypothesis, children's primary attachment is to their mothers, and the former need a stable and secure relationship with the latter if they are to develop personally, emotionally, and

41. George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (1949; repr., New York: Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

42. Talcott Parsons and F. Bales Robert, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (New York: Free Press, 1955).

physically. Inadequate maternal contact in early infancy, for Bowlby, would cause serious problems in future stages of development. This would mean problematic individuals threatening social stability. [43] These theories illustrate that in the same way the family is situated at the centre of all other institutions for social stability, so too are women placed at the centre of the family, with its success positioned firmly on their shoulders. Therefore, from the functionalist perspective, a malfunction or a change in women's roles would mean a dysfunction or a change in the family, which would in return threaten the entire social system.

The Family in Marxism/communist Theory

While Marxism and communism share similarities, the former is a political theory that analyses class-driven inequalities in existing society, whereas the latter is a political system that theorises an egalitarian future society. Marxism views society and its institutions as structured by capitalism, which is established upon an uneven class conflict between a small and elite group called the bourgeoisie and a large number of working class people called the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, having the economic power, control the means of production and labour, keeping the proletariat oppressed due to the unequal distribution of economic power and labour. In Marxist/communist theory, the production of food and material objects are necessary if humans are to survive. Therefore, productive activity is key to the ways in which the ordering of a society and its institutions are created. The function of the family is to sustain the operation and reproduction of capitalism over time.[44] The Marxist school of thought critiqued the modern family as a state apparatus controlling individuals in accordance with capitalist imperatives.

Communist theories of the family mainly originate from the writings of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Rather than offering a systematic critique of the family, especially in relation to gender inequalities within society, communist theory focuses more on the relation between capitalism and the family in sustaining a class-based

43. John Bowlby, 'The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 39 (1958), 350-373.

44. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1932, repr., London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 49.

society through production and reproduction.[45] Marx and Engels write about the transformation of the economic structure, which they believe would bring a change in the elements of superstructure such as family and religion in the communist society. Therefore, it is taken for granted that economic transformation will bring a change in the function of the family. Richard Weikart summaries Engels and Marx's critique of the family in three main points. They offer 'a depiction of the hypocrisy and inhumanity of the contemporary bourgeois family, the historicisation of the family, i.e. historical account of the origins and development of the family in the past; and a vision of the future "family in communist society"'.[46] The bourgeois family refers to an economic unit that controls modes of production and reproduction on behalf of capitalism. It provides a ready and free labour force through unpaid housework, childbearing, and childrearing. Capitalism exploits the labour in the family as a way to benefit from the working class (mostly men) at a maximum level in the production.

In *The Principles of Communism* (1847), Engels presents the influence of the communist society on the family. At the very beginning of his analysis, he defines communism as 'the doctrine of the conditions of the liberation of the proletariat'.[47] Engels argues that in communist society, the relations between the sexes will be transformed into a purely private affair, so society would have no intervention into these relations at all. In order to achieve this, he proposes the abolishment of private property and suggests the communal education of children:

> With the transfer of all means of ownership into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of the society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not.[48]

For Engels, private property and children are the 'two bases of the traditional marriage' that ensure the dependence of women on men, and children on their parents. Moreover,

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45. Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Burke Leacock, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (New York: International Publishers Company, 1972).

46. Richard Weikart, 'Marx, Engels, and the Abolition of the Family', *History of European Idea*, 18.5, (1994), (657-672), p. 658.

47. Engels, *Principles of Communism*, p. 1.

48. Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Burke Leacock, p. 139.

as private property is transmitted from one generation to another in accordance with male lineage, it reproduces the sexual division of labour in each succeeding generation. Alexandra Kollontai, a twentieth-century communist writer, identifies the establishment of communal kitchens, raising children communally, weakening the parent-child bond, and the abolishment of inheritance and private property as the characteristics of the future family in communist society.[49] In particular, her reference to kitchens and children signals women's traditional role and ongoing oppression in families. Also, the abolishment of inheritance, which is wealth passed through male generations, would mitigate the continuing transfer of male hegemony.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), drawn from Friedrich Engel's and Karl Marx's notes, the former successively analyses the evaluation of different family forms in primitive societies as identified by the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan: 'The Consanguine, the punaluan, the pairing, the patriarchal and the monogamous families'. For Engels, the rise of capitalism in the eighteenth century elevated with it the monogamous family, which controls sexuality. In his analysis, Engels concludes that the family and labour are two different modes of production, which have a determining effect on the creation of a class society:

> According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other.[50]

As the communist/Marxist ideology envisages 'a classless society', it aims to regulate both modes of production in a way that would eradicate any class stratification in society. Among its proposed stages of economic development, communism will be the last stage where the whole society will be transformed into one family rather than being divided into different classes of family (that is, working, middle, and upper). Instead of analysing the family with regards to individuals (either women, men, or children),

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49. Alexandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family* (1920), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/communism-family.htm> [accessed 10 June 2017].

50. Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, pp. 71-2.

communism focuses on the relation between reproduction and capitalism, which transforms family into an economic unit together with 'sex role differentiation'. As Irine Bruegel argues:

> Capitalism exploits the differentiation of the sexes. It does this by differentiating between 'men's work' and 'women's work', using women both as a cheap labour for employment in the more marginal and insecure jobs, and as a reserve army of labour. […] Thus it is in the interests of capitalism as a system to sustain sex role differentiation and the family as a reservoir of potential (latent) labour power.[51]

Through this role differentiation, capitalism creates a ready human labour force, and women's participation in the market offers an opportunity for cheaper labour due to their socially specified inferior role at home. Therefore, as Heather A. Brown highlights in *Marx on Gender and the Family* (2012), Marx and Engels indirectly argue that 'since the origins of class-society exists in the family, a classless society cannot be created and maintained so long as familial and gender oppression exits'.[52] Lindsey German, a Marxist feminist, explains the relation between reproduction and capitalism: 'Reproduction through the family is not a separate mode, but part of the superstructure of capitalism. Abolition of the capitalist system – a revolutionary overthrow of society – means the capitalist system of reproduction, the family, cannot survive intact'.[53] The Marxist/communist ideology envisages the transformation of the family via the economic transformations in historical development, say, from capitalism to socialism. In this sense, it critiques the family with regards to the material conditions such as private property that cause the inequalities between the sexes in society.

In *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (1976), Eli Zaretsky argues that the family is 'already an integral part of the economy under capitalism', and the bourgeois view that presents the family as 'the basic unit of the society' regardless of the individuals or classes 'reinforce[s] the deeply rooted traditions of male supremacy'.[54] In Marxist and functionalist views of the family alike, men have been the reference and norm against which everything else is measured and discussed. From a functionalist

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51. Irene Bruegel, 'What Keeps the Family Going?', *International Socialism*, 2.1 (1978), (2–15), p. 8.

52. Heather Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study* (Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 42-3.

53. Lindsey German, 'Theories of Patriarchy', *International Socialism*, 2.12 (1981), p. 10.

54. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and the Personal Life* (London: Pluto Press, 1973), p. 45.

perspective, women's roles as mothers and wives contributed greatly to the sustenance of a stable society. Marxist/communist views critiqued this society for creating an unequal distribution of power and labour between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, while ignoring a greater unequal distribution of labour and power relations existent between men and women in the family. Women have been at the very centre of these theories, but their labour in the family has been excluded or made invisible. Feminist movements, contrary to Marxist and fundamentalist views, have prioritised womanly concerns and their problems in the family. The invisibility of women's labour and their exclusion from wider society and from Marxist theory and politics have been what energised diverse feminist movements - liberal, radical, and Marxist - as part of their critique of the family.

Feminism and the Patriarchal Family

There have been diverse feminist views of familial arrangements, but feminists agree that families are ideological and political structures where humans become gendered. The central focus in feminist criticism is on the effect the family has on women. Feminist theory critiques the traditional family as a patriarchal unit. The patriarchy thrives through unequal treatment of men and women in family and society. For example, men benefit from women's service in the family, and they are also privileged by a lack of competition in the relative absence of women in wider society. Women's oppression under their assumed natural roles as wives, mothers, and daughters creates ways in which they are disadvantaged in public spheres through being given work akin to their familial obligations. Feminists claim these roles are 'not natural but grow out of and are the expressions of a complex series of social relations: patriarchy, economic systems, legal and ideological structures, and early childhood experiences and their unconscious residues'.[55] In other words, gender roles are learned and therefore can be changed in favour of an egalitarian family and society.

By focusing on women's conditions in the family, feminists challenge patriarchal ideology, operating as a means of 'holding together and legitimising the existing social, economic, political and gender systems'.[56] The feminist critique of the family therefore

55. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics,* (1970; repr., London: Virago Press, 1985), pp. 250-1.

56. Dianna Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Household and Familiar Ideologies* (1985, repr., Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1993), p. 168.

puts extant social, political, economic, and patriarchal systems into question. In their critique, feminists analyse sub-systems of family such as marriage, pregnancy, childrearing, and domesticity as key to the construction and eradication of gender inequalities. Each feminist movement has critiqued the family as a site of female oppression and gender inequalities. Although feminist critiques of the family vary in their orientations and emphasis, they all, with their distinctive and specific concerns, look at the ways in which family and its obligations are central to women's oppression and hence creation of an unjust society. It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that feminist perspectives called for equality in all spheres of life. These calls 'contributed greatly to the changes in family law' such as The Abortion Act 1967 and The Divorce Reform Act 1969, which successively enabled women to have control—though limited—over their sexuality and made divorce relatively easier.[57]

All feminist movements agree that gender roles have shaped human behaviours in a way that disadvantages half of society (women). On the other hand, behaviours that are not generated by gendered extremes, such as strong men and weak women, would relieve the pressures on men, women, and children, and enable them to focus more on their individual capacities rather than gendered ones. For example, a family where parenthood and domesticity are shared equally would not only lessen the burden on women, but it would also contribute to men's capacities as nurturers. This would in return mean equal participation in wider society, enabling women to fully enter the public sphere and develop their human potentials. Variations in feminist movements are not due to ambivalence, but rather suggest that what is a problem for women is a problem for the entire society, requiring multiple solutions from distinctive perspectives.

Liberal Feminism

The recognition of the family as a subject of feminism dates back to the early years of liberal feminism in the late eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft advocated an egalitarian transformation of family and society where women could have the same rights as men. She critiqued patriarchal relations and inequalities in the family. With the

57. Susan Westerberg Prager, 'Shifting Perspectives on Material Property Law', in *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, ed. by Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom (London: Longman, 1982), p. 126.

publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft called for equality in marriage, access to paid work, and women's education. She argued that men and women are equal in the eyes of God, and therefore men need to follow the same moral and virtuous values expected of women.[58] In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill, in his *The Subjection of Women* (1869), highlighted family 'as a school of despotism, in which virtues of despotism, but also its vices, are largely nourished'.[59] These virtues can be transformed into freedom with a just family: 'The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom'.[60] Mill sees the family as a sphere where women need to spend their energies to gain equalities in wider society. This is because a virtuous family, for Mill, is a prerequisite for justice in other social and political spheres. Both Wollstonecraft and Mill acknowledged family as central to women's development as much as it is to do with their oppression.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal feminists acknowledged women's oppression in the family, but their solutions still confined women to the domestic situation. In her *Three Guineas* (1938), Virginia Woolf's position on the family significantly differed from those of Wollstonecraft and Mill. She viewed the patriarchal family to be a prototype of fascism for creating a male-dominated sex-gender system, and hence producing unequal distribution of power between the sexes. Woolf explores the ideological connection between private (family) and public (society) spaces: 'the tyrannies of and servilities of the one are the tyrannies of and servilities of the other'.[61] Therefore, the eradication of tyranny in the private sphere is key to ending it in public. Woolf illustrates that the exclusion of women from public affairs, denying them representation in public positions of prestige and power, renders society far from democratic. She goes on to contend that the continual relegation of women to the family and domestic sphere is the reason for their absence from public affairs as well as their lack of power within their families.

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58. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792, repr., Oxford: Oxford Press, 1993).

59. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869, repr., Cambridge: The University Press, 1995), p. 160.

60. Ibid., p. 160.

61. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938, repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 162.

In the early 1950s, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) challenged the ways in which femininity is constructed. Her argument that '[o]ne is not born, but rather, becomes, a woman' explains that femininity and the traits attributed to women (for example passive, nonessential, and secondary) are not the result of biological, psychological, and intellectual differences between men and women, but rather are the products of differences in their situations.[62] Questioning the validity of women's 'biological role' as carers and nurturers would mean putting the biological family under scrutiny. The call to overthrow the myth of the 'happy housewife' and involve women in 'meaningful works' for self-fulfilment came in the early years of second-wave feminism. With the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan challenged hegemonic sexism in the United States by exposing the myth that the roles ascribed to women were natural. For Friedan, the marketing industry and companies that sold household products benefited from the myth of the 'happy housewife', creating the ways in which familial problems are ignored. The 'feminine mystique', which resulted from women's confinement to unending domestic responsibilities, was the reason for the 'problem that has no name', a term Friedan employed to explain women's ongoing dissatisfaction in the family during the 1950s and 1960s. She encouraged middle-class educated women to minimise their familial obligations and involve themselves in 'meaningful works' such as careers, with the aim to develop their talents and potential. The argument was that the inclusion of women in public affairs and the workplace would solve their unhappiness and create a more egalitarian society.[63] Since the 1960s, liberal feminism has been key to women's demand for equal rights in wider society.

Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism critiques the family as a site of women's exploitation under the economic system of capitalism and gender oppression under patriarchy. The writings of first-generation Marxists such as Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx determined that women's liberation was dependent upon the economic transformation from capitalism to socialism. However, Marxist feminists such as Heidi Hartmann consider this to be unrealistic and suggests that 'women should not trust men to liberate them after the

62. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949; repr., London: Pan Books, 1988), p. 259.

63. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

revolution'.[64] This is because it would mean the acceptance of women's ongoing oppression until a particular yet undefined stage, one determined by men. Therefore, Hartmann calls for a synthesis of Marxism and feminism, abstaining from a relationship in which the latter is subordinate to the former.[65] In this regard, Marxist feminism expands the Marxist theory of class by looking at gender and hence at the ideological connectedness between capitalism and patriarchy. Hartmann argues that while capitalism creates a hierarchal labour structure, patriarchy based on male hegemony determines the ordering of this structure, resulting in women being connected with the private and men with the public.[66]

It is in the family that women carry out their assigned tasks under the name of supporting men and children, including by cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and childrearing. However, in socialist and communist movements, women at home were not recognised as a social class and hence their labour in the family was excluded from a discussion in relation to capitalist modes of production. Yet the tasks women carry out are key to sustaining capitalism, as they reserve a free and ready labour force required for production. Marxist feminism enabled the recognition of women as a social class and their labour in the family as part of the economy under capitalism. Eli Zaretsky critiques Juliet Mitchell and Shulamith Firestone's conceptions of the economy, which he argues signifies 'the production of goods and services to be sold'.[67] For Zaretsky, this conception recognises that a woman hired to cook in a restaurant performs an economic activity, but it does not extend the same recognition to a housewife who cooks for her family. Such an understanding therefore excluded housewives and families from revolutionary politics and the struggle between 'economic classes'.[68] Marxist feminism challenges capitalism's control of the family and men's control of women, hence women's double oppression under the workforce both at home and in public.

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64. Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. by Lydia Sargent (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1981), pp. 1-41 (p. 32).

65. Ibid.

66. Hartmann Heidi, 'The Historical Roots of Occupational Segregation: Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex', *Signs*, 1.3 (1976), 137-69.

67. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, pp. 23-4.

68. Ibid., p. 24.

Radical Feminism

The main feminist objection towards the family has been a '[c]ritical analysis of the family, and efforts to change traditional family arrangements', which inflicted upon women oppressions including domesticity, marriage, reproduction, and childrearing.[69] Family has long been associated with the biological, natural and universal, as it is considered the domain of birth, nurturing, and other such events. This understanding was promoted by the nineteenth-century evolutionists who associated women with 'an unchanging biological role' while viewing men as 'the agents of all social processes'.[70] The term biological family, which was built upon the biological distinction between men and women, underwent a vigorous challenge and critique from radical feminism.

The start of the second-wave feminist movement in the early 1960s radically questioned the main reasons behind women's oppression in the family and larger society. During this time, Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, and Germaine Greer introduced a wide range of theoretical perspectives that called for a radical approach to feminism, one that considered biological differences between men and women as the main reason for the oppression and exploitation of the latter. The family is where women's sexuality and reproduction are controlled by biology. In the patriarchal systems of family and society, men benefit from the daily support of women directly, and so create and contribute to situations in which women are oppressed. Therefore, radical feminists also hold men responsible for female subordination. In the late 1960s, radical feminists in the United States argued that patriarchy was evident in all societies as the root of gender oppression. For them, patriarchy was perpetuated by the family, which they argued needed to be abolished in order to remove the conditions that oppressed women.[71] In the early 1970s, Firestone proposed pregnancy and motherhood as the conditions that create women's exploitation and oppression. As a solution, she envisioned a post-patriarchal society in which 'tyranny of the biological family would be broken' and where '[t]he reproduction of the species by one sex […] would be

69. Barrie Thorne, 'Feminist Rethinking of the Family: An Overview', in *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminists Questions* (London: Longman, 1982), 1-23 (p. 2).

70. Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako, 'Is There a Family? New Anthropological Views', in *Gender/Sexuality Reader*, ed. by R. Lancaster & M. di. Leonardo (London: Routledge, 1997), 71-5 (p. 75).

71. Hilde Lindemann Nelson, 'Introduction', in *Feminism and Families*, ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1- 12.

replaced by […] artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either'.[72] Although Firestone's solution of alternative reproduction methods was found to be utopian in the following decades, her discussion was essential in demystifying the relation between reproduction, motherhood, and patriarchy, and in enabling other critics to explore these concepts. Radical feminists offered 'new reproductive technologies', advocated 'opting out of family', and proposed 'separatism from men' as solutions to end women's oppression.[73] These suggestions, though radical in mood, opened the path for exploration of alternative kinship and human relations that can be considered within the context of non-normative families.

Psychoanalytical Feminism

During the 1970s, feminist criticism took a new direction, one that expanded existing criticism into a psychoanalytical approach.[74] This led feminists to analyse the family in relation to early childhood experiences, motherhood, childrearing, and reproduction. The studies of Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein focused on understanding 'inequality between sexes, certain differences between the sexes, and misogyny originating from prevailing child rearing arrangements'.[75] For psychoanalytical feminists, gender inequalities were based on an individual's unique psycho-sexual development, not their biological differences. Early childhood experiences were key to the construction and promotion of gender roles in wider society, as boys and girls learn to be different by internalising the traits of masculinity and femininity that they witness in adults. Chodorow highlights the centrality of mothers in orienting boys and girls into different developmental paths. For example, boys learn to separate themselves from their mothers and identity with their fathers, and hence assume male supremacy. This departure results in boys developing autonomy and a less dependent persona, and reduces their capability for intimate and emotional relationships, which in turn suits

72. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 11.

73. Ti Grace Atkinson, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer and Christine Delphy were key figures of radical feminism, critiquing familial arrangements and women's oppression.

74. Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate and Psychoanalysis Feminism* (1971); Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990) are among the notable feminist texts dealing with the subject of gender inequality from psychoanalytical perspective.

75. Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 17.

them better as they mature and enter the public domain and assume their role as breadwinners. On the other hand, girls are not allowed to identify with their fathers but only with their mothers, which makes them less prepared for life in the public sphere but better suited to private spaces, including the family. They are also taught to perform traits of intimate personal and emotional relationships such as nurturing, care, and support.[76] The solution identified by psychoanalytic feminists was dual parenting, which they envisioned would enable children to break away from viewing parenthood in a gender-categorised way. As a consequence, children would be able to experience both parents as self and other, and participate equally in private and public domains.

Gay Men, Lesbians and the Family

The very formation of the traditional family is built upon heterosexuality, so it could not historically accommodate gay men and lesbians. Starting from early childhood experiences, boys and girls are raised successively in line with the image of the dominant man and the submissive woman. Early on, children are indoctrinated into playing with the 'right' toys, those that connote boyishness and girlishness, even when these do not correlate with the individual child's inclinations. When it comes to their adolescence, they are 'expected to prove [themselves] socially to [their] parents as members of the right sex by either being a "right" man (oppressive) or a "right" woman (oppressed)'.[77] According to heteropatriarchal ideology, a 'right' man is attracted to women; a 'right' woman is attracted to men. The attributes of hegemonic masculinity and femininity and heterosexuality embodied in the traditional family are presented as biological and hence unchangeable. Therefore, any deviation from these attributes is met with alarm and considered within the range of 'abnormality'. As such, people who do not conform have been labelled as 'deviants', 'neurotic', 'sick', or 'bent', and as a potential threat to the family unit and social stability. Consequently, gay men and lesbians have been thrown out of their homes, not allowed to have family, pressurised into marriage, ostracised from social groups and sent to psychiatrists who historically deemed same-sex desire a mental disorder to be treated. For example, APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* included homosexuality as a

76. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (London: University of California Press, 1978).

77. Gay Liberation Front, *Manifesto* (1978), <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/pwh/glf-london.asp> [accessed 25 July 2018].

sexual deviation in the form of a pathologic behaviour from the first edition in 1952 up until 1973.[78] The term was updated when the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry Federal Council declared homosexuality not an illness. Gay people contested the claim that differences between men and women were normal, viewing it as propaganda of the patriarchal family and sexism, rather than the truth. In this way, they stepped out of the traditional notion of the family arrangement, and rejected gender roles designed by society. Their critique of the heterosexual family puts the entire sexist culture and its institutions into question, alarming politicians and prompting them to call for a return to 'family values'.

The first manifesto of the Gay Liberation Front was declared in London in 1971, which was followed by the first Gay Pride in 1972. The manifesto details the oppression of homosexual people through 'physical violence and by ideological and psychological attacks at every level of social interaction', including in both the public and private domains of family, school, media, employment, community, and the law.[79] It offers solutions for gay people to bring revolutionary change to the whole society rather than temporary reforms, and contends that a real change for all lies in subverting the patriarchal family and sexism by allying with the Women's Liberation Movement: 'The end of sexist culture and of the family will benefit all women, and gay people'.[80] Therefore, the manifesto calls gay people to rise up and step out of imperatives determined by the dominant heteronormative society and family.

Political Lesbianism

Political lesbians and lesbian separatists contributed to the validity of non-normative families in challenging homophobia and backlash against lesbians. During the 1970s many lesbians had their children taken away from them based on the assumption that a lesbian could not be a 'proper' mother. During the 1970s and 1980s, a group of radical feminists voiced their support for political lesbianism, which fought against what Adrienne Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality and sexism by advocating lesbianism

78. American Psychiatric Association Mental Hospital Service, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1952), p. 39.

79. *Gay Liberation Front*, *Manifesto* (1978).

80. Ibid.

as a positive solution to women's oppression.[81] The divergence of political lesbianism from mainstream feminism moved the discussions of family into a new phase, in which women were invited to reject heterosexual relations and to embrace liberation in practice. For example, Ti-Grace Atkinson and Alice Echols considered married women to be 'hostages' trapped in the 'anti-feminist' institution of marriage and heterosexuality.[82] Shelia Cronan suggested the abolition of marriage for women's freedom, as it 'constitutes a slavery for women'.[83] Roxanne Dunbar stressed the importance of demanding 'full-time childcare in public schools' to free many women and enable them to make decisions, suggesting that the demand 'alone will throw the whole ideology of family into question, so that women can begin establishing a community of work with each other and [they] can fight collectively'.[84] Andrea Dworkin called upon women to renounce 'all forms of male control and male domination', and to destroy 'the institutions and cultural valuations which imprison [women] in invisibility and victimization'.[85] For Dworkin, the patriarchal system created a timeless cycle of victimisation for individuals:

> Under patriarchy, every woman is a victim, past, present and future. Under patriarchy, every woman's daughter is a victim, past, present and future. Under patriarchy, every woman's son is her potential betrayer and also the inevitable rapist or exploiter of another woman.[86]

Marilyn French critiqued the family as promoting female subjection through male control of women's sexuality. She further added that while women have always been subjects of disempowerment, degradation, and subjugation, men, particularly in the West, have 'exploded in a frenzy of domination, trying to expand and tighten their

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81. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-60 (pp. 630-631).

82. Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odsseey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), p. 86; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 178.

83. Shelia Cronan, 'Marriage', in *Radical Feminism*, ed. by. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 213-221 (p. 219).

84. Roxanne Dunbar, *Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Revolution*, (1970, repr., Flatbush: El libro Libre, 2013), p. 11. <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/RDO/_single_RDO_Female_Liberation_as_Basis_for_Social_Revolution.pdf> [accessed 5 May 2018].

85. Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics*, (Perigee Books: New York, 1976), p. 65.

86. Ibid., p. 20.

control of nature and those associated with nature—people of color and women'.[87] Marilyn Frye highlighted the connection between male dominance and naturalisation of female heterosexuality for perpetuating patriarchal systems.[88] Shelly Jeffrey co-wrote *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* (1981) with the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, arguing that '[a]ny woman who takes part in a heterosexual couple helps to shore up male supremacy by making its foundations stronger'.[89] Claiming that '[f]eminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice', political lesbianism critiqued the idea of reconfiguring familial arrangements as impractical as long as the heterosexual relations continue.[90] Their solutions, though radical in tone, challenged the single form and meaning of the family, and celebrated families of choice.

Queer Kinship and Families of Choice

A significant challenge to the traditional family has come from lesbians and gay men, who have destabilised the heteronormative nature of the family by living outside traditional family arrangements. Judith Stacey introduces the concept of the postmodern family condition, in which as she contends, choice determines family composition. She maintains that the postmodern family 'is not the next stage in an orderly progression of stages of family history; [it] rather […] signals the moment in that history when our belief in a logical progression of stages has broken down'.[91] The way in which gay men and lesbians form their families represents the break-down in the history of the heterosexual family. For example, Cheshire Calhoun contends that lesbians are uniquely positioned to violate the conventional gender expectation that they, as women, would be dependent on men in their personal relations, would fulfil the maternal imperative,

87. Marilyn French, *The War Against Women*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), pp. 9-10.

88. Marilyn Frye, 'Do You Have to Be a Lesbian to Be a Feminist?', *Off Our Backs*, 20.8 (1990), 21-23.

89. Onlywomen Press Collective, *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* ed. by Onlywomen Press (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981), p. 6.

90. Chicago Women's Liberation Union Pamphlet, *Lesbianism and Feminism* (1971) quoted in Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1996), p. 282.

91. Judith Stacey, *In the Name of Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), pp. 7-8.

would service a husband and children, and would accept the confinement to the private sphere of domesticity.[92]

By avoiding heterosexual and conventional gender relations, gay men and lesbians create ways in which the perpetuation of sexism and the gender role system are avoided, being replaced instead by alternative and liberated lifestyles. Gay men and lesbians have also illustrated that family composition can be determined by choice rather than being imposed by biology or dominant ideology. This has developed the idea that families can exist in a variety of forms and purpose, depending on the demands of the individual. The struggles of gay men and lesbians, therefore, represent a transition from the dominant family ideology to a new phase, one characterised by the 'chosen family'. This concept contrasts with the compulsory heterosexual nature of the family. In a chosen family, human biology does not determine the ordering of parental and sexual relationships. This family promotes the idea that human sexuality 'is a choice, and [humans] are not destined to a particular fate because of [their] chromosomes'.[93] For example, women do not have to be mothers—or primary carers—just because they are born female, and being male does not privilege men to be relatively free from parental responsibilities. Instead, the idea of parenthood is equally shared by both parties in a non-hierarchical manner. This, in return, creates ways in which children are raised free from gender constraints. For Kath Weston, 'familial ties between the same sexes, [which] are not grounded in biology or procreation, do not fit any tidy division of kinship into relations of blood and marriage'.[94] Therefore, prevailing family ideology and gender roles are not transferred across generations.

The chosen family replaces traditional family arrangements, such as heterosexual marriage, gendered parenthood, and biological kinship, and introduces non-normative arrangements such as same-sex marriage, same-sex parenting, and non-biological kinship. In deciding whether or not to have children, gay men and lesbians have challanged the family ideology that promotes having children and raising them within a

92. Cheshire Calhoun, 'Family's Outlaws: Rethinking the Connections between Feminism, Lesbianism, and the Family', in *Feminism and Families* ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), 131-150 (p. 133).

93. Julie Binden, *My Sexual Revolution* (2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/jan/30/women-gayrights> [accessed 21 July 2018].

94. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays and Kinship*, (1991, repr., New York: Colombian University Press, 1997), p. 3.

heteronormative family, in line with gender roles. These non-normative arrangements initially incurred a backlash, as they were considered to be deviant and a threat to social stability. However, the struggles of gay men and lesbians to receive equal rights in the public domain have paved the way for chosen families to be gradually recognised and legalised.[95] Gay men and lesbians have put into practice the long feminist fight against gender oppression by establishing non-normative family arrangements and celebrating sexual diversity.

The New Right and After: The 'Pretended' or Alternative Families

Feminist and gay challenges to the traditional family have not passed without resistance. During the 1980s, stable families were part of the New Right's policy and its vision of a stable society. Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) declared that 'a nation of free people will only continue to be a great nation if your family life continues and the structure of that nation is a family structure'.[96] This conservative notion of the family structure reinforced a sharp distinction between private and public spheres in which women and men were successively situated. This distinction was sustained through 'stable' families, which in Diana Gittins' view 'shaped the ways in which government policies were perceived and regulated'.[97]

The period in which the New Right came to power was marked by changes in the way families were perceived and formed. In particular, traditional family values were challenged by the rise of the Gay Liberation Movement, radical feminists' attack on family values, easier access to divorce and cohabitation, advanced birth control methods, and technologically assisted reproduction. Thus, the claim that the nuclear family is a natural and unchanging unit came under scrutiny. The New Right was alarmed by these changes, and declared that the family was in a state of crisis, one that was likely to cause wider social problems. Rather than acknowledging underlying causes of social problems in the economy, education, and health sector, the New Right pointed to the family as the site where social problems could be solved. For example,

95. See, for example Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Marriage Act 2013 that give same sex couples equal rights for a legal marriage and adoption as heterosexual couples.

96. Margret Thatcher, *No Such a Thing as Society* (interviewed by Douglas Keay for Woman's Own) (23 September, 1987) < https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [accessed 28 June 2018].

97. Dianna Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familiar Ideologies*, p. 157.

Thatcher stated, 'You have to accept that these problems will occur, but it is best to have them solved within the family structure and you are denying the solution unless the family structure continues'.[98] According to the Tories, individuals were threatened with social instability if they were not part of a family. Under the New Right, the family once more functioned as a disciplinary institution where women and children could be controlled by men in an attempt to avoid social problems such as AIDS.

In the 1980s, the New Right defended their notion of 'family values' by actively discouraging homosexuality through the education system. Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibited the endorsement of homosexuality, stipulating that 'a local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.[99] Homosexual parents and their children were reconfigured as a 'pretended family', a stance that dismissed of possibility of an alternative family. Cheshire Calhoun explains the ideological motif behind targeting a specific group and accusing them of destroying family values:

> In periods where there was heightened anxiety about the stability of the heterosexual nuclear family because of changes in gender, sexual, and family composition norms within the family, this anxiety was resolved by targeting a group of persons who could be ideologically constructed as outsiders to the family.[100]

The New Right was unsettled by homosexuality not because it was a threat to the well-being of families and individuals, but rather because, in their view, it had the potential to dissolve the traditional family ideology that structures social, economic, and governmental systems. Thatcher declared that 'there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families'.[101] Her emphasis on 'individual men and women' hints at their roles in the gendered system of family required for social

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98. Margret Thatcher, *No Such a Thing as Society* (interviewed by Douglas Keay for Woman's Own) (23 September, 1987) < https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [accessed 28 June 2018].

99. Local Government Act 1988 (Section 28), <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted> [accessed 20 July 2016].

100. Cheshire Calhoun, 'Family's Outlaws: Rethinking the Connections between Feminism, Lesbianism, and the Family', p. 137.

101. Margret Thatcher, *No Such a Thing as Society* (1987).

stability. Homosexuality was seen as a danger to the gendered roles of individual men and women, in part because gay men were perceived to be 'feminine' and lesbians as 'masculine', thus subverting preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity.

In 1991, the New Right's insistence on a single form and meaning of the family was opposed by the Labour Party, when Labour MP Harriet Harman called for recognition of alternative families in family and public policies:

> Family policy needs to recognise that families come in all shapes and sizes… to claim one kind of family is right and others wrong can do considerable harm by stigmatizing those who live in a non-traditional family setting. Public policy cannot alter private choices, but it can mitigate the painful effects of change.[102]

Harman maintained that the formation of a family depends on individual choices. The state's responsibility, for her, was to support these choices rather than impose a monolithic form of the family that disregarded individuality and variety. Her speech also acknowledged the stigmatisation of individuals who live outside the traditional family arrangements. Harman's emphasis on choice as a criterion for family formation was key to countering this stigmatisation and introducing further legal steps for chosen families.

The years 1994 and 2000 witnessed developments in the rights of chosen families. The legal age of consent for men engaging in homosexual acts, previously set as 21 in 1967, was lowered to 18 by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, and finally to 16 by the amendment to the Civil Partnership Act 2000. The equalisation of the age of consent illustrated that chosen families started to gain the same rights as traditional families. In particular, the Adoption and Children Act (2002) and the Civil Partnership Act (2004), introduced by New Labour and supported by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, was a milestone in the legal recognition of non-normative human relations within the context of a family. The acts granted same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as heterosexual couples who chose civil marriage and adoption in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the hegemony of the traditional family as unique, natural, and universal was put into question on legal grounds. The act also represented the

102. Harriet Harman, cited in David Clapham, *The Meaning of Housing: A Pathways Approach* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2005), p. 45.

transition from the family of fate imposed by the collective to families of choice, voluntarily selected by individuals. So although homosexuality had been dismissed as a 'pretended family' earlier, it was finally acknowledged in law under a broader and more inclusive definition of family. It is against this backdrop of new ideas about family, that Lessing reimagines family in her fiction.

Overview of Existing Criticism: Lessing and the Family

Scholars agree that family is a major concern in Lessing's fiction. However, there is as yet no robust account of Lessing's fictional family in the large body of critical work on her fiction. In 2007, Susan Watkins suggested that family is one of the 'issues that [is] clearly at the forefront of [Lessing's] most recent work'.[103] In 2010, Robin Visel issued a call to read Lessing's novels 'anew in the twenty-first century'.[104] Notwithstanding, the existing criticism on Lessing rests more on how she is critical of the traditional family arrangements. In other words, there has yet not been much attention paid to Lessing's representation of non-normative families. The tendency in critical studies has been to identify Lessing's critique of traditional family as an institution that is oppressive to women. This tendency has revealed the ways in which Lessing's treatment of family has benefited from feminist criticism, largely missing insights from communism, Sufism and postcolonial ecofeminism. This has created the risk of reading Lessing as only critical of the traditional family arrangements, and her fiction as only concerning women's issues. As such, non-normative families have remained evident but underdeveloped themes in Lessing criticism.

Non-biological and non-normative families have received relatively less critical attention from Lessing scholars. Anthony Chennells and Watkins approached the Lennox family in *The Sweetest Dream* as a non-biological one. Chennells contends that the presence of two adopted African children means that family 'is more than a shared genetic inheritance' in Lessing's fiction.[105] Watkins offers a similar reading of these adopted children, suggesting that their inclusion in the Lennox family signals 'a new

103. Susan Watkins, '"Grande Dame" or "New Woman": Doris Lessing and the Palimpsest', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 17 (2007), 234-62 (p. 259).

104. Robin Visel, '"Then Spoke the Thunder": The Grass Is Singing as a Zimbabwean Novel', Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 43.2 (2008), 157-166 (p. 157).

105. Anthony Chennells, 'From Bildungsroman to Family Saga', *Partisan Review*, 69.2 (2002), 297-301 (p. 297).

sense of community, family and home.'[106] I read the Lennox house within the context of a commune as an alternative to the traditional family arrangements. The kinship relations in the Lennox family evoke forms of blended and biracial families that challenge a single meaning and form of the family. Reading Lessing's short story "Each Other", Judith Kegan Gardiner discusses Lessing's employment of incest rhetoric as a narrative strategy to titillate 'her readers while exploring […] themes of identity, family, social convention, and sexuality […].'[107] This reading is valuable in terms of highlighting Lessing's reference to non-normative families and human relations. I argue that the rhetoric of incest serves to enhance Lessing's critique of kinship and blood for the purpose of introducing non-normative families. Lessing employs incest in *Mara and Dann* as a strategy to cross the borders of the traditional family and conventional thinking.

The significance of non-normative families, kinship and alternative domesticities has recently been recognised by Lessing scholars in MLA 2018, in the panel titled 'Alternative Domesticities in the Works of Doris Lessing', followed by the publication of a cluster of articles in volume 36 of *Doris Lessing Studies* in December 2018. This issue has focused on Lessing's representation of 'non-biological families, non-normative affiliations, and unconventional households', chiefly by offering fruitful insights on how her fiction engages with works written by others, such as Jenny Diski, Lara Feigel and Vladimir Nabokov.[108] Focusing on Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), alongside Jenny Diski's memoir, *In Gratitude* (2016), Susan Watkins introduces the concept of 'apocalyptic imaginative memoir' that she observes Lessing and Diski develop as a way to 'imagine the transformation of conventional mothering and family'.[109] Watkins's comparative reading of their works as examples of such 'apocalyptic imaginative memoir', and their concurrent lived experimentations with new images of the mother/daughter relationship,

106. Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 56.

107. Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'No Climax: Rhetoric of Incest and Short Story Form in Lessing's "Each Other"', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 30.2, (2012), 9-14 (p. 9).

108. Robin Visel and Dorian Stuber, 'Letter from the Co-Editors', *Doris Lessing Studies,* 36 (2018), 3-4 (p. 3).

109. Susan Watkins, 'Reimagining Maternal in Jenny Diski's and Doris Lessing's Apocalyptic Imaginative Memoirs', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 36 (2018), 5-9 (p. 5).

demonstrates how Lessing's fiction genuinely offers 'a new form of family' through 'a new genre'.[110]

Selcuk Senturk examines *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Ben, in the World* as Sufi novels that, he argues, illuminate the ways in which Lessing 'problematises and reconfigures the family' both at personal and fictional levels.[111] He further suggests that 'the simultaneous presence of Diski and Sufism in Lessing's life allows her to realign family and parenthood in her fiction'.[112] His reading of the novels through a Sufic lens introduces three novel concepts, 'Sufi family', 'Sufi parenthood', and 'Su-feminism', which together demonstrate Lessing's resistance to 'social conventions [and] power structures, specifically here, in the example of parenthood and family', through new forms. Terry Reilly examines the traces of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1995) in and through Lessing's novella "The Grandmothers" and Diski's memoir *In Gratitude*, illustrating how these works intersect in their representations and reworking of alternative and taboo familial relationships. He argues that 'Lessing and Diski are linked in that they reference *Lolita* as a way to expand the notion of traditional family to include the alternative relationships that they explore' in their texts.[113] Reilly's article is an example of how Lessing's fiction is transformative of conventional and taboo family relationships. Taken as a whole, this issue has been key in demonstrating how Lessing's fictional family transforms 'conventional ways of thinking and writing' in a collaborative and bidirectional manner through the works of others.

When family is addressed by critics in Lessing's fiction, it has mainly been read in relation to ideas from the anti-psychiatry movement. R.D. Laing has been influential for Lessing scholars in understanding the origins of schizophrenia in the family. James Arnett reads the *Children of Violence* series by employing insights from Laingian

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110. Ibid., p. 9.

111. Selcuk Senturk, 'The Representation of Non-Normative Family and Kinship: Sufi Family and Sufi Parenthood in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Ben, in the World*', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 36 (2018), 16-21 (p. 16).

112. Ibid., p. 17.

113. Terry Reilly, 'Alternative Domesticities, Altered Perspectives: Reading Lessing's "The Grandmothers and Diski's *In Gratitude* through Nabokov's *Lolita*', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 36 (2018), 22-24 (p. 24).

family theory and progressive politics to 'undo the logic of the family.'[114] He suggests that 'fighting so hard to preserve the self', as Martha Quest does, is indeed a way of preserving historical circumstances that have constructed the self. The solution to the distorting effects of the family lies in the dissolution of oneself by becoming schizophrenic. Therefore, schizophrenia is not to be seen as a problem but a way of escaping from the conventional family. Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) mirrors Laingian family theory. Professor Charles Watkins suffers from a mental breakdown due to being stuck between his family obligations and his own sense of self. Lessing extends Laing's theory, including men as sufferers of schizophrenia alongside women to suggest that the family is equally oppressive to men and women alike.

The Fifth Child also evokes a Laingian theory of the family when Harriet Lovatt has an unwanted child. She has to decide either to accept her son, Ben, or send him away as the destroyer of the family happiness. Ben's assumed abnormalities create a tension in Harriet as the mother. Laing wrote: 'A crisis will occur if any member of the family wishes to leave by getting the 'family' out of his systems, or dissolving the 'family' in himself. […] Dilemmas bound. If I do not destroy the 'family', the 'family' will destroy me.'[115] This dilemma creates a conflict for Harriet between either destroying or protecting *her* family or *the family*. Rather than destroying the family or letting it destroy her, Harriet dissolves the idea of the family in her mind. The conflict is resolved when she saves Ben from the straightjacket he is made to wear in the institution for his assumed abnormality. The fact Ben is transferred between the disciplinary institutions of school and hospitals reveal Michael Foucault's idea of family as an interlocking disciplinary mechanism.

Lessing scholars have considered *The Fifth Child* as challenging traditional family arrangements. Watkins reads the novel as a critique of Thatcherism and its promotion of family values.[116] Clare Hanson also introduces Ben Lovatt as 'a signifier of difference

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114. James Arnett, 'Free From the Family: Lessing, Klein, and the Unwanted Child', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 30.1, (2012), 13-17 (p. 17).

115. Ronald David Laing, *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (1969, repr., London: Routledge, 1999), p. 14.

116. Susan Watkins, 'Writing in a Minor Key: Doris Lessing's Late-Twentieth Century Fiction', in *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times* ed. by Debrah Raschke, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, and Sandra Singer (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010), pp. 149-61.

who […] challenges normative family values […].'[117] I suggest that *The Fifth Child* is a key feminist text that shows how the family situation can be oppressive to men and children beyond women. By depicting Harriet's relationships with her children, husband and parents, Lessing illustrates how the ideology of the family cannot accommodate difference and is oppressive to its members. Jeanie Warnock argues that the mother-daughter relationship is a recurring theme in Lessing's fiction whereas critical studies overlook father-daughter relationships which could offer new readings, especially considering Lessing's conflicts with her own father.[118] In my reading of *The Fifth Child* I illustrate that Ben is not an extension of his father, which challenges the patriarchal ideology and its continuance.

Several Lessing scholars have discussed Sufism in Lessing's fiction and the ways it has influenced her style, technique and language. Muge Galin's *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1997) is the first complete critical assessment of Sufism in Lessing's fiction. For Galin, Sufism sheds a new light on Lessing's work. She suggests that it is thanks to Sufism that Lessing writes with 'self-assurance', and becomes 'more didactic' in her writing.[119] Following communism and feminism, Lessing employs a non-political philosophy of Sufism in her fiction that adds novelty to the content of her writing and style. Contrary to her ambivalent relationships with communism and feminism, Lessing expresses an open interest in Sufism. However, Galin's assertion that Lessing becomes 'more didactic' contradicts the very nature of Sufism which avoids didacticism to enable individuals' potential for self-learning. As I show in Chapter Three, this is evident in *Memoirs* and *Ben, in the World* in which Emily and Ben follow the Sufi way as free from any prescribed behaviour and conventional thinking.

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117. Clare Hanson, 'A Catastrophic Universe: Lessing, Posthumanism and Deep History', in *Forming of the History*, ed. by Kevin Brazil, David Sergeant and Tom Sperlinger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2016), p. 167.

118. Jeanie Warnock, 'Unlocking the Prison of the Past: Childhood Trauma and Narrative in Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor*', *Doris Lessing Studies* 23:2, (2004), 12-16 (p. 13).

119. Muge Galin, *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 155.

Galin proposes that Sufism 'will not only complicate our understanding of [Lessing's] work but also reshape our assessments of its quality'.[120] In a similar fashion, Nancy Topping Bazin celebrates Lessing's move into Sufism, suggesting that her 'ideas have been nourished and clarified through her interest in Sufism'.[121] My reading of Lessing's fiction through Sufism differs from the existing criticism in the sense that it offers ways of reassessing her work within the context of non-normative families.

There have been several discussions of *Memoirs* as a Sufi novel, but these do not link Sufism to the family. For example, Roberta Rubenstein reads the novel as a breakthrough in Lessing's fiction 'rendering […] the mystical path of self-transcendence'.[122] Muge Galin takes *The Memoirs of a Survivor* as a Sufi novel which 'traces the steps a would-be Sufi takes toward enlightenment'.[123] When *Memoirs* is read in relation to the family, there is no connection made between family and Sufism in the novel. Watkins suggests that 'the narrator experiences the collapse of civilized society and the nuclear family'.[124] For Sunita Sinha, the novel demonstrates Lessing's ongoing interest in alternative groups to the nuclear family structures, and 'the degeneration of atmosphere, the collapse of law and order and material infrastructure led to the breaking of stable, biologically related families'.[125]Although critics spot the representation of the family either as Lessing's view of the family or her interest in the alternative structures, there has yet not been a reading that examines the connection between Sufism and Lessing's representation of the family. I read Gerald's commune within the context of a non-normative family that reflects Sufi principles. Therefore, Sufism enables a shift from the collapse of the nuclear family to Lessing's creation of non-normative families in the novel. A focus on the family also contributes to studies of Sufism as there has yet not been any detailed studies or theories of how Sufism deals with the institution of the family. This is because, unlike political movements, which prescribe certain behaviours

120. Ibid., p. 3.

121. Nancy Topping Bazin, 'The Evolution of Doris Lessing's Art from a Mystical Moment to Space Fiction', in *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy* ed. Robert Reilly (Westport: Greenwood, 1985), 157-67 (p. 159).

122. Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing*, p. 240.

123. Galin, *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*, p. xxii.

124. Watkins, *Doris Lessing*, p. 53.

125. Sunita Sinha, *Postcolonial Women Writers* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008), p. 38.

within the family, Sufism avoids any form of prescriptive behaviour in order not to limit individual development.

There have also been readings that unpack the relationship between patriarchal systems of colonialism and family. Reading *The Fifth Child*, Debrah Raschke highlights the 'domestic scene […] as a breeding ground for colonial domination'.[126] I employ Raschke's argument to reveal an ideological interconnectedness between family and colonialism in *The Grass is Singing*. I show that, in the same way that the colony is domesticated by the empire, women and people of colour are domesticized through family. Anthony Chennells, a notable postcolonial critic of Lessing's work, explores Lessing's connection to African land, stating 'the empty country, untouched by man, has capacity to offer men and women new relationships […]'.[127] In *Mara and Dann,* Lessing creates her own utopian African continent, *Ifrik* contrary to the one dominated by colonial activity as way to reconfigure human relations within the context of non-normative families. Though being a recurring theme, the significance of the family has not yet been adequately established in the existing criticism.

Reading family within three phases as political, mystical and planetary throughout Lessing's fiction, I argue that the family illuminates Lessing's legacy and ever broadening perspective from woman to human then to the planet. The ways in which Lessing critiques and reconfigures family in her fiction offers solutions to problems that threaten humans and the planet. The pull between individuals' desire to achieve a full human identity and their need to feel a part of the collective is negotiated through Lessing's reformulation of the family. This thesis also extends existing criticism by showing that Lessing's fiction suggests more than her critique of traditional families, introducing non-normative families and kinship with alternative domesticities. Moreover, Lessing's fictional family is shaped by her environmental concerns and interest in mysticism. Critics have addressed these themes without linking them to family. The inclusion of these themes in exploring Lessing's representation of the family shows how Lessing's fiction can be reassessed. Such a reading, for instance,

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126. Debrah Raschke, 'The 'Heart of Kingdom': Colonial Politics in Lessing's *The Fifth Child*', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 22.1, (2001), 20-26 (p. 21).

127. Anthony Chennells, 'Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Setter Novel', *Doris Lessing Newsletter*, (1985), 9.2, 3-7 (p. 4).

acknowledges that Lessing seeks to liberate the family from ideology rather than individuals from the idea of family.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One, Communism and the Family, considers Lessing's representation of communes in the context of non-normative family arrangements. Communist ideology offers such arrangements in theory, including communal kitchens, shared raising of children, and relationships outside the sanction of marriage, all of which have the potential to subvert the conventional family ideology and its oppression, especially in relation to women. Alice in *The Good Terrorist* and Frances in *The Sweetest Dream* test the capacity of communism to introduce these arrangements in practice. However, Lessing illustrates that communism fails to liberate women from domesticity even in non-typical family settings. In these political communes, women are ironically represented as the proletariat while men, who are comrades, are portrayed as capitalists who benefit from women's labour.

Chapter Two, Feminism and the Family, takes the conventional family as a locus of gender oppression and the source of other inequalities in wider society. It focuses on the main elements of the family, such as marriage, reproduction, motherhood, child-rearing, and domesticity, employing insights from feminist critique of the family. The chapter also problematises the family as, to borrow from Foucault, a disciplinary institution that ideologically cooperates with wider disciplinary institutions, such as schools and medical establishments.[128] The chapter illustrates that Lessing's ambivalence towards feminism can partly be explained by her interest in other forms of oppression upheld by the family. Lessing writes about feminist issues, but she is not *just* a feminist writer, as her explorations include other forms of oppression such as bodily norms besides gender, as can be seen in the example of Ben Lovatt (emphasis added). The chapter positions *The Fifth Child* and *The Summer Before the Dark* as key post-1970s feminist texts. Although they have been overshadowed by *The Golden Notebook*, these novels offer equally strong critiques of women's oppression in society and, more specifically, in the family.

128. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, p. 81.

Chapter Three, Sufism and the Family, presents an entirely innovative approach to Lessing studies in the sense that it considers literary explorations of the family in the context of Sufism, and in doing so introduces two new terms: 'Sufi family' and 'Sufi parenthood'. This chapter illustrates that Lessing deploys elements of Sufism to represent non-normative kinship. Sufism enables Lessing to undo the conventional ideology of the family, an accomplishment she previously hoped to achieve via communism. I offer a comparative reading of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Ben, in the World* as Lessing's early and late Sufi novels. In this way, this chapter explores developments and changes between the two phases of Lessing's Sufism, and examines how these impact on her representation of the family. The introduction of the terms 'Sufi family' and 'Sufi parenthood' conveys the non-hierarchal, non-gendered and non-biological relationship between a Sufi guru and her student. These two terms hence add a new focus to Lessing's representation of non-normative families, and the chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways in which Lessing's Sufism intersects with and expands her feminism.

Chapter Four, Postcolonial Ecofeminism and the Family, focuses on *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* to trace changes in Lessing's postcolonial writing and demonstrate her increasing environmental concerns, and to explore how these changes have shaped her representation of the family. While Lessing details human settlement in remote lands, which resulted in the oppression of subaltern groups (for example, women and indigenous people) and the exploitation of the environment in *The Grass is Singing*, she challenges humans' assumed superiority over the environment—a very colonial stance—through displacement caused by environmental catastrophes in *Mara and Dann*. In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing gives a clear image of how the institutions of the family and colonialism cooperate in controlling indigenous peoples, settlers and, especially, white women as a way to exploit the African environment. On the other hand, in *Mara and Dann* the end of human advancement through environmental catastrophes enables Lessing to refigure her non-normative family, which is not based on blood or genetic ties. She transforms nature into an active agent from its submissive and passive position. In this way she subverts patriarchal and racial ideologies that associate women with nature—particularly in relation to the common feminisation of nature as 'Mother Nature'—something to be tamed and controlled. This chapter argues that Lessing's representation of the family moves from dystopia (*The Grass is Singing*)

to utopia (*Mara and Dann*), in that the changes in nature (the environment) initiate the change in the 'nature' of the family in Lessing's fiction. It also illustrates how *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* exemplify the convergence of postcolonialism with ecofeminist concerns through their representation of the family.

While the first two chapters examine Lessing's critique of conventional family arrangements, the last two chapters consider her representation of non-normative families. This points to a development in Lessing's representation of the family across her career. In this regard, I identify three main phases in Lessing's representation of family, namely political, mystical and environmental. In the first phase, which coincides with the years between the 1950s and 1960s, her representation is limited to her critique of traditional family arrangements and of how they specifically oppress women. In her second phase, between the 1970s and 1980s, Lessing's fiction offers a strong critique of the family, extending her concerns beyond women to illustrate how family is also oppressive to children and men. This shift in her focus can be explained through the intersection of her feminism and Sufism during that stage. In the final phase, which covers the 1990s and the early 2000s, Lessing's rising concern about the exploitation of the environment intersects with her interest in non-normative family forms. Overall, Lessing's fiction critiques and reconstructs the family without being anti-family and challenges inequality and hierarchy through the celebration of non-normative family forms.

Chapter One

Communism and the Family

Changes in traditional families and the idea of the commune as alternative to traditional family are represented in Doris Lessing's novels *The Good Terrorist* (1985) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001). A commune is an expression of the communist vision of the family, denoting 'a group of families or single people who live and work together sharing possessions and responsibilities'.[1] It differs from the traditional family in the sense that it implies an intentional togetherness with its members gathering for a common cause. In both novels, Lessing intertwines domesticity and political action as a way to realign traditional family arrangements and kinship. This fits the function of the commune proposed by Adrian Wilson: the creation of communes is an attempt to 'restructure conventional domestic and kin relations'.[2] The novels introduce communes as a revolutionary and therapeutic base to support victims of conventional family ideology, and explore the degree to which the idea of the commune enables women to achieve self-discovery and a release from domestic oppression. By examining Lessing's critique of 'latent slavery', and her focus on relationships between women and men in communes, this chapter will demonstrate that her fictional family rests on possibilities and limitations. Lessing examines the possibility of left-wing politics as an alternative to the traditional family, yet she also points to its limitations in transforming women's traditional roles.

During her time in Southern Rhodesia (1925-1949), Lessing becomes interested in communism as she finds communists to be the only group that fights against racial inequalities. The revolutionary politics of communism further inspires Lessing to challenge gender oppression in the family: 'In my case, it was because of my rejection of the repressive and unjust society of old white-dominated Africa'.[3] Her vision of a new family was initially shaped by communism as she mentions in an interview:

> I need my own family because the world is a terrible place, and the arena for unceasing struggle and conflict and a battle-ground between good and evil,

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1. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/commune> [accessed 25 January 2019].

2. Adrian Wilson, *Family* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 105.

3. Doris Lessing, *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), p. 27.

> God and the devil (or Communists and capitalists), and my new friends and I will fight on the side of the good.[4]

Lessing sees communism as offering her a new family both at personal and fictional levels. Therefore, she equates communism with goodness, and considers her friends as her new family through her belief in communism's potential to transform the family. Her new family is non-normative in the sense that it resists patriarchal systems, and it is not based on blood or genetic ties. However, in 1980 – five years before the publication of *The Good Terrorist* – she declares communism to be 'a germ or virus that had already been at work in [her] for a long time'.[5] Her growing disillusionment with communism started early in the late 1950s, but it becomes clearer in her writing as she moves from *The Good Terrorist* to *The Sweetest Dream*. In these novels, Lessing revisits communism as part of her rejection of oppressive family and of her attempt to create non-normative family and kinship.

The Good Terrorist and *The Sweetest Dream* focus most closely on family at a time when the discussion of changing family forms was a topical issue both in social and political areas. Thus, Lessing's representation of family in these novels contributes to a broader social and political reappraisal of the family and to the struggle over its meaning. From the 1950s onwards, the traditional family evolved with gradual changes in its structures. Ipsos MORI, one of the leading research companies in the United Kingdom, identifies three main causes for these changes: 'a massive feminization of the workforce since the second world war, widespread contraception leading to deferred decision about the start of families and divorce, remarriage and cohabitation becoming much more acceptable'.[6] Adrian Wilson concludes that the concept of the 'typical British family' has ended, and there are now different types of families coexisting due to changes in demographic factors, social outlook, and the role of women.[7] The social changes have resulted in the decline of stable and natural family paradigms that promote a single form of the family, a decline that paves the way for the exploration of new family forms. Rebecca O'Neill argued that the 1970s and 1980s were periods when

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4. Lessing, *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, pp. 36-7.

5. Ibid., pp. 36-7.

6. <http://www.ipsosmori.com/DownloadPublication/1215_sri_families_in_britain_2008.pdf> [accessed 23 September 2017].

7. Adrian Wilson, *Family (Society Now)*, p. 66.

many people discussed the end of the traditional family based on marriage and biological ties, and concludes that feminists and social rebels, with their demands for 'freedom of choice, self-fulfilment, and equal respect for all kinds of families', have started to experiment with different family structures.[8] On the other hand, Lessing's novels question to what extent the end of, to borrow a phrase from Wilson 'the typical British family' eradicates women's oppression in the family. Lessing's fiction does not take family changes for granted, but it tests the practicality of them by looking at women's condition therein.

Set in the early 1980s, in Thatcher era Britain, *The Good Terrorist* starts with a brief description of an old and neglected house that would later be transformed into a commune in the sense of a non-normative family run by Alice and her friends: 'Now [Alice] was thinking of them, her friends, *her family* (emphasis original)'.[9] The reason why Alice comes to live in a commune is her search for a new family, as she is dissatisfied with the conventional lifestyle of her own biological family. Her mother Dorothy, divorced and uneducated, leads a conventional lifestyle with economic difficulties, while her father Cedric enjoys a prosperous life, owning a factory. Hence, the commune offers a way for Alice to create her own family on her own terms, with her friends. The condition of the house is explained by the third-person narrator from the viewpoint of Alice:

> The house was set back from the noisy main road in what seemed to be a rubbish tip. A large house. Solid. Black tiles stood at angles along the gutter, and into a gap near the base of a flat chimney a bird flew, trailing a piece of grass several times its length. 'I should think, 1910,' said Alice, 'look how thick the walls are'.[10]

Houses are spaces in which the family ideology is embodied, and they determine human relations and activities. Here the house, as reinforced by the date '1910', represents a traditional model of the family. The image of the bird, 'trailing […] grass several times its length', and reference to nesting imply a gendered division of labour that limits women to the role of homemaker. The stability and the enduring strength of the

8. Rebecca O'Neill, *Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family*, (2002) <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/Experiments.pdf> [accessed 5 September 2012].

9. Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist* (1985, repr., London: HarperPerennial, 2007), pp. 84-5.

10. Ibid., p. 5.

traditional family are conveyed through the solidity of the house and the thickness of the walls. Alice relies on communism's potential to transform the family ideology that is hinted at her transformation of the house. She uses her energy in domestic and economic responsibilities to transform the old house into its new form: a commune and left-wing household. The new household accommodates characters who are representatives of different social groups: Philip and Jim, who are the working class; Roberta and Faye, a lesbian couple from the women's movement; Mary and Reggie, from the Greenpeace movement; Jasper, a homosexual man; and Pat and Alice, representing women whose potential is totally confined to the domestic realm. The common ground that brings them all together is that they are in search of alternative families as victims of the dominant family ideology. Alice's attempts to transform the outmoded model of a traditional house into a radical commune represents Lessing's experiment with non-normative families.

The Sweetest Dream covers a period that runs from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. The publication of the novel corresponds to New Labour's time in office, when things slightly improved in terms of women's participation in the labour force and recognition of alternative families. The novel exemplifies Lessing's pattern of looking back and moving forward to see changes in the family. The setting of the novel shifts between London and fictitious Zimblia. At the times when the setting is London, the protagonist is Frances Lennox, a single mother who is stuck between her heavy domestic burden and her part-time job as an Agony Aunt. Frances assumes the role of a bread-winner besides her maternal and domestic responsibilities. She is in charge of running a big extended family, evoking a commune. This family consists of her adult sons, Colin and Andrew, her mother-in-law Julia (the owner of the house), her ex-husband communist Johnny, Johnny's daughter Sylvia from his second marriage, and Johnny's second ex-wife, Phyllida. It also includes African communists and revolutionaries who stay transiently in the Lennox house, youngsters who take refuge in the house to escape from their own families, and orphans from Africa such as Franklin. The co-existence of biologically related and unrelated individuals who reside in the Lennox house for different purposes challenges a single meaning and form of the family.

In both novels, Lessing's central character is a woman, and the author foregrounds domesticity in her critique of the traditional family. Whereas *The Good Terrorist* represents a radical commune with characters from political backgrounds, the idea of the commune in *The Sweetest Dream* rests on normative and non-normative kinship with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Alice Mellings in *The Good Terrorist* and Frances Lennox in *The Sweetest Dream* actively and efficiently run the communes. While the former is dedicated to left-wing ideology and identifies as a communist, the latter believes in the inefficiency of communism as a political movement in eradicating inequalities. In *The Good Terrorist*, the relationship between Alice's commune and communist ideology is explicit, as the former is a branch of the Communist Centre Union. In *The Sweetest Dream* communism is at work through Frances's husband, Comrade Johnny. The link between Frances's commune and the ideology is implicitly provided by the representation of Johnny, who is criticised for remaining indifferent to familial problems. While Alice's commune advocates communism as a way to challenge social conservatism, Frances's commune is represented as anti-communist for prioritising male concerns and demands. Therefore, the representation of the commune differs in each novel in accordance with Lessing's gradual detachment from radical left-wing politics.

Some critics read Lessing's representation of the family in its relation to wider social problems and to her relation with political movements. In her analysis of the family in *The Four Gated City* (1969), Ruth Whittaker concludes that Lessing uses the family 'as a sounding board' to recall trends, movements, transitions, the cold war, the shocks of Suez and Hungary, and her growing disaffection with communism.[11] In a similar way, Robin Visel reads the Lennox house in *The Sweetest Dream* as a 'laboratory' and the Lennoxes as a 'surrogate family'.[12] Visel further suggests that Lessing re-imagines big ideas of the twentieth century such as communist revolution, psychoanalysis, decolonisation, feminism, and youth counter culture around Frances's big kitchen table 'in more realistic, small scale familial terms'.[13] Although the function of the family as illuminating wider social problems and political movements is valuable

11. Ruth Whittaker, *Doris Lessing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), pp. 55-6.

12. Robin Visel, 'House/Mother: Lessing's Reproduction of Realism in *The Sweetest Dream*' in *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 58-74 (p. 58).

13. Ibid., pp. 58-9.

when it is considered a microcosm of society, it does not adequately acknowledge and therefore fails to unpack Lessing's interest in creating non-normative families. Anthony Chennells identifies *The Sweetest Dream* as 'a family saga', a genre, which he contends, has not been used in Lessing's previous novels.[14] Margaret Rowe argues that *The Good Terrorist* is a 'family novel' that 'explores relationships in unconventional families'.[15] Susan Watkins considers *The Sweetest Dream* as representative of a family that is not based on 'genetic or blood ties or economic ties that operate through exchange of women in marriage'.[16] My reading of the novels focuses on the pull between traditional and non-normative families to challenge the notion of 'family stability', whilst illuminating the limitations of left-wing movements when it comes to family and women.

The Revolutionary Possibilities of the Commune/Communism

In *The Good Terrorist and The Sweetest Dream*, the idea of the non-normative family is built on communes gathering individuals who are exposed to social and familial oppression at different levels and contexts. Marxist theory presents different groups 'in constant opposition to each other' with a focus on class consciousness and the oppression of the working class. However, Lessing's fictional family brings different groups to common and equal grounds, 'to be genuinely transformative' of inequalities and conflict in wider society, to borrow a phrase from Susan Watkins.[17] In *The Good Terrorist*, the transformation of the traditional house into a political commune calls into question different forms of oppression experienced by diverse groups. For example, Alice and Pat represent women's ongoing oppression and delusion in the family: 'the two women accomplished miracles, dying caves being transformed one after another to fresh and lively rooms'.[18] The solidarity between the two evokes the Women's Liberation Movement: 'Alice began to feel protective, wanting Pat to wake up in case the others should come in and see her, defenceless'.[19] While Jim represents the

14. Anthony Chennells, 'From Bildungsroman to Family Saga: The Sweetest Dream', *Partisan Review*, 69, (2002), 297–301 (p. 297).

15. Margaret Moan Rowe, *Doris Lessing* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 93-4.

16. Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 145.

17. See, for example Watkins' *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 23.

18. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 190.

19. Ibid., p. 61.

'unemployable' black youth, Philip stands for the working class, whose labour and skills are exploited by employers: 'Philip had been promised jobs and not given them; had been turned off work without warning; had not been paid for work he had done'.[20] At a time when the New Right was targeting homosexuality as a 'pretended family', Jasper (a homosexual), and Roberta and Faye (a lesbian couple) seek refuge in the commune as they challenge established gender roles and heteronormativity within society. Their oppression, albeit the result of both capitalism or patriarchy, invokes the need for a reformulation of the family. Lessing hints that this can be achieved through solidarity between the oppressed groups, symbolised by the sharing of soup: 'Roberta and Faye, Mary and Reggie, Philip and Jim, Pat and Alice, sat around all evening compelled into being a family by the magic of that soup'.[21] The soup scene hints at nourishment and thus therapeutic aspects of the commune. The way Lessing presents the characters in relation to soup also implies the required solidarity for them to create their own sense of family that would be truly reflective and accommodate of their diverse individual demands and preferences.

The Lennox family of *The Sweetest Dream* is like the commune in *The Good Terrorist* in the sense that it gathers individuals who suffer under the dominant family ideology: 'Frances saw that here was another refugee from a shitty family'.[22] The phrase 'shitty family', also used in *The Good Terrorist*, implies disdain for the traditional family in the sense that it cannot welcome individual demands and choices.[23] The non-normativity of the Lennox family rests on the co-existence of biological and non-biological kinship relations and the absence of male supremacy. It consists of a younger generation clashing with the older ones, with Johnny's ex-wives and children, orphans from Africa, and political figures paying regular visits. The Lennox family witnesses the growth of four generations, and thus represents the pull between traditional and non-normative families. Traditional values and non-normative ideals are set side-by-side for the purpose of presenting the latter as better in regards to the family, and this suggests the changes in Lessing's fictional family. The idea of a radical transformation of the traditional family in *The Good Terrorist* is replaced by the idea of

20. Ibid., p. 118.

21. Ibid., p. 195.

22. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 47.

23. See for example, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 354.

a gradual transformation from the old towards the new in *The Sweetest Dream*. While Julia, the grandmother and Frances's mother-in-law, represents traditional 'family values', the ways in which Frances keeps her autonomy and independence paves the way for the non-normative family: 'Julia asked whether if she got a decent allowance from the family would she give up her job and look after the boys? Frances said no'.[24]

Lessing creates a radical commune in *The Good Terrorist* that counters the New Right's backlash against women's emancipation from their traditional roles as full-time housewives. This emancipation would mean the emergence of alternative family forms, and a re-definition of the labour force with women's rights incorporated. The Torys' call to return to family values was an attempt to undermine changes in the family and society, and an attempt to return women to their predefined domestic situation. The clash between Julia and Frances evokes the struggle between New Right and New Labour over the definition of the family and women's roles. While Julia aligns herself with 'the family values', with women's role as the bearer and hence 'the natural' nurturer of the children, Frances's resistance to the conflicting demands of home and work call the efficiency of left-wing politics and movements into question in introducing non-normative family arrangements. Lessing's protagonists do not take the changes in the family for granted, but rather become the means of change.

'Latent Slavery': 'Natural' Division of Labour in the Family

The Good Terrorist and *The Sweetest Dream* exemplify 'latent slavery', a term introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to critique the natural division of labour in the family. Historically, the natural division of labour restricted men and women to their predefined places as breadwinners and homemakers, respectively. Men as the owners of property are advantaged over women within the family, controlling if not devaluing the latter's labour in wider society. The division determines the hierarchical relationship between men and women, and modes of production in a manner akin to a master/slave relationship. The submissive and compulsory nature of slavery evokes the never-ending maternal and domestic responsibilities women have to carry out in the family. For Marx and Engels, this division is a form of 'latent slavery' and an 'unequal

24. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 10.

distribution', where 'wife and children are the slaves of the husband'.[25] They further discuss that in modern times, this slavery is pronounced as 'the power of disposing the labour-power of others'.[26]

Lessing's fiction corresponds to early discussions of Marx and Engels in illuminating how men dispose of women's labour in the family. In *The Good Terrorist*, Alice's mother, Dorothy, is an example of how women's maternal and domestic labour is exploited:

> Dorothy cried out, 'Oh I did so want something decent for you, Alice. I had no proper education, as you know. […] I was married when I was nineteen. […] And I just kept house and looked after you and your brother and cooked and cooked. I am unemployable. I used to sit there, when you and your brother were babies, thinking how my friends were all making something of themselves. And I was stuck'.[27]

Lessing's critique of latent slavery in the family is embodied in Alice's conversations with her mother. Domestic responsibilities prevented Dorothy from actively participating in the public realm. She married at an early age, and is unemployable due to her lack of an education. After getting divorced from her husband, Cedric Mellings, she understands that the domestic responsibilities she carried out are only for the sustenance of the family and not for her own life: 'Your father won't pay the bills any longer. I can't afford to live here. I'll have trouble paying my own bills. Do you understand, Alice?'[28] Following the divorce, she struggles to get by because she remains economically dependent on her ex-husband, while he leads a prosperous and happy family life with his new wife and child. Her labour in the family remains invisible and exploited, akin to slavery. Cedric, as the owner of the property, controls the labour power in it, demanding or disposing of the labour as he wishes. In the absence of her maternal and domestic responsibilities, Dorothy is disenfranchised as her labour is not recognised outside the family.

According to communist theory, women's participation in the labour market is key to ending their slavery in the family. Engels argues that 'the first condition for the

25. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 51.

26. Ibid.

27. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 354.

28. Ibid., p. 19.

liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry', in order to abolish the monogamous family within society.[29] However, *The Sweetest Dream* illustrates that women's participation in the labour force does not provide a release from the slavery in domestic or public realms. In other words, the latent slavery of women in the family is transformed into the public one, and it is reinforced cyclically from family to work. Frances of *The Sweetest Dream* works as an agony aunt, responding to letters from women who are having problems in their families. Unlike Dorothy in *The Good Terrorist*, Frances is economically independent: 'She had kept her independence all this time, paid for herself and the boys'.[30] However, her participation in the labour market and economically self-sufficient status do not lessen her oppression within the family, but rather doubles her latent slavery. Besides her part-time occupation, she has to carry out her domestic responsibilities: 'Frances sat alone in the kitchen, and the table which she had wiped and waxed shone like a pool'.[31] Here, the way Frances pays particular attention to cleaning the table highlights the domestic oppression of women. Her alienation in the kitchen and responsibility for it imply that even work outside the family cannot liberate women from such domestic oppression. Although men's roles as breadwinners give them a release from domestic responsibilities, women like Frances must be homemakers even if they are also breadwinners. This is because capitalism benefits from women's inferior position in the family as 'an oppressed group that can be compelled to work for less'.[32] The traditional role that Frances assumes within the family as a working woman and singe mother calls into question perceived changes in the family during this period.

Lessing's fiction highlights the ways in which the Marxist theory of conflict can be reformulated in a familial context. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels consider the capitalist society as a site of ongoing conflict and clash between different groups:

> Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant

29. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1844, repr., New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 105.

30. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 12

31. Ibid., p. 85.

32. Heather A. Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family* (Boston: Brill, 2002), p. 215.

> opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.[33]

Conflict and inequality arise due to the uneven distribution of material resources, power, and status among different groups that make up a society. This distribution advantages certain groups over others in relation to controlling resources, accumulated wealth, politics, and social institutions. In *The Good Terrorist*, Lessing represents family as a site of inequality and conflict. However, this representation not only mirrors the conflict between individuals but also introduces family as a revolutionary base for the re-constitution of society at large. While Marxist theory explains the conflict through individuals such as 'oppressor and oppressed', Lessing reformulates the conflict at an institutional level. As representatives of non-normative and traditional families, the conversation between Alice and Dorothy exemplifies the clash between two forms of the family:

> The main point was, did she [Dorothy] or did she not think that the whole ghastly superstructure should be brought down and got rid of, root and branch, once and for all? Get rid of the rotten superstructure to make way for better. For the new. Did it matter all that much who did the cleansing, the pulling down?[34]

Alice believes in the revolutionary politics of communism as a means to subvert the traditional family and bring forth a new form of the family. Here, the word 'superstructure' described as 'ghastly' and 'rotten' is a communist term that refers to the traditional family. Alice's relation to the ideology parallels Lessing's early involvement in communism. The way former communist groups resisted racial injustices in Southern Rhodesia inspires Lessing to challenge gender injustices and reconfigure family in her fiction. In Alice's case, it is her rejection of the oppressive institution of the family: '"You don't understand, Mother," said Alice, calm and confident. "We are going to pull everything *down*. All of it [including the traditional family]. This shitty rubbish we live in"'.[35] By attacking the traditional family as an

33. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848, repr., Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1970), p. 32.

34. Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 177.

35. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 354.

oppressive institution rather than men as oppressors, Lessing avoids the perpetuation of ideological dualism and of the conflict between the oppressed and oppressor.

The clash between non-normative and conservative family ideals is also reflected in the conflict between Frances and her mother-in-law, Julia. The latter warns Frances against the squatters who consume the food and occupy the familial space: 'Julia's voice rose. "That thieves' kitchen of yours, Frances […]. If they want something they go and steal it. This was an honourable house. Our family was honourable, and we were respected by everyone"'.[36] As the owner of private property, Julia stands for the bourgeois class in her attempt to control the Lennox house and preserve its traditional values. On the other hand, Frances endeavours to gain her autonomy and independence by not submitting to and instead challenging Julia's authority: 'She had kept her independence all this time, paid for herself and the boys, and not accepted money from Julia'.[37] The conflict between the two evokes Marx's discussion of wealth and the proletariat:

> Proletariat and wealth are opposites; as such they form a single whole. They are both creations of the world of private property. [...] Within this antithesis the private property-owner is therefore the conservative side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it (emphasis original).[38]

Julia's reference to the dignity of the house and the family places her on 'the *conservative* side', while Frances represents 'the *destructive* side' by letting the putative 'thieves' into the Lennox house. The act of consuming is associated with the act of theft, as it poses a threat to Julia's wealth. Julia is not satisfied with the way Frances spends her labour and energy for those who are not biologically related to the Lennox family. The physical act of stealing food from the kitchen by the squatters calls the actual theft of Frances's labour into question by Julia. That said, Lessing illustrates that the gendered space of the kitchen, of which women are supposed to be in charge, is indeed where their energy and labour are stolen.

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36. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 137.

37. Ibid., p. 12.

38. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique* (1844, repr., Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing, 1956), p. 51.

Dependant Men: The End of Male Supremacy

The representation of men as dependants signifies Lessing's subversive reconfiguration of the family. In this way, she illustrates that women's perceived dependency, and hence inferior status, is not natural or biological, but rather a social construction that can be changed. The independent woman is a well-known figure in Lessing's fiction, especially in relation to her *Children of Violence Series* and *The Golden Notebook*, with their respective protagonists Martha Quest and Anna Wulf. Dependant women are also represented through Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark*, and Harriet Lovatt in *The Fifth Child*. On the other hand, *The Cleft* details mutual forms of dependency between men and women without positioning one as superior to the other. However, there has not yet been a critical study that looks at the image of dependent men in Lessing's fiction. In her critique of established gender roles, Lessing is careful not to simply invert the established hierarchy, making men subordinate to women. This is evident in her 1993 interview with Earl G. Ingerson, where she comments: 'The danger is in confusing liberation of one with the submission of another. I have a couple of liberated friends who have simply inverted roles and have husbands as servants'.[39] Lessing's representation of 'dependent men' does not mean that women come to oppress men. However, the possibility that men can also become dependent like women challenges the inherited ideology of patriarchy that perpetuates traditional families and male supremacy.

In *The Good Terrorist*, Jasper and Philip exemplify the ways in which men either become dependent on women or seek physical assistance from them. These examples also point to the difference between male and female dependency in practice. While Lessing's dependant women are active, seeking ways to become independent, her men in the same situation present a form of parasitic dependency that preys on women's labour and energy. Jasper's ongoing dependency is an example of that situation: 'And Jasper did not leave. She knew he had become dependent on her. As they moved from squat to squat, commune to commune, this pattern remained: she looked after him and he complained that other people exploited her'.[40] Philip becomes dependent on Alice's

39. Doris Lessing and Earl Ingersoll, *Putting Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing*, 1964-1994 (London: Flamingo, 1996), p. 57.

40. Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 17.

help to sustain his life at a time when poor working conditions threaten workers with unemployment and unfair payment:

> Working from eight in the morning till late in the evening and over weekends, he still had not been able to keep up with what he had promised. […] If Philip could not finish the [painting] in a couple of days, [he] would not be paid the second half of the money. […] Philip demanded hotly of Alice. […] It was she who had painted most of this big house – painted it fast, and very well.[41]

Here Alice feels superior to the men and imagines that they need her. Jasper's and Philip's dependence on Alice illustrates that men can also become dependants in Lessing's fiction. However, the fact that men are dependant does not bring an end to Alice's domestic oppression. This suggests that the forms of male and female dependency are significantly different with the latter becoming more vulnerable as patriarchy still functions in society. Traditional notions of family endorse male supremacy and leave women dependent, yet the absence of male supremacy in the communes suggests new forms of kinship.

The Limitations of Communism and Marxist Theory: Gender Blindness

The limitations of radical left-wing politics in terms of gender and family reflect Lessing's pessimism about communism and Marxist theory in transforming women's lives and hence the family. In acknowledging a Marxist understanding of gender, Heather Brown asserts that for Marx, 'women's position in society could be used as a measure of the development of society as a whole'.[42] In a similar way, albeit in the context of the family, Lessing takes women's position as the foremost concern to measure the efficiency of left-wing politics in introducing non-normative families. The communist/Marxist ideology envisages a transformation of the family via the economic transformations in historical development, say, from capitalism to socialism, with a communal understanding of the family in the communist society.[43] In this sense, it critiques the family ideology with a focus on the material and economic conditions that perpetuate a class-based society, such as private property and production. Lindsey

41. Ibid., p. 287.

42. Heather Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family*, p. 212.

43. In *Communism and the Family* (1920), Alexandra Kollontai suggests that child care and domestic labour will cease to be necessary when communal kitchen and families are introduced in communist society.

German argues that '[a]bolition of the capitalist system – a revolutionary overthrow of society – means the capitalist system of reproduction, the family, cannot survive intact'.[44] However, waiting for an unspecified duration to abolish the capitalist society would in practice mean accepting gender inequality and men as decision makers in both politics and the family. In *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream*, Lessing attempts to wake women up from the delusion of equality and encourage them to take actions which would lead to immediate results that would effectively challenge their oppression and exploitation.

Lessing's fiction does not rest on the rhetoric of change promised by the left-wing political movements to transform the family. Rather, she explores it in a more realistic way, illuminating to what extent such movements can change women's traditional roles in the family. In her critique of Marxist theory of the family, Juliet Mitchell argues: 'What is striking in his [Marx] later comments on the family is that the problem of women becomes submerged in the analysis of the family—women, as such, are not even mentioned'.[45] *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream* mirror Mitchell's argument in highlighting the gender-blind aspect of communism with distinctive examples. The novels also illustrate that the theory advocates a release for women from domesticity and a change in the family, but that practice is at fault.

Domesticity and Women: Invisible Labour and the Alienated Proletariat

The Good Terrorist and *The Sweetest Dream* foreground domesticity as a form of invisible labour that perpetuates the ways in which women are alienated in the family, and hence excluded from equal participation in public realms and politics. Alice and Frances live in what are supposed to be radical and non-normative family settings, respectively, yet their domestic labour is not acknowledged and addressed by communism, although the theory critiques the exploitation of labour and the working class. Therefore, their condition with regards to domesticity does not differ much from that of women living in traditional families. Despite their domestic duties, which include running the house and sheltering others, they are represented as what I term

44. Lindsey German, *Theories of Patriarchy* (2008) <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?s=contents&issue=11> [Accessed 15 December 2017].

45. Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate and Psychoanalysis Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), p. 78.

alienated proletariat: 'Alice was alone in the kitchen', and 'Frances sat alone in the kitchen'.[46] In the novels, Lessing problematises domesticity as a form of labour that remains unrecognised, unaided, and unpaid, and attempts to acknowledge women's labour in the family and make them visible in wider society.

The novels demonstrate that domesticity provides a free form of labour for capitalism by alienating women and making their labour invisible. Eli Zaretsky observes that the family is 'an integral part of the economy under capitalism' with several acts of labour necessary in order to maintain social life, such as reproduction, child-rearing, cleaning, maintenance of property, cooking, and daily health care.[47] However, Zaretsky critiques the word 'economy' as perceived by socialist and communist movements in developed capitalist countries, and argues that confining a definition of economy to the acts of commodity production and exchange, or to the production of goods and sales of services, is problematic. In this way, other variables that indirectly contribute to the economy are ignored, such as domesticity. This poses the risks of excluding the family and especially women from 'revolutionary politics', as it limits the political struggle to the 'economic classes'.[48]

The novels also suggest that the communist notion of 'shared responsibility' never works in relation to domesticity. Although communism is theoretically in effect in gathering revolutionary groups to unite against capitalism, representatives of the women's liberation movement such as Alice, Pat, and Frances remain unaided in their struggle to overthrow domestic oppression. Alice does not receive any help from other oppressed groups in domestic tasks:

> Alice finished the second coat at midday, washed the roller, put the lids on the paint tins, took them to a room upstairs. While Philip slept, while Mary and Reggie slept, while Roberta and Faye slept (they had not come out of their room) she had painted a whole room.[49]

Other members of the commune never lessen Alice's oppression, including Philip and Jim, who fight for the liberation of the working class, and Roberta, Faye, Bert, and

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46. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 390; Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 85.

47. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism*, *the Family and Personal Life* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 25

48. Ibid., p. 24.

49. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 173.

Jasper. At one point, Bert and Jasper watch Alice lifting heavy items upstairs so that Philip can repair the hot water system: 'Bert and Jasper were in the kitchen and the door was shut against [Alice]. She went straight in and said to them, "For shit's sake, can't you help us take things up the stairs?"'[50] The door that was shut against Alice implies men's indifference to women's domestic oppression in the family, and hence women's liberation. In a similar way, Frances has to carry out all her domestic tasks on her own while listening to Johnny talk about communism's poetics of change: '[W]hen she stood in the kitchen, producing dishes of food for "the kids", […] more and more […] she relied on [Johnny's] brave sweet new worlds'.[51] In these contexts, Alice's and Frances's endeavours to transform their traditional roles in non-normative households remain impractical, and instead reinforce their oppression.

Lessing demonstrates that the liberation of either the proletariat or women cannot be achieved without the collaboration of different groups. Zaretsky's argument that 'women alone cannot transform the family' also stresses the necessity of collaboration between revolutionary groups.[52] *The Good Terrorist* exemplifies one-sided collaboration, namely women with the proletariat and other oppressed groups in the commune. Alice pays Philip, a member of the proletariat, for every single duty he carries out inside the commune. This suggests that she values human labour by paying in a timely manner and the right amount. Moreover, she even assists him in his paid work, whether it concerns the commune or not. When Philip takes a part-time job painting a house, he needs someone's help to do it properly, otherwise he will not be paid, so Alice helps him: 'Yet she knew she was going to help Philip, because she had to do. It was only fair'.[53] The word 'fair' implies the sharing of work and solidarity between revolutionary groups, here between women and the proletariat: 'Philip, affectionately supported by the two women, got the hot water system working'.[54] Philip completes all his work thanks to the assistance he receives from the women and mainly from Alice inside the commune. On the other hand, Alice receives aid only from Pat, ironically another representative of the women's liberation movement. The novel

50. Ibid., p. 208.

51. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 54.

52. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, p. 138.

53. Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 228.

54. Ibid., p. 190.

represents the disintegration between the revolutionary movements as a failure to overthrow patriarchy and capitalism.

The Lennox family evokes the consumer society that benefits from the work of the proletariat at the maximum level possible. The consumer family rests on Frances's domestic labour, which accommodates several 'people coming and going, sleeping on floors, bringing friends whose names she did not know'.[55] The images of the kitchen and table, with which Frances is represented as being in close contact, imply her exploited labour within the context of the family: 'Frances was lying filled plates in front of everyone, family style, and setting bottles of wine down the middle of the table'.[56] While her domestic labour satisfies the consumer, it creates the ways in which she becomes alienated: 'On Christmas morning, like millions of other women throughout the land, Frances descended to the kitchen alone'.[57] Frances's domestic oppression mirrors Marxist theory of 'external labour', a labour of alienation, self-sacrifice, and mortification:

> [T]he fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. […] His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. […] It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it (emphasis original).[58]

Here, Marx's use of the generic pronoun '*he*' is problematic in the sense that it poses the risk of viewing labour as a masculine concern and generalising men as the only group oppressed by such labour (emphasis added). Lessing's representation of domesticity problematises if not extends the Marxist concepts of labour and the working class by focussing on the family and women's traditional roles within it. As in the example of Frances, alienation and invisible labour acknowledge domesticity as a work that is equally if not more exploitative of women than men's work outside the family. This in return puts women into the category of the working class, with their own

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55. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 3.

56. Ibid., p. 238.

57. Ibid., p. 156.

58. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto* (repr., New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 74.

problems and rights within the context of the family. Contrary to traditional family values that promote the image of happy women satisfied with their domestic and maternal labours, Lessing represents Frances as unhappy and external to her familial obligations: 'Frances was remembering herself, mostly alone, with two small children, her boredom alleviated by reading'.[59] Marx notes that the forced labour 'mortifies [the worker's] body and ruins his mind'.[60] Like the worker, Frances's physical and mental energy is consumed by traditional roles in the family. However, the act of reading implies that Frances can find intellectual means that would be internal to her own demands. This is because Frances has 'to fight for her independence, her own self' rather than the alienated self.[61] In this way, Lessing indicates the ways in which the worker can avoid ruining their mind and hence their mental energy necessary for their liberation.

'Pretended' or Alternative Family: New Right and New Labour

Lessing deploys a radical commune against the New Right's call for a return to family values in *The Good Terrorist*, whereas in *The Sweetest Dream* she demonstrates the Left's inability to eradicate women's oppression in families despite recognising the validity of alternative family forms. More specifically, Lessing dismantles the traditional family arrangements through communism. However, she also points out that communist ideology fails to really transform the traditional family as it remains patriarchal. While both households are non-normative in the way they are formed, the position of women within them still mirrors the conditions they experience within the traditional family. In her novels, Lessing tests the capacity of communism to see whether it can change traditional family arrangements through communes. The distance between the two novels reflects Lessing's increasing pessimism about the Left's potential to change both the family and women's lives.

The changing family forms were also addressed in the policy agenda of the Conservative and Labour parties. Margaret Thatcher's government (1979-1990) took a stance against any alternatives to the traditional family, as she believed in a strong

59. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 150.

60. Marx and Engels, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, p. 74.

61. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 36.

relationship between the prosperity of nations and traditional families during the 1980s: 'The family, according to Conservative doctrine, is the indispensable foundation of the nation'.[62] The Conservatives equated family stability with social stability, and the traditional family, according to Conservative doctrine, meant the division of labour in which women and men are suited to private and public realms, respectively. Therefore, the alternative family would mean an alternative division of labour that would put the gendered division of labour into question. For Thatcherism, what mattered was the 'well-functioning' existing family form rather than an acknowledgement of the validity of other forms.

At the Conservative party conference in 1987, Thatcher criticised homosexuality for subverting traditional moral values: 'Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay'.[63] In the following year, promotion of homosexuality was strictly prohibited with the addition of section 2A to Clause 28 of the Local Government Act 1988: 'A local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.[64] Thatcher's policies aimed to cement the traditional family as a whole and without alternatives, and these are protested in *The Good Terrorist* by Alice's commune in a scene where Thatcher gets ready to make a public speech but is heckled by …: 'altogether, shouting in unison, "Thatcher out, out, *out*!", shouting "Scabs out, out, *out*!"'[65] In another scene, the commune organises the first national congress of the Communist Centre Union, and Jasper addresses comrades: 'We all know the criminal, the terrible condition of Britain. We all know the fascist imperialistic government must be forcibly overthrown!'[66] Here, the fact that the speech is made by Jasper, a homosexual, implies gay resistance to the Conservative government's prohibition and censorship on homosexuality.

62.Edgar Wilson, *A Very British Miracle: The Failure of Thatcherism* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), p. 64.

63.Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference', Blackpool, 1987, (2014) <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941> [Accessed 15 October 2014].

64. *Local Government Act 1988 Chapter 9* (2014) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/pdfs/ukpga_19880009_en.pdf> [Accessed 1 November 2014].

65. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 85.

66. Ibid., p. 236.

The New Right's view on homosexuality was an attempt to block any recognition of alternative families and prevent a celebration of individual choices. Any deviation from the traditional family was considered not as an alternative but as a 'pretended family', as evidenced in the language used in Section 2A of Clause 28. On the other hand, New Labour under Tony Blair (1997-2005), unlike the Tories, recognised alternative family forms. The Civil Partnership Act 2004, which 'allows same-sex couples in the UK to register civil partnership with rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriage', is clear evidence of this recognition.[67] However, recognition on its own was not enough to bring real change to the family when legal and social services still recognised women's traditional roles as carers rather than encouraging men to participate in caring and familial roles. In this way, women were not permitted to achieve their full potential in the labour market, as like Frances in *The Sweetest Dream*, they had to combine their maternal and domestic responsibilities with a career. This suggests that the novel's title, *The Sweetest Dream*, relates to the failures of both communism and New Labour in bringing real change to women's lives.

Alice's family is represented as conventional, and her father the breadwinner and mother the nurturer together pressurise Alice into having a 'proper' life with a decent education and marriage. However, Alice deviates from 'the proper life' by abstaining from conventional marriage and family. Instead, she continues her relationship with Jasper, a homosexual communist: 'Alice was thinking: We are together… This is like a marriage; talking together before going to sleep'.[68] Alice's relationship with Jasper does not involve legal ownership or control of each other, but rather gives them a self-defined understanding of being together. It also validates the function of communes, which Adrian Wilson defines as an attempt to reconfigure human relationships. However, it is not considered within the range of normality as it challenges societal expectations of predefined gender roles. Dorothy, Alice's mother, complains about the latter's preference: 'You are such a good girl Alice, why can't you choose yourself someone – you should have a real relationship with someone'.[69] In the

67. <http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/families/familyandparentinginstitute/140889 10_Years_of_Family_Policy> [Accessed 23 September 2014].

68. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 89.

69. Ibid., p. 38.

same way that their togetherness is not considered to be a real relationship, Jasper is not counted as an individual with his own rights and choices. In the same commune, Roberta and Faye, a lesbian couple, prefer an alternative form of relationship as opposed to the heteronormative nature of the traditional family. Therefore, Lessing's representation of homosexual relationships undermines the conventions of the time. Their exclusion from the mainstream society corresponds to the time when Thatcher gave her famous speech, declaring the traditional family as the only possible option: 'The overwhelming majority of people live in the traditional family. Yes, there will be problems. […] most of the problems will be solved within the family structure'.[70] The ways in which the New Right promoted the traditional family suppressed and generated contempt towards alternative family forms, resulting in homophobia.

Lesbians and Homosexuals: Invisible Groups in the Revolution

The Good Terrorist calls communism's position on homosexuality into question as part of Lessing's critique of revolutionary politics. Roberta, Faye, and Jasper potentially represent families of choice that are attacked by the New Right for threatening family stability. Lessing recognises the revolutionary potential of homosexuality to dissolve traditional family arrangements. The relationship between Alice and Jasper challenges sexuality and heteronormativity as promoted by traditional families.[71] Their relationship is non-normative in the sense that it represents a closeness between two individuals of the opposite sex with different sexual orientations, namely homosexual and heterosexual. This intimacy challenges a single meaning and form of the family, and hence it points at the ways in which Lessing reconfigures her non-normative family.

The Good Terrorist illustrates that communism is not revolutionary enough to accommodate homosexuality in its politics despite the fact that gay people 'have been involved in the struggles for the emancipation of the working class as revolutionary agitators'.[72] The absence of a critical analysis on homosexuality either by Marx or Engels demonstrates communism's limitation in addressing the oppression of

70. Margret Thatcher, 'No Such a Thing as Society' (interviewed by Douglas Keay for *Woman's Own*) (23 September, 1987) < https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [Accessed 28 June 2018].

71. See *The Good Terrorist*, p. 96.

72. Norman Markowitz, *The Communist Movement and Gay Rights: The Hidden History* (2013) <https://web.archive.org/web/20130816143523/http://politicalaffairs.net/the-communist-movement-and-gay-rights-the-hidden-history> [Accessed 15 May 2018].

homosexual people. Alice's conversation with Comrade Andrew, a Russian communist figure from the KGB, recalls homophobia as perceived in the revolution: '"And Alice," [Andrew] said, "you must, you *must* separate yourself. Believe me, Alice, I'm not without experience of – this type of person. Where they are, there is always trouble" (emphasis original)'.[73] Here, Andrew's insistence that Alice keeps away from Jasper mirrors the New Right's consideration of homosexuality as an epidemic, a view shared by Alice's own mother. Despite being an important communist figure, Andrew's lack of knowledge on lesbianism also reflects communism's failure in acknowledging revolutionary formulations:

> What the connection was between lesbianism and the revolutionary formulations of the political women. […] He simply had no idea of it. […] How did women like Faye and Roberta see the relations between men and women after the revolution?[74]

Lessing's choice of a Russian comrade implies if not evokes the criminalisation and censorship of homosexuality under Stalinist rule in the early 1930s. The novel illustrates that gay and lesbian people are excluded from the sweet dream of communism compared with women.

Women in the Revolution

Traditionally, women's participation in politics has been limited due to their predefined familial obligations. Their lack of representation in politics reinforces their socially constructed secondary and disadvantaged status in both the private and public realms. The problem of the family emerges from the problems of women, so the transformation of the family is dependent on a reconfiguration of women's traditional roles. Contrary to communist theory, Lessing's fiction problematises women's status in the family as well as the family itself. While the traditional family submerges women's problems to keep them within their restricted domestic situation, communism remains both inadequate and impractical when it comes to empowering women to address these problems in politics. Frances's marriage to and subsequent divorce from Johnny mirror the ways in which she initially welcomes communism and later becomes trapped by it: 'Frances had fallen for Johnny's windy rhetoric, […], and her life had been set by it

73. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 246.

74. Ibid., p. 179.

ever since. She simply had not been able to get free'.[75] Therefore, Frances, unlike Alice, is already aware that the political system of communism relies on patriarchal concerns of ruling and controlling, hence excluding women's problems. This is evident in one of the scenes in which Frances is challenged by Johnny, as he feels a sense of superiority over her and thus believes that it is his duty to address the younger generation of communists in the Lennox house:

> 'Frances's line seems rather more to be advice on family problems,' said Johnny, and, firmly putting an end to this nonsense, raised his voice, addressing the young ones, 'You are a fortunate generation,' he told them. 'You will be building a new world, you young comrades. You have the capacity to see through all the old shams, the lies, the delusions- you can overturn the past, destroy it, build a new…'.[76]

Johnny considers familial problems as 'nonsense', which illustrates his ignorance of them as a political figure. The fact that he raises his voice as a way to silence Frances hints at women's perceived passivity in politics as passive listeners. That means Johnny does not recognise female oppression and inequality in the family as subjects of the revolution despite women's labour in the family. The revolution creates the ways in which male supremacy and women's subordination are affirmed if not reinforced.

Lessing critiques communism for creating a gender-blind liberation, which excludes women from politics and confines them to domesticity. For instance, while male comrades in *The Good Terrorist* can attend the congresses arranged in different cities several times, Alice can only attend one congress during the entire novel, which is not surprisingly organised in her own commune. Although she transforms the traditional house into a new and political commune, she is not given the chance to address the residents on women's issues at the congress.[77] Likewise, in *The Sweetest Dream*, Johnny complains about Frances being backward in politics '"I am afraid my wife has never had even the beginnings of an understanding of politics." "Your ex-wife," said Frances'.[78] Here Lessing hints at the idea that politics is seen as the concern of men. So, women are excluded from politics, and in turn politics has historically

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75. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, pp. 226-7.

76. Ibid., pp. 77-8.

77. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 236.

78. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 186.

failed to address women's issues. Also, Johnny's reference to Frances as his "wife", even after they have divorced, implies men's perceived right to possess women.

In the preface to *The Emancipation of Women*, Nadezhda K. Krupskaya discusses the situation of women with references from Lenin's works:

> At that time, the class consciousness of the mass of the workers was still little developed, the most backward among them being the working women. They received very low wages and their rights were flagrantly violated. So the leaflets were usually addressed to the men.[79]

In *The Sweetest Dream*, Lessing highlights the masculine roots of communism endorsed by male leaders through her representation of Johnny. She establishes a link between Johnny and Lenin as part of her critique of the revolution: '[Johnny] was standing like Lenin'.[80] In the same way, Frances, albeit a working woman, cannot find a place for herself in the revolution that would address her problems and demands. She rather has to listen to what her ex-husband Johnny tells her about the revolution. Revolutionary rhetoric recognises women as passive listeners like Frances rather than active participants on their own terms. This suggests that communism in its fight for class consciousness excludes womanly concerns and problems.

The novel demonstrates that the revolution reinforces gender roles in a way that benefits men and disadvantages women. Men are liberated from their role of being a breadwinner and father as they are given authority in the revolution. Johnny's communist ideals and ignorance of his family represent the gap between communist theory and practice in relation to family and women. He is not concerned with his familial obligations as either a breadwinner or a father, as stated by his daughter: '"I don't want to hear about him," said Sylvia. "He was never a father to me. I hardly remember him"'.[81] At one stage Comrade Mo, a friend of Johnny, accuses his wife of not understanding the aims of the revolution and attempts to justify male ignorance of familial problems: 'My wife blames me too. She does not understand that the Struggle must come before the family obligations'.[82] On the other hand, women are supposed to

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79. Vladimir Lenin, *The Emancipation of Women; From the Writings of V. I. Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), pp. 5-6.

80. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 78.

81. Ibid., p. 178.

82. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 186.

assist the revolution from their domestic stage, which is the site of their oppression, as highlighted by Watkins: '[a]s the times goes on, Frances finds that she is cooking and caring for comrades from the African nationalist movements who become important political figures after independence'.[83] The unequal participation of women in the political arena creates the ways in which men are privileged over women both in the family and wider society.

Under the guise of promoting communist ideals, Johnny gets married four times, in each case claiming that he needs a real revolutionary woman as highlighted in a conversation with Frances: '"I have a right to a woman who is a real comrade," he said to Frances. "For once in my life I am going to have a woman who is my equal." "That is what you said about Maureen, do you remember? Not to mention Phyllida"'.[84] The quotation illustrates that Johnny does not consider the wives from his previous marriages, including Frances, to be his equals. The latter's sarcasm hints that what is positioned as being for the sake of the revolution turns out to be male satisfaction. While Johnny declares that he 'has a right to a woman who is a real comrade', his ex-wife Frances has to suppress her demands due to the familial oppression. This is evident in one of her conversations with Harold Holman, who she would like to date: '"Can I ring you?" Harold asked. "Why not? But better ring me at *The Defender*." And she lowered her voice, because of her sons'.[85] The act of lowering her voice hints at Frances's anxiety about an intended relationship outside the family. Here, the house is a reminder of the gender roles that she is expected to follow. Therefore, she rather prefers to be contacted at her work, a space in which she can be free from familial obligations, albeit temporarily.

Lessing critiques the politics of communism for exploiting women's bodies and labour to the benefit of male comrades. At one point in *The Sweetest Dream*, the third-person narrator introduces women as sexual objects that satisfy men in the revolution: 'In France every hero had a group of girls who served him, they were all sleeping together, because of the new plank in the revolutionary platform – sexual freedom'.[86]

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83. Watkins, *Doris Lessing*, p. 145.

84. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, p. 161.

85. Ibid., p. 112.

86. Ibid., p. 184.

Here it is not a group of men who served every heroine, but 'a group of women who served every hero', which means that the sexual freedom is only offered to male comrades. Moreover, male comrades consider women either as material that can be moulded into communists or be used as means for male pleasure. This fact is evident in Johnny's desire to marry Phyllida: 'she was not a comrade, but said she was good material and he would make a communist of her'.[87] Here, Lessing hints that there is hardly any difference between the ideology, which regards women as a material for its sustenance, and the bourgeois family, which regards them as the property of male authority. In this sense, rather than being recognised, women seem to be overshadowed by the ideology.

Delusions and Sweet Dreams

In *The Good Terrorist*, the characters do try to put communist theory into action, yet it does not work in relation to the family, as hinted by Alice's sense of imprisonment: 'This house, for [which Alice] had fought, she now felt as a trap […]'.[88] In *The Sweetest Dream*, Lessing illustrates that communism still remains 'the sweetest dream' that gives fault in practice. For Lessing, the transformation of the family is dependent on the changes in women's lives, as the family ideology is built upon women's labour. The end of *The Good Terrorist* highlights Alice's disappointment with communism: 'Smiling gently, a mug of very strong sweet tea in her hand looking this morning like a nine-year-old girl who has had, perhaps, a bad dream'.[89] Here, the sweet tea relates to communism's failure in practice that Lessing invokes in her later novel, *The Sweetest Dream*, and suggests that Alice can only taste what is real rather than the dream. While communism is put into action in *The Good Terrorist* to explore whether it can generate an alternative family, *The Sweetest Dream* is the conclusion of this exploration. The novels suggest that communism either in the form of a 'bad dream' or 'a sweetest one' still stays a dream as it fails in practice while offering a lot in theory.

Communism is represented as a political ideology that is built on the dreams of those who are unaware that the ideology only serves one group while ignoring the rest,

87. Ibid., p. 12.

88. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 288.

89. Ibid., p. 397.

as Lessing argues: 'I have long recognized that the salvation of this world cannot lie in any political ideology. All ideologies are deceptive and serve only a few, not people in general'.[90] The hope if not the idea of change itself keeps Alice committed to communism, while it is the reality—communism's failure in practice—that keeps Frances away from it. The reality is that gender roles remain unchanged in what is supposed to be radically new households: '[Alice] sat on quietly there by herself in the silent house. In the *betrayed* house […], but the work had not been properly acknowledged'.[91] Similarly, *The Sweetest Dream* communism does not work to release women from their ongoing oppression in family and wider society. Lessing is highly critical of the communist ideology of the family, which fails to recognise the role of women in the revolution and to revolutionise women's roles. The novels suggest that communism cannot really transform the traditional family, as it remains patriarchal.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that Lessing explores the possibility of a new family through communism that would transform women's traditional roles. *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream* exemplify the ways in which Lessing's representation of the family differs from the family theory of communist/Marxist theory. While communist theory points at class consciousness to transform the family, Lessing's fiction brings gender consciousness into view for a reconfiguration of the family. Left-wing politics take the family as an oppressive space in theory, but Lessing's fiction enables a re-consideration of the family as a revolutionary space. Her fictional family reflects women's historical oppression within the family, yet her protagonists do not take this oppression as their fate, but rather challenge it by not submitting to the authority of family. The representation of non-normative families in these novels has demonstrated that families are made not stable by individual demands and problems therein.

The departures of characters from their biological family and at some points from their traditional roles can be read as forms of resistance to the family ideology. Alice abandons her biological family, Frances and Dorothy are single parents, and

90. Lessing and Ingerson, *Putting the Questions Differently*, p. 105.

91. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, p. 392.

others leave their biological families as victims of the family ideology. In this way, Lessing holds the subjects of the oppression (women) and agents of oppression (men) separate in a way that would not reinforce the oppression of the oppressed nor the reign of the oppressor. These departures evoke a new sense of the family and non-normative forms of kinship such as the one between Alice and Jasper. She also implies that the transition from traditional to non-normative family is not successful enough, as revolutionary groups do not unite to overthrow the family ideology. According to Lorna Sage, Lessing's writing clears away 'some of the most stubborn boundaries on our mental maps'.[92] In *The Good Terrorist* and *The Sweetest Dream*, Lessing seeks a reformulation of the stubborn boundaries of the traditional family. The novels challenge these boundaries with their representation of individuals escaping from their families and seeking refuge in communes to create their own sense of the family. This suggests that families are no longer stable, with alternative families resisting against a single meaning and form of the family.

This chapter has also demonstrated that a recognition of women's historical oppression is not enough to create just families, as more representation of women in politics is also required. Otherwise, the inequalities practised in the traditional families pose the risk of being transferred into non-normative ones, making change ineffective. The novels have shown that a genuine transformation of the family depends on the changes in women's lives under domestic and maternal duties. Lessing's fictional family prioritises women's problems as a prerequisite for a transformation of the family. These novels have illustrated that while the existing form of the family bears the need for alternative families and kinship, changes in the way families are formed do not warrant a release from the family ideology if women's traditional roles remain unchanged. A focus on gender in what are supposed to be non-normative spaces tests the capacity of communism in more realistic terms rather than simply relying on its rhetoric of change. Women in the family are not considered as members of the working class, hence the labour performed by Alice and Frances is not categorised as 'work'. Women's oppression still continues despite revolutionary movements that promise change in women's lives. This suggests that women have to fight more for their liberation from the

92. Lorna Sage, *Doris Lessing* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1983), p. 11.

family ideology and transform family as a site of resistance rather than of their oppression.

Chapter Two

Feminism and the Family

In her fiction, Lessing treats the family as a 'patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole', to borrow Kate Millett's expression.[1] In other words, she explores the relation between the family and larger society in order to dislodge all sorts of inequalities and oppression driven by patriarchal ideology. Sandra Singer argues that '[i]n current British fiction such as Lessing's family stress is understood in relation to wider social issues of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity'.[2] In the novels *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) and *The Fifth Child* (1988), Lessing foregrounds the family as a place of gender oppression and as a source of societal inequalities. The respective protagonists of the two texts, Kate Brown and Harriet Lovatt, live in patriarchal families that demand they be 'proper' mothers and wives by carrying out domestic and maternal responsibilities. Their roles illustrate Simone de Beauvoir's well-known assertion that '[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'.[3] The family is the sphere where Kate and Harriet acquire their feminine identities through the performance of their assigned gender roles. Lessing brings these roles into to view to problematise traditional family arrangements.

The theme of the family in these novels allows Lessing not only to critique patriarchal ideology, but also to explore ways of transforming the family in order to create a just society. This confirms Sidney Callahan's argument that the family can conserve and reproduce the existing culture, but it also has the potential to adapt to new socio-political conditions by challenging the status quo.[4] For Lessing, the family is central to women's liberation as much as it is to their oppression. The ways in which Kate and Harriet resist patriarchal ideology within the context of the family also point at the wider problems in society. For example, Harriet's visits to doctors during her pregnancy do not relate only to familial problems, but also those of health care and politics that control women's bodies and ignore their demands.

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1. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1970; repr., London: Virago Press, 1985), p. 33.

2. Sandra Singer, 'Looking Back to the Days of Thatcher: Mirroring Familial Relationships in *London Observed*', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 30, (2012), 15-20 (p. 19).

3. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949; repr., London: Pan Books, 1988), p. 259.

4. Sidney Callahan, 'Gays, Lesbians, and the Use of Alternate Reproductive Technologies', in *Feminism and Families* ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), 188-202 (pp. 189-90).

The Summer Before the Dark and *The Fifth Child* focus on female self-discovery, self-definition, and the renegotiation of the traditional female role in the family. In these novels, Lessing presents her heroines as dissatisfied with their life in the family. Patriarchal ideology promotes women's dissatisfaction in the family 'as a personal failure'.[5] However, Lessing uses the dissatisfaction as a personal challenge for new beginnings, with Kate seeking ways she can break away from the constraints associated with family conventions. Set in a London suburb in 1973, *The Summer Before the Dark* covers the course of a single summer from the perspective of Kate Brown, the mother of four grown-up children. Kate is an intelligent, educated, and middle-class woman who has fulfilled family obligations for over twenty-five years. During the summer, all of her family members leave home for different reasons, some for business and others for holidays. Kate chooses to stay at home rather than accompanying her husband, Michael, a successful neurologist, on his trip. However, the family house, the place where Kate usually spends most of her time, is let for the summer, which frees her from all family and domestic obligations for the first time in her married life.

The novel is divided into five main sections – successively 'At Home', 'Global Food', 'The Holiday', 'The Hotel', and 'Maureen's Flat' – which consecutively trace Kate's gradual awakening to the idea of real change in her life. In these sections, Lessing steadily transforms Kate's condition from an ordinary housewife with no autonomy at all to an astute observer of the familial and social conditions that oppress women. Kate frequently compares her conventional lifestyle with that of her close friend, Mary Finchley: 'Why was she thinking so much about Mary?'[6] The latter is an unconventional woman in the sense that she rejects her roles in the family and romantic notions of love, and instead pursues sexual freedom. The novel ends with the section 'Maureen's Flat', with Kate sharing an apartment with a young, unconventional woman called Maureen. The latter is on the verge of getting married, yet unlike Kate, she has a greater autonomy in her decisions about with whom and when to start a family. However, Maureen's lack of experience in regard to the family makes her time with Kate valuable. Their togetherness implies a feminist sisterhood in which the images of 1950s traditional woman and of 1970s independent woman come to terms.

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5. Shelia Rowbotham, *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 3.

6. Doris Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), p. 37.

Published in the 1980s, the decade of Thatcherism, *The Fifth Child* addresses the family at a time when the New Right was promoting a return to traditional family values. Set in London of the early 1960s and extending to the late 1980s, *The Fifth Child* depicts the family life of a couple, Harriet and David Lovatt, who yearn for a happy family in a large Victorian house. The novel is narrated from Harriet's point of view, sacrificing her life for the sake of family stability and the wellbeing of her five children. Harriet starts her family life as an 'ideal' housewife, keeping the house tidy, reproducing successfully, nurturing her children, and satisfying her husband. However, her fifth pregnancy, which is much more demanding than the previous four, prevents her from carrying out her domestic and familial duties. This pregnancy further threatens the family stability as it makes relations between Harriet and David unstable: 'She felt rejected by him'.[7] Harriet frequently visits doctors during the course of her fifth pregnancy, which she believes damages family happiness and her own psychology. The birth of the fifth child, Ben, dramatically changes the happy mood of the family, as 'stability' is lost by Ben's presence: 'Ben's screams and struggling were shaking the house'.[8] Harriet becomes a 'bad mother', ignoring her house, children, and husband as she spends her entire time with Ben: 'After a day with Ben I [Harriet] feel as if nothing exists but him. As if nothing has ever existed. I suddenly realize I haven't remembered the others for hours. I forgot their supper yesterday'.[9] However, Harriet finds herself in a state of maternal ambivalence towards Ben once she begins to question patriarchal oppression of women. Her ambivalence subverts the assumption that women always find pleasure in domestic and maternal responsibilities, and challenges family stability.

Lessing and Feminism

Lessing's place in the feminist literary canon has been and continues to be an uncertain one. Susan Watkins maintains that Lessing has always been sceptical about feminism as a movement, and 'unwilling to identify herself as a feminist'.[10] Her fiction explores women's issues both in the family and in society during second-wave feminism, and

7. Doris Lessing, *The Fifth Child* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), p. 45.

8. Ibid., p. 105.

9. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

10. Susan Watkins, *Twentieth Century Women Novelists: Feminist Theory in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 63.

therefore it clearly echoes feminist ideas in its criticism of patriarchal ideology. For Darshana Goswami, a woman-centric approach is evident in the majority of Lessing's novels, as they are almost always narrated from the point of view of a woman, a fact that brings gender and feminism into question.[11] For Roberta Rubenstein, Lessing's novels are conveyed diverse subjects such as class, race, gender, and mysticism, sometimes combined in a single novel, and thus her writing resists categorisation: 'to regard her through a feminist lens alone—or through any single position or statement contained in her fiction—is manifestly insufficient'.[12] In a similar fashion, Lili Wang contends that Lessing is an author of independent ideas, which empower her with the responsibility to represent human issues in a wider sense rather than the 'interests of a small group of people'.[13] These all suggest that Lessing destabilises feminist expectations about her writing with her statements about feminism. Her sceptical relation to the movement, as she explains, seeks to avoid 'oversimplified statements about men and women'.[14] I argue that, regardless of how it is categorised, Lessing's fiction contributes to the development of feminism as much as self-consciously feminist fiction in relation to the family. The representation of women's issues in fiction that does not define itself as feminist is a way of articulating the ideas of the women's movement and women's problems to a wider audience including non-feminist readers.

Viewed as a site of women's ongoing oppression, the family has been the subject of feminist scholarship. Lessing was writing about women living in traditional families during second-wave feminism, and her texts challenge the backlash against feminism for destroying the family stability, serving to create the ways in which family can be transformed into an egalitarian institution that would benefit society as a whole. The family in feminist criticism is analysed from multiple points, such as marriage, pregnancy, reproduction, child-rearing, and domesticity, which create inequalities in wider society. Laura M. Purdy argues that 'one of the hallmarks of early second-wave

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11. Darshana Goswami, *Tiny Individuals in the Fiction of Doris Lessing* (New Delhi: Readworthy Publications, 2011).

12. Roberta Rubenstein, 'Doris Lessing: An Appreciation', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 30, (2012), 32-3 (p. 32).

13. Lili Wang, 'Reading "What Is the Function of the Storyteller?": A Response to Alice Ridout's Essay', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 30, (2012), 21-3 (p. 21).

14. Lesley Hazelton, 'Doris Lessing on Feminism, Communism and Space Fiction' (1982), *The New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/books/99/01/10/specials/lessing-space.html> [accessed 11.11.2015].

feminism was its critique of marriage and the family'.[15] For Eva Figes, '[t]he family was regarded as the microcosm of the state, so that marriage was a way of maintaining the social order'.[16] The family as a private institution constituted the backbone of social stability for the New Right, whereas for feminists it is 'undeniably political because it is the place where we *become* gendered selves (emphasis original)'.[17] For Mary Midgley and Judith Hughes, the fact that family is promoted as 'the fundamental building block of society' already fits into the political context.[18] Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako also maintain that the family is 'not a concrete institution designed to fulfil human needs, but an ideological construct associated with the modern state'.[19] This is because family arrangements have already been regulated by social politics such as child-care, which is entirely left to the mother's responsibility or when extended to include others, usually female relatives such as the maternal grandmother and older sisters. Therefore, it has been one of the main tasks of feminism to disclose ideological, political, and state-based relations of the family to the benefit of all.

Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1961) was regarded as a key feminist text of the Women's Liberation Movement.[20] However, the author declares that the novel was not indented as a feminist text, stating: 'I'd constructed this whole book on my experience […], but it never crossed my mind that I was writing about feminism or what is called Women's Lib'.[21] As the quotation suggests, Lessing did not intend for an alignment of her novel with feminist activity, yet the text details problems awaiting for the new image of free women. Shortly after its publication, *The Golden Notebook* was recognised as a novel that introduced and celebrated a new image of women overcoming gender injustices and avoiding patriarchal institutions such as the family. Protagonist Anna Wulf and her close friend, Molly Jacobs, are divorced single mothers

15. Laura M. Purdy, 'Babystrike', in *Feminism and Families*, ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 69-75 (p. 69).

16. Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes* (Manchester: The Philips Park Press, 1972), p. 139.

17. Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 111.

18. Mary Midgley and Judith Hughes, 'Are Families Out of Date Mary', in *Feminism and Families*, ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 55-68 (p. 60).

19. Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako, 'Is There a Family? New Anthropological Views', in *Gender/Sexuality Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 71-5.

20. Doris Lessing, 'Preface to *The Golden Notebook*', in *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. by Paul Schlueter (London: Flamingo, 1994), p. 25.

21. Ibid., p. 25.

in 1950s London. Both are economically independent, earning their living respectively as a novelist and an actress, and bringing up their children on their own. They can be considered 'free women' in the sense that they have autonomy and can shape their lives, unlike many women living in patriarchal families. However, at the beginning of the novel Anna announces that their freedom is quite limited, as they live in a male-dominated world that defines women in patriarchal terms rather than as separate individuals: '"Free women," said Anna, wryly […] "They still define us in terms of relationships to men, even the best of them"'.[22] At the end of the novel, Anna gives up her writing career and decides to work as a marriage counsellor, while Molly prepares for a second marriage. As such, despite being so-called free women, Anna and Molly remain involved in marriage in different ways.

Lessing's post-1970s novels *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child* offer equally strong critiques of women's oppression in society, whilst her earlier novel *The Golden Notebook* provides a more specific challenge to the family through a feminist lens. Harriet and Kate's struggles against the family, including their children, are as essential as Anna's struggle against a patriarchal society with her five notebooks. Mary Eagleton and Emma Parker observe Lessing's post-1970s fiction is 'inevitably influenced' by feminism and therefore 'open to feminist analysis'. They further maintain that 'one cannot be writing in the post 1970s without that being the case'.[23] In contrast to Anna and Molly in *The Golden Notebook*, who are introduced as liberated women, Harriet and Kate struggle to achieve their full human potential in the context of patriarchal family arrangements. Their plight fruitfully evokes what Betty Friedan calls 'the crisis of women growing up', which she defines as 'a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity'.[24] In this sense, the protagonists' place within the family is transformative from two main points of view: it questions patriarchal family arrangements, and it reclaims women's place in the public sphere. Watkins maintains that 'Lessing rejects the idea that feminism merely means

22. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p. 26.

23. Mary Eagleton and Emma Parker, 'Introduction', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1970 – Present*, ed. by Mary Eagleton and Emma Parker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

24. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 80.

including women in patriarchal structures without changing them'.[25] Achieving more than social inclusion is essential for women, since liberation from a domestic role seems to suggest very little in a society where patriarchal ideology still structures social and political institutions.

Following *The Golden Notebook*, *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child* test the practicality of changes in the lives of women who are living in families and trying to participate in society. The novels illustrate that women are still oppressed despite the claim that the politics of liberation is changing their lives significantly. *The Fifth Child*, published fifteen years after *The Summer Before the Dark*, implies that the family remains—even after two decades of feminist activism—a stronghold of patriarchal oppression, because women's rights are being eroded by the Tory administration of the 1980s and the backlash against feminism. Implicitly, this emphasises the continuing importance of feminism and the need to reconfigure traditional family arrangements.

The Summer Before the Dark and *The Fifth Child* critique the family as a patriarchal institution and explore ways of transforming it to the benefit of all. In this regard, Lessing's representation of the family in these novels both echoes early periods of feminist activity and reflects on more recent discussions of the family as the 'New Feminist Frontier'. The novels detail how women are made vulnerable and oppressed through their responsibilities in the family. This is in line with Susan Moller Okin's argument about women's increasing vulnerability in the family: 'Women are made more vulnerable by anticipation of marriage, and are made more vulnerable by entering into and living within such marriage. But they are *most* vulnerable if they marry and have children (emphasis original)'.[26] Lessing illuminates that the experiences of maternity and domesticity cause the oppression of Kate and Harriet, and highlights that patriarchal ideology has a control over them. Such ideology promotes the idea that women can only reach personal fulfilment by carrying out the life-long responsibilities of maternity and domesticity, and thus their potential is confined to the patriarchal roles of wife and mother. These roles, which demand time and energy be spent on others, prevent women from exploring their own identities and from actualising their potential

25. Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 23.

26. Okin, Justice, *Gender and the Family*, p. 167.

as human beings. Moreover, as the ideology presents these roles as natural for women, any attempt to cross beyond them is considered to be transgressing against nature.

The Summer Before the Dark and *The Fifth Child* were written at different phases of feminist activity, and thus they question women's experiences and conditions in the family as ideological constructs rather than as results of women's biology. Lesley Hoggart maintains that 'revisiting earlier periods of feminist activity has enabled feminist historians to develop a more critical perspective'.[27] My objective in reading *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child* is to visit an earlier period of feminist criticism of the family and to compare it with more recent ones. Kate and Harriet start their family life as ordinary housewives, oppressed by the domestic and maternal responsibilities critiqued by early radical feminists. However, as the novels progress, Kate critically observes her past family experiences while Harriet resists the oppression of maternity and family life. Both protagonists never abandon the idea of the family altogether, but rather struggle against the patriarchal family ideology to achieve their full human identities as envisioned by contemporary feminists.

The New Right and Feminism

The publication of *The Fifth Child* corresponds to the period in which Margaret Thatcher of the New Right was in office (1979-1990). The New Right was well known for its call to a return to traditional family values, as well as its backlash against feminism for putatively destroying these values. In her 1987 interview with Douglas Keay, Thatcher firmly declared that 'there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families'.[28] Thatcher's declaration is a way of denying the existence of social problems, relying on the family rhetoric. Although there is an emphasis on individuality, men and women are grouped separately. It was the policy of the New Right to make a strict distinction between private and public places, in which women and men were successively situated. Diana Gittins argues that the distinction between the two sexes, which assumes that men are naturally 'authoritative, stronger, [and] more intelligent' whilst women are naturally 'deferential, weak, passive

27. Lesley Hoggart, *Feminist Principles Meet Political Reality: The Case of the National Abortion Campaign* (2014) <http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk/a16.php> [accessed 15 July 2015].

28. Margret Thatcher, *No Such a Thing as Society* (interviewed by Douglas Keay for Woman's Own) (1987) < https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [accessed 15 July 2015].

and intuitive', shaped the ways in which the Conservative government policies were perceived and regulated.[29]

Contrary to the New Right's emphasis on family values in opposition to 1960s liberalism and the permissive society, feminists instead critiqued the institution for creating problems of injustice and oppression. The feminists concluded that what was promoted as 'necessary' and 'pleasant' for women turned out to be a cause of their oppression, such as love, dependency, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and child-rearing. Therefore, 'drawing political conclusions from their personal experiences' is essential to women's deconstruction of family ideology.[30] Lessing makes women's familial experiences the centre of her novels, and illustrates how these experiences, promoted as 'private' and 'natural', are actually constructions of patriarchal ideology. Lessing's representation of these experiences in *The Fifth Child* and *The Summer Before the Dark* can be read a feminist attempt to critique family ideology and the New Right.

The Lovatt family in *The Fifth Child* echoes the characteristics of the family as highlighted by Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, who argue that the New Right called for 'an idealized, middle class, patriarchal family, firmly predicated on male authority, heterosexuality, and romantic notions of motherhood'.[31] Lessing introduces David and Harriet Lovatt as a 'conservative, old-fashioned, [and] timid' couple who stand in contrast to the radicalism of the sixties.[32] David economically controls the family, and Harriet is heavily engaged in domestic and maternal responsibilities. They desire to have '[s]ix children at least' in a large 'Victorian house', but are dependent on David's limited budget.[33] Victorian family values implied by the house enforce a sharp distinction between the responsibilities of women and men, with the former expected to produce a large family, be submissive to male authority, carry out their maternal and domestic responsibilities, and protect their purity at all times. While Harriet is engaged in domestic responsibilities and five successive pregnancies and child-rearing, David

29. Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familiar Ideologies*, p. 157.

30. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 5.

31. Thorne and Yalom, *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminists Questions*, p. 19.

32. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 7.

33. Ibid., p. 14.

carries out the role of breadwinner and is removed from household responsibilities altogether:

> He knew what he wanted, and the kind of woman he needed. If Harriet had seen her future in the old way, that a man would hand her the keys of her kingdom, and there she would find everything her nature demanded, and this as her birthright, which she had—at first unknowingly, but very determinedly […] then he saw his future as something he must aim for and protect.[34]

Lessing's choice of the Victorian house and a conservative couple living in it works effectively in representing Victorian family values, which the New Right adopted as the core of its family policies. The quotation is from the perspective of David before he starts his life with Harriet and their family. Here, Lessing suggests the type of family based on Victorian ideals and those subsequently promoted by the New Right. Her choice of words such as 'old-way', 'kingdom', 'birthright', and 'future' specifically hints at the characteristics of the patriarchal family. David wants to marry a specific kind of woman who complies with 'the old way', which in turn connotes the traditional ideals of Victorian society, in which a woman must be submissive to male authority within a relationship, and be well aware of her duties as both a mother and wife. One of Harriet's responsibilities is to reproduce the 'kingdom', a word that emphasises the New Right's assertion that the family is a solid and strong unit that is male governed. It also hints at the number of children to be born into the family, since like the monarch Queen Victoria, Harriet is prolific in terms of reproduction. Royal households often produced many children. For David, the kingdom means futurity through the continuity of his lineage, while for Harriet it implies a set of responsibilities and strict rules to be followed concerning maternity, love, care, and protection. Therefore, the family stands as an ideal place where Harriet and David can actualise the potential of their 'nature'. Lessing's description of the family as 'natural' and being Harriet's 'birthright' can directly be linked to Thatcher's use of the 'birthright' when discussing the way in which family should be possessed and embraced.[35] The Lovatt's anticipation of a large family with as many children as possible can be read as a symbolic representation of Margaret

34. Ibid., pp. 12-3.

35. Margret Thatcher, *No Such a Thing as Society* (interviewed by Douglas Keay for Woman's Own) (1987) < https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [accessed 15 July 2015].

Thatcher's defence and promotion of Victorian family values. Thatcher values Victorian ideals in opposition to 60s liberalism and the permissive society.

Women and the Family

A woman's first interaction with the patriarchal family occurs upon birth. From there, women grow up in the family, which feeds their anticipation of getting married and having children of their own one day. Women who are not involved in the institution either as a matter of choice or chance have been regarded as going against what their 'nature' demanded. This is because patriarchal ideology promotes marriage as the ultimate route to personal fulfilment for women. Eva Figes argues that 'women have never been made aware of any alternative' for personal fulfilment, so many readily accept marriage as a way of achieving the sense of being personally fulfilled. For Figes, this is 'one of the reasons that a patriarchal society has been able to work for so long'.[36] Both Kate in *The Summer Before the Dark* and Harriet in *The Fifth Child* are the victims of this anticipation, which blocks their route to alternative means of personal fulfilment.

Kate is an example of how women are defined as wives and mothers, specifically in relation to others. She has no autonomous identity for herself, causing her to have a limited conception of female identity. After long years of domestic and maternal responsibilities, Kate finds herself in a state of loneliness, weakness, and dissatisfaction: 'she could look forward to nothing much but a dwindling away from full household activity into getting old'.[37] This is the time when Kate, in Simone de Beauvoir's words, starts experiencing her 'true sentiments':

> And then her true sentiments become clear; she sees that her husband could get along very well without her, that her children are bound to get away from her and to be always more or less ungrateful. The home no longer saves her from empty liberty; she finds herself alone, forlorn, a subject; and she finds nothing to do with herself.[38]

This description offered by de Beauvoir of 'true sentiments' applies to Kate's condition in the family. Her four grown-up children and husband no longer need her service, and

36. Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, p. 91.

37. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 9.

38. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 496.

she comes to realise that 'this was the first time in her life that she was not wanted. She was unnecessary'.[39] Kate's female identity is trapped in her domestic and maternal responsibilities. Therefore, in the relative absence of these duties, Kate feels dull and useless. Lessing illustrates that removing domestic and maternal responsibilities from the shoulders of women does not bring liberation for them, as their social approval is still dependent on their capability to serve the family.

In her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan describes the situation as 'the problem that has no name', and offered in this absence 'the feminine mystique', a term that represents the myth that it is in a woman's nature to devote herself to the roles of housewife and mother for personal fulfilment.[40] Kate Brown is like the women in Friedan's study who suffer 'the problem that has no name', resulting from the pressure of striving to be a 'perfect housewife': 'Because she was depressed? Was she depressed? Probably. She was feeling something pretty strongly that she couldn't put her finger on'.[41] After long years of family obligations, Kate echoes the voice that says, 'I want more than my husband and my children and my home', as revealed by Friedan. This voice was signalling a change in her life: 'But why should she not announce to the family that she [Kate] was going to change, was in the process of changing?'[42]

In *The Fifth Child*, Harriet longs for domestic happiness with her five children, a desire that exactly fits into Friedan's discussion of the women trapped by the 'feminine mystique': 'Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands'.[43] The title, *The Fifth Child*, clearly signals Lessing's reference to Friedan's discussion of 'five children'. Linda Nicholson argues that 'the 1950s model of family life still structures many of our institutions'.[44] Therefore, *The Fifth Child* takes the 1950s model of familial and social institutions but situates it in the 1960s. This

39. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 21.

40. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (1981; repr., Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

41. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 8.

42. Ibid., p. 92.

43. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 18.

44. Linda Nicholson, 'The Myth of the Traditional Family', in *Feminism and Families*, ed. by Hilde Lindemann Nelson (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 27- 42 (p. 40).

is because the 1960s and 1970s were the periods when feminists began to challenge the taken-for-granted notion of family stability.

Work as a Hobby Rather than a Career for Women

The Summer Before the Dark and *The Fifth Child* foreground that familial obligations force Kate and Harriet to give up their professions. Lessing reflects on the occupational hierarchy promoted by patriarchal ideology through her representation of prestigious occupations for men and less prestigious ones for women. Michael and David, the husbands of Kate and Harriet, are a neurologist and an architect, respectively, and are able to progress in their careers even after marriage. Lessing illustrates that women are encouraged to leave their careers after marriage. In this way, it becomes certain that they will bring less to the marriage than men do, at least financially, which confirms their 'secondary' position in both the family and the wider society.

The pre-marital status of both sexes is an example of how patriarchal society treats men and women unequally. This inequality is further reinforced in the family after marriage when women have to become involved in domestic and maternal responsibilities. Kate and Harriet comply with the expectation of patriarchal society, which favours women devoting themselves to the family as full-time housewives. The lives of the two women prior to their marriages validate this assumption. Harriet has a good educational background, which enables her to attend an art college and then become a graphic designer. Although she earns her living through this work, the third person narrator's description of her profession as an 'agreeable way of spending her time until she married' clearly illustrates that Harriet considers work as a hobby, something to fill her time until marriage and then be promptly discarded in favour of becoming wives and mothers.[45] This constitutes her first step towards vulnerability, as like Kate she will become economically dependent on her husband.

Kate represents the impossibility of having a career if one is a wife and mother during the 1970s. She is an intelligent woman who studied Romance languages and literature, and her qualifications could offer her an alternative route to personal

45. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 11.

fulfilment. However, Kate reflects that she felt obliged to sacrifice her career upon marriage:

> If she had not married, she would probably become something special in her field? A lecturer perhaps? Women did not often become professors. […] If she had not married – but, good God, she would have been mad not to marry, mad to choose Romance languages and literature.[46]

The quotation can be taken as a summary of women's exclusion from public spheres, and also that marriage was considered to be the ultimate achievement for women. During the 1950s, when Kate got married, there were hardly any choices for women other than marriage. The decision not to marry was equal to madness, as the patriarchal society in which she lived presented marriage as the only viable option for a woman to be accepted in society. However, Kate is not happy about her situation, and after leaving the family becomes aware that marriage enabled her to fulfil the expectations of the patriarchal society at the expense of her own dreams and the fulfilment of her desires. Her roles in the work place such as caring for delegates, in Global Food implies her traditional roles in the family: 'Her work had become something she did as easily as she had run a home'.[47] The word 'global' implies women's worldwide oppression under their traditional roles that are transferred into the work place. Kate's part time job is to develop her traditional skills at a wider level rather than have a career and progress.

Romantic Notions of Love and Marriage

Lessing foregrounds romantic love as a patriarchal notion, which takes the form of a power relation after marriage. Marriage is underpinned by the ideology of romantic love that unites the two sexes in the institution of marriage. In each novel, romantic love becomes entangled with male power and privilege over women. Both Kate and Harriet get married because they think they have no choice. Their confinement to the family starts via the illusion of romantic love. Simone de Beauvoir argues that 'the word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes'.[48] Shulamith Firestone explains that women's relationship with love is 'first, for its natural enriching function, and second, for social and economic reasons', while it takes the forms of ownership,

46. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 18.

47. Ibid., p. 30.

48. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 652.

control, jealousy, and lack of interest for men.[49] For Firestone, love becomes 'corrupted by an unequal balance of power', functioning as 'the pivot of women's oppression' in the family.[50]

Lessing demystifies the love practiced by women early on in *The Summer Before the Dark*. The narrative introduces readers to '[a] woman [who] stood on her back step, arms folded, waiting' at home, one who has held domestic and maternal responsibilities for twenty-five years.[51] The description of the woman 'waiting' reveals her tension with the family, and her 'folded arms' reinforce her judgmental feeling that soon 'slides around her tongue': '*Ah yes, first love!… […] My first child, you know… But I was in love! … Marriage is a compromise […] Love is a woman's whole existence*'.[52] For this woman, these phrases are 'worn […] and pretty stereotyped', and she thinks love 'has seldom to do with a personal feeling'.[53] Here, the ideology presents love as a personal feeling between couples. The marriage starts with enthusiasm, but then it imposes heavy maternal and domestic responsibilities upon women, leaving them no room for personal fulfilment.

In parallel with feminist criticism, Lessing clearly shows that women's preoccupation with love has been more a matter of oppression than bliss, as it demands they sacrifice themselves to satisfy others. Firestone argues that '[r]omanticism is a cultural tool of male power to keep women from knowing their conditions'.[54] Romantic love initially sparks between Harriet and David, who meet for the first time at an office party:

> he took her hand, […] they sat facing each other, so they might look as much as they wished, […] and then they went […] to his flat […]. There they lay on his bed holding hands and talked, and sometimes kissed and then slept. […] They were made for each other.[55]

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49. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 145.

50. Ibid., pp. 126-30.

51. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark,* p. 5.

52. Ibid., p. 5.

53. Ibid.

54. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 147.

55. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, pp. 10-1.

On the surface, the quotation suggests the beginning of a love affair between two adults represented as an ideal match. However, a close reading reveals that David's treatment of Harriet slowly takes the form of ownership and control. While Harriet remains passive in the scene, David is active, taking her hand rather than giving his own. Lessing's choice of possessive pronouns such as 'his flat', and then 'his bed' where they make love clearly hint at the beginning of an unequal power relationship veiled by romance. Moreover, soon after this scene they decide to marry, which is followed by Harriet's sudden decision to move into David's flat, 'for she had been able to afford only a room in a big communal flat'.[56] By this move, Lessing reiterates Firestone's argument by pointing to two main meanings of romantic love from women's point of view, which are security and economy. On the other hand, David as the owner of the flat is empowered by the patriarchal ideology to own whatever is inside, including Harriet.

In her novels, Lessing treats marriage as an unequal partnership based on patriarchal notions of gender role segregation, men's authority and control over women, and the private/public dichotomy. Dianna Gittins argues that 'contemporary ideology of the family presents marriage as an equal partnership between a man and a woman who love each other'.[57] In the novels, Lessing critiques the injustices to which Harriet and Kate are exposed after they marry, and she illustrates how marriage makes them 'more vulnerable' in different stages of their lives. Like romantic love, men and women experience marriage differently. Firestone explains:

> To him it [marriage] was simply an economic arrangement of some selfish benefit, one that would most easily satisfy his physical needs and reproduce his heirs. His wife, too, was clear about her duties and rewards: ownership of herself and of her full sexual, psychological, and housekeeping services for a lifetime, in return for long-term patronage and protection by a member of the ruling class, and in her turn limited control over a household and over her children until they reached a certain age.[58]

Here, Firestone describes marriage as an exchange of services that works to men's advantage through women's restriction to familial and domestic life. As she suggests, women can only gain a limited control of what they do and produce at home, which in

56. Ibid., p. 11.

57. Gittins, *Family in Question: Changing Households and Familiar Ideologies*, pp. 90-1.

58. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 222.

the end reinforces patriarchal authority. For example, women's 'duty' of reproduction is quite exhausting for them, while it is quite satisfactory for men both in terms of pleasure and authority. In return for their 'lifetime' of responsibilities such as housekeeping, women 'gain' male protection and patronage. This clearly illustrates that marriage by its very nature is an unequal institution in which women are expected to sacrifice their entire lives for the service of others.

Sexual Activity

In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing illustrates that the sexual activity within the context of the conventional family creates conditions that enable men to control women's bodies and sexuality. Harriet and David postpone having children for at least two years due to economic reasons, although they firmly consider having at least six in the meantime. However, their first intercourse results in Harriet's pregnancy as decided by David. His control over Harriet pregnancy can be explained by Shelia Rowbotham's argument that '[s]exual performance becomes a goal which the man has to strive towards'.[59] As the patriarch, David has to prove his masculine identity through sexual performance, resulting in pregnancy:

> Harriet and David lay down side by side, and looked at their room. They made love, there, on their bed. Harriet almost cried out, 'No, stop! What are we doing?' For had they not decided to put off having children for two years? But she was overwhelmed by his purpose – […] his taking possession of the future in her. […] '*Well,*' said Harriet, in a little voice, for she was frightened and determined not to show it, 'Well, that's done it, I am sure.' He laughed. A loud, reckless, unscrupulous laugh, quite unlike modest, humorous, judicious David.[60]

The quotation indicates two Davids: the usual 'modest' one and the 'loud, reckless' one. This suggests that David himself perhaps has two ideas regarding sex and pregnancy: the economic and the planned one, and the reckless and urgent change of mind. The quotation also illustrates that the feelings and attitudes of both parties towards the idea of sex resulting in pregnancy significantly differ. Sylvia Walby argues that '[s]exual practice is seen to be socially constructed around male notions of desire, not women's. Further, sexuality is seen as a major site of male domination over women,

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59. Shelia Rowbotham, *Women's Consciousness*, p. 56.

60. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, pp. 15-6.

through which men impose their notion of femininity on women'.[61] David is quite eager to have sex and becomes very happy afterwards. This is because the act serves patriarchy, which privileges David with male pleasure, control, and heirs to maintain his lineage. On the other hand, Harriet feels obliged to have sex, and does not find any pleasure in it. Although she is afraid of pregnancy as a result, evidenced in 'her little voice' in comparison with David's laughter, she is unable to resist David's decision and 'his purpose'. This is because reproduction is one of the means by which Harriet can affirm her place in the family. The shift from the pronoun 'they', signalling a mutuality between the couple, to the pronoun 'he', confirms David's authority and clearly suggests that the intercourse not only ends with pregnancy but also with David's possession of Harriet, and the baby.

Reproduction

The patriarchal ideology promotes the family as a reproductive unit, contributing to the creation of stable society. Such an ideology presents reproduction as the main criteria for heterosexual couples to be regarded as a family. The phases of reproduction control women's bodies to the advantage of a patriarchal society, and it is in the very early months of marriage that couples are frequently asked when they are planning to start a family, meaning that they are not yet considered to be a family due to the absence of children. Gittins argues that the desire to have children is the result of '[p]atriarchal values, notions of inheritance of both property and self, economic and political motives, a desire for status, a desire for love, fears of loneliness, [and] a desire to be seen as "normal"'.[62] David insists on having 'at least six children' to establish his status and to take possession of the future through reproduction. Gittins argues that having children functions as a means of achieving status for women: '[A] woman never achieves full status unless she has children'.[63] Thus, Harriet agrees to have a lot of children because maternity renders women 'normal' in the eyes of the patriarchal ideology and grants them status within society.

61. Sylvia Walby, *Theorising Patriarchy* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1990), p. 3.

62. Gittins, *The Family in Question*, p. 110.

63. Ibid., p. 96.

The Myth of the Perfect and Happy Mother

Motherhood is one of the roles women are frequently expected to perform to a degree of perfection. As women's bodies are capable of giving birth and nurturing their infants, motherhood is assumed to be 'natural' for them. Besides assigning it to a specific gender, patriarchal ideology also glorifies motherhood. As a result, love, care, affection, mercy, endurance, and sacrifice become almost synonymous with motherhood. The opposite of these words, such as hate, ignorance, tyranny, and individualism, come in effect when women cannot carry out the role for various reasons, or do so poorly in the eyes of patriarchal society. Mothers have also been demonised throughout the twentieth century, as pathogenic and dangerous to the healthy development of their children. These two extremes of either glorifying or blaming women make it clear that motherhood is an oppressive burden for women. Mothers who conform to patriarchal expectations are considered good, whilst those who do not are seen as bad, with the former glorified and the latter demonised.

The common definition of a perfect mother would be heterosexual, married, not too young or old, selfless and self-sacrificing, devoted, and not employed in paid work. Both Kate and Harriet neatly fit this definition, carrying out maternal and domestic responsibilities within the family. Kate reproduces four children, which she describes as 'monsters', while Harriet has five. Lessing details and critiques the ideals of a perfect mother through Kate's memory:

> It was true that to continue living as if there had been no changes, with the wakings in the night, and the having to get up early, and the always being bound to the infant timetable, had been hard. […] With three small children, and then four, she had had to fight for qualities that had not been even in her vocabulary. Patience. Self-discipline. Self-control. Self-abnegation. Chastity. Adaptability to others – above all. This always. These virtues, necessary for bringing up a family of four on a restricted income, she did slowly acquire. […] But virtues? Really? Really virtues? If so, they had turned on her, had become enemies. Looking back from the condition of being an almost middle-aged wife and mother to her condition as a girl when she lived with Michael, it seemed to her that she had acquired not virtues but a form of dementia.[64]

64. Ibid., pp. 88-9.

In the quotation, Lessing unpacks the 'virtues' of a perfect mother. The patriarchal ideology encourages women to be proud of reproduction, child rearing, and domesticity as part of the glorification of motherhood. After a long time, Kate becomes aware that so-called virtues such as 'patience, self-sacrifice, and adaptability to others' have blocked her way to personal fulfilment. Moreover, these attributes also create a problem that Kate cannot identify easily, causing her to question their effects on her personality: were they 'really virtues', or 'enemies', or even a 'form of dementia' Kate's questioning of her family experiences evokes the shift from the 1950s image of the perfect housewife to the 1960s image of the new feminist who was not satisfied with her condition in the family and wanted more than offspring and domesticity, as revealed in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique:*

> All I wanted was to get married and have four children. I love the kids and Bob and my house. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?[65]

Friedan's discussion of the unhappy housewife can fruitfully be applied to Lessing's description of Kate in a state of tension with her duties in the family. Although she seems to have enjoyed carrying out her domestic responsibilities for years, she strongly feels that they cannot provide her with personal satisfaction and personal identity. In the section 'At Home', Lessing employs various images of domesticity such as 'a kettle to boil', 'cooking', 'coffee-pot', 'dirty-dishes', and 'washing-up' to describe Kate's condition in the family. Of these images, the boiling kettle requires attention to understand Kate's tension with her familial obligations: 'Steam was now energetically at work on the kettle lid, and pouring out of the spout'.[66] Like the boiling kettle, 'energetically' erupting out of its container after a certain period of time, Kate reaches her boiling point, which becomes a symbol of her desire to explore her personal identity outside the family.

In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing explores how women's roles as mothers consume them both mentally and physically. In this way, the novel challenges if not subverts the myth of the happy mother, who is expected to love her children unconditionally. The

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65. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 21.

66. Lessing, The Summer Before the Dark, p. 7.

perceived ‘abnormalities’ of Ben, Harriet’s fifth child, are what threatens Harriet’s role as a happy mother and the Lovatts as a stable family: ‘She found she was silently addressing Ben: “I’m not going to let you destroy us, you won’t destroy me”’.[67] The word ‘silently’ implies that Harriet cannot articulate her concerns and be in direct conflict with the infant, as this could earn her the epithet of a bad mother. Moreover, looking after Ben is demanding, which causes Harriet to overlook her other familial responsibilities, as Dorothy, Harriet’s mother, observes: ‘The other children … they’re suffering. You’re so involved with it [Ben’s care], girl, that you don’t see it’.[68] Instead, Harriet spends most of her time trying to understand what Ben really is, as Ben’s ‘abnormality’ would damage Harriet’s role in the family as the mother: ‘“But what, that’s the point” said Harriet. “*What* is he?”’[69] While all the family members feel uneasy about Ben’s presence in the family and avoid him, Harriet is in regular contact with Ben for feeding, which she finds quite challenging. Ben has a strong appetite, and at some points fails to be satisfied by Harriet’s milk. His strong chin muscles damage Harriet’s body during feeding: ‘Ben sucked so strongly that he emptied the first breast in less than a minute, […] and sucked so hard that she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat, […] and she cried out, pulling him away’.[70] The ravenous way in which Ben feeds indicates that women are consumed by the act of breastfeeding. Harriet is both physically and mentally exhausted by Ben’s rearing and nurturing: ‘Once again she was bursting into tears over nothing at all’.[71] Simone de Beauvoir’s discussion of the relation between mother and infant directly echoes Lessing’s description of Harriet feeding Ben:

> Even nursing affords such a woman no pleasure; on the contrary, she is apprehensive of ruining her bosom; she resents feeling her nipples cracked, the glands painful; suckling the baby hurts; the infant seems to her to be sucking out her strength, her life, her happiness. It inflicts a harsh slavery upon her and it is no longer a part of her: it seems a tyrant; she feels hostile to this little stranger, this individual who menaces her flesh, her freedom, her whole ego.[72]

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67. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 80.

68. Ibid., p. 88.

69. Ibid., p. 66.

70. Ibid., p. 63.

71. Ibid., p. 78.

72. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 524.

For de Beauvoir, the mother's new life with her infant generates a kind of hostility within the mother when regarding the infant, which is also evident in Lessing's novel, when Harriet says to Ben 'You aren't going to do me in, I won't let you'.[73] Here, de Beauvoir's argument clearly speaks for Harriet's tears and cries when dealing with the infant. Harriet feels that her 'freedom' is restricted through the painful physical activities that the infant performs and inflicts on her body. The infant, which was once to an extent controllable when it was a part of her body, is now Ben, a separate being that cannot be controlled easily. Just like de Beauvoir, Lessing challenges the patriarchal promulgation that motherhood is a privileged status in which women find pleasure and satisfaction by highlighting the horrors of motherhood.

Both the family and medical institutions associate Ben's abnormalities with Harriet, which is in line with the ideology's tendency to blame mothers when something goes wrong. Harriet's tensions lie initially with the infant but eventually with her whole family, and stem from her inability to control Ben, which causes her to receive indirect condemnations as 'the destroyer of her family':

> As if I were a criminal! she raged to herself. She spent far too much of her time quietly seething, but did not seem able to stop. Even David, she believed, condemned her. She said to him, 'I suppose in the old times, in primitive societies, this was how they treated a woman who'd given birth to a freak. As if it was her fault. But we are supposed to be civilized!'[74]

Firestone argues that during the 1970s, 'for a woman to come out openly against motherhood on principle is physically dangerous. She can get away with it only if she adds that she is neurotic, abnormal, childhating and therefore "unfit"'.[75] It is during the same decade that Harriet regularly takes Ben to see doctors, and these visits can fruitfully be applied to Firestone's argument. In the family setting, Harriet still tries to mother Ben, as she cannot openly declare herself free from mothering him for the fear of being categorised as a 'childhater', 'abnormal', or 'unfit' mother. However, she also looks for a legal authority such as a doctor that would approve Ben's abnormality so that she can get rid of her epithet as bad mother. For this reason, Harriet initially visits Dr Brett, who refuses to affirm the diagnosis of 'abnormality' that Harriet desires,

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73. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 69.

74. Ibid., p. 74.

75. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 199.

instead claiming that Ben is 'physically normal for eighteen months', and adding that '[i]t is not abnormal to take a dislike to a child. I see it all the time. Unfortunately'.[76] Harriet then visits the female Dr Gilly, who only affirms Harriet's 'failure' in mothering: '[t]he problem is not with Ben, but with you. You don't like him very much'.[77] Both doctors' statements illustrate the patriarchal notion that mothers are expected to love and care for their children unconditionally. In this sense, Harriet is considered to be an 'unreasonable woman who couldn't handle her fifth child'.[78] This illustrates that society, with its patriarchal institutions, leaves no space for women to reject the role of motherhood, hence women's ambivalence within this role.

Illusions of the Happy and Stable Family

In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing portrays the reality that notions of the happy and stable family are dependent on women's reproduction and service. Harriet and David insist on the idea of having as many children as possible: '[w]e should have children while we can'.[79] Harriet reproduces five times, which exhausts her physically and psychologically, leading to tears, frustration, pain, sickness, and sleepless nights alongside her domestic duties: 'Harriet […] was pale and strained because of morning sickness and because she had spent a week scrubbing floors and washing windows'.[80] She sacrifices her own body and autonomy for them to be viewed as a happy family: 'Happiness. A happy family, The Lovatts were a happy family. It was what they had chosen and what they deserved'.[81] They are happy because they sustain a 'perfectly' functioning family according to the 1950s model, where the mother proves herself to be a prolific producer of healthy children and the father enjoys his authority over the family.

The novel progresses in accordance with feminist resistance to the New Right's insistence on the traditional family values. Harriet's reproductive years call for further attention from scholars, in order to understand better Lessing's criticism of the family.

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76. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 67.

77. Ibid., p. 77.

78. Ibid., p. 124.

79. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 23.

80. Ibid., pp. 17-8.

81. Ibid., p. 28.

The five Lovatt children are born in 1966, 1967, 1970, 1973, and 1974, and these years are of significance because they signal some important socio-political events and changes that advanced women's position in the family and society. These are the National Organisation for Women, founded in 1966, the Abortion Act in 1967, The Equal Pay Act and first Women's Liberation Conference in the UK in 1970, the amendment to abortion rights in the United States in 1973, and free contraception in the United Kingdom in 1974, the latter of which is ironically positioned as coinciding with the year when Harriet has her fifth child, Ben.

Published fifteen years after *The Summer Before the Dark*, *The Fifth Child* tests the practicality of the changes in women's lives gained as a result of long feminist activity both in private and public spheres. Both novels illustrate that inequality in the family in regards to women's secondary position is reflected and reproduced in wider society. Gittins asserts that '[f]amily ideology has been a vital means […] of holding together and legitimising the existing social, economic, political and gender systems',[82] while Firestone regards the family as 'the cause of the ills of the larger society'.[83] This distinction is transferred into other public spheres as bigger injustices, which cyclically reinforce women's secondary place and oppression in society. For Walby, there are two forms of patriarchy: private and public.[84] While private patriarchy constitutes women's main site of oppression under domesticity, public patriarchy keeps this oppression active in institutions other than the family. Public institutions are empowered by the state in a way that protects the interests of the family ideology. When women are involved in any of these institutions for whatever reason, they are treated in accordance with the patriarchal ideology's demands on them in the family.

Public Patriarchy

The relationship between family ideology and the social system, namely the one between private and public dichotomy, can be clearly traced in the novels. Lessing hints that a critique of family ideology constitutes a key step towards social change. Therefore, Kate's involvement in the workplace and her observation of the world

82. Gittins, *The Family in Question*, p. 168.

83. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 224.

84. Walby, *Theorising Patriarchy*, p. 24.

outside the family, and Harriet's experiences with social institutions such as medical authorities and institutions for 'abnormal' children, can be read within the context of this desire for social change. Lessing's heroines challenge the patriarchal family ideology, and even 'the whole social system'.[85] Thus, Lessing's critique of the family illuminates the ideological interconnectedness between the family and larger society.

In *The Summer Before the Dark*, Kate's contact with public forms of patriarchy is through her part-time translating job and observation of other women in society. This temporary job distinguishes her from Harriet. Friedan argues that career 'seemed to mean doing something, being somebody yourself, not just existing in and through other'.[86] In the absence of a career, Kate is known thorough her pre-defined roles as mother and wife in the family, as highlighted by the third-person narrator: 'her position in it [family] as her husband's wife. And, of course, as the mother of her children'.[87] The fact that the section 'At Home' is followed by the section 'Global Food' enables Lessing to reflect on the parallels between home and work.

Kate's experiences in her part-time job reveal that although work can grant women some autonomy, they are still expected to carry out responsibilities in parallel with domesticity. Unless gender roles in society are subverted, women's predefined roles continue outside the family. Kate starts working as a translator in a firm called 'Global Food', which organises global conferences on food shortage. It is her responsibility to translate between French, Italian, English, and Portuguese, and to take care of delegates who are unfamiliar with the environment and to answer phones. Kate gets used to the job easily, as the tasks she handles are similar to her domestic responsibilities: 'The second week was less pressured. Her work had become something she did as easily as she had run a home – unbelievably, only a few days ago. She did it automatically'.[88] Also, it does not take a long time for Kate to realise that her experience in the workplace does not differ from that of the home. These responsibilities are in line with Kate's roles in the family: 'She had become what she

85. Gittins, *The Family in Question*, p. 168.

86. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 40.

87. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, pp. 10-1.

88. Ibid., p. 30.

was: a nurse, or a nanny […]. A mother'.[89] Barrie Thorne's discussion of the effect of family ideology on the workplace is quite relevant to Lessing's representation of the parallels between the two:

> The belief that women are uniquely suited for domestic service and nurturing supports sex segregation of occupations and the confinement of women to jobs that resemble their wife-and-mother roles: clerical and service work, nursing, teaching and care of the young, production and selling of food and clothing.[90]

In accordance with Thorne's argument, Kate is offered a job ironically related to food and caring, duties with which she is already familiar. Lessing illustrates that the family ideology shapes people's perceptions of gender roles even outside the family setting, where women cannot be free of their 'natural tie' to domestic and maternal responsibilities.

After recognition of her own condition in the workplace, Kate becomes a good observer of other women exposed to similar gender inequalities in public spheres of employment. One of these is when she observes women flight attendants, who are employed to satisfy other people. Kate realises that these women are specifically chosen for this occupation for their 'ability' to be admired in the way they look and behave:

> These girls, dressed fancifully, and in arresting colours […]. They smile and smile […] And inside the aircraft are girls in exactly the same condition: the air hostesses, every one of them intoxicated by her position as public benefactor, a love supplier. […] They offer drinks. They lay before you, with tenderness and intimate smiles, trays of packaged meals. As they move about displaying themselves, the fever rises. At the beginning of the flight a girl is fresh and radiant with general friendliness; but soon she seems ready to explode with the forces of attention she has absorbed.[91]

Kate's observation of flight attendants illustrates the relation between the family ideology and public spheres. The observation clearly echoes Kate's gendered responsibilities and manners inside the family, which control what she wears and the way she behaves. Okin maintains that 'the division of labor within the gendered-structured family raises both patriarchal and psychological barriers against women in all

89. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 31.

90. Thorne, *Rethinking the Family*, p. 4.

91. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, pp. 54-5.

the other spheres of life'.[92] Like the hostesses, Kate has to supply love and service for her family members, all while displaying a high-spirited mood. Women have to be considered attractive to win social approval: Kate 'dressed suitably for a family afternoon, […] with care so that the grass did not mark her shoes. Her choice would have been to go bare-footed, to discard her stockings […] with her hair straight to her shoulder'.[93] Here, as the quotation suggests, Kate is not happy with what she has worn and how she looks, in the same way an 'air hostess' is not satisfied with the 'forces of attention'. However, the ideology requires women either in the family or public sphere to look charming and neat with specific forms of clothing in order to meet the social expectations of femininity. Kate's desire to 'bare-footed' and with 'hair straight to her shoulder' hints that she is aware of the existence of a choice, which in this sense is deconstructive of these patriarchal expectations of femininity.

Kate goes a step further by imagining what marriage can mean for these flight attendants: 'Then she marries. It must be walking off a stage where a thousand people are applauding into a small dark room'.[94] Darkness is evident both in *The Fifth Child* and *The Summer Before the Dark* in several incidents. Lessing uses darkness especially when it comes to familial issues such as marriage, sex, and pregnancy. This, I suggest, signals Lessing's criticism of patriarchal family arrangements. For instance, the room in which Harriet and David make love is unlit: 'Now the room was quite dark, it looked vast, like a black cave that had no end'.[95] Furthermore, Harriet is described as 'lying in the dark' during her fifth pregnancy. Similarly, the dark room represents a flight attendant's ultimate destination after marriage, implying something negative and dull for her: 'Why does she feel so irritable, why can't she relax, rest, sleep?'[96] Although the roles women perform change from work to home, their experience of oppression and control stays the same. This evokes Okin's term 'cyclic process', which affirms men's dominance over women, 'from home to work […] and thence back home again'.[97] Lessing hints that women are not happy with the roles assigned to them either in the

92. Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, p. 111.

93. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 11.

94. Ibid., p. 55.

95. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 16.

96. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 55.

97. Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, p. 113.

public or private spheres, because they become performers who internalise these roles rather than actualising their own potentials. Lessing illustrates that women are given no choice other than to play the roles chosen for them either in their families or the public sphere.

Family is not the only place in which women's bodies and labour are controlled by patriarchal ideology. Walby suggests that the patriarchy functions in public spheres to oppress women. In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing explores the relation between family ideology and medical institutions that ignore women's concerns over their bodies. Unlike her four previous pregnancies, Harriet's abortive visits to doctors during her fifth pregnancy implies that she seeks an abortion, which clearly reflects the novel's relationship to the 1967 Abortion Act. The Act was a milestone in providing women with a degree of control over their bodies. According to the Abortion Act, pregnancy can be terminated under specific conditions:

> [A] person shall not be guilty of an offence under the law relating to abortion when a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith—that the pregnancy has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family; or [..] that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.[98]

One of Harriet's frequent visits to Dr Brett occurs when her pregnancy reaches its fifth month, which exactly corresponds to the time restriction of twenty-four weeks as stated in the Act: '"Just look at that,' she said as her stomach heaved up, convulsed, subsided. '*Five months*"'.[99] Harriet's visit in the twenty-fourth week is not surprising when the difficult conditions of her pregnancy are considered: she experiences pain, weeping, sleepless nights, and nightmares. The continuation of the pregnancy causes Harriet's mental and physical health to degenerate. However, Dr Brett's insistence on the 'normalcy' of the pregnancy becomes an obstacle for Harriet when deciding on whether

98. Abortion Act 1967 (section 1) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/section/1> [accessed 22.06.2015].

99. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 49.

or not to have an abortion: 'He made the usual tests and said, "It's large for five months, but not so abnormally"'.[100]

According to the Abortion Act, termination of a pregnancy is conditional upon the approval of the medical authorities. In her conversations with Dr Brett, it is evident that Harriet cannot claim her 'legal' right to abortion, but instead tries to convince him that her pregnancy poses a high risk to her mental and physical health compared with her four previous pregnancies: '"But it's [the fifth pregnancy] not the same thing, it is *absolutely* different, I don't understand why you can't see it. Can't you see it?" […] No, he couldn't see it. Rather, he wouldn't—that was the point (emphasis original)'.[101] This is because, although it was legal, abortion was still stigmatised and socially unacceptable. During her visits, the doctor's focus is entirely on the foetus rather than Harriet's worsening condition: '"I've certainly seen energetic babies before," he said shortly, and […] he refused to meet her'.[102] Thus, the doctor disregards Harriet's experiences as a pregnant woman for the sake of the foetus. Although the latter damages her mentally and physically, she is only offered sedatives, indicating that reproduction must be completed even in extreme conditions, as it is of great importance to the political and economic institutions of patriarchy. These sedatives can also be read as a way to pacify Harriet's protests and demands, and make her comply with the medical authorities. The doctor treats Harriet in a way that reflects society's expectations of women who are supposed to bear children even under the most dreadful health conditions. While the Act constituted a step towards female autonomy in women's lives, Lessing seems hesitant to see it as a big step towards social change. This is because the dominant family ideology still structures society and its institutions in a way that denies women's autonomy, as seen in Harriet's experiences during her fifth pregnancy.

Lessing's criticism of the legal arrangements and social institutions becomes much more evident towards the end of Harriet's pregnancy, when she suffers great pain: 'Harriet lying down, her hands pressed into her stomach, tears running down her face,

100. Ibid., p. 49.

101. Ibid., p. 59.

102. Ibid., p. 49.

moaning from some pain'.[103] In this way, Lessing questions the restriction on abortion to twenty-four weeks, which if exceeded does not leave any chance for women other than delivering their babies regardless of their health conditions. Harriet's last visit to Dr Brett, which occurs as she approaches the end of her pregnancy, clarifies the point:

> She went to Dr Brett at eight months and asked him to induce the baby. He looked critically at her and said, 'I thought you didn't believe in it.' 'I don't. But this is different.' 'Not that I can see.' 'It's because you don't want to. It's not you who is carrying this—[…] 'I've had you sitting here through four pregnancies, with all kinds of problems—all credit to you, you put up with everything very well'.[104]

Here, Lessing clearly indicates that the legal arrangements are still not enough to encourage and enable women to make their own decisions surrounding issues that primarily concern them, such as pregnancy. The doctor tries to convince Harriet to complete this pregnancy by reminding her that she successfully completed her four previous ones. Writing the novel nearly two decades after the introduction of the 1967 Act, Lessing is able to reflect on its effect on women's lives. Although the Act protected women's mental and physical health to a degree, medical authorities remained empowered to protect the foetus 'against' the mother, but not the mother 'against' the foetus at all.

Kate and Maureen: Feminist Sisterhood of the 1970s

In accordance with the spirit of the 1970s, Lessing deploys the theme of sisterhood in *The Summer Before the Dark* as a critique of the patriarchal family ideology. Writing about the 1970s, Suzette Henke argues that 'women started speaking more frankly to one another, and feminists began to share information about emotions, relationships with men and with other women'.[105] This enabled women to share their experiences either in their family or society, and publicise inequalities as mutual sources of oppression. Lessing explores sisterhood through Kate's relationships with two unconventional characters, Mary and Maureen. Kate is represented as a good observer of an unjust society in relation to her own family experiences, and has the powers of

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103. Ibid., p. 48.

104. Ibid., pp. 58-9.

105. Suzette Henke, 'The Challenge of Teaching Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*', in *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 183-202 (p. 190).

'observing' and 'recalling' in order to deconstruct the family ideology: 'Looking back, it seemed as if she had been at everybody's beck and call, always available, always criticized, always being bled to feed these – monsters [her children]'.[106] Kate's observation of society and recollections of her family experiences are frequently cut by sequences from Mary's unconventional lifestyle, which is completely different from that of Kate: 'What about Mary Finchley, for instance? If she felt like staying in bed till mid-afternoon she did, and shouted at the children to bring her food and tea'.[107] Mary stands as an ideal feminist icon in the way she rejects being a good mother and wife by not carrying out her familial responsibilities. In this way, she contributes to the development of Kate's personal identity. Their time together, spent sharing their family experiences, exemplifies the feminist sisterhood through which Lessing subverts the family ideology:

> A few days later, in Mary's kitchen, waiting for a dish to get itself cooked, they began laughing again […]. They could not stop themselves. They began improvising, telling anecdotes or describing situations, in which certain words were bound to come up: wife, husband, man, women … They laughed and laughed. 'The Father of my children', one woman would say; 'the bread-winner', said the other, and they shrieked like harpies. […] [T]hey were shrieking at 'family' and 'home' and 'mother' and 'father'.[108]

The patriarchal ideology presents the kitchen as the woman's space in the family, and therefore it functions as a locus in which women's energy and time are exhausted by the demands that arise as a result of gender role segregation. In order to comply with the patriarchal codes of womanhood, women pay a great deal of attention to keeping their kitchens tidy and cooking regularly. In the initial pages of the novel, Kate is represented as a woman highly concerned about her dirty dishes and family meals. However, Mary's kitchen juxtaposes with Kate's, as Mary does not really care about cooking, cleaning, or other duties that women are expected to perform. The act of continuous laughter between the two can be read as a way to deflate the patriarchal authority, making it subversive. Gender roles, which privilege men and oppress women in the family, are the subject of their laughter. Through laughter, Kate is able to share her family experiences with Mary in a humorous way rather than in a desperate manner,

106. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 87.

107. Ibid., p. 84.

108. Ibid., p. 143.

and to listen to Mary's experiences in order to reject the ideal of the 'perfect housewife'.

Lessing's choice of the word 'harpies' rather than housewives when critiquing the family ideology requires further attention. In Greek mythology, a 'harpy' is a heartless and unpleasant creature with a woman's face and the body of a wild bird below the waist, sent by the gods to punish wrongdoing. In the 1970s they were employed as symbols of feminism, as 'they were strong female characters who represented male fears about female power'.[109] The reference to harpies in the novel reflects female power during the 1970s, which challenged female oppression. Therefore, the solidarity between the two 'shrieking harpies' implies the ongoing feminist activity to claim women's place in the family and society.

Lessing's representation of an unconventional woman, Maureen is another example of feminist sisterhood. Kate's last destination before returning home is 'Maureen's Flat', a basement apartment that she can hardly afford with the money left after a summer holiday and a private hotel room in London. Maureen is on the verge of getting married when she meets Kate. For Ruth Widmann, Maureen and her unconventional lifestyle have the same function in Kate's life as Mary. Widmann argues that Kate's examination of Maureen's reaction against marriage enables her to learn a lot about herself and family life, since Maureen 'already knows, at age twenty-two, that she does not have to choose a man in order to make an identity'.[110] Widmann's argument seems to be accurate in that the patriarchal ideology presents marriage as women's destiny, but Maureen has autonomy, unlike Kate: '"Are you thinking of marrying?" "I might" [says Maureen]'.[111] Maureen's reaction to marriage contributes to Kate's understanding that marriage, thanks to feminist activity, stands as a matter of choice rather than of fate.

Kate's memories of family life are equally essential to Maureen's development before she starts her own family. For this reason, Maureen wants to learn more about

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109. Anna Clayborune, 'Harpies' in *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology* (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish, 2012) <http://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/harpies_greek_mythology > [accessed 20.11.2015]. See, for example 'Virago' press.

110. Ruth L. Widmann, 'Review: Lessing's "The Summer Before the Dark"', *Contemporary Literature*, 14 (1973), 584-85, (p. 584).

111. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 175.

every single detail of Kate's family life. However, Kate has difficulty in answering her questions in regards to marriage, as she once internalised the necessity of marriage for social approval. Maureen's questions are directly linked to marriage at an early age. Therefore, she believes that Kate's answers will illuminate marriage:

> 'You married young?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'But are you sorry?'
> 'Are you? Are you?'
> 'How can I answer that? Don't you see that I can't?'
> […] 'Have you daughters?'
> 'One.'
> 'Is she married?'
> 'No.'
> 'Does she want to?'
> 'Sometimes yes and sometimes no.'
> 'What do you want for her?'
> 'Can't you see that I can't answer that?'[112]
> [Kate to Maureen] 'Be what you like. I can't help you.'
> 'Then what is the use of all that ripeness?'
> 'None, I think.'[113]

When Maureen cannot get the answer directly from Kate, she tries another way by asking about her daughter. However, each time Kate illustrates her inability to answer these questions. I argue that as Kate still feels herself to be the subject of the patriarchal family, she is afraid that the details might affect Maureen's free will in marriage. Kate is aware that her 'ripeness' is useless for Maureen, as it is the result of serving the family over twenty-five years, which in other words means denying her individuality for the sake of others. Lessing challenges the ripeness, which passes family ideology across generations. By resisting Maureen's questions, Kate avoids the reproduction of the ideology over the generations.

The twenty-five-year experience of raising children and maintaining a family would mean not that much for Kate's personal development, although the ideology promotes otherwise. Therefore, Kate considers talking about herself and her family within the context of 'immaturity' rather than ripeness: 'I haven't travelled the golden trail to Kathmandu or done social work among the aged or written a thesis. I've just

112. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 175.

113. Ibid., p. 179.

brought up a family'.[114] She illuminates Maureen by telling incidents from Mary's unconventional life:

> Mary was quite different, she had never been in love in her life. […] She had sex with other people almost from the first. […] She read detective stories, and boys' adventure stories, and animal stories. I even thought for a while she was masculine.[115]

Mary's unconventional attitudes, reflected in her rejection of control over her sexuality and subversion of gender roles, are essential to Maureen's development during second-wave feminism as a way to gain autonomy.

Kate's reference to Mary's lifestyle in her conversations with Maureen can be read as an implicit invitation to the Women's Liberation Movement. Kate tells Maureen about Mary, a happy woman who lives an unconventional life, in contrast with her own conventional but unhappy life, as a way of directing her to the Women's Liberation Movement. Kate implies that she is not happy living with Michael under the patriarchal family arrangements, and therefore sees Mary's life as emblematic of happiness. Maureen observes to Kate: "[W]hen I wanted you to talk about being happy with Michael, you had to tell me about Mary'.[116] While recalling family experiences is essential for Kate to subvert the effects of the ideology on her identity, Lessing hints that there is no point in Maureen hearing Kate's family experiences for her development.

The relationship between Kate and Maureen fits into Friedan's definition of the New Women of the 1980s:

> The New Women heroines were the ideal for yesterday's housewife; they reflected the dreams, mirrored the yearning for identity and the sense of possibility that existed for women then. And if women could not have these dreams for themselves, they wanted their daughters to have them. They wanted their daughters to be more than housewives, to go out in the world that had been denied them.[117]

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114. Ibid., p. 178.

115. Ibid., pp. 213-14.

116. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark,* p. 217.

117. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 40.

By dreaming of Maureen, Lessing illustrates that Kate's struggles are not only for herself, but for a cause that concerns all women, as is revealed in a conversation between the two: '[Maureen to Kate] Do you think dreams are just for the person who dreams them? Perhaps they aren't?' Therefore, Maureen encourages Kate to fulfil her dream to the benefit of all: 'I think what you have to do is to finish your dream […] before you go back to your family'.[118] Kate starts her dream sequence again and this time, instead of the seal, she sees Maureen in her dream: 'She slept and dreamed, but did not reach the dream of the seal, the dream was all of Maureen'.[119] In the *Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argues that '[t]here is no way she [the woman trapped in the mystique] can even dream about herself, except as her children's mother, her husband's wife'.[120] Lessing's novel comes exactly a decade after Friedan's statement, and illustrates that women trapped by the mystique can dream for themselves and for others. In this way, Lessing shows how the revolution brought hope for women's condition in society.

Kate benefits freedom from a freedom that came at a later stage of her life, which develop into an opportunity to advance the feminist cause, which contrasts with de Beauvoir's argument that late freedom is no use for women:

> As for the children, they are old enough to get along without her, they are getting married, they are leaving home. Rid of her duties, she finds freedom at last. Unfortunately, in every woman's story recurs the fact that we have verified throughout the history of woman: she finds this freedom at the very time when she can make no use of it.[121]

Kate may not attain a sense of complete freedom, but I argue that contrary to de Beauvoir's discussion of freedom that occurs later in life, when women can make no use of it, Kate makes an important discovery: she can sustain her life without her family. This realisation can be incorporated into her life at home as a free woman, and thus the novel concludes with the possibility of change in the lives of millions of women like Kate. However, her return home has caused disagreement amongst critics. Gayle Greene argues that 'Lessing […] envisions female identity as a trap [and that

118. Ibid., p. 199.

119. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 208.

120. Ibid., p. 62.

121. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 595.

Kate] has no choice but to return to the home that is the source of her unhappiness, in a closed, circular structure'.[122] Similarly, Ingrid Holmquist takes the return as a failure, as 'she returns to the family situation she initially rebelled against'.[123] On the other hand, Ruth Whittaker takes issue with critics who interpret Kate's return home as a defeat, counter arguing:

> It is unimaginable that she will revert to the person she was at the beginning of the summer. Having restored her scarred and wounded self from aridity into its element, she can begin anew anywhere she chooses, even in her old environment.[124]

I argue that Kate's female identity undergoes some form of recovery against the 'feminine mystique', and the novel suggests that she has reached a sense of inner freedom: 'Her experiences of the last months—her discoveries, her self-definition, what she hoped were now strengths'.[125] At the end of the novel, Kate recalls and critiques her past family experiences at a time when she is able to enjoy a taste of freedom, ironically in Maureen's flat: 'There was nothing in the world to stop her going out now, and buying her fantasies, and wearing them here, in Maureen's flat. She decided that this was what she would do'.[126] Therefore, her return home is not 'a defeat' or coincidence but rather a necessity and an example of a renewed focus on the family.

Maternal Ambivalence: A Feminist Struggle

While the 1970s introduced a strong feminist solidarity that challenged women's oppression in public and private spheres, the 1980s witnessed a backlash against feminism through an attempt to force women into their conventional roles in the family. As a result of these shifting tides, the women of the 1980s found themselves ambivalent towards their conventional roles in the family, a situation employed by Lessing as a way to challenge these conventional roles rather than passively internalising them. Maternal ambivalence destabilises women's fixed relationship with their children, and hence their role in the family. Harriet experiences this ambivalence towards Ben, and it

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122. Greene, *The Poetics of Change*, p. 140.

123. Ingrid Holmquist, *From Society to Nature: A Study of Doris Lessing's Children of Violence* (Goteborg: Mirab, 1980), p. 140.

124. Ruth Whittaker, *Doris Lessing*, p. 56.

125. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 230.

126. Ibid., p. 207.

encourages her to fight against gender oppression alongside other forms of oppression. Her decision to save Ben from the institution demonstrates her growing autonomy within the context of the patriarchal family, as she overrides the family decision and brings Ben back home. It is in the institution that Ben is put into a straight-jacket and treated like an animal. Upon witnessing his oppression there, Harriet starts the process of bringing him home by asserting their relationship: 'I'm Mrs Lovatt and I've come to see my son; I'm Ben Lovatt's mother'.[127] This is the first time that Harriet calls Ben by his full name rather than the adjectives the family often uses to describe him due to his appearance, such as 'dwarf', 'goblin', and 'animal', which implies that she now recognises Ben as a human on his own terms, as well as part of her family. In the absence of Ben, 'the family expanded like paper flowers in water', so Harriet's action can be read as a challenge to the family.[128] Here choice of 'paper flowers' rather than actual flowers blooming needs attention. Paper flowers are an ersatz version of the real thing, implying illusion if not falseness of family happiness. Harriet's decision to reintroduce Ben potentially means destroying the family's stability and harming its members, rendering her a failure as a mother to her other children: 'Harriet, the destroyer of her family'.[129]

Lessing tests the practicality of the idea of 'a renewed focus on the family' by emancipating her heroine from domestic and familial responsibilities and allowing her to explore new experiences. Kate acquires a new perspective on the family once she is outside of it. While away from her family, she is repeatedly described in reflective states, such as 'observing', 'looking back', 'watching herself', 'listening to herself', and 'laughing', all in relation to her past family experiences. Lessing uses these moments to explore Kate's family experiences when she is not the subject of her family: 'Looking back, it seemed as if she had been at everybody's beck and call, always available, always criticized, always being bled to feed these–monsters [her children]'.[130] The fact that Kate calls her children monsters is in contrast with traditional notions of motherhood, with mothers supposedly viewing their children with affection. Kate's contrasting response to her children demonstrates a new perspective on the family once

127. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, pp. 95-7.

128. Ibid., p. 93.

129. Ibid., pp. 140-1.

130. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 87.

she is outside of it. Lessing uses maternal ambivalence as a way to escape from familial oppression and gender roles.

Other Forms of Oppression

Lessing is interested in other forms of oppression such as bodily norms besides gender. The bodily norms are also policed in the family, oppressing individuals as in the example of Ben: '[Ben is] almost in his room, like a prisoner'.[131] The education of children as obedient individuals living in harmony with wider society is one of the familial tasks imposed on mothers. Ben's place within his family is not harmonious, in the sense that he is disobedient and in conflict with his environment. Moreover, his physical appearance differs from his siblings, and he is described as a 'goblin', 'dwarf', 'Netherland baby', and 'freak'. Besides ensuring social conformity, the family ideology also polices individuals to ensure that they fit into the social expectation of bodily norms. The novel explicitly suggests that bodily and social norms reinforce each other in a way that stigmatises and oppresses individuals. In other words, Ben's perceived 'abnormalities' in his behaviours are reinforced by how he looks.

Through the institution for 'abnormal' children where Ben is kept, Lessing hints that social and bodily norms are first embedded in the family and then policed by the larger society with its institutions. These institutions, like the family, are regulated by social politics to fit individuals into society's accepted norms. Lessing's ambivalence towards feminism can partly be explained by her interest in other forms of oppression upheld by the family. Lessing writes about feminist issues, but she is not just a feminist writer. The straitjacket that Ben is forced to wear while in the institution becomes a symbol of this oppression: 'He was unconscious. He was naked, inside a strait-jacket'.[132] Harriet's attempt to rescue Ben from this place indicates that he is a member of an oppressed group, which in turn signals Lessing's critique of the oppression on bodily norms besides gender.

131. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 72.

132. Ibid., p. 99.

Conclusion

Lessing's inclusion of her heroines in patriarchal families after *The Golden Notebook* suggests that the family still constitutes an obstacle to women's liberation, and explains her preoccupation with this subject in both *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child*. Such a persistent exploration of the theme of the family can be read as Lessing's way of exploring and demystifying patriarchal institutions and social politics. A comparative reading of both novels suggests that Harriet and Kate are dissatisfied with their place in their respective families. For instance, Harriet 'wanted to be done with this unhappy house, and the thoughts that went with it',[133] while 'Kate was not feeling anything at all about this house in which she lived for nearly a quarter of a century. Nothing'.[134] Lessing transforms their dissatisfaction from passivity into an active endeavour to develop their full human identities, and eventually into a struggle against the family ideology. For the first time in her life, Kate values herself as an individual rather than as an extension of her family. Harriet, too, matures from the myth of a perfect housewife into a revolutionary character who resists her family and associated decisions. Although the two women are unable to attain their full human identities at the end, Lessing illustrates that they paved the way for the emancipation of future generations.

In her seminal work *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir announces that the 'representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth'.[135] This criticism of a male-centric representation of the world is echoed in *The Summer Before the Dark* and *The Fifth Child* in relation to the family. In these novels, Lessing deconstructs the male-centric representation of the family and reclaims it from a female perspective, which reveals that the family under patriarchy is oppressive to women in many ways in its existing form. Lessing clearly illustrates that the family cannot be a 'domestic heaven' in which all individuals are equal and have the same experiences. Harriet and Kate are controlled—both in terms of body and life—by patriarchal notions of dependence, domesticity, and maternity within the family context. Therefore, they are

133. Lessing., *The Fifth Child*, p. 153.

134. Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, p. 141.

135. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 166.

denied autonomy and freedom. In contrast, their husbands, David and Michael, are empowered by patriarchal notions of gender role segregation, which exempts them from the responsibilities that oppress Harriet and Kate. Their role in the family as 'breadwinner' grants them status along with their careers, unlike women's role of 'homemaker', which makes them more vulnerable both in the family and society. Moreover, Harriet's relation to social and medical institutions, and Kate's observation of society illustrate that women are treated in accordance with the demands of the patriarchal ideology both within and outside their families.

Lessing's criticism of the family aligns with the ideas of second-wave feminism in its examination of the reasons for women's oppression, such as marriage, romantic love, reproduction, maternity, and domesticity, but she does not call for a rejection of the family. For Lessing, families are collective units that have the potential to initiate broader social changes. Hers is an invitation for the transformation of the family in a way that would create justice and equality in society, in a manner similar to Friedan's observations in *The Second Stage*. Lessing's novels illustrate that equality within the family would weaken the patriarchal ideology and politics that promote inequalities in larger society. The novels also demonstrate that gender roles are an impediment to self-development, and self-actualisation, the concepts Lessing later develops by Sufism as part of challenging conventional roles that impede human development.

Chapter Three

Sufism and the Family

Bringing Sufi perspectives to bear on Lessing's work enables a reconfiguration of her work in regards to the family.[1] Alternative family structures and kinship in particular are central to her novels *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and *Ben, in the World* (2000). A Sufi reading of these novels illustrates that Lessing deploys elements of Sufism to challenge conventions and introduce non-normative families and kinship. While *Memoirs* depicts the collapse of the traditional family and the rise of non-normative forms, *Ben*, the sequel to *The Fifth Child* (1988), focuses on human relations within the context of the family. In these novels, Lessing is preoccupied with family not as an institution to be discarded, but rather as a social concept to be critiqued and reconfigured for the benefit of individuals and society. Her involvement in Sufism inspires the ways in which she problematises and reconfigures the family. A Sufi reading of family in Lessing's fiction shows that she seeks to liberate the family from the dominant ideology rather than to liberate individuals from the idea of the family. Whereas family ideology indoctrinates individuals into gender roles and hierarchical relations, through Sufism Lessing introduces non-normative human relations that create new forms of family.

Discussions of Lessing's Sufism have not adequately been acknowledged in terms of as Muge Galin asserts, 'the changes in her themes and content, her characters' resolutions and expectations'.[2] Moreover, critics do not attend to the ways in which Lessing's interest in Sufism informs her representation of the family. Based on my comparative reading of the novels, I introduce two new terms to discuss Lessing's representation of the family: "Sufi family" and "Sufi parenthood".[3] The Sufi family is a term I derive from the relationship between a Sufi guru and their disciple. This

1. An essay version of this chapter won Doris Lessing Graduate Student Essay Contest in 2017, and a revised version of the winning essay was published in the journal of *Doris Lessing Studies* in volume 36, December 2018. See https://dorislessingsociety.wordpress.com/essay-contest/

2. Muge Galin, *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 27.

3. Selcuk Senturk, 'The Representation of Non-Normative Family and Kinship: Sufi Family and Sufi Parenthood in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Ben, in the World*', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 36, (2018), 16-22.

relationship is non-gendered, non-hierarchical, and non-biological, ensuring the gradual development of the disciple into, to borrow a phrase from Sufi terminology, a perfected person.[4] Lessing translates the Sufi-disciple relationship into the context of the family, which justifies new familial terms such as "Sufi parenthood". Akin to the role a Sufi guru assumes for their disciple, Sufi parenthood offers an alternative model in which children do not become extensions of their carers through gender roles but rather detach from their parents to further their individual development. The individual's personal development and self-actualisation are at the centre of Sufism, just as they emerge as core themes in Lessing's writing.[5] I suggest that Emily in *Memoirs* and the eponymous protagonist in *Ben* are potential Sufis, whereas the unnamed narrator of the former novel and Mrs. Ellen Biggs of the latter are Sufi parents, who successfully guide Emily and Ben, respectively, in their journey towards self-actualisation and personal development. Their togetherness implies a Sufi family. The terms 'Sufi parenthood and Sufi family' illuminate Lessing's critical stance towards traditional family arrangements and allow non-normative families and kinship to be explored in her fiction.

Lessing scholars have tended to discuss either the form of Sufism in Lessing's fiction and/or the ways it has influenced her writing style. Galin's *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1997) is the first complete critical assessment of Sufism in Lessing's fiction, and proposes that Sufism 'reshape[s] our assessments of its quality'.[6] In a similar fashion, Nancy Topping Bazin celebrates Lessing's move into Sufism, suggesting that 'Lessing's ideas have been nourished and clarified through her interest in Sufism'.[7] According to Tom Sperlinger, 'Sufi thought is vital in providing Lessing with a language of possibility'.[8] I argue that Sufism is a lens through which Lessing explores the family and sees the possibility of creating more egalitarian and inclusive institutions that would replace the traditional family. Galin,

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4. Perfected person (*Al-Insān al-Kāmil*) is a Sufi term used for Sufis when they truly become self-conscious and know their true capacities as human.

5. Ustad Hilmi Mevlevi, 'The Sufi Quest', in *Thinkers of the East*, ed. by Idries Shah (London: ISF Publishing), 193-196 (p. 198).

6. Galin, *Between East and West*, p. 3.

7. Nancy Topping Bazin, 'The Evolution of Doris Lessing's Art from a Mystical Moment to Space Fiction', in *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy*, ed. by Robert Reilly (Westport: Greenwood, 1985) 157-67 (p. 159).

8. Tom Sperlinger, 'Radical Pedagogy in Doris Lessing's Mara and Dann', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 58.3, (2017), 300-311 (p. 302).

Susan Watkins, and Ann Scott agree that the form of Sufism in Lessing's fiction is not theological, as there is no attempt to convert readers to Sufism, but rather it is preoccupied with the personal development of her characters as individuals.[9] My reading of Sufism and the family in Lessing's fiction is partly a response to the thematic gap in Lessing's fiction.

Lessing and Idries Shah

Lessing's Sufism, entirely influenced by the teachings and writings of Idries Shah (1924-1996), is a manifestation of Western Sufism. Her interest in Shah's work surfaced in the 1960s, a period when she was wary of the limitations posed by the political movements of communism and feminism. The main limitation of these political movements for Lessing was that they could serve only a certain group and its concerns rather than humanity itself. However, the spiritual philosophy of Sufism offered Lessing a broader perspective through which she could gain more inclusive representations in her fiction. Sufism has long been promoted in the East as a mystical branch of Islam, but Shah's adaptation is free from any dogma, religion, and traditionalism, and instead explains Sufism 'in a more accessible way, often employing psychological terminology'.[10] In *The Way of the Sufi* (1968), Shah introduces Sufism as a method of 'transcending ordinary limitations'.[11] He does not provide a specific definition for the term, as this would already bear some limitations. Shah, as Scott notes, leaves Sufism 'virtually undefined and certainly unlimited'.[12] In *Knowing How to Know* (1998), Shah asserts: 'ideology drives people into absurd forms of thought and behaviour. Beware of it, because it attempts to apply mechanical concepts to human development'.[13] Gender and hierarchical relations in the traditional family could be considered one of these mechanical concepts that impede individual development. The

9. Galin, *Between East and West*.

10. Jason Webster, 'Sufism: A Natural Antidote to Fanaticism' (2014)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/23/sufism-natural-antidote-fanaticism-the-sufis-idries-shah> [accessed 11 December 2017].

11. Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), p. 14.

12. Ann Scott, 'The More Recent Writings: Sufism, Mysticism and Politics', in *Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing*, ed. by Jenny Taylor (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 164-190 (p. 167).

13. Idries Shah, *Knowing How to Know: A Practical Philosophy in the Sufi Tradition* (London: Octagon Press, 1998), p. 76.

fact that Sufism avoids any form of prescriptive behaviours such as gender roles is key to undoing the ideology of the family. This aspect of Sufism contributes to gender equality, as the philosophy considers women and men as beings, regardless of their biological differences. Sufism therefore intersects with feminism, enabling cultural, social, and political determinants of gender to be challenged. The ways in which Lessing employs Sufism also contribute to the philosophy by introducing non-normative human relations within the context of the family. Most importantly, by focusing on the family in Lessing's fiction, we can see how her understanding of Sufism differs from that of Shah, whose Sufism centres on individual development and self-actualisation within the context of a psychological framework. By contrast, Lessing's use of Sufism expands its scope in the sense that it becomes political in its contest against a patriarchal configuration of the family. Although Sufism originated as an apolitical philosophy, Lessing's fiction opens up the ways for Sufism to be read anew from a political perspective by challenging social conventions and power structures, specifically in the examples of parenthood and family.

Lessing and Jenny Diski

Lessing's personal life mirrors the ways in which she reconfigures the family in her fiction. One example is her time with Jenny Diski, a classmate of her son Peter, whom Lessing took in when Diski was a teenager. In her memoir of the time she spent with Lessing, *In Gratitude* (2016), Diski observes the difficulty she experienced in naming her relationship to Lessing: 'I have never managed to figure out a designation for her that properly and succinctly describes her role in my life'.[14] I suggest that Sufi family is one way of summing up Lessing's relationship to Diski, with the former assuming the role of a Sufi parent. Their unconventional, non-biological, yet affirmative relationship illuminates Lessing's experiment with Sufism on a personal level. The fact that it was unconventional did not necessarily mean it did not contain some elements of conventional relationships, such as imbalances between them. However, the simultaneous presence of Diski and Sufism in Lessing's life allows her to realign family and parenthood in her fiction.

14. Jenny Diski, *In Gratitude* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 19.

Both Lessing and Diski experienced the oppression of the dominant family ideology. Diski had a traumatic family life due to a mentally ill mother and an unreliable father, while Lessing made the radical decision to leave two of her children behind when moving to London in 1949. The point at which Lessing and Diski met, when the former agreed to let the latter live in her flat, corresponds to Lessing's initial interest in Sufism, as Diski explains: 'When I got there, Doris was just getting involved with the Sufis'.[15] As fellow sufferers of oppressive, sexist family ideology, their togetherness can be seen as an experiment within the context of a non-normative family. As Diski reveals in her memoir, Lessing's relationship with her non-biological child was just as fraught and conflicted as her relationship with her three biological children. Her necessarily unconventional, "selfish" life as a writer took precedence over a conventional maternal investment in her children. Arguably, Sufism creates the ways in which Lessing the writer can assume a parental responsibility without the restrictions of the ideological implications of motherhood.

As Diski has acknowledged, Lessing's *Memoirs* is in part a fictional depiction of their relationship.[16] Set in an unknown time and city, the work depicts the breakdown of society for an unspecified reason. In this dystopian atmosphere, the family unit also collapses, and children grow up on the streets with no idea of love or attachment to any families, possessing only an instinct for survival. This creates a community of feral youth, with anarchy and theft part of their daily life. The novel is narrated from the perspective of an unnamed, middle-aged woman, who carefully observes and comments on the societal breakdown from her flat. Her isolation is interrupted early in the novel, when an unknown man hands her a twelve-year-old girl called Emily Cartright, saying that she is now the responsibility of the narrator and then leaving without any further remark. As the narrator exists between the past and the present, and between real and imaginary worlds, penetrating through and between the walls of her flat and other flats, she and Emily embark on a non-hierarchical relationship that fosters her inner development and self-actualisation. After a period of time with the narrator, Emily decides to explore the outside world, where she meets Gerald, who runs a commune

15. Jenny Diski, *Jenny Diski on Doris Lessing*: *'I was the cuckoo in the nest'* (interviewed by Tim Adams for *The Guardian*) (7 December, 2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/07/jenny-diski-doris-lessing-cuckoo-in-nest> [accessed 2 July 2018].

16. Jenny Diski, *In Gratitude* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 26.

made up of children living on the streets. Emily joins this commune, which becomes a non-normative family that is free from hierarchical relations, biological connectedness, and the conventions of the past. The novel ends with the dissolution of the walls for Gerald, Emily, and the children, who are able to penetrate through them just as the narrator does, a fact implying that Lessing's new family is created.

In her later Sufi novel, *Ben*, Lessing tells the story of the struggles of Ben Lovatt, who is stuck between finding his true self and conforming to social expectations. The novel was written as a sequel to *The Fifth Child*, in which Ben is born into a traditional family he is blamed for destroying. Having left his family and now aged eighteen, in *Ben* the eponymous protagonist helplessly looks for a family to which he can belong. Because of his unconventional appearance and behaviour, he is stigmatised as abnormal and rejected by society, considered an 'alien', a 'throwback', or an 'animal', and abused by the people around him, with the exception of an elderly woman, Mrs. Ellen Biggs. Mrs. Biggs, a motherly figure, welcomes Ben's existence and behaviours without question, and helps him to find his way in life. The fact that Mrs. Biggs is more generous, welcoming, and maternal than Ben's biological mother fits with the pattern of Lessing's idealisation of non-biological mothering, while the novel, through its depiction of Ben's efforts to find the meaning of his existence, exemplifies the journey a would-be Sufi would take for their self-actualisation.

In the way *The Golden Notebook* (1962) has benefited from feminist criticism, *Memoirs* has been elucidated as a Sufi text by Lessing scholars. For example, Roberta Rubenstein reads the novel as a break-through in Lessing's fiction, 'rendering … the mystical path of self-transcendence'.[17] Galin takes *Memoirs* as a Sufi novel that introduces and 'traces the steps a would-be Sufi takes toward enlightenment'.[18] On the other hand, *Ben* has not yet received any critical attention as a Sufi novel, despite the fact that the title—*Ben, in the World*—clearly evokes a Sufi motto: 'Be in the world but not of it', meaning 'detaching from the things of the world, without having cut oneself off from it'.[19] Lessing explores the Sufi path through her protagonist Ben, who does not fit into either his traditional family or his conformist society. Like a Sufi, Ben is in the

17. Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing*, p. 240.

18. Galin, *Between East and West*, p. xxii.

19. Shah, *Knowing How to Know*, p. 271.

world and at work, but at the same time he does not seem to belong to this world, as observed by other characters: 'What was Ben? He slept in his bed, like everyone else, he used his knife and fork, he kept his clothes clean, he liked his beard neat, and his hair cut, and yet he was not like anybody'.[20] Ben can be read as an everyman, introducing Sufism in the most basic way possible: 'the Sufi brings his experience into operation within the culture, country, the climate in which he is living'.[21] Lessing employs Ben as a Sufi picaro, who wanders across countries and continents.

The Sufi Family

When we read *Memoirs* and *Ben* as early and late Sufi novels, we can see how they respond to if not advance recent discussions of family and parenthood in Lessing's canon. Regarding *Memoirs*, Susan Watkins suggests that 'the narrator experiences the collapse of civilized society and the nuclear family'.[22] For Sunita Sinha, the novel demonstrates Lessing's ongoing interest in alternatives to the structure of the nuclear family, and 'the degeneration of atmosphere, the collapse of law and order and material infrastructure[,] led to the breaking of stable, biologically related families'.[23] Ingrid Holmquist is also alert to Lessing's representation of the family in the novel: 'The characterization of the family is hardly individualized; but perhaps it stands for a sort of essence of Doris Lessing's view of the family'.[24] Such readings partly work, considering Lessing's critique of traditional families. However, no argument has yet explained the significance of this collapse, nor discussed the Sufic ideas of the family in these novels. In *Memoirs* and *Ben*, Lessing creates non-normative human relations by employing insights from Sufism. While *Ben* celebrates alternative and non-normative human relationships within the context of a family, *Memoirs* depicts the disintegration of the conventional family and the rise of non-normative forms, as illustrated through the communes of the Ryans and Gerald.

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20. Lessing, *Ben, in the World* (2000; repr., London: Flamingo, 2000), p. 69.

21. Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, p. 1.

22. Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 53.

23. Sunita Sinha, *Postcolonial Women Writers: New Perspectives* (Delhi: Atlantic, 2008), p. 38.

24. Holmquist, *From Society to Nature*, *p*. 146.

A Sufi reading of *Memoirs* and *Ben* opens up new paths into Lessing's work as well as possible new directions in Sufic thought. My introduction of the term Sufi family is in part a response to the fact that Sufism has not yet developed a family theory, unlike feminism and communism. This is because the philosophy centres on the individual and his or her concerns rather than on collectives such as the family. Considering that the philosophy aims to break the barriers to individual development, Sufism has the potential to critique the traditional family. Galin suggests that the form of Sufism encountered in Lessing's work is 'modern, relevant, and applicable to contemporary life'.[25] I take Galin's suggestion one step further, applying Sufism to the contemporary form of the family in Lessing's fiction. Therefore, an exploration of Sufism in Lessing's oeuvre is not only central to her representation of the family, but also to introducing family studies into the literature of Sufism.

In *Memoirs*, the Ryans can be interpreted as a Sufi family. Recalling the old days, the unnamed narrator introduces the Ryan family as a well-functioning unit with their own unique way of living. They live communally without any forms of authority, kinship, private ownership, or discrimination. Deviating from mainstream society by not following prescribed behaviours, rules, and relationships, the Ryan family constitutes an alternative way of living to the traditional family. However, as the narrator reveals, the Ryans are eventually absorbed by society, with only a few of its members remaining. The dystopian atmosphere of the society triggers in the narrator a nostalgia for the Ryan family, and she describes its members with sympathy and yearning:

> The point was, the goal of the saints and philosophers was theirs by birthright: *The Way of the Ryans*, it might be called. Each day, each experience, was sufficient unto itself, each act divorced from its consequences… [The] truths, always being presented to them by the officials in and out of the house, could never stay in a Ryan head. … To be attached to property is bad? What property? A Ryan had none, not even a shirt or a comb. [W]ithin the clan which was the Ryans and their friends, white, black, brown, who came and went day and night in and out of the house, was infinite giving and tolerance, was a generosity of judgement, a delicacy of understanding.[26]

25. Galin, *Between East and West*, p. 160.

26. Doris Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974; repr., London: Pan Books, 1976), pp. 110-1.

The form of a family determines the way individuals engage with each other within it. For example, a family can be considered patriarchal if it is sustained through gender roles under the control of a patriarch. It is evident in the quotation that the members of the Ryan family represent the traits and behaviours of Sufis, as they engage with each other and behave in non-normative terms that evoke a Sufi family. In particular, Lessing's employment of the phrase '*The Way of the Ryans*' in the above quotation is a direct reference to Idries Shah's book *The Way of the Sufi* (1968), which introduces Sufi mysticism and its principles. In the Ryan family, members reject social conventions by not behaving in a mechanical way. The fact that 'each act [is] divorced from its consequences' suggests that the Ryans are not bound by the fixed consequences of their actions, as determined by society. The idea of not being attached to property also resonates with Sufism. Not owning property can be read within the context of 'Be in the world but not of it',[27] as Sufism aims to free individuals from the materialism of the world, and being 'not of it' implies a release from the pressure that owning material puts on individuals.

The absence of private ownership, as Lessing once explored through communism, can be considered a development in her representation of the family. Instead of private ownership, the Ryans choose collective ownership that does not privilege one individual over another, in contrast to the traditional family where the patriarch, as 'the owner' of the property, claims ownership of everything associated with it. The word 'clan' implies that the Ryans are an extended family, accommodating biologically unconnected individuals. Lessing's choice of the colours 'white, black and brown' is noteworthy, as it implies the multiculturalism of the family members. This suggests that there exists no form of racial discrimination in the Ryan family. Tolerance and humbleness are Sufi traits open to everybody, regardless of their social, cultural, and ethnic background. In this sense, the Ryan family recalls the words of Jalal al-Din Rumi, a thirteenth-century Sufi who said, 'Come, come, whoever you are', calling for the rejection all socially constructed divisions and for the unity of people under the umbrella of humanity.[28]

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27. Shah, *Knowing How to Know*, p. 198.

28. Doug Marman, *Introduction: The Discourses of Rumi* (1999) <http://www.littleknownpubs.com/RumiIntro.htm> [accessed 14 June 2017].

Meanwhile, Gerald's household, which includes Gerald, Emily, June (a Ryan), and feral children, is the reconfiguration of the Ryan family in the context of the alternative groups that replace the traditional family. The narrator reveals the connection between the two groups: 'I use that phrase *Gerald's house* as people once said *the Ryans*, meaning a way of life (italics original)'.[29] The unnamed narrator recalls her nostalgia for the Ryan family as a way to guide Emily in creating a form of non-normative family. In their development, would-be Sufis are expected to put into practice the knowledge they have gained through their time with their Sufi gurus. Emily joins Gerald's commune to put her knowledge into practice and to create her own non-normative family, as observed by the narrator: 'And in a moment she was with them, her family, her tribe, her life'.[30] The collapse of society causes the dissolution of the conventional family, as the two are ideologically interconnected. However, the creation of 'a new social unit' can be read as an attempt to redesign the society in non-normative terms that we may identify as Sufi.

Lessing presents the actions of the feral children at Gerald's commune through the viewpoint of the narrator. The effect of their actions is then embedded in her observations and evaluations: 'They stole what they needed to live on, which was very little indeed. They wore clothes—just enough'.[31] The act of theft is not a thrill, but a way for these children to meet their needs. Empathising with the children, the narrator also views the act of theft from a different perspective, one that deviates from its meaning constructed by society: '*This is more mine than yours—says the act of the theft; more mine because I needed it more, it fits my stage of life better than it does yours, you have outgrown it*'.[32] This statement is made soon after Emily takes the narrator's dress without asking her permission. The latter is happy with Emily's actions as they challenge the idea of private ownership. In Sufism, '[t]he Sufis reject excess, but they go through excess to reach moderation'.[33] Therefore, Emily and the children in

29. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 112.

30. Ibid., p. 133.

31. Ibid., p. 154.

32. Ibid., p. 8.

33. Bootheina Majoul, *Doris Lessing: Poetics of Being and Time* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 20.

Gerald's house go through excessive behaviours such as theft to subvert the ideology of private ownership.

A Sufi reading celebrates the existence of these feral children as they rebel against the corrupted social structures, as expected from Sufis who were considered to be 'rebels of their time'.[34] Lessing employs these children to rebel against the corruption and conventional family. As the members of this 'new social unit', the children have not been involved in any familial or educational settings. Gayle Greene evaluates this new unit in terms of its results: 'The destruction of family brings not freedom but anarchy: the release from necessity produces not liberation but inconsequence'.[35] For Greene, Lessing's experiment with the new family yields 'anarchy' and 'inconsequence', and she arrives at that conclusion in relation to the actions of the children. Outwardly, they are regarded as potential threats to the well-being of society: 'They were wild and difficult, problematical, heart-breaking; they were not like the children of a stable society'.[36] They participate in theft and attacks, being rebellious and promoting anarchy. However, I suggest a reading of these children and the family in which they are involved in terms of the effects they evoke rather than the results they bring, contrary to Greene's analysis.

The removal of the dining table in Gerald's house hints at Lessing's way of breaking down hierarchies promoted by the dominant family ideology. The dining table is a recurring motif in Lessing's familial fiction, as she frequently uses tables to signal her critique of the family ideology in standing for hierarchical and gender relations. *The Fifth Child* exemplifies these relations: 'A scene in the kitchen: family supper. Harriet and David commanded the head and foot of the table. Luke and Helen sat together on one side'.[37] The dining table clearly illustrates that everyone takes the 'right' and 'fixed' place for themselves in traditional family arrangements. On the other hand, the absence of the dining table in Gerald's house signals the dissolution of these hierarchies and divisions created by family ideology: 'They would not sit down at the table—they

34. V. Krishna Kumar, Creativity: A Perspective from Sufism (2014) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/psychology-masala/201405/creativity-perspective-sufism)> [Accessed 5 December 2017].

35. Greene, *The Poetics of Change*, pp. 150-1.

36. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 154.

37. Lessing, *The Fifth Child* (1989; repr., London: Flamingo, 2001), p. 53.

never had, they would not sit down on the floor in an orderly way'.[38] Gerald's attitude towards the table is a rejection of the family ideology, and an indication of the development in Lessing's representation of the family.

Lessing's depiction of the eponymous protagonist in *Ben* constitutes a link to the children in Gerald's commune and the Ryan family in *Memoirs*. Like the members of Gerald's commune, Ben does not meet the standards of his conformist family and its wider society. His surname, Lovatt, evokes the imperative to 'love it'. Surnames are associated with lineage, which sustains the family ideology across generations through male authority. However, contrary to the connotation of his surname, Ben does not love his family but rather hates them: 'He walked away from his family, left it forever'.[39] Lessing uses Ben to comment on people's fixed ideas, prejudices, and constructions of reality. The ways Ben deviates from his family and society constitute a base for Lessing's critique of both. The children in Gerald's commune and Ben cannot be assimilated into conventions, which is key to Lessing's realigning of family and parenthood.

Sufi Parenthood

Lessing's representation of the relationship between Sufi gurus and their would-be Sufi students in the novels opens up the idea of Sufi parenthood. Sufism offered Lessing a positive way to balance her own need to be independent from her children with their need to become independent of her. This, as her autobiographical fiction and memoirs by her and others show, was a central tension in her life. Lessing represents this need in *Memoirs* and *Ben* through the relationships between the unnamed narrator and Emily, and Mrs. Biggs and Ben. In these novels, Sufi parenthood undoes the ideological interconnectedness between children and parents, as it constitutes a way to be free from the gendered roles of motherhood and fatherhood. Contrary to conventional parenthood, which is created and sustained through power relations and social conventions, Sufi parenthood offers non-normative, varied, and inclusive human relations that are non-conventional, non-hierarchical, and non-biological.

38. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 156.

39. Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, p. 26.

In the novels, both Ben and Emily are accompanied and guided by someone other than their biological parents as they develop as individuals. Lessing mentions the necessity of this relationship in her Sufi-themed essay, "An Ancient Way to New Freedom": 'Every person comes to a point when the need is felt for further inner growth. Then it is wise to look for the guide, the exemplar, that figure central to Sufism who shows others what is possible'.[40] The quotation explains the role of the Sufi guides, the narrator and Mrs. Biggs, in the lives of Emily and Ben, respectively, which is to direct them on the path to fulfilling all of their capacities. A Sufi, in Lessing's words, can be anyone, including 'a [s]cientist, a politician, a poet, [or] a housewife', regardless of gender, race, class, or any other social divisions.[41] It does not matter who a guru is, but rather whether they are able to help the would-be Sufi on the path to self-actualisation and development. A guru should aid a Sufi in making his or her own choices for self-actualisation, rather than prescribing certain behaviours to follow, believing that each individual's journey is unique. The narrator and Mrs. Biggs fulfil this role.

In *Memoirs*, the association between the narrator and Emily differs from the traditional mother-daughter relationship that can be found in her earlier novels, in which both parties tyrannise each other (for example, *Martha Quest*). In *Memoirs*, Emily was handed to the unnamed narrator by an unknown man, who claimed that Emily was her 'responsibility'.[42] The word "responsibility" can be associated with parenthood in the sense that it prescribes the role of the carer. This in turn determines the nature of the relationship between Emily and the narrator: 'I was a continuation, for her parents, or a parent, a guardian, foster parents'.[43] This relationship differs from the conventional parent/child affinity in eradicating the conflict between the needs of the carer and those of the child. In this way, the narrator avoids maternal ambivalence and fosters Emily's inner development as a potential Sufi. Therefore, she never questions Emily's decisions and she does not stand as an authority in her life:

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40. Doris Lessing, 'An Ancient Way to New Freedom', in *The Diffusion of Sufi Ideas in the West*, ed. by Leonard Lewin (1971, repr., Colorado: Keysign Press, 1972), p. 51.

41. Ibid., p. 46.

42. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 17.

43. Ibid., p. 28.

> Day after day, Emily was with them [the gangs that came through]. She did not ask if she could. And I wasn't going to forbid her, for I knew she would not obey me. I had no authority. She was not my child. We avoided a confrontation.[44]

This scene occurs just before Emily starts creating her own commune family with the gangs. Based on what she has learned from the Survivor about the absence of authority and hierarchy, Emily creates her own family with Gerald. Indeed, Lessing avoided a similar confrontation with Diski when the former was still concerned with the latter's development and well-being. In *Memoirs*, the narrator assumes her role as a Sufi parent, one that is not based on any authority, hierarchy, or kinship. The way she cares for Emily resonates with Lessing's idealisation of non-biological motherhood that is not authoritative but supportive and caring.

A comparative approach to the representation of Sufi parenthood in *Ben*, published sixteen years after *Memoirs*, allows us to trace the links and changes between the two novels. While Lessing does not provide an account of Emily's family experience prior to being handed to the narrator, the author gives a detailed account of Ben's family life in *The Fifth Child*, where he leaves his traditional family after failing to meet their expectations. In this way, Lessing illuminates the distorting effects of the dominant family ideology on children. In *Ben*, Lessing hints that the only way the main character can find a place in society is through a way of being that is like Sufism, which accepts every person just as they are and fosters their individual development. Similar to the handover that occurs in *Memoirs*, Lessing hands Ben, the would-be Sufi, to Mrs. Biggs, who becomes the Sufi parent responsible for him. The result is a relationship characterised by feelings of happiness, assurance, and acceptance: '"You're a good boy, Ben," she said, and tears came into his eyes. … There was Ben, in his clean clothes, full of energy and something like happiness because of that loving "You're a good boy"'.[45]

Ben's biological parents, Harriet and David, are represented in *The Fifth Child* as conventional, and their ability as parents is questioned because of their disobedient and abnormal child, Ben. The way he behaves and appears is the first point of reference for people to define what he is. It is also the reason why his biological parents cannot

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44. Ibid., p. 38.

45. Lessing, *Ben*, *in the World*, pp. 33-4.

welcome him. In her discussion of Sufism, Lessing states that 'Sufism may have nothing to do with outward appearance and behaviour'.[46] The fact can be clearly seen in the way Mrs. Biggs approaches Ben: '[He was not] like anything she had known. He was Ben, he was himself—whatever that was'.[47] Mrs. Biggs can regard Ben's difference as his uniqueness rather than a means of stigmatisation. This welcoming and voluntary relationship constitutes an alternative to the tyranny of traditional parenthood, and Mrs. Biggs' openness changes the way people think about Ben's difference. Unlike his biological parents, Mrs Biggs, as a Sufi parent, is only responsible for ensuring Ben's individual development and not for his actions. This is because while traditional parenthood values an individual's ability to be part of a collective, such as the family, Sufism values a person for being an individual, irrespective of their inclusion into the collective. In other words, in Sufism the idea of the family and parenthood becomes a matter of choice rather than of a fate dictated by convention. As a Sufi parent, Mrs. Biggs prepares Ben for his journey of inner transformation and self-actualisation, a path that a would-be Sufi is expected to follow. The result of this Sufi parenthood is varied forms of relations that foster the idea of real learning, rather than learning social habits.

Habit (Un)Learning

In her writing, Lessing fights against the idea of habit learning, as it stands as an obstacle to individual and social development. Habit learning is a process through which individuals internalise the codified behaviours and norms promoted as appropriate by social institutions such as family. Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* (1950), Martha Quest in "The Children of Violence Series" (1952-1969), Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), and Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) are all involved in a fight between the individual and the collective. They can go, to some extent, beyond the limitations and the conventions of their society by breaking habits. The dominant ideology deploys habit to produce monotype individuals, and therefore sustains a society that works mechanically. On the other hand, Sufism promotes the philosophy of 'learning how to learn' and of unlearning habits that immerse individuals

46. Doris Lessing, 'An Ancient Way to A New Freedom', p. 46.

47. Lessing, *Ben*, *in the World*, p. 12.

into the preferences of the collective.[48] In *Memoirs* and *Ben*, Emily and Ben, the would-be Sufis, unlearn habits, break fixed thinking patterns, and are involved in unconventional relationships, while the unnamed narrator and Mrs. Biggs, as Sufi parents, create spaces that foster individual development.

Schooling

Like families, schools are the locus of habit learning, educating individuals according to societal standards. Lessing, who was self-educated after the age of fourteen, critiques the contemporary education system for the way it restrains the growth of the individual mind and learning. In her long-celebrated novel, *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing addresses problems of a mechanical educational system:

> We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination…Those of you who are more robust and individual than others will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your own judgements. Those that stay must remember, always, and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society.[49]

Besides warning against the negative effect of contemporary education on individual development, the above quotation also hints at a non-normative form of education through Sufism. When it is considered that the publication of *The Golden Notebook* corresponds to Lessing's early involvement into Sufism, her call to find alternative ways of educating oneself at that time, I argue, recalls education by the Sufi method. Shah argues that as a result of Sufi approaches to education, a Sufi perceives the world in an non-habitual and varied way, and therefore 'things are meaningful in a sense which they are not to people who follow only the training which is imposed upon them by ordinary society'.[50] In the introduction to Shah's book *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* (1964), Lessing describes the role of Sufi teachers, which fits into the non-conventional education she presents in *Memoirs* and *Ben*: 'Sufi teachers were concerned about freeing people from social and religious

48. Doris Lessing, 'Introduction', in *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way*, ed. by Idries Shah (London: Arkana Press, 1996), 7-13 (p. 8).

49. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962; repr., London: Flamingo, 1972), p. 16.

50. Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (1964; repr., London: ISF Publishing, 2015), p. 39.

indoctrinations'.[51] Lessing's representation of Sufism, therefore, both constitutes her criticism of the conventional education system as a locus of habit learning and it enables her exploration of alternative ways of individual development.

By scrutinising schooling and putting it into question, Lessing contests the ideological link between schools and families. The following conversation between the unnamed narrator and Emily in *Memoirs* reveals Lessing's criticism of habit learning through school:

> I suggested she might like to go to school—'for something to do', I added hastily, as I saw her quizzical look. This look was not measured: it was her genuine reaction. […] She said, 'But what's the point?' What was the point? Most schools had given up the attempt of teaching; they had become, for the poorer people at least, extensions of the army, of the apparatus for keeping the population under control.[52]

It is believed in Sufism that individuals have 'the possibility of conscious development, but the education system twists and distorts individual talents'.[53] The unnamed narrator's use of inverted commas around 'for something to do' implies school's dysfunctionality. Emily rejects the idea of schooling on the grounds that her individuality would be ignored. The unnamed narrator takes the school as an extension of a control mechanism through which individuals are expected to follow certain ways. However, her refusal of schooling illustrates that Emily deviates from the habitual patterns of mainstream society, as a Sufi would do. Instead, she creates her own space of learning by questioning the world around her, but not being questioned about her actions by the narrator.

Both Emily and Ben develop by the Sufi method of education. Contrary to conventional education where knowledge is dictated, Emily and Ben learn through observing and watching their Sufi parents: 'She [Emily] was watching me carefully, closely'.[54] Likewise, when looking at Mrs Biggs, 'Ben's eyes did not leave her face, taking in every little movements of eyes, mouth, her smile, her insistence'.[55] Their

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51. Lessing, 'Introduction', in *Learning How to Learn*, p. 8.

52. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, pp. 31-2.

53. Scott, *The More Recent Writings: Sufism, Mysticism and Politics*, p. 169.

54. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 17.

55. Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, p. 7.

education method and relation with Sufis clearly recalls the Sufi way: 'Development depends upon [human], but must start through a teacher'.[56] The choice of alternative education method is one way of contesting social conventions that mould individuals into specific forms.

While Emily in *Memoirs* makes her own decision not to be part of schooling, Ben in *The Fifth Child* is forced into school to comply with the expectations of his conformist family: 'There was no way Ben could get out of going to school. She [Harriet] had given up trying to read to him, play with him, teach him anything: he could not learn'.[57] He does not behave like the majority of his peers, which is highlighted by the school mistress: 'Ben is really trying very hard. He does not seem to fit in with the others'.[58] Thus, Ben is excluded initially from his family and then from his school because he cannot learn in a habitual way. Like his family, the education system cannot accommodate Ben's difference, and therefore it cannot provide him with a space for his individual development. In *Ben*, Lessing illustrates the vital role of a Sufi teacher in a student's development. While Ben's individual development is avoided, as he cannot comply with society's standards in *The Fifth Child*, he is capable of going through an inner transformation and self-actualisation by making sense of his experience in *Ben*. Galin explains that the 'Sufi approach to knowledge is a practical one. They are more interested in immediate knowledge that comes from experience'.[59] Therefore, Sufism offers an alternative form of education for individuals like Ben and Emily, who are, in Lessing's words, 'more robust and more individual than others'.[60]

Lessing's Sufism and Feminism: Su-feminism

Lessing develops a blend of feminism and Sufism in her fiction, which I term Su-feminism to illuminate the intersections between the two. The 1960s and 1970s, when Lessing showed and developed her interest in Sufism, also correspond to the time when she was writing on women's issues. Lessing's simultaneous involvement in feminism and Sufism can be read as her development from womanly concerns to humanly ones.

56. Lessing, 'An Ancient Way to a New Freedom', p. 47.

57. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 117.

58. Ibid., p. 120.

59. Galin, *Between East and West*, p. 40.

60. Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p. 16.

Although Lessing attaches to the ostentatiously masculine 'guru' figure of Idries Shah and his work, the way she reconfigures Sufism in her fiction earns the philosophy a gender-neutral aspect, making it applicable both men and women. This also offers Lessing a broader to look at things, and explore 'the blind spots' in political ideologies.

The shift from woman to human through her move from feminism to Sufism is not a different phase in Lessing's writing but rather a complementary one in terms of her feminism, as acknowledged by scholars. Lessing's shift into Sufism is key to comprehending and complementing her feminism and to unpacking her ambivalent relationship with the movement. Galin suggests that 'Lessing's move into Sufi studies is not a sign of abandonment of her earlier political, psychological, or social stands'.[61] Su-feminism provides Lessing an authority to contest both the psychological and social limits of gender on humans.

Patriarchal family ideology promotes the internalisation of gender roles, through which women and men are placed in a hierarchy. In contrast, Sufism promotes the idea that although 'in this world of duality we may find ourselves in different forms, ultimately there is no male or female, only Being'.[62] The definitive point people can reach in Sufism is to recognise their own capacities as a Being regardless of social roles and constructions. In Sufism, prescribed gender roles fall into the category of constrictive collective. Jean Pickering explains that humans experience the loss of identity in these roles, what Sufis call 'the false self'.[63] Sufism stresses the importance of individualism in order to reach the real self, and in this regard, women are no different from men. In her *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (1976), Laleh Bakhtiar says:

> In the inner duality, men and women are the same. The meaning of the form does not differ: the masculine and feminine principles of soul and spirit exist in both, irrespective of the outer form. The differences are between individuals, depending upon capacity and preparedness.[64]

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61. Galin, *Between East and West*, pp. 21-2.

62. Camille Adams Helminski, *Women and Sufism* (2018) <https://sufism.org/sufism/writings-on-sufism/women-and-sufism-by-camille-adams-helminski-2> [Accessed 12 September 2017].

63. Jean Pickering, *Understanding Doris Lessing* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 63-4.

64. Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 21.

Lessing's characters are healed and improved through Sufism to achieve their full human capacity, which in return creates ways in which they can challenge the construction of gender.

Lessing's fiction offers a strong feminist critique of the traditional family as a patriarchal institution, as has long been acknowledged by Lessing critics. However, when we foreground her involvement with Sufism, we can understand Lessing's criticism in a new way, namely, one that emphasises non-normative families. Sufism is in part a response to Lessing's ambivalent relationship with feminism, which is evident in an interview where Lessing discusses her inclination to Sufism:

> People ask, 'How can you, a feminist, have anything to do with an Islam-based study?' … It is not enough for us to be concerned with the situation of women; it is the situation of humankind that should be our concern.[65]

Lessing's Sufism makes gender a human-centric issue rather than a woman-centric one. This fact fits into Lessing's representation of the non-normative human relations that focus on the concerns of the children as much as on those of women and men.

The clash between the individual and the collective has emerged as a major theme in Lessing's fiction, and her representation of the family can also be read as an example of this clash. She introduces individuals in families and society, going against the demands of the authoritative power of the collective for their self-actualisation. Lessing's discontent with communism, and her interest in the Women's Liberation Movement, mainly originates from the idea of the clash between the individual and the collective. This is evident in *The Good Terrorist* (1985) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001), where Alice and Frances are oppressed under the demands of the communist groups in which they are involved. Lessing illustrates in these novels that the collectivism of communism underestimates womanly concerns for the sake of the collective, which is also highlighted by James Arnett: 'She [Lessing] seeks in communism the undoing of the logic of the family, only to find that the party itself is a reiteration of "family"'.[66] It is through her involvement in feminism that she is quick to

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65. Doris Lessing, 'Learning How to Learn', cited in Muge Galin, *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 37.

66. Arnett, 'Free from the Family: Lessing, Klein, and the Unwanted Child', p. 13.

grasp the gender blindness of communism, which oppresses women through domesticity, even in a family setting that could be called relatively non-conventional.

Unlike the clash between her feminism and communism, Lessing's move from feminism to Sufism is fulfilling and complementary in terms of her representation of the family. Sufism can contribute to the eradication of inequalities in families and society. The philosophy is against prescribing any certain behaviour patterns and roles for individuals as well as against dividing them into certain categories. Exploring the link between Lessing's feminism and Sufism, Ingrid Holmquist argues that '[m]ysticism provides Doris Lessing with a new form of thinking which functions as a solution to the female as well as the general social concerns in her work'.[67] Sufism's call for the acceptance of every individual as human, regardless of any socially constructed divisions and discriminations, fits feminism's endeavour to create just families and a society where half of the society will not be privileged over the other half. Therefore, a focus on Sufism in Lessing's fiction extends and opens up her feminism beyond women to humans, without abandoning the feminist principle of gender equality. In this way, Lessing's feminism is polished and completed through her Sufism, which is not built on any binary opposition.

A close reading of *Memoirs* illustrates that Lessing's Sufism and feminism intersect in her critique of the conventional family and of woman's condition within it. This intersection is clear in one of the moments when the unnamed narrator penetrates through the wall and observes a room:

> [I]t was a scene of clean tidiness, a room that oppressed and discouraged because of its statement that here everything had its place and time, that nothing could change or move out of its order. The walls were ruthless; furniture heavy, polished, shining; […] the legs of a great table bruised the carpet. There were people. […] Dominant among them was a woman, one I had seen before, knew well […]. Her hair was brown […]. She was dressed for company; she wore good clothes, expensive, fashionable, and inside them her body seemed to be trying to assert itself–timidly […]. Her arms and legs looked uncomfortable; she had not wanted to put on these clothes; but had felt she must […] The woman, the wife and mother, was talking;

67. Holmquist, *From Society to Nature*, p. 180.

> she talked, talked, she went on and on as if no one but herself existed in that room or beyond it.[68]

In conventional families, rooms are gendered spaces in which individuals internalise and perform gender roles. The narrator effectively observes the atmosphere and the order of the things in the room, providing a clear image of female oppression in terms of domesticity and femininity. The never changing order and condition of the things imply women's never-ending domestic responsibility and unchanging condition in the family. The images of the stable table, unmoveable, ever shining furniture, and solid walls stand for the strict and oppressive order of the conventional family. In particular, the narrator's stress on the woman's hair colour, 'brown', implies the monotony and dullness of her life. Gender roles determine how individuals are supposed to behave, speak, dress, and conduct themselves according to their assigned gender. In the same way, the woman is expected to dress in a feminine way to be good company for her husband. The fact that she is made to dress and behave in certain ways hints at her denied individuality in the family. She cannot exist for herself but rather does so for the sake of others, suggested through the roles of mother, wife, and company.

The denied autonomy of woman in the above quotation is an example of how Lessing's feminism and Sufism intersect to form a Su-feminist approach. The narrator, as a Sufi, critically explores the scene from a feminist viewpoint. I argue that penetrating through the walls is as much to do with Sufism as it is with feminism. The room stands for women's experience of oppression and domination in the family. By penetrating into this room, the narrator publicises what is called private. From a Sufi perspective, the woman's oppression is due to fixed thinking patterns, stemming in this case from her gender role. The narrator's reference to 'the room or beyond it', I argue, evokes the Sufi motto, 'Be in the world but not of it'. The woman needs to 'be in that room but not of it', to travel outside the room inwardly in order to develop her mind and autonomy, just like the narrator does. I argue that inward freedom from the room is key to travelling from it outwardly, meaning the actual freedom from the family ideology. In this regard, Lessing's intersected Su-feminism is key to undoing the ideology of the family.

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68. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, pp. 61-3.

The term Su-feminism indicates that Lessing's Sufism expands her feminist critique of the family by providing a new form of arrangement in which parental roles are minimised. Analysing the traditional family from a Sufi perspective offers a strong critique of hierarchies and parental roles, and reveals ways in which non-normative family arrangements could emerge. Sufism prioritises the idea of "unity" or "oneness", without any discrimination. In this way, Lessing's Sufism, I suggest, expands and contributes to her desire to eradicate gender-based segregation in both family and society. This suggests that her ambivalent relationship with biological motherhood can be reconciled through an alternative, non-biological form of parenthood, as offered by Sufic tenets.

The Sufi Liberation: The Walls

Lessing challenges conventional thinking patterns in order to introduce new ideas for her representation of the family. This is evident in the scenes where the narrator of *Memoirs* penetrates through the walls: '[I]t was always a liberation to step away from my "real" life into this other place, so full of possibilities and of alternatives'.[69] The image of the wall, standing solid and impenetrable, evokes the limitations of the human mind. Therefore, the dissolution of the wall is a motif that can be aligned with the ideals of Sufism. In the Sufic context, it implies the mind's ability to travel between the past, present, and future to construct its own reality. The moments when the narrator penetrates the walls can be considered her movements towards the journey of illumination. This journey implies a Sufi method that Lessing employs as a way of exploring alternatives. In *The Commanding Self*, Shah introduces the Sufi method as not only revealing limitations but also possibilities.[70] In the context of the family, the wall stands both as a limitation and as a possibility for the creation of an alternative family.

Gerald's commune and the Ryan family can be interpreted as Lessing's experiment with this alternative. The scene at the end of *Memoirs*, where Gerald, Emily, and the children penetrate the walls, suggests that Lessing's attempt to create alternative families is successful:

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69. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 60.

70. Idries Shah, *The Commanding Self* (London: Octagon, 1994), p. 232.

> There was nothing to prevent a new community being made there. The old one might be restored? No, of course it could not … And then, at the very last moment, they came, […] children came running, clinging to his hands and clothes, and they followed quickly on after the others as the last wall dissolved.[71]

This image, in the case of Gerald's commune, signals the emergence of the new family. While the walls recall a prison in the sense they are solid and impenetrable, their eventual dissolution and penetration indicates 'liberation', as the narrator calls it.[72] This release is in line with the Sufi aim of freedom: 'Well, the Sufis say we live in such a prison, and it is their concern to give us equipment to free ourselves'.[73] Lessing illustrates that the conventional family, in the case of Ben Lovatt, is a prison he did not choose to live inside: 'Ben was almost in his room like a prisoner'.[74] In *The Fifth Child*, Ben is made to wear a strait-jacket both in the family and while at the institution, as he is considered to be a threat to his family and society: '[Ben] was naked, inside a strait-jacket'.[75] However, in *Ben*, *in the World* Lessing introduces the protagonist's 'new jacket', that is provided for him by Mrs. Biggs and liked by Ben.[76] The change in the type of his jacket hints at his renewed experience in his new family with his Sufi parent. Mrs. Biggs tries hard to equip Ben with the ability to free himself from the trauma he suffered in his own biological family and to develop his inner self.

The moments when the unnamed narrator penetrates the walls can be considered her moments of illumination, which enable her to observe incidents from her life and the lives of others, as Lessing highlights in an interview:

> In *Memoirs of a Survivor*, what the narrator believes that she is seeing behind the wall, that apparent dream world, actually represents her own life, her own childhood. In the tangible world, Emily whom she sees growing up represents the image of her adolescence. Thus reality and dream marked off

71. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 163.

72. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 60.

73. Doris Lessing, 'Introduction', in *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way*, p. 10.

74. Lessing, *The Fifth Child*, p. 72.

75. Ibid., p. 99.

76. Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, p. 8.

> by the wall, complement each other to give an all-encompassing vision to the narrator's past.[77]

Penetrating through the walls is a sign of the narrator's inner transformation and liberation. In a 2001 interview entitled *Against the Utopia*, Lessing's thoughts on the tenets behind her Sufism recall the process in which the narrator in *Memoirs* is involved:

> SL: Do you think you can describe some of the tenets behind your Sufi beliefs?
>
> DL: A large part of it is getting rid of ideas, emotions and conceptions, making you more sensitive, more observant, more watchful. Then (with advanced people, of which I'm not one), you become aware of very subtle changes – I don't like to use the word "cosmic" because it's tainted – of atmosphere, of input, which can be then used to transform you.
>
> SL: Transform you how?
>
> DL: You become removed from this life. Inwardly, not outwardly. That's what the phrase "*In the world,* but not *of* it" means. […] It is so difficult to describe all this… (emphasis original).
>
> SL: But why should we not be of this world? This is our world.
>
> DL: Because this is only a very small part of experience, and there are many other worlds that we might travel through. But you know, I can hear myself talking and think it sounds ludicrous.[78]

Prior to the dissolution of the walls, the unnamed narrator claims to hear some strange sounds: 'I heard sounds that certainly were not part of "my" world at all'.[79] These sounds imply a place beyond the walls, and foreshadow the time when the narrator will be able to pass through them: 'And again the wall dissolved and I was through'.[80] She stresses that the sounds are not from her world, evoking Lessing's description of travel to other worlds in the above quotation. Independent from the materiality of the physical world, the unnamed narrator travels 'inwardly' for new experiences:

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77. Francis-Olivier Rousseau, 'The Habit of Observing', in *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll (London: Flamingo, 1985), 146-154 (p. 148).

78. Susie Linfield, 'Against Utopia: An Interview with Doris Lessing', *Salmagundi*, (2001), 130:131, 59-74 (p. 71).

79. Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 44.

80. Ibid., p. 16.

> Because of this feeling, born of the experiences behind the wall, I was changing. […] I found that I was more often, simply, waiting. I observed to see what would happen next. I observed. I looked at every new event quietly, to see if I could understand it.[81]

The experiences behind the wall contribute to the narrator's inner transformation. In line with the Sufi tenets highlighted by Lessing, the unnamed narrator becomes 'more sensitive, more watchful and more observant' in understanding the incidents, free from fixed thinking patterns. The fact that she becomes removed from the world 'inwardly' clearly evokes the Sufi motto, 'Be in the world but not of it'. She is in the world and in action, but not limited by the materiality of the physical world.

The image of the wall is also represented in *Ben*, especially during Ben's moments of 'crisis', when he 'was undergoing some kind of inner change'.[82] This inner change is reinforced by his act of 'banging his head on the wall'.[83] The world Ben lives in is incompressible to him, as his Sufi guru, Mrs. Biggs, recognises: '[H]e had no home in this world'.[84] The authoritative power of the collective has forced Ben into believing that he does not fit in: 'I don't have any people. I'm not like my family – at home. They are all different from me. I've never seen anyone like me'.[85] His attempt to find people like himself, I argue, can be read as his attempt to answer the questions of who he is and what his purpose is in life. Ben undertakes a Sufi journey of self-discovery, and in the last section of the novel, he expresses his frustration that the several attempts he has made to find people like himself have resulted in failure: '[H]e was banging his head on the wall, thud, thud, thud'.[86]

There are a variety of interpretations for the image of the wall in Lessing's fiction. An explanation of the wall in *The Four Gated City* (1969), offered by Ann Scott, is significant to unpacking what it means for Ben: '[T]he wall stands for the self, which both defines and confines the person'.[87] Scott's interpretation suggests that Ben's

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81. Ibid., pp. 91-2.

82. Lessing, *Ben*, *in the World*, p. 103.

83. Ibid., p. 98.

84. Ibid., p. 35.

85. Ibid., p. 126.

86. Ibid., p. 98.

87. Scott, *The More Recent Writings: Sufism, Mysticism, and Politics*, pp. 174-5.

engagement with the wall via his head, which I argue stands for the mind, illustrates that he tries to transcend the fixed thinking patterns of the world. It is soon after his engagement with the wall that Teresa, his friend, finds Ben in a different state, which implies his inner transformation: 'This young woman who had seen everything in her short life of extremes of all kinds, knew very well that this Ben, the unknown, was in a crisis, was undergoing some kind of inner change'.[88] Ben's journey of defining himself in relation to the collective is replaced by his Sufi quest, which yields an inner transformation and defines him as a unique individual independent of the collective.

Like the narrator of *Memoirs*, Ben is in the world outwardly, and so banging his head against the wall can be read as his attempt to penetrate the wall forcibly and travel to other worlds. This travel, which can be viewed as Ben's Sufi quest, comes at the end of the novel, when he claims to hear the sound of singing stars: '"They're talking!" he shouted. "They're singing to us." … He danced on, bending and bowing and stretching up his arms to the stars, stamping and kicking up his feet, and whirling about and around, on and on'.[89] The singing stars are an echo from another world, whereas Ben exists in this one, as the title of the novel makes clear. The acts of singing (stars) and dancing (Ben) unite the two worlds, enabling Ben 'to be in the world but not of it', and to complete his Sufi quest. Lessing mentions the necessity of this union in one of her science fiction novels, *Re: Colonised Planet 5: Shikasta* (1979), where she explores other worlds: 'We are all creatures of the stars and their forces, they make us, we make them, we are part of a dance from which we by no means and not ever may consider ourselves separate'.[90] The novel was published between *Memoirs* and *Ben*, suggesting that Lessing's reference to stars and to dancing hints at the idea of travel to other worlds through Sufism.

The words describing Ben's performance with the stars—bending, bowing, and stretching up his arms, whilst stamping and kicking his feet, and whirling—directly evoke the whirling dance of Sufi dervishes, introduced by the thirteenth-century Sufi

88. Lessing, *Ben in the World*, p. 103.

89. Ibid., p. 173.

90. Doris Lessing, *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta* (1979; repr., New York: Vintage International, 1981), p. 40.

master Jalal al-Din Rumi. An example of this dance is narrated in a poem by a Turkish poet, Asaf Halet Celebi:

> The image in me
> is a different image
> how many stars fall
> into my interior dance!
> I whirl and whirl
> the skies whirl as well.[91]

Stars are metaphors, representing other planets that are known for their remoteness. In a Sufi dance, the physical act of the body is transformed into an interior dance. It is through this interior dance that the mind can free the body from the physical world to achieve inner transformation. Jale Erzen explains: 'As in the dance, the Sufi is with the world but is also away from the world'.[92] It is at that moment of the dance that Ben is observed to be unaffected by the cold, a feeling to do with the physical world, while Teresa, Alfredo, and Joe 'shivered and held themselves in blankets'.[93] The fact that Ben performs the whirling dance indicates that he is now a Sufi, capable of going beyond the constraints of his physical being. While his dance is an indication of the union between the physical and metaphysical world, it at the same time signals the separation of the body from the mind, thus removing Ben from the world 'inwardly'.

Conclusion

Memoirs and *Ben* exemplify Lessing's reconfiguration of non-normative families and relationships through a Sufic lens. As potential Sufis, Emily and Ben are not only concerned with their individual development but also with the betterment of the families and society in which they live. In addressing the institution of the family and parenthood, the novels make Sufism more relevant to the contemporary Western context, as Lessing has explained: 'It [Sufism] must be contemporary or it is nothing'.[94] Lessing refers to Sufism as 'an ancient way to a new freedom', and this freedom offers

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91. Jale Erzen, 'The Dervishes Dance: The Sacred Ritual of Love', Contemporary Aesthetics, 6, (2008) <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.0006.007/--dervishes-dance-the-sacred-ritual-of-love?rgn=main;view=fulltext> [accessed 7 May 2018].

92. Ibid.

93. Lessing, *Ben, in the World*, p. 173.

94. Lessing, 'An Ancient Way to New Freedom', p. 50.

a resolution to her ambivalence towards motherhood, and to her rejection of patriarchal family ideology.

A focus on the family illustrates how Sufism benefits from Lessing's fiction in its critique of conventional institutions that impede human development. The novels discussed in this chapter explore non-normative forms of kinship, such as 'Sufi parenthood', which is gender neutral and free from any form of power relations. Lessing's persistent interest in her alternative families can also be explained through Sufism:

> As a contemporary Sufi puts it: "The difference between a democrat and a Sufi is that the democrat says, with Winston Churchill, "Democracy is not perfect, but it is the best system which we have"; while the Sufi says, "Keep if it works, but work your very hardest to find the perfect: otherwise you are a disguised pessimist".[95]

The fact that Lessing experiments with Sufism in her fiction can be read as her attempt to find the best possible form of family, by challenging the limits and boundaries put in place by society and the conventional family. The Sufi phrase 'keep if it works' explains the reason why Lessing never abandons the idea of the family altogether in her fiction.

As Lessing wrote to Shah, 'I have been trying to find out by myself how to be and what to do, and getting everything in a state of confusion. Everything in me and my life is turned upside-down'.[96] The inner tension Lessing experienced evokes the initial stages of development in Sufism, when one is stuck between their construction of selfhood and the demands of their social roles. Lessing's writing, fictional and non-fictional, is both the site of maternal ambivalence and a challenge to the limits of gender and the patriarchal family. Bringing Sufi perspectives to bear on Lessing's work allows us to reframe her as a creator and liberated individual. Lessing was drawn to Sufism in part because of her needs as a writer and unconventional mother. Many of her literary foremothers and contemporaries eschewed motherhood, but she was drawn throughout

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95. Adilbai Khorkauli, 'Those Astonishing Sufis', in *Sufi Thought and Action* (London: ISF Publishing, 1990), p. 172.

96. Idries Shah Foundation, *Doris Lessing and The Sufis* (2017) <https://idriesshahfoundation.org/doris-lessing-and-the-sufis/> [accessed 30 September 2017].

her life into maternal relationships, in which she opted to maintain her autonomy–a tricky and painful balance. Family ideology promotes mothers as a means of shaping the future in accordance with societal expectations, yet Lessing leaves this ideological responsibility behind to assume a new responsibility: changing the world and family for the better, not as a conventional mother but as a writer introducing alternative and non-normative human relations. Sufism is one way for Lessing to reconfigure and redefine the family and her role as a mother, respectively, in non-normative ways.

Chapter Four

Postcolonial Ecofeminism and the Family

A chronological reading of *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (1999) is essential when tracing changes in Lessing's postcolonial writing and her rising environmental concerns, and to explore how these changes shaped her representation of the family.[1] While *The Grass is Singing* depicts colonial settlement that resulted in the oppression of subaltern groups, women, and indigenous people, as well as the exploitation of the environment, *Mara and Dann* challenges colonial activity and the resulting human perception of superiority over the environment through displacement caused by environmental catastrophes.[2] In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing provides a clear image of how the institutions of the family and colonialism cooperate in controlling indigenous peoples, settlers, and especially white women as a way to exploit the African environment. On the other hand, in *Mara and Dann*, the end of human advancement through environmental catastrophes enables the author to reconfigure her earlier explorations of the non-normative family, one that is not based on blood or genetic ties. Lessing transforms nature into an active agent from its submissive and passive position, which also subverts patriarchal and racial ideologies that associate women and indigenous people with nature, thus needing to be tamed and controlled. In this regard, Lessing's representation of the family moves from dystopia (*The Grass is Singing*) to utopia (*Mara and Dann*) in that the changes to the natural environment initiate the change in the 'nature' of the family. The two novels exemplify the convergence of postcolonialism with ecofeminist criticism through their representation of the family.

In her postcolonial fiction, Lessing's critique of colonial ideology is embedded in her representation of the family. A consideration of the environment brings the issue of gender into view, as the land and women are dominated through patriarchal systems of colonialism and family. Lessing's critique of the family mainly relied on the fact that

1. I define Lessing's postcolonial writing in terms of place and her treatment of power dynamics between coloniser and colonised.

2. Parts of this chapter were presented at MLA conference, 2018 in New York in the panel titled, 'Alternative Domesticities in the Works of Doris Lessing'. See https://dorislessingsociety.wordpress.com/mla/past-panels/

she witnessed the cooperation between the two rigid and closed systems, namely family and colonialism. These two patriarchal systems—as *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* illustrate—restrict human freedom and transform the vast African continent into a wasteland. The colonial domination of the region results in the family's oppression of subaltern groups. Taking *The Grass is Singing* as an example of Lessing's early postcolonial fiction, and *Mara and Dann* as an example of later such work, I argue that a postcolonial ecofeminist reading can provide novel insights that shift the direction of existing criticism into new readings and acknowledge Lessing's representation of the family in postcolonial literature.

Lessing, Postcolonialism and the Environment

Doris Lessing's position in postcolonial literature has long been celebrated, especially in relation to discussions of race, class, and gender with a focus on her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950), the Children of Violence Series (1952, 1954, 1958, 1965, and 1969), and *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Susan Watkins observes the family 'as a model of interpretation and identity that is clearly at the forefront of most of Lessing's fiction', and she suggests that a reassessment of her work on the family can be undertaken by employing 'insights from postcolonial and feminist critical practices'.[3] Sarah De Mul posits that Lessing's feminism has been the result of an intersection with a colonial history and her involvement in Marxism, and she reminds us of Lessing's caution 'not to divide things off' to understand the intersection between power relations of gender, race, and class in her fiction.

Individual insights either from postcolonial or feminist critical practices are inadequate when attempting to discuss the family in Lessing's postcolonial texts. Therefore, a theory such as postcolonial ecofeminism that already involves an intersection in itself—that of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism into one analytical perspective—provides novel readings of Lessing's fiction. I also contend that postcolonial ecofeminism revives environmental themes that have been largely overlooked by Lessing's scholars. Watkins suggests that Lessing's work is over-ripe for

3. Susan Watkins, '"Grande Dame" or "New Woman": Doris Lessing and The Palimpsest', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 17: 3-4, (2007), 243-262 (p. 259).

a reassessment in relation to ideas from postcolonial theory.[4] In a similar way, Robin Visel calls for a reading of Lessing's fiction 'anew in the twenty-first century [as it] prefigures postcolonial themes and issues'.[5] These calls have still not been met, as Lessing's critics have mostly tended to employ ideas from a solely postcolonial perspective when analysing her work. This trend cannot adequately acknowledge Lessing's interest in exploring the link between the oppression of different subaltern groups and the exploitation of the natural environment.

Postcolonial criticism on Lessing has overlooked environmental concerns in relation to gender. In her postcolonial writing, Lessing always employs female protagonists who are oppressed under the demands of their society and families against their individual choices. Her novels draw parallels between the ways women are oppressed in the family, and the manner in which the natural environment is exploited under colonialism. While postcolonial scholarship critically details hierarchal forms of oppression such as class and race in the colony, it remains relatively inadequate in analysing how the environment is gendered through a feminine identity. For Anne McClintock, the term 'post-colonialism' becomes 'unstable' especially when it comes to women. She argues that '[n]ot only have the needs of postcolonial nations been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interest, but the very representation of national power has rested on prior construction of gender power'.[6] In postcolonial criticism on Lessing, indigenous peoples, and the environment have been discussed as secondary subjects rather than of primary importance.[7]

A few Lessing scholars have highlighted the relation between family and colonialism in the author's postcolonial fiction. In her reading of *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Cherry Clayton considers the family as 'the microcosm of that colonial society'

4. Susan Watkins, 'Remembering Home: Nation and Identity in the Recent Writing of Doris Lessing', *Feminist Review*, 85, (2007), 97-115 (p. 97).

5. Robin Visel, '"Then Spoke the Thunder": The Grass Is Singing as a Zimbabwean Novel', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43.2, (2008), 157-166 (p. 158).

6. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 13.

7. The focus of postcolonial literature on Lessing has been more on her representation of white female protagonists in the colony, resisting against the conventions such as Mary Turney of *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), and Martha Quest of *Children of Violence Series* (1952-1969).

in Lessing's fiction.[8] Likewise, Eileen Manion focuses on the relation between the two, arguing that 'in Lessing's fictional world, colonial relationships are reproduced, in some primary sense, through the family'.[9] For Manion, the family in the colony offers an 'ideal model' of social order. In this society, indigenous peoples, white settlers, women, and men 'assume their "natural" places in a patriarchal and paternalistic structure', which heavily relies on social divisions and power dynamics.[10] Although Manion's and Clayton's arguments have been valuable in identifying Lessing's interest in employing family in her postcolonial fiction, there has not yet been any criticism exploring how Lessing's representation of the family evolves between her early and late postcolonial fiction, and how it responds to a postcolonial ecofeminist reading, as she moves from social realism to a more flexible mode of representation. I suggest that a stress on the family also recalls the environment and environmental concerns in Lessing's fiction. Her fiction details how the domination of the environment creates ways for patriarchal systems to control women in the family. These systems associate women with the natural environment, as Anne McClintock notes: 'Women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all owned'.[11] The same process, McClintock highlights, applies to the environment at the time of colonialism.

A focus on the environment is key to deconstructing patriarchal families and systems, which are sustained through connections between women, nature, and subjugated groups. For example, in *Mara and Dann*, Lessing illustrates that man's loss of control over the environment enables the reconfiguration of the conventional family. This point has been overlooked among Lessing critics, who mostly focus on class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity when it comes to the family. My reading of the family in relation to the environment aims to exemplify this link through Lessing's early and late postcolonial novels, *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann*.

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8. Cherry Clayton, 'White Settlers in the Heart of Empire: Visionary Power in Lessing's *The Four Gated City*', in *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing*, ed. by Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp.55-61, (p. 56).

9. Eileen Manion, '"Not About the Colour Problem"; Doris Lessing's Portrayal of the Colonial Order', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 21.3, (2008), 434-455 (p. 435).

10. Ibid., p. 435.

11. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 31.

Set in a time spanning the early and late 1940s, and situated in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), *The Grass Is Singing* depicts a colonial society built upon the intertwined hierarchies of race, class, and gender. The novel delineates these connections as a way to critique colonialism and family ideology as two intertwining patriarchal systems. Lessing introduces two settler families, namely the Slatters and Turners, who are respectively represented as 'successful' and 'failed' farmers in the society. The atmosphere of the time and place is conveyed via the perspective of Mary Turner, who joins the settler society after marrying an ill-fated farmer, Richard Turner, known as Dick. Dick is unable to sustain his family and farm economically as expected from a white family in the settler society because he chooses more eco-centric farming methods. The novel opens with a newspaper announcement reporting the murder of Mary by the houseboy, Moses, who is rumoured to have been 'in search of valuables'.[12] Leaving the motive behind the murder unknown, the novel travels back in time to Mary's childhood, which was spoiled by a drunken father, before moving on to her time as an independent woman in the city, and eventually to her sudden decision to get married and start family life in the colony. The novel foregrounds the interconnectedness of the domination of the environment and of different groups by the patriarchal systems of family and colonialism.

Lessing's engagement with the family and gender continues in her futuristic novel, *Mara and Dann*. The novel is set some thousand years in the distant future, on the African continent which is now known as Ifrik. The north of the continent is covered by glaciers while the south is extremely dry and hot, threatened by desertification. The story centres around the struggles of two orphaned siblings, Mara and her younger brother Dann, who travel northwards to survive severe climate change and reach a green place. At the beginning of the novel, Mara and Dann, respectively seven and four years old, are kidnapped by a tribe called the Rock People, who question them to learn about their family, which once ruled Ifrik. An unknown man from The People tribe rescues them and hands them over to an old and motherly woman called Daima, who is also a Memory, an individual whose role is to keep records of history and pass them down orally. During her time with Daima, Mara learns a lot about ecological change, power relations among big families, plants, farming, and the

12. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* (1950; repr., London: HarperPerennial, 2007), p. 9.

relationship between men and women. In the novel, a sense of the non-normative family is conveyed through the siblings, whose togetherness and affection for each other is suggestive of incest, and by a commune family that Mara and Dann create with others at the end of the novel. Due to their young ages, Ann Snitow describes the siblings as 'raw human material', through which, I argue, Lessing remoulds a non-normative family.[13] Lessing reinvigorates the representations of non-normative family forms and of marriages in *Mara and Dann*, and experiments with these forms to see whether changes in the way families are formed can eradicate social inequalities and exploitation of the environment.

Gendered and Exploited Spaces: Family and the Environment

The majority of Lessing's protagonists are either oppressed in marriage or obsessed with the idea of it, as in *The Grass is Singing*. Before starting a family, Mary and Dick live in different spaces of the colonial society, with the former residing in the city and the latter on the farm, resulting in two starkly different lifestyles. What joins them together are societal pressures that cause them to become obsessed with the idea of marriage: 'And all the time, unconsciously, without admitting it to herself, she [Mary] was looking for a husband'.[14] Lessing's selection of names for her characters is designed to illustrate that their fate is to marry. In its similarity to the word 'marriage', or 'to marry', the name 'Mary' connotes wedlock, and it hints at her denied autonomy as well as the societal pressures inflicted upon her: '[She] lived as she pleased, before "people made her get married"'.[15] Similarly, the name Dick, a slang term for the penis, suggests the societal expectations of men, which emphasise reproduction and the production of heirs: 'His dream was to get married and have children'.[16] In this way, marriage stands as a patriarchal institution that regulates the relationship between two individuals in a way that meets social expectations of them rather than their individual needs. The pressures on Dick include maintaining the family and farm, and they illustrate that the family as a gendered space can also be oppressive for men, demanding them to be economically strong.

13. Ann Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty: Gender Diary* (London: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 323.

14. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 43.

15. Ibid., p. 97.

16. Ibid., p. 46.

However, the patriarchy works through gender roles by privileging men over women in the family. In *The Grass is Singing*, the Turners and Slatters exemplify the family as a gendered space, one that oppresses women. In these families, men and women are expected to follow rigid gender specific roles that are prescribed as 'ideal'. These roles are not natural, but are instead social constructions that individuals are forced to internalise. An example of these roles takes place the morning after Mary and Dick's marriage:

> She need not think of him as the man she had married who had claims on her. She sat herself down, with composure, in front of the tray he had brought in, and watched him [Dick] pour tea. On a tin tray was a stained, torn cloth, and two enormous cracked cups. Across her wave of distaste came his voice: 'But that is your job now'; and she took the teapot from him, and poured, feeling him watching her with proud delight.[17]

This is the first incident of tension between Mary and Dick, occurring on the first full day of their marriage. Before their wedding, Dick gives Mary the impression that he is a man on his own terms, one who would not trouble Mary in their family life. As the quotation clearly indicates, however, and in contrast to what Mary assumes, Dick—as patriarchal ideology demands from men—has 'claims' on her when they become a family. The example of tea pouring, which not surprisingly comes on the first day of their marriage, is well chosen to illustrate the construction and performance of gender specific roles in the family. Dick initially is willing to pour tea as he probably did when he was single, as hinted by the existence of the items used to make tea. However, he suddenly remembers the gendered division of labour, and realises that what once had been his job is now the responsibility of Mary: 'that is your job now'. This indicates that he expects Mary to be involved in this and other domestic responsibilities, in order to 'disburden' and please her husband.

The performance of gender roles in the families are of utmost importance to the success of a colonial settlement. Anias Mutekwa argues that the colonised space and colonialism are often viewed as gendered in postcolonial representations. In the Zimbabwean context, she notes that gender-segregated forces play a significant role in colonial conquest and settlement 'in favour of men, rendering the whole enterprise a

17. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 54.

masculine one'.[18] In *The Grass is Singing*, also set in what is now Zimbabwe, Lessing illustrates that colonial settlement is partly achieved through the implantation of patriarchal families into African land. Although womanly concerns are secondary in importance, femininities play significant roles in the colonial society as masculinities are constructed in relation to them. In one of the Slatters' visits to the Turners, Lessing illustrates that the family is a gendered and oppressive space, one that creates an atmosphere for the performance of these femininities and masculinities:

> 'I am glad they came, […] you must talk women's talk sometimes,' said Dick […]. She [Mary] glanced at him in surprise: this tone was new to her. […] [T]he masculine talk […] gave him self-assurance in his relations with Mary. He felt as though he had been given an injection of new vigour, because of that hour spent in the little room, the two men one side, discussing their own concerns, and the women on the other, talking, presumably, about clothes and servants. […] Mary did not understand why he seemed alien and hostile to her.[19]

The Slatters are represented as an 'ideal' patriarchal family, in which Charlie Slatter exerts masculine authority over his wife, Mrs. Slatter, who in return ultimately submits to his authority. Mrs. Slatter does not have her own name revealed in the novel, but is rather defined by her relationship to her husband through his surname. Having no name implies that her identity is completely dependent on her husband. On the other hand, the Turners struggle to perform gender roles of masculinity and femininity. Previously an independent woman, Mary does not fancy internalising feminine traits such as submissiveness, passivity, and sympathy. Dick's masculinity is already in question in the settler society, as he is unable to exhibit the masculine traits of self-confidence, authority, stability, and strength to run his family and farm. The visit, which is described as 'an injection of new vigour', is an 'opportunity' for Dick to restore his manhood. The women and men are separated into different corners, chatting about the issues as required by gender roles: men talk about farming and labour, while women focus on clothes and servants. Having discussed manly concerns with Charlie, Dick's attitude towards Mary changes, as he develops a superiority over her by using an imperative 'tone', such as 'must', which he has never employed before. The Slatters'

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18. Anias Mutekwa, 'Gendered beings, Gendered Discourses: The Gendering of Race, Colonialism, and Anti-Colonial Nationalism in Three Zimbabwean Novels', *Social Identities*, 15.5, (2009), 725-40 (p. 726).

19. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, pp. 77-8.

decision to visit the Turners can be read as colonialism's attempt to ensure that settler families are patriarchal enough to sustain the gendered system of colonialism.

In *The Grass is Singing*, the colonial ideology requires families to be a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal system of colonialism. Family reveals the ideological interconnectedness between individual domination and environmental exploitation in Lessing's fiction. The more these groups are dominated, the easier it becomes for white men to settle and gain authority over the environment. Colonial settlement starts with environmental exploration and then exploitation, which are later transformed into different forms of oppression over marginalised groups. In her work *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen J. Warren highlights that '[e]cological feminists claim that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of color, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature'.[20] The Slatter family has long been part of the settler society, with Charlie making a fortune from the land:

> He farmed as if he were turning the handle of a machine which would produce pound notes at the other hand. He was hard with his wife, making her bear unnecessary hardships at the beginning; he was hard with his children, […] and above all he was hard with his farm labourers.[21]

The control of the family is part of male authority, so Charlie asserts his masculinity on his family and indigenous labourers. The act of farming involves various forms of contact with the environment. Just like the family, the patriarchal system of colonialism creates gender roles in its definition of the land. Charlie's control of the family as the patriarch is translated into the exploitation of the land and domination of indigenous inhabitants, as implied by the repetition of the word 'hard'.

The True Self and the Social Self

The Grass Is Singing and *Mara and Dann* introduce the concepts of the true self and the social self in relation to gender roles. While the true self stands for ways of personal fulfilment, the social self is shaped by patriarchal politics. Lessing illustrates that masculinity is a social construction that is internalised by men rather than being specific to their sex. As the novel unfolds, Mara becomes aware that Dann assumes two

20. Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), p. 1.

21. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 14.

conflicting personalities. One of these is Dann as Mara's brother, whom she loves passionately, and the other one is Dann as a 'man', whom Mara avoids for his masculine traits of ruling, controlling, possessing, and exploiting. These two personalities are reflected in Bilma, a place on their journey towards the North. In Bilma, Dann and Mara fall apart after the former stakes the latter when gambling, and then they reunite:

> And the two were in each other's arms, hugging and weeping, 'Oh Mara, forgive me,' and Mara, 'Oh Dann, you are here.' Then Dann said, 'Mara, it was the other me, not me.' 'I know,' said Mara and thought that Dann had never before acknowledged his division.[22]

The gambling can be associated with economic power and risk, which are considered manly concerns. Dann considers Mara a possession to be exchanged between two men: when offered the chance to stake his sister while gambling, Dann says, 'I'll stake Mara. I'll stake my sister'.[23] The conversation between Mara and Dann, however, suggests that it is not Dann who possesses and dominates Mara but rather 'the other' Dann, which hints at his assumed masculinity. While Dann accompanies his sister and participates in a non-dominating relationship, 'the other' Dann is greedy to gain wealth at the cost of losing his sister.

The other self is also evident in women, as in the example of Mary in *The Grass Is Singing*, who runs the farm when Dick is ill. Mary's treatment of the workers is inhuman, in line with how white men were expected to run their farms:

> When one of them paused for a moment in his work to rest, or to wipe the running sweat from his eyes, she waited one minute by her watch, and then called sharply to him to begin again. […] She was exhilarated and light-limbed, and swung the sjambok jauntily on her wrist. […] The sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence; it was a good feeling, keeping them under her will, making them do as she wanted.[24]

The quotation details the underlying conditions that cause Mary to internalise a masculine identity. The farm is an economic space defined as a male sphere in the patriarchal system of colonialism. Her involvement in the farm and ability to control

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22. Lessing, *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 339.

23. Ibid., p. 311.

24. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 112.

the workers pressurises her into assuming a masculine identity. In particular, her use of the sjambok—a whip that symbolically represents white men's authority and domination over indigenous people and oppression of others as a violent tool—is an example of the social self in the hierarchical and racial system of colonialism. Despite being a woman, Mary is still white and has superiority over indigenous men. The words 'new confidence', 'good feeling', and 'exhilarated' signal a change in her attitude, and illustrate that gender roles reflect the social self that is independent of biological sex but internalised by humans as imposed by societal expectations.

The Environment: From 'Singing' to 'Dying'

The portrayal of the natural environment is key to tracing Lessing's representation of the family in the novels. Depictions of the environment significantly differ between the two texts, illustrating the effects of colonial activity on environmental degradation. In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing introduces an evergreen environment, mainly represented by trees, grass, and soil: 'the good red soil with plants and grass'.[25] The colour red can be read as a symbol of the fertility of the soil and yet also as a foreshadowing of something more negative such as Mary's murder in the sense that it can be suggestive of blood. It represents the oppressive nature of colonialism, which entails both the murder and the abuse of indigenous people. The phrase 'singing grass' in the title suggests that the natural environment is active and yet unspoiled by colonial activity. The colonial ideology plants white families in remote lands as a way to exploit the natural environment and dominate indigenous men and white women. This is because colonial settlement—a form of control over the natural environment—is partly carried out by settler families.

The degraded images of the environment in *Mara and Dann* signal the long-standing effects of colonialism on humans and non-humans. In their 2013 article, Kent G. Lightfoot and colleagues discuss the effects of colonialism on the environment, which recalls the ways in which Lessing prefigures colonial effects on the environment: '[C]olonial enterprises placed tremendous pressures on long-standing anthropogenic landscapes, leading to significant modifications with the invasion of foreign species, the disruption of native habitants, the extermination of keystone species, and in some

25. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 198.

places, the loss of biodiversity'.[26] Lessing is critical of these effects and changes, evidenced early in *Mara and Dann*: 'Everything changed: rivers moved, disappeared, ran again: trees died—the hills were full of dry forests—and insects, even scorpions, changed their natures'.[27] The environmental changes in the form of ecological disasters such as climate change, floral and faunal metamorphoses, and geographic transformations affect all human and non-human communities, taking them either to the point of extinction or mutation. Fish are dying rapidly, trees are thirstier than ever, water dragons are attacked by water stingers half their size, herbivorous birds are after wild pigs that are too weak to run away, and insects are rapidly growing larger. Most technological advancements have been wiped out as a result of these changes, and humanity is once again back to living in tribe-like communities in search of food and shelter. In this way, Lessing brings to a near end the perception of human superiority over the environment, challenging human activity with environmental crises such as severe droughts, famines, and floods. Such environmental changes push people towards forming non-normative families and kinship.

Feminist Exploration (Eco-centric) vs Masculinist Exploitation (Ego-centric)

A comparative reading of the novels reveals two contrasting forms of engagement with the environment and the family, namely masculinist exploitation and feminist exploration. Charlie Slatter in *The Grass is Singing* represents the exploitation in question through his brutal and anti-eco-centric farming methods, which cause the ecological deterioration of his farm: 'Mr Slatter's farm had hardly any trees left on it. It was a monument to farming malpractice, with great gullies cutting through it, and acres of good dark earth gone dead from misuse'.[28] His 'success' in farming through environmental exploitation brings him great economic prosperity, and this is what is of relevance to Charlie: 'But he made the money, that was the thing'.[29] This in return strengthens his authority over his family members and indigenous labourers, through the aforementioned 'hard' way he treats them. The idea of being hard, which hints at an

26. Kent G. Lightfoot, Lee M. Panich, Tsim D. Schneider, and Sara L. Gonzalez, 'European Colonialism and the Anthropocene: A View from the Pacific Coast of North America', *Anthropocene*, 4 (2013), 101-115 (p. 101).

27. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 67.

28. Ibid., p. 81.

29. Ibid., p. 81.

authority over others, can be associated with masculinity, reinforced in the domain of the family. The novel does not make any direct references to Charlie's treatment of his wife, but the fact that her name is not revealed at all beyond her designation as "Mrs Slatter" hints at the domination of Charlie over her. She has no identity outside the family, as she is exposed to her husband's masculinist (ego-centric) attitudes.

Charlie's treatment of the environment and indigenous labourers reveals the interconnectedness of the domination of the environment and subjugated groups: 'His attitude to the land was fundamentally the same as that of natives whom he despised; he wanted to work out one patch of country and move on to the next'.[30] The more he can control the indigenous workers, the better he can dominate and exploit the environment. Therefore, his treatment of his labourers is brutal and inhumane, just like his mark on the environment: 'Slatter believed in farming with the sjambok. […] He had once killed a native in a fit of temper'.[31] Colonial ideology insists on the inferiority of indigenous men, who are considered to need taming and controlling. Such an ideology treats the environment in which indigenous men are born and raised in a similar vein, viewing it as requiring domestication. The use of the sjambok against indigenous people can be read as white men's assumed superiority, one based on racial segregation in the hierarchical system of colonialism. Charlie performs traits of his assumed masculine identity such as assertiveness, authority over others, aggression, and cupidity both in the farm and family. Youngsuk Chae notes that 'men's need to dominate women and oppress the powerless corresponds to the ideology of authoritarian patriarchy'.[32] Charlie's employment of patriarchal authority in the domains of family and farm is an example of the masculinist exploitation of the environment and subjugated groups.

In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing introduces a feminist exploration of the environment in contrast with the masculinist exploitation of it, as represented in *The Grass is Singing*. The novel illustrates that colonialism caused environmental degradation: 'Everywhere the bones of animals lay in the dead grass'.[33] The image of 'the dead

30. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 170.

31. Ibid., p. 14.

32. Youngsuk Chae, 'Postcolonial Ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5, (2015), 519-530 (p. 527).

33. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 61.

grass' in her futuristic novel is in stark contrast with the condition of grass in *The Grass is Singing*, indicating a change. Lessing employs Mara as a feminist explorer to interrogate the human stamp on the environment:

> There was a recklessness about the ways they used their soil and their water. […] These were peoples who had no interest in the results of their actions. […] They cut down forests, so that country after country, once forested, became desert or arid.[34]

This observation is made by Mara, and occurs when she visits the Museum of Human Advancements during her time in a place called the Centre. The pronoun 'they' denotes the past civilisations, and recalls their exploitation of the environment under the guise of advancement, such as Charlie Slatter of *The Grass is Singing*. Mara's descriptions of soil, forest, and trees clearly evoke Charlie's masculinist and rapist attitudes to the environment in the earlier novel. In this sense, Charlie represents people 'who had no interest in their actions' at the cost of destroying their environment, as mentioned in *Mara and Dann*.

The novel articulates an ecofeminist perspective that involves 'a critique of patriarchal science, [and] a concern with the degradation of 'nature'/ the environment' in order to reclaim environmental discourses.[35] Mara tries to understand the environmental degradation around her, and she becomes concerned with the ecological issues and how they affect other non-human communities: 'Mara knew that animals were dying everywhere because of the dryness […]. These thirsty trees must have been thinking of all that water rushing past, just over the ridge, but they couldn't get to it'.[36] On the other hand, Dann assumes a superiority over the environment, in a manner similar to that of Charlie. Dann's contact with non-human entities is ego-centric, and always violent with the aim of satisfying his own needs: 'Dann set down his can, told Mara to do the same, and caught two frogs, killed them with his knife, […] and skinned them – all in a moment'.[37] This contrasts with Mara's contact with the environment and non-human communities, which is eco-centric and sympathetic: 'She had been strolling

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34. Ibid., p. 381.

35. Maxine Molyneux and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, 'Mies and Shiva's Ecofeminism: A New Testament?', *Feminist Review*, 49, (1995), 86-107 (p. 86).

36. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, pp. 12-8.

37. Ibid., p. 82.

from the hill to the village, listening to the singing beetles and her own thoughts'.[38] The novel makes several references to how the dominant masculinist attitudes and behaviours shaped human history and caused the environment to degrade. At the museum of human advancements, Mara witnesses inventions that she tries to make sense of:

> She could not understand the weapons. […] Projectiles that could carry diseases designed to kill all the people in a country or a city? […] The machines they invented were ever more subtle and complex, using techniques that no one has matched since. These machines, it is now believed destroyed their minds, or altered their thinking so they became crazed.[39]

It is evident here that the inventions and weapons recall patriarchal science and masculinist methods that threaten both human and non-human entities. Mara recognises that what is called 'advancement' drove people into a form of madness, indeed reversing their progress. One of the main tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism is to 'contest western ideologies of development'.[40] The way Lessing critiques western development and progress underlines the conjunctions of postcolonialism and environmentalism.

In *The Grass is Singing*, Mary's attitude to the environment changes over the course of the novel, becoming more feminine, and in her last days she assumes a feminist exploration of the environment:

> Her mind was filled with green, wet branches, thick wet grass, and thrusting bushes. And for all those years she had listened wearily, […] with her nerves prickling, to that terrible shrilling, and had never seen the beetles who made it.[41]

The quote also evokes Mara's engagement with the environment in *Mara and Dann*. Her ambivalence towards Moses is transformed into a resolution by which Mary can cross familial conventions and societal pressure on her. In this way, rather than hating the African environment—as she did at the beginning of the novel—she can

38. Ibid., pp. 55-6.

39. Ibid., p. 381.

40. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 27.

41. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, pp. 197-8.

sympathetically experience, an indication of feminist exploration shortly before she dies:

> She realised, suddenly standing there, that all those years she had lived in that house, with the acres of bush all around her, and she had never penetrated into the trees, had never gone off the paths. And for all those years she had listened wearily, through hot dry months, with her nerves prickling, to that terrible shrilling, and had never seen the beetles who made it. Lifting her eyes she saw she was standing in the full sun, that seemed so low she could reach up her hand.[42]

Mary's interaction with the environment, as the quotation suggests, is different from her previous experiences. She realises that the house, representing familial responsibilities, has been an obstacle for an exploration of herself and the environment. Through Mary, Lessing illustrates that feminist exploration and observation are key to interrogating colonialism, reclaiming the environment, and deconstructing the ideological interconnectedness between the oppression of women, domination of the subjugated, and control of the environment.

Environment and the Women

Lessing's fiction explores the intersection between the exploitation of the environment and oppression of women. In other words, the ways in which women's sexuality is controlled give way to a cycle of environmental exploitation and of women's oppression. In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing introduces societies such as Bilma, where female sexuality is controlled and women are exchanged like property between men. It is in Bilma that Dann stakes Mara when gambling, which results in the latter being sold to a house where women are only allowed to leave on condition that they marry. Compared with other previous societies that the siblings visit, such as Rustam or Chelops, Bilma is rich in terms of water reserves, with no restriction for human use, and it has no reproduction problems, as Mara describes in excitement: '[W]ater that stood in great barrels on street corners for people to drink out of generous wooden ladles that hung ready […]. And, because of the water, healthy people, and children everywhere, and children's voices'.[43] In this way, Bilma evokes the setting in Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, where the natural environment is alive and fresh, as Mary illuminates: 'It was

42. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 197.

43. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, pp. 299-300.

so beautiful: […] the beautiful still trees, with their load of singing birds'.[44] However, in both places, and in line with men's control over the environment, women's sexuality is also controlled and their status is defined in relation to men through marriage. For example, Mary can only gain status in settler society after her marriage to Dick, and Mara can only leave the house to which she is sold if she marries:

> In a few minutes Mara was married to Daulis, with Leta as the witness, by expedient law. She was given a leather disc, on a thong, to hang around her neck, so the world would know she was married and the property of a man – same purpose as a wedding ring. And for this time she was pleased to have the protection.[45]

Mara enters a marriage of convenience with Daulis in order to leave the place where she is kept. Mary's marriage can also be considered a convenient one in that she marries Dick to be protected from societal pressures. I argue that as colonial ideology associates man's development and advancement with his access to natural resources and his control over the environment, men's control over the environment—as in the example of Bilma—is translated into other forms of control, including of women.

The subversion of control of women's sexuality is key to introducing new forms of families. In *Mara and Dann*, ecological changes cause a drop in women's fertility, which in turn lessens the control over their sexuality. The social effect of such infertility is hinted in a conversation between Mara and Candace, a local man: 'Mara had certainly breasts again […].' 'Are you going to make me have a child?' Mara asked Candace. 'You might have noticed that we don't *make* anyone do anything.'[46] The changes in Mara's body, explicitly associated with femininity, make her uneasy, as she is afraid of being employed for breeding purposes. However, the existence of non-normative marriages eradicates pressures on women in Chelops. This is also evident in another place called Charad, where marriages are classified into degrees due to low fertility rates: '[S]econd degree. That meant, here, either man or woman could have other partners, but the man must assume responsibility for any child, since there was no way of establishing paternity'.[47] Here Lessing breaks the ideological tie between

44. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 192.

45. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, pp. 329-330.

46. Ibid., pp. 154-5.

47. Ibid., p. 224.

mothers and children and control over women's body, and sexuality by handing child responsibility to men.

Non-Normative Families in *Mara and Dann*

While Lessing critiques patriarchal family arrangements in its relation to colonialism in *The Grass is Singing*, she introduces non-normative family forms in *Mara and Dann*. This shows the changes—if not developments—in Lessing's representation of the family between the two novels. The journey Mara and Dann take towards the north of Ifrik represents Lessing's experiments with non-normative families. During their travels, the siblings witness and at times even experience different family forms and marriages practised by the various human societies they encounter. For example, upon arrival at a place called Chelops, the pair are imprisoned for defiling a water supply and resisting arrest. The Chelops community is threated by extinction due to the great drop in fertility, and has introduced laws that enable non-normative marriages to increase fertility as Ida, a local woman, explains to Mara:

> This law was that a man could have two wives, a woman two husbands, if everyone agreed. This law had begun when it first became evident that fertility was lower, there were fewer children, and many miscarriages. So morality changed to suit a necessity.[48]

The forms of marriages highlighted in the quotation are polygamy and polygyny, which respectively enable men and women to have more than one spouse. The patriarchal family ideology creates 'moralities' to be followed in a society. One of them is monogamy, which allows two individuals of different sexes to marry under the institution of family. Lessing interrogates the politics of morality as a social construction, which needs to be subverted for people to choose diverse forms of relations instead of forms forced upon them. Polygamy and polygyny stand as tropes, suggesting that the way families are formed can change depending on social and economic circumstances.

Incest as a Trope

In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing employs incest as a trope to question if not subvert the cultural significance of blood and kinship to the creation of families. The non-

48. Ibid., p. 155.

normativity of incest enables the author to comment on and reconfigure the family. While incest is not a recurring theme in Lessing's fiction, its emergence in her work of the 1990s signals the changes in her representation of the family. As a term, incest denotes more than actual physical activity, as defined by critics. For Elizabeth Barness, incest 'represents […] undeniable power of kinship ties and their widespread ramifications for individuals and society at large'.[49] Claire Sprague considers incest 'an act that overturns established social conceptions of priority',[50] while Lisa Hopkins defines it as 'the perk of families in power, operat[ing] as a way of perpetuating that power and of excluding others from access to it'.[51] The continuation of male hegemony in the family is sustained across generations through lineage. Lessing's use of incest in the novel is political in the sense that it interrogates patriarchal notions of ruling, controlling, and domination across generations. In the novel, incest represents both probability and improbability, standing as a means of crossing familial boundaries. In other words, it both reflects Lessing's denial of conventional families and her desire to create non-normative ones.

Initially, Lessing introduces a form of psychological incest by presenting siblings in love with each other. In this way, Lessing questions the 'incest taboo' that is promoted by the family ideology to avoid genetic disorders likely to be 'suffered' by the marriage of close family members: 'Dann said, "Why Mara, why are brothers and sisters not allowed to love each other? Why not?"'[52] The first time Mara and Dann explore each other as adults takes place in a pool, where they encounter each other after the long absence of Dann:

> For a moment she thought her reflection was doubled, but she raised her head and saw on the other side of the pool a youth, who was staring at her. Deliberately, he cupped his hands, dipped them in the water, and drank, keeping his gaze on her. He was naked. She saw there between his legs what Daima had told her she must be afraid of: the two young, round balls in their little sac, and the long thick tube over them—nothing like the wrinkled old

49. Elizabeth Barness, *Incest and the Literary Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p. 1.

50. Claire Sprague, *Rereading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition* (North Carolina: UNC Press, 1987), p. 19.

51. Lisa Hopkins, 'Incest and Class: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Borgain's, in *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Elizabeth Maslen (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p. 104.

52. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 387.

> lumps Mara had seen so often […]. There was flesh on him. It had been a long time since she had seen skin fit so nicely over the bones of a face, or arms and legs that had a smooth softness to them.[53]

Here, the siblings explore each other as two strangers rather than siblings. The improvements in Dann's body, which was once weak and skinny due to the scarcity of food and water, attract Mara's attention. From the first moment of this encounter, she recognises that the man whose body she admires is her brother Dann. Therefore, she has mixed feelings that are caught between the excitement of finding Dann and an anxious understanding that he is no longer her little brother, but rather a man whose sexuality poses a risk to Mara's existence as a woman: 'But she thought, If I did let my arms reach out now it wouldn't be Dann, but only this strange man with the dangerous thing between his legs. I could not just hug him or kiss him now'.[54] Daima, the old and wise woman who took care of Mara and Dann since their childhood, had warned Mara to be careful of the domination of women by the patriarchal ideology. Mara's focus on Dann's genitals recalls Daima's warning, and therefore what concerns her is not the physical changes in Dann's body but the social construction of masculinity. The fact that Dann is kidnapped by three Mahondi men—the family he belongs to—who once ruled Ifrik, can be associated with the new masculine identity instilled in him. This is reflected in Mara's observation of him: 'She could not read his face, his movements; she did not know him. He might just walk off again—disappear'.[55] The probability of an incestuous relationship between the two enables Mara to recognise the changes in Dann's attitudes, which are now masculinist.

The ways in which Mara and Dann consider such a relationship also reflect how men and women perceive and experience the idea of family differently. The siblings are from a noble family, which once ruled *Ifrik*, and are greeted as a princess and prince by their distant relatives, Felix and his wife Felissa.[56] This couple dreams of re-building the royal family, which once practised consanguineous marriage by wedding brothers and sisters. Mara and Dann are told that they are the last survivors of the royal family, so their marriage is vital to establishing a return to the family's former glory, when the

53. Ibid., p. 75.

54. Ibid., p. 79.

55. Ibid., p. 76.

56. Ibid., p. 369.

Mahondis ruled Ifrik in 'peace'. Dann welcomes the idea, as he seeks the power that a dynasty can provide. On the other hand, although Mara loves her brother, she is hesitant to become involved in a legal contract that would imprison them inside the royal family, which would then re-establish its former domination over the environment and people. Incest represents both a critique of the family ideology as in the example of the siblings.

In the last quarter of the novel, Lessing transforms incest into a political context to critique patriarchal notions of ruling and controlling. These notions are represented through the depiction of the royal family. Mara's ideas on such a family only become clear when the siblings reach the Centre. Felix explains to Mara that '[t]he Royal family kept marriage inside itself. Brothers and sisters got married, [and they] are the only two Royals of the right age'.[57] They ask Mara and Dann to marry in order to revive the royal family and rule Ifrik again. Rather than readily accepting the idea, Mara interrogates the royal family in a conversation with Felix:

> 'How long did this dynasty last?' asked Mara.
> 'Hundreds of years, so they say,' Felix said.
> 'With stability? Prosperity? Peace?' [asks Mara]
> 'You are asking too much, Princess. Hundreds of years—of peace? No. But the kingdom was able to fight off aggressions and attacks'.[58]

Mara understands that the family Felix and Felissa desire will dominate others rather than bring 'peace', 'stability', and 'prosperity' to individuals and communities. It will be a Kingdom, where Mara and Dann will be involved in reproduction and ruling, respectively, which will both nurture patriarchal ideology and create a hierarchical society. Dann welcomes the idea, as it provides 'the other Dann' with what he wants, which is to establish his own dynasty and have Mara as his wife at the same time: 'I rather fancy the idea of being married to you, Mara. And all our little ones running about. […] Well, we could start our own royal family, have you thought of that?'[59] Dann's desire to marry Mara recalls Dick Turner's wish to get married in *The Grass Is Singing*: 'Having driven himself for years, it was part of his [Dick's] dream to spoil a

57. Ibid., pp. 373-4.

58. Ibid., p. 374.

59. Ibid., pp. 376-7.

wife. His dream was to get married and have children'.[60] Although the families Dick and Dann envision are different (based on tradition and incest, respectively), the idea of the family is built upon masculinist imperatives such as controlling women and having children, and thus the concept serves patriarchal needs. Unlike Mary in *The Grass is Singing*, who submits to societal pressures on her to start a family, Mara is careful enough not to be involved in a partnership that is imposed by others, as hinted in a conversation with Dann before they leave the Centre: 'Your marvellous plans depend on one thing. On me. On my womb', she says, tapping her stomach, 'And I'm leaving'.[61] The fact that Mara does not let Dann or anyone else control her sexuality, along with her awareness of her potential, can be read as her autonomy against the patriarchal ideology. Read alongside each other, the novel also exemplifies how men and women experience the idea of the family differently. While men's control of women is key to the sustenance of the patriarchal family, the alternative offers ways in which the ideology can be questioned if not subverted, as Mara achieves.

The Farms

A comparison of the farms in *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* reveals the changes in Lessing's representations of the family and environment in her postcolonial writing. In *The Grass is Singing*, farms are gendered spaces, sustaining white men's superiority over indigenous people and women in other spheres of the settler society. The family in the novel is patriarchal, which includes hierarchical relations and gendered division of labour, with men working on the farm and women in the house. I argue that as a gendered space, the farm determines the relations that exist within the family, because the space gives white men an economic superiority and authority over women in the family and indigenous men on the farm. The presence of the latter in the white family as 'houseboy' makes it even more patriarchal, in that white women are required to assume a masculine identity in order to break the masculinity of local men and force them to submit to their authority: '"It's my house," said Mary [to Dick]. "He's my boy, not yours. Don't interfere"'.[62] This hierarchy places the indigenous man in a feminine position. The novel illustrates that colonial society provides the necessary

60. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, pp. 46-7.

61. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 385.

62. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 78.

atmosphere for family ideology to flourish, and creates individuals – white men, women, and indigenous men – that would in return sustain a hierarchical system. Thus, gender and race intersect to create hierarchical relations both in the family and society.

Returning to *Mara and Dann*, the ending introduces a utopian farm where, in contrast to the farm in *The Grass is Singing*, hierarchical relations and gender division of labour are replaced by egalitarian practices. The changes in the way the farm is managed implies Lessing's reconfiguration of the non-normative family and of an unspoiled environment. In its most concrete sense, Lessing's new family comes at the end of the novel, when Mara, Dann, and their friends from other communities gather to create their own community on a relatively small farm: 'So here we all are at last. We are a family'.[63] The scene takes place around a table, a familiar image in Lessing's familial novels, including *The Fifth Child* (1988) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001). The family, which consists of individuals both with and without shared blood ties, recalls the idea of the commune employed in Lessing's earlier novel, *The Good Terrorist* (1985). The author's early experiment with the commune family in *The Good Terrorist* illustrated that the gendered division of labour and hierarchy could still exist in a setting interpreted as relatively non-normative. However, the commune family in *Mara and Dann* is built upon a non-hierarchical structure, with individuals from diverse backgrounds adopting an ecological living style and sharing their possessions, work, income, and resources. This, I argue, is in line with the changes in Lessing's postcolonial fiction, which increasingly focuses more on environmental issues and non-normative families.

Members of the commune in *Mara and Dann* discuss how to run the farm rather than readily assume a gendered division of labour. The conversation between Kira, a former slave, and others highlights this point:

> 'Did you run everything for the Hadrons?' Shabis asked [meaning the time when Kira was a slave]. 'Most things. But we were their slaves. They had got so fat and lazy and disgusting…' And now Mara cried out, remembering, 'We must not let ourselves get like that, it frightens me even thinking about it.' 'We aren't going to have slaves,' said Dann.[64]

63. Ibid., p. 398.

64. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 406.

Slavery, which is based on master-servant dualism, is a hierarchical relation not only in itself but also in the way it shapes societies. The idea of slavery was initially introduced by colonial movements to meet excessive workloads and build the economic foundations of nations. In *The Grass is Singing*, through the example of the Turner family, the idea of slavery takes different forms, such as indigenous men being involved in domesticity and in farming to nurture white people's feelings of superiority. It is evident in the novel that Mary's involvement in domesticity evokes a kind of slavery, one where the work never ends: 'Then, having done all she could to the house, she began on dress materials […] There came an end to embroidery; again she was left empty handed. Again she looked about for something to do'.[65] However, Lessing's new farm and family in *Mara and Dann* are examples of non-hierarchical spaces, which involve equal participation and contribution of all individuals with the works they are able to do. I argue that a non-hierarchical space is key to the formation of non-normative families, as families are places where hierarchical relations are created and spread to wider society.

In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing also abolishes the idea of private property to subvert men's assumed superiority over women through the former's designation as the owner of the property. The farm and household, along with the way they are managed, are not submitted to one man's control and ownership, so there does not exist any hierarchy among individuals or any distinction such as men's or women's spaces or works. In the introduction to Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels explains how a form of slavery for women takes place in families:

> Men seized control over the households, women became degraded and slaves to men's lust and were the instruments for reproducing more children. In fact, the word family comes from the Latin term *famulus* which means household slave, and *familia*, the totality of slaves belonging to one man, the patriarch, who inherited all the wealth and wielded absolute power over all members of the household. This shift towards gender inequality was presented as a natural, not a social process.[66]

The quotation highlights that the man, as the owner of private property, also claims possession over women and children. This in return requires women to be involved in a

65. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 62.

66. Pat Brewer, 'Introduction', in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* by Friedrich Engels (1884; repr., Newtown: Resistance Books, 2004), p. 7.

form of slavery to satisfy men's needs, as in the example of Mary in *The Grass is Singing*: 'Mary worked hard, and looked for Dick's look of approval'.[67] Mary's hard work is not enough to achieve this approval, however, and so she feels obliged to do more to make him happy, which includes reproduction: 'She felt that she needed one child to save her from herself. […]'.[68] Mary feels obliged to reproduce, as she is traumatised by her demands and those of the patriarchal ideology, which expects women to be reproductive.

In *Mara and Dann*, on the other hand, in the absence of private property, family members contribute to farm work and its finance in equal terms with what they have:

> Now there was a general accounting. Mara slid her hand under her gown and brought out the cord that had on it one gold coin, which she laid on the table. Dann set out his five gold pieces. Leta fetched her bag of coins from her sack […]. Shabis […] laid out a handful of small money. Daulis said that his contribution was the farm. And […] Kira [gave] her heavy gold earrings, bracelets, rings.[69]

Whilst at the farm, Mara discovers she is good at farming: 'Mara, you have farming skills. […] Mara undertook this work [farming] and taught Leta how to do it'.[70] Thus, her contribution to the commune is not based on her gender, but rather her aptitude. Similarly, Dann is also asked to do work based on his ability and fortes: 'You start Dann. What kind of work do you think you'd be good at, on the farm?'[71] In this way, Lessing subverts gender roles in how work is to be allocated. Therefore, individuals develop their own potentials, and are not restricted by gender-based expectations. This enables them to engage in various forms of human relations that could be considered within the context of the non-normative family.

In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing introduces non-normative forms of companionship that do not oppress individuals within marriage and the family, but celebrate their individual preferences to decide with whom they want to live. For example, Mara and Shabis are a happy couple, choosing to live together without any legal contract and

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67. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 61.

68. Ibid., p. 135.

69. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 400.

70. Ibid., pp. 400-2.

71. Ibid., p. 406.

expecting a baby. In the same way, Dann and Kira are a couple, just like Leta and Dauglis. The novel also implies that the togetherness Mara and Dann share with others does not restrict them to think only of their love for each other: 'she knew that she loved Shabis but she always would love Dann more and nothing could change that'.[72] In the same way, Dann declares his love for Mara, asking her 'why can't we be together? We ought to be together'.[73]

The Family: From Dystopia to Utopia

A chronological reading of the novels suggests a move from dystopia to utopia in Lessing's representation of the family. A term coined by Thomas Moore in 1516, utopia means 'no place' or 'nowhere', and has come to mean 'an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect'.[74] The exact opposite term is dystopia, meaning an imaginary unpleasant society where humans are oppressed and dehumanised, and the environment is degraded. A dystopian reading of *The Grass is Singing* also reclaims Lessing's place in postcolonial literature, in that it counters accusations against her such as 'promoting the colonial ideology', 'not giving adequate voice to her black characters', and offering inadequate criticism of colonialism. For example, Collin Style argues that Lessing's wonderful description of the African landscape is enough to inspire in her readers a tenderness towards the people occupying those spaces.[75] In other words, Style criticises Lessing for potentially promoting a colonial utopia among colonisers, who may be tempted by her description of the African land. As opposed to Style's argument, I claim that reading *The Grass is Singing* within the frame of a dystopia offers a strong criticism of the colonial society. Lessing subverts colonial utopia through the tragic and dystopic results it has brought, and such a reading illustrates how the vast African land becomes a wasteland through colonial utopia and settlement. Lessing's use of quotations from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) in the para text before her novel reinforces the argument that the images she provides of Africa, regardless of how beautiful, reveal an exploited land and spoiled nature.[76]

72. Ibid., p. 403.

73. Ibid., p. 403.

74. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/utopia> [accessed 11.11.2016].

75. Collin Style, 'Doris Lessing's "Zambesia"', *English in Africa*, 13.1, (1986), 73-91 (p. 74).

76. Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, p. 7.

Therefore, her representation of the family is shaped according to the dystopian society, which is hierarchical and oppresses individuals.

The incidents that take place in *The Grass is Singing* offer dystopian elements despite the setting being real rather than imaginary. For example, Mary is oppressed in the family, and she is finally murdered by Moses, a houseboy who is dehumanised through this role within the family, and who eventually goes to jail for the murder. Dick goes bankrupt, as he cannot manage his family and the farm as envisaged by the colonial authorities. The environment is exploited by patriarchal families such as the Slatters. All incidents are examples of the oppression and exploitation of humans and the environment, respectively, within the settler society. *The Grass is Singing* develops the idea that through their utopian vision, the colonisers ultimately caused the emergence of dystopian society and families.

Lessing's engagement with utopia in *Mara and Dann* is apparent in the physical setting of the novel, Ifrik, which is a non-existent continent. It is non-existent in the sense that it imagines what Africa will be like in the future. Lyman Tower Sargent notes that 'utopianism is a philosophy of hope, and it is characterised by the transformation of generalized hope into a description of a non-existent society'.[77] Lessing's description of Ifrik as a non-existent place is unpacked by the journey that Mara and Dann undertake. It is a journey of unknowns and dangers such as extreme famine, droughts, environmental changes, kidnaps, imprisonments, and hostility. However, the idea of hope, central to utopian fiction, is what keeps the pair alive and in motion. They yearn for a peaceful, green life, and for a family that will celebrate their individual differences and preferences. Watkins notes that the novel ends with 'the rejection of the Centre and the establishment of the utopian community at the farm'.[78] It is through this farm that Lessing employs the elements of utopia to reconfigure her family. Both the siblings' continuous migration from place to place, and Mara's rejection of the incestuous and hierarchical family form of the Centre, as discussed earlier, endorses Tower Sargent's argument that 'the basis of all utopianism is dissatisfaction'.[79] Utopia instils the idea

77. Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 8.

78. Watkins, '"Grande Dame" or "New Woman"', p. 256.

79. Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Ideology and Utopia', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ideologies*, ed. by Michael Freedon (Oxford: Oxford University, 2015), p. 444.

that things do not have to be the way they are, but can be better and different. Mara and Dann are dissatisfied with what they have witnessed and experienced in these different communities, such as slavery, trafficking of women, hostility, gender inequality, and power relations. The utopian farm they establish at the end of the novel is built upon their dissatisfactions and hopes.

The endings of both novels are key to the discussion of utopia and dystopia in terms of the family. Gayle Greene notes that Lessing's sense of possibilities is to do with her female identity, in that 'happy endings derive from female power and unhappy endings from female disempowerment'.[80] In *Mara and Dann*, the new non-normative family created by 'the utopian community' at the end of the novel evokes Lessing's desire to introduce non-normative families that celebrate female power. At this stage, Lessing creates her new family unit with two pregnancies—that of Mara and Shabis, and that of Kira and Dann—although the novel closes by revisiting Mara and Dann's mutual interest in each other.

On the other hand, the ending of *The Grass is Singing* reveals Lessing's dissatisfaction with colonial rule and the patriarchal family, with the murder of Mary signalling female disempowerment. So although the two novels are open to individual readings of dystopia and utopia, a comparative reading of the pair suggests that the family in *The Grass is Singing*, with its unhappy ending, constitutes a basis for Lessing's utopian novel *Mara and Dann*, where she reconfigures family and society. It is through female power and resistance against the status quo that the end of the novel introduces a new family unit to be achieved by a utopian community.

Conclusion

Lessing's representation of the family significantly changes between the two novels discussed in this chapter. Her focus on traditional family forms in *The Grass is Singing* is replaced by non-normative ones in *Mara and Dann*. Although both novels are open to postcolonial readings, there are differences in the way they engage with colonialism. In her earlier novel, Lessing delineates a colonial system that is represented in the form of white settlement in African lands. Her criticism of the colonial system is limited by

80. Greene, *The Poetics of Change*, p. 27.

social realism, which depicts contemporary life as it takes place rather than allowing her to go beyond conventions. Therefore, Lessing's representation and criticism of the family is shaped in line with the conventions of the time, when the family form is patriarchal and oppresses individuals both within it and outside of it. On the other hand, *Mara and Dann* is a work of speculative fiction, which I argue gives Lessing the flexibility and authority to critique the colonial ideology effectively. The novel clearly illustrates that the ideology of colonialism still continues in the form of human advancement and development in the modern era.

While *The Grass is Singing* delineates the western 'development' project of colonialism, *Mara and Dann* interrogates the tragic results of such a predatory project on human and non-human communities. In other words, in *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing introduces a community that is shaped by colonial concerns, while in *Mara and Dann* she examines the results of these colonial concerns on communities. I argue that as a futuristic African novel, *Mara and Dann* enables Lessing to offer a much stronger criticism of the colonial ideology in a way that does not repeat the legacies and geographic divisions of this ideology: 'We use words like south and north and east and west, but why do we? Where do they come from?'[81] Displacement of human communities through environmental catastrophes can be read as Lessing's subversion of colonial settlement. It is through displacement that she is able to introduce new forms of human relations, which can be regarded as non-normative families. Although Lessing critiques the conventional family in *The Grass is Singing*, she is unable to offer new possibilities for a novel form of the family. Instead, her construction of the non-normative family comes with *Mara and Dann*, which illustrates a development and change in her representation of such atypical families.

A comparative reading of the novels illustrates that family is equally essential to the dissolution of ideological interconnectedness between different forms of domination as much as it is to the establishment of a hierarchical colonial society. *The Grass is Singing* and *Mara and Dann* exemplify the convergence of postcolonialism with ecofeminism through their representation of the family. While the former can be read as Lessing's attempt to explore critically a colonial society that is built upon the family ideology, the latter was written nearly four decades later, and can be taken as the

81. Lessing, *Mara and Dann*, p. 88.

author’s attempt to dissolve such a society and suggest new forms of family. The representation of the ecologically degraded environment also suggests Lessing’s heightened concern with ecological issues in her postcolonial writing, which corresponds with the increased awareness of the global environmental crisis in the 1990s.

Conclusion

> 'So we see an increasing range of family structures, to the extent that there is arguably no longer a one size fits all family in Britain today. But this is diversity and not decline. There is no single family form that guarantees happiness or success.' (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2008, p. 4).

In 2018, the Doris Lessing panel at the annual MLA conference invited 'new readings of Lessing's 'portrayal of non-biological families, non-normative modes of affiliation and dependence, and unconventional households and genealogies'.[1] In line with this call, this thesis is an attempt to offer new readings of Lessing's representation of family. This thesis has established the significance of the family in Doris Lessing's fiction, and illuminated the author's ambivalent relationships with communism and feminism, as well as her unequivocal interest in Sufi mysticism and the environment. By moving backwards and forwards between her early and late novels, this study has focused on Lessing's persistent interest in the reformulation of the family and of women's traditional roles within it. The ways in which Lessing engages with political movements and mysticism at a personal and fictional level have shaped her representation of the family. Reflected in the ordering of the chapters by a thematic comparison of two novels per chapter, I have identified three main phases in Lessing's representation of the family that brings her developing vision into view.

In the political phase, explored in Chapters One (Communism) and Two (Feminism), I have discussed family as a political institution and ideological construct that oppresses women both in traditional and non-normative family settings. During this phase, Lessing not only critiques traditional family arrangements, but tests the capacity of political movements in transforming women's conventional roles in the family. Chapter Three (Sufism) focused on the second phase, which I call mystical, and I have argued that Sufi mysticism enables Lessing to go beyond the limitations set by the family conventions in a way that is not possible through political movements. I have suggested that Lessing's Sufism became political in the sense that it blended with

1. Cornelius Collins, 'Letter from the President', *Doris Lessing Studies*, 36, (2018), 1-2 (p. 2).

feminism and challenged a patriarchal configuration of the family. Looking at the family and Sufism has enabled me to coin three new concepts, Sufi parenthood, Sufi family, and Su-feminism. These concepts have also demonstrated that Sufism can be enriched by Lessing's fiction. The last phase, discussed in Chapter Four, is the environmental phase, during which Lessing was interested in postcolonial ecofeminism and the family. My analysis observes that Lessing's limited subversion of patriarchal systems of family and colonialism in *The Grass is Singing* is resolved in *Mara and Dann*, in which she introduces her utopian, non-normative family. Each phase, illuminating Lessing's interest in unconventionality has demonstrated that she reconfigures the family in a way that would promote transformative social change.

I have also observed that Lessing's fictional family develops in a non-linear way, negotiating between limitations (traditional family) and possibilities (non-normative family) throughout her fiction. *The Grass is Singing* (1950), *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973), and *The Fifth Child* (1988) represent women's discontent under patriarchal systems that offer a backlash against alternative families. In such texts, Lessing's fictional family is within the range of critique and resistance, pointing out the need for alternative family structures and modes of kinship. In *The Good Terrorist* (1985) and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001) Lessing becomes more ambitious in her vision through introducing alternative familial arrangements. However, at this stage of her writing, the possibility of a non-normative family is impeded by the limitations of left-wing politics, which fail to transform women's oppression in what are supposed to be unconventional settings. Having followed Lessing's ambivalent attitude to political movements, I have shown that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and *Ben, in the World* (2000) include what could potentially be interpreted as non-normative families and kinship. In *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (1999), I have argued that Lessing challenges humanity's perceived superiority over the natural environment. In this way, she can break men's historical control over nature and women, which in return enables her to reconfigure her fictional family.

Both within and beyond the scope of this thesis, but of future scholarly interest, are two points that could serve to complement and expand further research on Lessing's representation of the family. The first is the notion of the dependant man, as I touched upon in Chapter One. Ongoing scholarly interest and research has been conducted on

the image of independent women or women becoming independent, such as Martha Quest of the "Children of Violence Series" (1952-1969) and Anna Wulf of *The Golden Notebook* (1962), yet Lessing's fiction also brings the image of the dependant man into view, which could shift the direction of existing criticism to produce new readings in regards to the family. For example, Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and Ben Lovatt in *Ben, in the World* (2000) exemplify the images of dependant or vulnerable men, who also suffer under the family ideology in a manner similar to Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) and Harriet Lovatt in *The Fifth Child* (1988). The images of men as dependant or vulnerable can be just as subversive of the dominant family ideology as those of independent women in the sense that they also challenge patriarchy. This could potentially dissolve male supremacy, creating ways in which family can be reconfigured in more egalitarian ways.

The second line of potential future scholarly enquiry is the image of indigenous people in Lessing's fiction, and analyses of where they fit in the author's representation of the family. Compared with indigenous men, such as Moses in *The Grass is Singing* (1950), indigenous women do not occupy a particularly visible place in Lessing's work, with the exception of *The Grass is Singing*, where Mary observes the local women breastfeeding their babies. These women are more scenery than characters, objects for the subjects (the white woman) to view, rather than subjects in their own right. An interesting area for exploration could be an analysis of the underlying factors of Lessing's limited portrayal of indigenous—particularly female indigenous—people, or if such a seeming omission is in fact a 'strategy' in her critique of patriarchal systems of family and colonialism. These two figures are potential areas of future research that beg greater exploration in Lessing's fiction. An additional development of the thesis would be to explore Lessing's short stories and science fiction series, which would facilitate an analysis of her fictional family across diverse genres that could potentially reveal non-normative ways of engaging with the family.

Today, the increasing diversity of alternative families and kinship, those that come in different sizes and shapes, challenges the single form and meaning of the family. The positive changes in the ways sexuality, gender, parenting, and reproduction

are perceived have paved the way for the validity of non-normative families.[2] Unconventional understandings of the family promote the idea that individuals can take diverse routes to achieving a family tailored to their own choices and needs. The idea of family as a matter of choice rather than of fate subverts traditional understandings, and underpins assumptions about the family and parental roles such as biology, blood, sexual orientation, marital status, income, gender, race, and class. Blended and biracial families, same-sex couples, LGBT parents (either through donor conception or surrogacy), single parenting by choice, co-parenting, transracial adoption, and fostering are just some of the non-normative forms that demonstrate enrichment in the experiences of parenting and the construction of families.

A recent example of such an experience was expressed by a woman who surrogated for a gay couple: [B]eing a surrogate and making that dream come true for another couple made me feel like I had served a purpose'.[3] The fact that the couple found a surrogate via a social network, and thus by themselves, rather than having to go through an agency, signified the overarching place of such families in wider society with individuals who are ready to help people to achieve their dream family. These families are promoted via diverse national and international platforms by professional organisations such as Pride Angel and Alternative Family Week, which connect and support individuals in their unique journey towards alternative families.[4] However, new meanings and the implications of families have been subject to continual struggle and stigmatisation by the reassertion of traditional values and anxiety over social stability.

Traditional family ideology still exists in British society. The legal developments in recognising alternative families have not necessarily meant a release from sexism and

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2. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed exclusions of lesbians and gay men from fostering and adopting opportunities. It was not until 2002 (Adoption and Children Act) that unmarried couples including same sex ones were given equal rights for adoption as heterosexual couples.

3. George Martin, *Gay couple become fathers to twins after using Facebook to find surrogate mother in North Dakota - saving them $100,000* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6602489/Gay-couple-fathers-twins-finding-surrogate-mother-Facebook.html> [accessed 20 January 2019].

4. Pride Angel was founded in 2009 by Erika and Karen, who are professional scientists with personal experience of donor conception and raising children within a lesbian relationship. The foundation is committed to helping single, lesbian, gay and infertile couples to become parents through donor conception and co-parenting with fertility support, health screening and legal advice. Alterative Family Week 'from 2016 AFW promotes a variety of events that showcase and educate on alternative family formats including single parenting by choice; co-parenting by choice and LGBT parents'. For further information. See <https://www.prideangel.com/Families.aspx> and <http://myfuturefamily.org.uk/external-links/alternative-family-week/> [accessed January 2019].

stigmatisation for those who are outside traditional family arrangements. A recent BBC article, entitled "The Everyday Sexism I Face as a Stay-at-Home Dad" (2018), reveals that the political rights gained on legal grounds are also subject to further challenges when it comes to their applications in wider society. This particular article reports the sexism faced by a gay couple in London, who are stigmatised as a result of their non-gendered parental responsibilities. Mathew Jenkin, the stay-at-home-dad, regularly takes care of his daughter, including changing her nappy and feeding her in public domains. His public visibility as a man caring for his daughter is frequently interrupted by the everyday sexism he faces, including offers of 'help', which despite being sympathetic in tone are sexist in nature:

> I was a dad in a sea of mums struggling to soothe his child, so the group decided to come to the rescue. Instead of support, I was offered pity and condescension. "Have you thought about changing her nappy?" Suggested one mother. "Do you think she's hungry?" And worst of all: "Perhaps I should hold the baby for you?" It's hard to imagine a woman in the same situation being offered an idiot's guide to parenting or being asked to hand over her child to a total stranger. But I've faced this kind of everyday sexism time and time again.[5]

The emphasis on motherhood promotes the idea that women's capacities are ideal for and perhaps even limited to childcare, and thus the image of a man soothing his daughter puts this ideology into question and challenges gender stereotypes as revealed at another incident: 'Two men cannot look after a baby. Next time bring a woman'.[6] The fact that men can mother as well creates a tension, as women have been considered the 'natural' and 'sole' carers. Therefore, the women's reaction to Jenkin, manifested in the form of offering help, arises not because either the father or his daughter is in trouble, but because the traditional family ideology is challenged, an ideology that society have come to accept as 'normal'. Her response illustrates the sexism and stigmatisation of difference that prevent equality. These recent examples of sexism clearly indicate that although families of choice have been made visible on legal grounds, members continue to be made publicly invisible in the sense that their choices are still considered in relation to established gender norms. In other words, the legal

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5. *The Everyday Sexism I Face as a Stay-at-home Dad* (2018), <*https*://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-44718727> [accessed 27 July 2018].

6. Ibid.

recognition has not been adequate to liberate individuals from oppression, stigmatisation and everyday sexism.

The family has been the subject of various disciplines, including politics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history, because it relates to concerns and problems of the wider society rather than merely concerning the individuals residing within it. The economic, political, legal, and ideological structures of the wider society are sustained through the structure of the family, as in the example of the New Right, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One. Therefore, the changes in these structures depend on changes in familial arrangements. For example, an increased number of fathers participating in childcare would lead to society benefitting from women's capacities in diverse fields. The continued stigmatisation and phobias towards non-normative families underline the importance of Lessing's fiction. Her work represents the pull between traditional and non-normative families. The ongoing and conflicting debates surrounding alternative kinship and domesticities show that family is an essential way of claiming Lessing's legacy in the contemporary context. As the recent articles from the BBC and *The Guardian* illustrate, 'the fight for equality is still on'.[7] As such, studies of non-normative families would create ways in which this fight can spread across wider society to the benefit of individuals and not institutions. The liberation of family from traditional ideology would bring liberation and equality for individuals.

The broken promises that have recently been made by politicians about equality if not liberation demonstrates that the struggle is ongoing. In 2016, Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump's daughter said: 'As president, my father will change the labor laws that were put in place at a time when women weren't a significant portion of the workplace, and he will focus on making quality childcare affordable and accessible for all'.[8] Addressing the problems of women in the workplace, Trump called pregnancy 'an

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7. *The Guardian View on LGBT Rights: The fight for equality is still on* (2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/03/the-guardian-view-on-lgbt-rights-the-fight-for-equality-is-still-on> [accessed 3 July 2018].

8. Erin Gloria Ryan, *Ivanka Trump Sets World's Lowest Bar, Faceplants* (2017) <https://www.thedailybeast.com/ivanka-trump-sets-worlds-lowest-bar-faceplants> [accessed 10 December 2018].

inconvenience', promising equal pay for mothers and single women.[9] During his presidential campaign, Trump tweeted that he also promised to fight discrimination against those who live in non-normative families: 'Thank you to the LGBT community! […] I will fight for you'.[10] Journalist Dan Diamond reported that the promised 'fight' has never been realised: 'Despite Trump's promise to defend LGBT rights, his health agency has blocked efforts to combat discrimination, [by removing] LGBT-friendly language from documents'.[11] These promises have all failed when it comes to their practice.

Recently, British Prime Minister Theresa May pledged to build 'a country that works for everyone', and promised that her party are 'going to give people more control over their lives'.[12] May's statement recalls Comrade Johnny's speech in *The Sweetest Dream*, where he addresses his followers by saying, 'You will be building a new world, you young comrades. […] You can overturn the past, destroy it, build a new'.[13] Both May and Johnny promise positive and new visions that will lead to the establishment of a more egalitarian society. However, inequalities still exist in British society, such as the gender pay gap caused by unequal distribution of labour in the family. May's society parallels that of Johnny in the way that it is built on promises rather than on realities. Lessing's fiction raises the key question that problematises these promises: 'so what's new?' What has changed between Vladimir Lenin of the Communist Russia and Communist leader Johnny of *The Sweetest Dream*, or between female conservative party leaders Thatcher and May?[14]

The dominant family ideology is built upon taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations about how men, women, and children should behave in line with

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9. J. Scott Applewhite, *Daughter Ivanka Trump raises issues father rarely mentions* (2016), <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/07/21/ivanka-trump-rnc-speech-donald-trump/> [accessed 15 December 2018].

10. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/742771576039460864?lang=en> [accessed 2 January 2019].

11. Dan Diamond, *Trump Administration Dismantles LGBT Friendly Policies* (2018), <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/19/trump-lgbt-rights-discrimination-353774> [accessed 10 July 2018].

12. Theresa May, *A Country that Works For Everyone* (2017) <https://www.conservatives.com/OurTeam/Theresa-May> [accessed 25 December 2018].

13. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, pp. 77-8.

14. Ibid., p. 448.

patriarchal imperatives. Lessing's characters usually fall outside these assumptions and expectations through their involvement in non-normative relationships, such as the transracial relationship between Mary and Moses in *The Grass is Singing*, or in non-normative forms of intimacy like Sarah Durham in *Love, Again*, who subverts the politics of ageing by falling in love with two younger men. At times, the characters create alternative domesticities in their search for new families and kinship, such as Alice Mellings in *The Good Terrorist* and Emily and Gerald in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. In other instances, they become destructive towards traditional family values, such as Ben Lovatt in *The Fifth Child*, or they detach from the idea of the family and renew their experiences outside it, like Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark*. Taken comparatively, these characters suggest that Lessing's fiction offers creative and subversive ways of responding to discussions about family in the contemporary context. Her work does not change the families we live in, but bears the potential to alter the ways we perceive the idea of the family.

The theme of the family has illustrated that Lessing's novels are not didactic, but rather suggest alternative forms rather than attempting to present solutions, and in this way they empower readers. Although she abandoned the family and motherhood in her personal life, her fiction realigns these two concepts as a way to liberate the family from the dominant ideology, rather than freeing individuals from the idea of the family. Lessing's protagonists are represented as being in conflict, between their individual selves and the collective, and it is through the theme of the family that this conflict is brought into view. Her fiction points to the human potential to challenge conventions and bring about change in its real sense. In her fiction, the pull between traditional and non-normative families reflects contemporary debates on the family. Recent attempts to reassert the family as the stable and natural backbone of the nation mean ignoring the problems that individuals still face within traditional notions of the family. The continuation of traditional ideas about family suggests that Lessing's fiction remains meaningful and relevant today.

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