

Female Identity in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

Heba Mohamed Abd El Aziz*

The Arab Academy for Science and technology-Cairo, Egypt

Corresponding Author: Heba Mohamed Abd El Aziz, E-mail: Heba_bibo2001@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of art in general and literature in particular, the presence of Doris Lessing could not be denied as one of the most influential English novelists in the 1960s. Doris Lessing is a writer who is concerned with the representation of women identity in the West. In her renowned novel, *The Golden Notebook* Lessing aims at showcasing women identity in Europe and any aspect related to them, i.e. their psychology, political lives, relation to men and children, their place in a male-dominated society and their frequent attempts to escape from the social and political oppression. The aim of this paper is to present a truthful account of female identity from a feminist point of view.

INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing's adoption of the feminist movement is due to tackling the politics of gender. Moreover, she focuses on the role of the family and the individual in society; the struggle inside one's self and the conflict between the individual consciousness and the collective good. It is Doris's life experience that leads her to gather all these issues in her autobiographical fictional works. In an article entitled "Doris Lessing's Mara and Dann" (1999), Doris Lessing's writings are described as follows:

Lessing's deeply autobiographical fiction emerges from her early experiences in Africa, her years of engagement with social and political issues, her concern for moral and psychological attitudes, and the role of women in modern society Her complex writing is not easily categorized, but always evident is her concern about the madness and self-destructive tendencies of modern society. Although not intended as such, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) has been regarded as a feminist landmark. (246)

Doris Lessing uses *The Golden Notebook* to reflect the consequences of the Hiroshima Bomb and the fall of the British Empire exemplified in violence, terror, chaos, as well

as the break up in every aspect. She, further, transcends the Marxist idea that society consists of two main groups: the exploiting class and the working class. However, she thinks that the society is much more complicated as it consists not only of the capitalist group and the working-class group, but also of men and women and that women are oppressed by men. By this, Doris Lessing moves from Marxism to feminism and thus, *The Golden Notebook* is one of her feminist landmarks.

The novel begins with "*The two women were alone in the London flat*" (GN 3). These two women are Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs. Both are divorced, each with a child. Each of them is disillusioned by communism and are, therefore, no longer members in the communist party. However, the main focus is on Anna Wulf who has a personal, artistic and social breakdown. Out of fear of chaos, Anna keeps four notebooks that record every phase in her life. The black notebook is dedicated to her life in central Africa, the red notebook to her experience in the Communist Party, and her thoughts concerning the current political situations in England, the yellow notebook records her life as a writer and about Ella, Anna's alter ego and the heroine of the novel inside the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*, which Anna

has created, and finally the blue notebook records Anna's dreams and emotions. However, these four notebooks are followed by a fifth one which is the golden notebook that is considered a successful self-healing from the fragmentation and the blocked creativity to which Anna has been exposed. *The Golden Notebook* is a story of a female writer who experiences alienation as well as fragmentation in her consciousness in a disintegrated world. The heroine, Anna Wulf, is represented as being subjected to physical as well as psychological exile.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Male Oppression and Free Women

In fact, in *The Golden Notebook*, there are no scenes of violence. Instead, men oppress women emotionally. Thus, Doris Lessing describes every minute detail concerning her heroines. She analyzes their feelings when they are in love, and when they are betrayed or deserted, but she does not mention anything about the men's feelings.

The Golden Notebook starts with Molly and Anna introducing themselves as 'free women'. They believe that to be free means to be single, free of marriage obsessions and to have physical relations whenever they want even with married men. This is illustrated in Molly's quotation: "*Free. Do you know, when I was away, I was thinking about us and I have decided that we're a completely new type of woman.*" (GN 5)

In *a Literature of Their Own* (1999), Elaine Showalter comments:

The novel of the 1960s, particularly Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, began to point out in a variety of notes of disillusionment and betrayal, that the 'free women' were not so free after all. Lessing's free women are Marxists who think they understand how the oppression of women is connected to the class struggle, who have professions and children, and who lead independent lives: but they are fragmented and helpless creatures, still locked into dependency upon men. (301)

Thus, the title 'Free Women' is ironic because they are not free at all. Being 'not free' is highlighted through the conversation between Molly and Anna:

[Anna] If we lead what is known as free lives, that is, lives like men, why shouldn't we use the same language?

[Molly] Because we are not the same. That is the point. (GN 43)

Thus, it is when they become aware of their identities that they feel they are not free. Also, when Anna looks back at her life, she discovers that her life, as well as Molly's, have not been free from men. On the contrary, they are badly influenced by them:

Both of us are dedicated to the proposition that we are tough-no listen, I'm serious. I mean—a marriage breaks up, well, we say, it's not important. We bring up kids without men—nothing to it, we say we can cope. We spend years in the communist party and then we say, well, well, we made a mistake, too bad. Now we had

to admit that the great dream has faded and the truth is something else—that we'll never be any use. (GN 51)

As Ella and her friend Julia - the heroines of the novel inside the novel- are Anna's and Molly's alter egos, they, like Anna and Molly, have the same attitude towards being 'free women':

[Ella]: My dear Julia, we've chosen to be free women, and this is the price we pay, that's all.

[Julia]: Free! What's the use of us being free if they aren't? I swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, has the old idea of good women and bad women. (GN 438-9)

Thus, the attempt to achieve freedom is the main reason behind the heroines' sense of fragmentation. They are trying all the time to get rid of this feeling in pursuit of wholeness. In his book *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (1994), Gayle Greene comments:

Lessing demonstrates that both male and female behaviors represent crippling adjustments to a destructive society, but that men are more crippled because they are locked into postures that prohibit change. (10)

Being unable to live in a complicated society, men sometimes kill or try to kill themselves like Molly's son, Tommy, who tried to shoot himself but the shot left him blind. In addition, some men try to survive in such a society through trapping women or gaining money like Michael, Anna's lover. However, the main focus in such disintegrated societies is on women who suffer self-disintegration and try all the time to achieve integration and wholeness. For instance, being a member of the communist party is one of Anna's attempts to achieve integration: "*...a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live*" (GN 154). So, Anna joins the communist party to achieve wholeness. However, she gradually discovers that there is a yawning gap between the communists' theories and realities. The communists are nothing but hypocrites, capable of doing nothing.

All the women in the novel are placed in a society that does not provide women with any sort of freedom. They are treated like second-class citizens, a fact asserted by Anna and Saul:

[Saul]... I've always been a hypocrite and in fact I enjoy being boss where women are second class citizen, I enjoy being boss and being flattered.

[Anna] 'Good', I said. Because in a society where not one man in ten thousand begins to understand the ways in which women are second-class citizens, we have to rely for company on the men who are at least not hypocrites. (GN 577)

Male oppression towards females in the novel is represented through Anna's love for Michael who deserted her after a five-year relationship in order to marry another woman. Roberta Rubenstein in *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing* (1979) concludes:

The most profound dimension of Anna Wulf's psychic split is generated, however, not at the political but at the emotional level, by the dissolution of a five-year relationship with her lover, Michael, the dynamics of which form the central subject of the yellow notebook. (79)

All the man-woman relationships that are represented in the novel highlight the sterility of the man's emotions and the fuller feelings of woman's emotions. Even Anna, who attained that sense of integrity and wholeness whenever she was with Michael, was deserted afterwards:

The morning when Michael woke in my arms he opened his eyes and smiled at me. The warm blue of his eyes as he smiled into my face. I thought: so much of my life has been twisted and painful that now when happiness flooded over with warm glittering blue water, I can't believe it. I say to myself: I am Anna Wulf, this is me, Anna, and I'm happy. (286)

However, this feeling of happiness and integrity changed into a sense of loss when Michael deserted her. She tried to reconstruct her identity by saying:

Anna, Anna, I am Anna, ...and anyway, I can't be ill or give way because of Janet, I could vanish from the world tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter to anyone except to Janet. What then am I, Anna?... who am I, Anna? (GN 373)

Another female figure in the novel who is subjected to male oppression is Marion, the wife of Richard, Anna's ex-husband. Richard's oppression of Marion is summoned in Marion's conversation with Anna:

I've been married to him for years and years and all that time I've been wrapped up in him. Well women are, aren't they? I've thought of nothing else. I've cried myself to sleep night after night for years. And I've made scenes, and been a fool and been unhappy and ... the point is, what for? Because the point is he is not anything, is he? He's not even very good looking. He's not even very intelligent - I don't care if he's ever so important and a captain of industry. ...I thought, my God, for that creature, I've ruined my life. (GN 381)

It is Marion's fragmentation and her sense of loss of identity that led her to adopt an odd behavior like deserting her husband and children, moving to Anna's house and becoming Tommy's friend. Anna describes such eccentricity:

My husband's second wife moving into my house because she can't live without my son ...I was sitting upstairs quiet as a mouse, so as not to disturb Marion and Tommy and thinking I'll simply pack a bag and wander off somewhere and leave them to it. (GN 488)

In the black notebook, there is another figure who is subjected to male oppression; namely, Marie. During the war, Anna joined a communist group and spent a long time with them at a hotel named Mashopi, owned by the British couple; Mr. and Mrs. Boothby. Paul, a member in the communist group, befriended Jackson, the Boothbys' African cook. However, another member of the group, George Hounslow, had an affair with the cook's wife Marie which resulted in the cook and his wife being sacked by the Boothbys. Jackson found another job in the city, but as his wife and children were unable to stay with him, so he sent them to Iceland. Thus, the only victim was the black-African woman, Marie, who was dispatched from her life at The Mashopi Hotel, as well as from her husband.

Besides Marie, there is another character in the yellow notebook named Ella who is Anna's alter ego and the hero-

ine of the novel inside the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*. Ella greatly suffered from Paul, who after giving him all her love, deserted her for another woman. After Anna's reflection of her relationship with Michael, she identifies herself with Ella by saying:

Paul gave birth to Ella, the naïve Ella. He destroyed in her the knowing, doubting, sophisticated Ella and again and again he put her intelligence to sleep, and with her willing connivance, so that she floated darkly on her love for him, on her naivety ... what Ella lost during those five years was the power to create through naivety. (GN 200-1)

Although *The Golden Notebook* embraces political themes, the gender issue is treated more seriously than politics. This fact is admitted by Anna herself as she states: "*The blue notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than any of them*" (GN 448). Consequently, she thinks that the blue notebook, which records her emotional life and her love to Michael is the most truthful of them all.

DISCUSSION

When discussing Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* as regards to sexual life, it is obvious that sexuality is tackled in the shadow of whether women are satisfied during their sexual intercourse with men or not. Although the heroines in *The Golden Notebook* consider themselves 'free women' and are free to have sexual relationships whenever they want even with married or single men, being free creates some limitations to their behavior. This is because they have to accept men's unfaithfulness towards them as well as the society's opinion about them. Men will consider them prostitutes. Also, the wives have to be cautious; otherwise they may lose their husbands.

In spite of the fact that the heroines think they are free in their sexual life, there are some references in the novel to the sterility they face whenever they are having sexual intercourse. For instance, Anna states: "*I have known too many sexual cripples*" (GN 396). In addition, Ella's friend, Julia, claims: "*Sometimes I think we're all in a sort of sexual mad house*" (GN 438). Whereas Ella states: "*Of the ten men I've been in bed with during the last five years eight have been impotent or come too quickly.*" (GN 439)

Doris Lessing summarizes the heroine's experience when she represents Anna as a woman who is always in search for a satisfactory sexual relationship. She is represented as a woman having several sexual affairs and who is all the time attracted to powerful men. For example, in the black notebook, Anna had a sexual intercourse with one of the communists, namely, Willi, who forced her to have a harsh sexual intercourse with him when he discovered that she had an affair with another man, and then left her afterwards. In the blue notebook, she, later, had a relationship with Michael, one that was based on sex not on love. Naturally, he then left her for the sake of his wife. Moreover, Anna met an American communist "*who had a mortal terror of sex, could never stay inside a woman for longer than a few seconds*" (GN 463). In addition, she came to know one of Molly's friends, named

De Silva, who is a womanizer, always picking girls from the street to have sexual intercourses with them. Later, he asked Anna to give him a room in her house for his several sexual intercourses. In addition to all these relations, Anna had an affair with a man called Saul Green. Louise Yelin, in his book *From the Margins of Empire* (1998), describes this relationship, which is the most influential of them all:

However, the most disturbing instance of her attraction to eroticized, infantile, seemingly gratuitous male aggression is her involvement with Saul Green, who subjects her to a 'brutal sexual inspection'. (85)

Saul Green is an American writer who came to Anna's house to rent a room. He is like Anna in her spiritual and emotional breakdown, and in her artistic block. From the moment Saul entered Anna's house, mutual attraction and several sexual intercourses took place between them. Saul severely exacerbates Anna's sense of breakdown. Although she enjoys sex with him, she feels it is full of different emotions. Saul's making love to her is sometimes out of fear of being alone; at other times, she feels it carries within it a sense of indifference towards her feelings as sometimes when she is with him, she feels as if he is making love to another woman: "*He wasn't making love to me. I said to myself, incredulously: he is making love to someone else*" (GN 556). The mixture of fear, cruelty and anger, which Anna usually senses during her sexual intercourse with Saul leads her to feel as if her female body is strange to her:

I sat on my bed and I looked at my thin white arms, at my breasts. My wet sticky centre seemed disgusting, and when I saw my breasts all I could think of was how they were full of milk, and instead of this being pleasurable, it was revolting. This feeling of being alien to my own body caused my head to swim... (GN 584)

During that time, when Anna asked for the advice of her psychotherapist, Mother Sugar or Mrs. Marks, she directed her to experience "*joy-in-destruction*" (GN 568). Although Saul raises Anna's sense of disintegration, i.e. destruction, he is a step in her way towards wholeness, in other words, joy.

On the other hand, there is Ella, Anna's alter ego, who, like her creator, experienced several sexual intercourses with Paul Tanner, which she did not enjoy. However, she felt insulted by his rude attitude. Once he insulted her by saying: "*odd, isn't it, it really is true that if you love a woman sleeping with another woman means nothing.*" (GN 194). Then, their relationship ended when Paul took his decision to travel abroad without referring back to her. After their separation, Ella came to know a man named CY Maitland, who is an American businessman. This man had a strange attitude in bed and she felt unsatisfied with him, as "*he penetrated her almost at once, and came after a few seconds*" (GN 309). A self-centered man, Maitland did not respect her feelings, as when she showed him no satisfaction, he insulted her by saying: "*That's what I like. No problem with you*" (GN 309). Later on, Ella decided not to get involved with him any more. At that moment, Ella felt nostalgic for Paul; the only real man she knew. He was the only man with whom she never felt sexual hunger. Out of this situation, Ella concludes that:

For women like me, integrity isn't chastity, it isn't fidelity, it isn't any of the old words. Integrity is the orgasm.

That is something I haven't any control over. I could never have an orgasm with this man, I can give pleasure and that's all. But why not, am I saying that I can never come except with a man I love? Because what sort of a desert am I condemning myself to if that's true? (GN 311)

However, the above quotation highlights the fact that women are not free in their sexual intercourse; they cannot feel real orgasm except when they love the other part. So, Doris Lessing tackles the idea of real orgasm that cannot be cut off from men.

Thus, for Doris Lessing, sexuality depends on men and for Anna in the yellow notebook: "*There is only one real female orgasm and that is when a man, from the whole of his need and desire takes a woman and wants all her response.*" (GN 205)

When Paul left the country, Ella became unable to feel any real orgasm with any man, thus, unable to achieve any sexual liberty:

Free, we say, yet the truth is that they get erections when they're with a woman they don't give a damn about, but we don't get an orgasm unless we love him. What's free about that? (GN 439)

On the other hand, there is Richard's wife, Marion. She is another figure that suffers from sexual oppression and she hates having a sexual intercourse with him:

I hate going to bed. Once it was the happiest time of my life ... sometimes Richard sleeps with me, but he has to make himself. I knew he was thinking all the time about that little tart he's got in his office. (GN 267-8)

Another aspect related to sexuality and tackled in the novel is the splitting of sex and sentiments. In his book *The Second Sex* (1974), Simone de Beauvoir thinks: "*It is more difficult for the female to dissociate sex and sentiment ... since in feminine adolescence the two are most profoundly associated*" (765). Doris Lessing agrees with Beauvoir. She thinks that it is the attempt to separate sex and sentiment that leads to disintegration. In the novel, Doris Lessing represents men as being able to split both whereas women are unable to do so. Ella is Doris Lessing's good example as "*when her husband attempted to rouse her physical manipulation against her emotions, the end of that was frigidity*" (GN 217). Moreover, her lover, Paul, attempting all the time to show several different personalities, wants women to mirror and cope with each of his multiple faces. For instance, his wife, Muriel, mirrors his stable personality, whereas Ella mirrors his sexual side, by being his sexy mistress:

If he really likes living like that or, at least, needs it, it would explain why he's always dissatisfied with me.

The other side of the sober respectable little wife is the smart, gay, sexy mistress. Perhaps he really would like it if I were unfaithful to him and wore tarty clothes. Well I won't. This is what I am, and if he doesn't like it he can lump it. (GN 211-2)

Thus, in *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing depicts the relationship between men and women in terms of sex and how the woman cannot achieve real orgasm except if she loves the man with whom she is having the intercourse. On

the other hand, the man can have sex with any woman, because, for him, it is a process for satisfying his sexual urge.

Parents-Children Relationship

Concerning family relations in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, there are no scenes of violence but desertion and neglect especially from the fathers' part towards their children. Doris Lessing represents all the families in the novel as broken ones. This breakdown is due to the twisted relationships between fathers and mothers. For instance, Anna got married to Max whom she did not love, gave birth to a daughter, Janet, and then got divorced. Anna's friend, Molly, was married to Richard, gave birth to a son named Tommy and, likewise, she got divorced. In addition, Marion was married to Richard, giving birth to five children and later on led the life of a divorcee. Moreover, there is Ella, Anna's alter ego, who was married to George, gave birth to Michael and then, like all the females in the novel, was divorced in the end. Thus, the relationship between parents and their children in such broken families is an important issue that should be tackled. In *The Politics of the Feminist Novel* (1986), Judi Roller describes the relationship between mothers and children as follows:

In the feminist novel, the mother is usually actively engaged with and emotionally connected to her children. Even more important, children come to exemplify some of what the modern world desperately needs. Children provide, first of all, a link to sanity for many of the women in the feminist novel; they provide a connection to humanity and to reality. They are that thing that, without question, one must stay sane for. (166)

For example, in Anna's family, Max is not mentioned at all and has no role inside the family. Thus, as there is no father figure, Anna is trying to depend on her daughter Janet, but as Janet is still a child, she has nothing to offer. All what Janet needs to do is to avoid her mother's mistakes, and all what she feels is jealousy of her mother's sexual affairs mainly with Richard who was staying with them at home during that time. Later on, Janet decided to go to a boarding school away from her mother's daily care and demands. She declares: "*I want to be ordinary, I don't want to be like you*" (GN 618). Anna analyzes, Janet's attitude as follows:

She had taken a look at the world of disorder, experiment, where people lived from day to day, like balls perpetually jiggling on the top of jets of prancing water, keeping themselves open for any new feeling or adventure, and had decided it wasn't for her. (GN 618)

Janet's departure to a boarding school was considered a loss for Anna. As Anna usually involved herself in shaping Janet's day from early morning till night, it was Janet who prevented Anna from going into pieces. Thus, when Janet left to a boarding school, Anna felt lonely and loveless.

On the other hand, in Molly's family, being dissatisfied with his life, Tommy tried to put an end to it by shooting himself; however, the shot left him blind. Afterwards, Tommy continued in his life as a socialist believer in cooperation with Richard's second wife, Marion. The relationship between Tommy and Marion is something very odd on which

Molly comments: "*My husband's second wife moving into my house because she can't live without my son.*" (GN 488)

Fragmentation and Its Relation to Psychoanalysis

In *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing introduces the idea of psychoanalysis and its relation to the heroine's fragmented self. Anna's fragmented consciousness is portrayed in her dreams which are analyzed through Anna's psychoanalyst, Mother Sugar. Suzan Faludi in her book *Backlash: the Undeclared War against Women* (1999) thinks that having female therapists is very important because they "dispense the opposite advice of traditional male clinicians: take actions and speak up, they urge" (154). Thus, Anna reports all her dreams to her psychoanalyst who analyzes them as being parallel to Anna's life. It is Anna's trials to overcome her writing block and her search for identity that go in vain under the oppression of men that lead her to the field of psychoanalysis. One of Anna Wulf's dreams in the novel is noteworthy as it summons Anna's life with the fragmentation inside and outside her. Anna narrates this dream to Mother Sugar as follows:

I dreamed I held a kind of casket in my hand and inside it was something very precious ... there was a small crowd of people ... they were waiting for me to hand them the casket ... but when I handed it over, I saw suddenly they were all businessmen, brokers ... I shouted 'open the box, open the box', but they couldn't hear me ... I opened the box and I forced them to look ... there was a mass of fragments and pieces. Not a whole thing, broken into fragments but bits and pieces from everywhere, all over the world ... They took the box from me and opened it ... but they were delighted ... I saw that there was something in the box. (GN 241-2)

According to Mrs. Marks, this dream parallels and mirrors Anna's life in every aspect. The group of the businessmen in the dream mirrors those with whom Anna had love affairs because most of them were businessmen. The group of businessmen in the dream did not respond to her when she asked them to open the box, equally like the men who did not respond to her feminine needs in reality. The phrase 'fragments and pieces' mentioned in the dream mirrors Anna's racial, political and sexual struggles.

Another notable dream, which reflects Anna's oppression in sexuality is her dream of a dwarf man who is sometimes deformed and sometimes having protruding pennies. This dwarf symbolizes the men who intruded upon Anna's life, whether potent or impotent. Thus, Anna's dreams really reflect her fragmented life. However, Mrs. Sugar's mission is to prevent Anna from seeing her life as being fragmented but to see the past, present and future as being coherent. This results in Anna's recording of her life in four notebooks and her trial to pull their threads together in the golden notebook.

The Journey towards Integration

Although Doris Lessing portrays in the novel all the aspects that prevent women from being free, the novel mixes new and conventional endings. She creates Anna who has a writer's block and a sense of breakdown; however, she frees this

Anna from the deadly endings of the 20th century novels where the female protagonist is subjected to death or madness. On the contrary, she places her in a journey from fragmentation to integration.

Doris Lessing is trying to convey a message, which is that admitting failure is the first step towards integration and that sometimes the break down is a way towards self healing. In a conversation between Anna and Molly, Anna declared that she was mistaken when she depended on men, and she was also mistaken, as well, joining the Communist Party. Thus, she frankly admits her failure to achieve freedom and to be a 'free woman':

Why do our lots never admit failure? Never. It might be better for us if we did. And it's not only love and men. Why can't we say something like this-we are people, because of the accident of how we were situated in history, who were so powerfully part - but only in our imaginations, and that's the point - of the great dream, that now we have to admit that the great dream has faded and the truth is something else - that we'll never be any use. (GN 51)

The great dream which Anna refers to in this quotation is the dream of being free women. Anna and her alter ego, Ella, think that being free women is a dream that has faded and admitting such failure has helped them to attain wholeness. Ella admits: "*I should have said that my being with Paul meant I remained myself and remained independent and free*" (GN 298). Moreover, Anna admits, "...and when had this new frightened vulnerable Anna been born? She knew: it was when Michael had abandoned her." (GN 390)

Although Anna and Ella are represented as being parallel to each other throughout the whole novel, Ella becomes someone else different from her creator. Towards the end of the novel, being completely sexless and away from men's control, Ella becomes able to be a real free woman. She also achieves integration through having the potentialities to write a book. It is at this point that Ella is separated from her creator, Anna. In the section entitled 'the golden notebook', Anna admits this fact by saying:

I was watching Ella moving about my room ... after a while I realized what I had done before, creating 'the third'- the woman altogether better than I was. For I could positively mark the point where Ella left reality, left how she would, in fact, behave because of her nature; and moved into a large generosity of personality impossible to her. But I didn't dislike this new person I was creating; I was thinking that quite possibly these marvelous generous things we walk side by side in our imaginations could come into existence, simply because we need them, because we imagine in them. Then I began to laugh because of the distance between what I was imagining and what in fact I was, let alone what Ella was. (GN 607-8)

Thus, Ella symbolizes Anna's illusionary dream to become a free woman. Even though Anna Wulf suffered from the loss of her lover Michael, she accepted the fact with laughter. However, it was Anna's involvement with Saul Green that helped her in her journey towards wholeness. An-

na's conversation with Saul asserts the fact that he helped her in that journey:

[Saul] instead of making a record of my sins in your diary, why don't you write another novel?

[Anna] the real reason is that I have a writer's block ... and it's the first time I have admitted it. (GN 576-7)

So, the episode of Anna's breakdown reaches an end when Saul, the man who destroyed Anna, eventually, supported her and encouraged her to write a novel through providing her with its theme, as well as, its first sentence: "*The two Women were alone in the London flat*" (GN 610). Anna, too, who was jealous of Saul to the point of insanity, provided him with the theme and first sentence of his novel: "*On a dry hillside in Algeria, the soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle*" (GN 610). Focusing on these two quotations highlights the reality that conforms to the British society at that time which is according to Louise Yelin in *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (1998):

'War' is a male province and 'private life' is a female domain: these conventions are destabilized by the feminine genealogy of his text and the masculine genealogy of hers. (87)

Thus, Doris Lessing's message which she wants to convey is that to admit failure and to admit that there is no integration is the first step towards wholeness and integration. Towards the end of the novel, Doris Lessing portrays her characters as being able to be 'free women'. This happened only when the characters accepted their fragmentation and tried to cope with the society they were living in. For instance, Ella became sexless and was able to write a book, Marion became a political activist and Molly was married. Besides, Anna was able to write a book entitled 'Free Women' in which she created another Anna who gave marriage counseling and also created Molly who got married in the end.

Exile: Physical and Psychological

Through a thorough reading of Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, one can deduce that almost it is male oppression that leads to alienation in its two forms, physical and psychological.

Physical Exile

In Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, it is the political situations taking place around her that lead to that sense of alienation. The novel presents Lessing's protagonist Anna Wulf, who resembles her in every aspect except in the writer's block which Doris Lessing does not suffer from. Anna is represented in the novel as being subjected to physical as well as psychological alienation, a state that results from the political situations giving rise to the superiority of men over women. Starting the section entitled 'Free women: 1' with the quotation: "*The two women were alone in the London flat*" (GN 3), which reflects Anna's presence in London and following this section with the black notebook that records Anna's memories in black Africa are strong proofs that she

is physically alienated. According to Patricia Spacks, in her article "Free Women" (1986):

The black notebook - about Africa, about her writing, about her finances - offers the truth of feeling, dominated by what Anna comes to consider her "lying nostalgia" for the past. (97)

The black notebook represents Anna's life in Zimbabwe from 1939 to 1945. She lived there and was married to Max Wulf: the biological father of Anna's daughter, Janet. So, although Anna was born in London, Doris Lessing places her in Africa through the black notebook. In Africa, Anna was staying in a hotel named Mashopi where a group of communists used to spend their weekend there. This hotel is owned by a British couple named Mr. and Mrs. Boothby, but the workers there are native black Africans. The black notebook carries in itself the black-white discrimination which Anna and many others admit that it is wrong and dream of putting an end to. But as there is no solution, the characters grow to be disillusioned.

The black-white struggle is frequently represented in Anna's dream of a Mashopi film which is directed by a white man whereas the technicians and the cameramen are all black. They are represented as turning their machines into guns while the director is trying to defend his version. Thus, this Mashopi dream symbolizes the eternal conflict between the blacks and whites which Anna experienced during her life in Zimbabwe and dreamed of finding a solution to.

Psychological Exile

The Golden Notebook clearly represents the theme of fragmentation and cracking up in every aspect, i.e., the cracking up in the national and global politics as well as one's self and consciousness. The clear connection between both cannot be denied because the degeneration in the surrounding atmosphere leads to the degeneration of the self. Thus, the deformity in the social, political and moral systems leads to the fragmentation in one's self. In *From the Margins of Empire*, Doris Lessing draws a comparison between both:

An epoch of our society, and of socialism, was breaking up at that time. It had been falling apart since the Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima... I feel as if the Bomb has gone off inside myself, and in people around me. That's what I mean by cracking up. (qtd. In Yelin 65)

Like Doris Lessing, Anna herself admits this fact when she states in the beginning of the novel: "... the point is that as far as I can see, everything is cracking up" (GN 3). In addition, dividing her life into four phases and collecting them in four notebooks prove the disintegration of self which, in turn, reflects the sense of psychological alienation which the heroines are experiencing. Anna Wulf describes the four notebooks as follows:

I keep four notebooks, a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf, the writer, a red notebook concerned with politics, a yellow notebook, in which I make stories out of my experience, and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary. (GN 455)

Thus, the fragmented form of the novel successfully represents the disintegration of the heroine who is living in a

disintegrated world. Moreover, the sense of fragmentation results from the heroines' usual attempts to be 'free women'; to free themselves completely from men. This asserts the fact that females are in a state of opposition to the sex/gender system with which they co-exist. Yelin in *From the Margins of Empire* declares that the representation of gender in *The Golden Notebook* has several components:

...male dominance; the ideological confinement of middle-class women, as mothers and wives, in a reconstituted 'family; women's attraction to misogynist, powerful men and, implicitly, to the power they wield; and compulsory heterosexuality or, seen from another perspective, institutionalized homophobia. These components are elements in the reciprocal reconstruction of gender and society that preoccupied Britain in the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s. (82)

Narrative Point of View

The Golden Notebook is not considered to be autobiographical in the full sense of the word. It is a novel that attempts to represent the life of Doris Lessing who has some common characteristics with her heroine Anna Wulf, but not all of them as, for example, she does not have an artistic block like her.

During the 1960s, and because of women's immigration and their awareness of their gender, the British society became no longer simple and no longer homogeneous. On the contrary, it became too heterogeneous. Thus, Doris Lessing thinks that the traditional form of the novel will not succeed in portraying this diversity that is why she uses a new style of narrative instead of the traditional form. In the book entitled *Women on the House of Fiction* (1992), Lorna Sage comments on Doris Lessing in relation to this aspect:

She has discovered as she went on that the realist formula (the heroine whose process of growing up also symbolizes and synthesizes the wider conflict of her culture) would not answer. (13)

Following Gerard Genette's classification of the narrative voice, it is obvious that in *The Golden Notebook*, there is a shift from one narrative voice to the other, i.e. the narrative voice is sometimes heterodiegetic like in the sections entitled 'Free Women' especially when the writer comments on the actions. The narrative is also heterodiegetic in the yellow notebook which is a novel inside the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*. In these sections, there is no presence of the author. However, Doris Lessing creates a female character and named her Anna Wulf, who somehow represents Doris Lessing. At other times, the voice is autodiegetic especially in the notebooks, except the yellow one. In the notebooks, Anna Wulf, the character who resembles Doris Lessing in a way or another, is using the first-person narrator 'I' as she is writing a diary of her life. Doris Lessing is using this shift from one narrative voice to the other to serve her aim which is the representation of the disintegrated world in which she and the characters are living, as well as the effect of this disintegration on their selves and personalities.

Through the method of narration, Doris Lessing presents the characters as entrapped in a fragmented society – disar-

ray that results from political problems that influence people's consciousness. The main heroine and narrator of the novel is Anna Wulf who suffers from a psychic fragmentation. Her description of this fragmentation is described in four consecutive notebooks: black, red, yellow and blue, and each of them is tackling a certain phase in her life. Moreover, she presents her sense of fragmentation through papering the walls of her room with newspaper clippings that embody the horrific events taking place all over the world. However, it is only through connecting the threads of the four notebooks in one golden notebook, together with her ability to write, that help her achieve psychic equilibrium.

Another character is Anna's friend, Molly Jacobs, who is different from Anna. Molly is more open, more care-free and more extrovert, but she resembles Anna in that both were once communist members and divorced with children. In addition, they and all the female characters in the novel want men to be real ones, but they are forgetting the fact that men are like women, they are also living in a tattered society.

Moreover, both Anna and Molly resemble each other in that both think that they are leading free lives like men. Nonetheless, they are not really free, especially, Anna, whose freedom is a source of her victimization as she exposes herself to men's lust. In addition, being female in gender makes her with no freedom. She is bound by her physical nature as a woman and her usual need for love and protection.

Another aspect that is related to Doris's representation of characters is that of dualism. There is a duality in the representation of Doris's novel and her characters. Doris Lessing has created the main novel entitled *The Golden Notebook* and also fashioned a novel inside the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*. There is a duality between both concerning the representation of the characters. This is evidenced by the fact that Anna is like Ella - both are female characters with blocked creativity. Molly is like Julia as both are the heroines' female friends. Janet is as Michael in terms of being the heroines' children, and finally Max is like Willi since both are the biological fathers of the children. However, this dualism is broken towards the end of the novel, as Ella becomes no longer Anna:

I see Ella, walking slowly about a big empty room, thinking, waiting, I, Anna, see Ella who is of course, Anna. But that is the point, for she is not. The moment I, Anna, write: Ella rings up Julia to announce, etc. then Ella floats away from me and becomes someone else. (GN 439-40)

Moreover, the characters are represented in the novel as either accepting their fragmentation or not accepting and destroying themselves. For example, Anna did not destroy her split parts; on the contrary, she pulled them back together in the section entitled the golden notebook. On the other hand, her ex-husband Richard confined himself only to the economic side, while Tommy tried to put an end to his life.

Furthermore, Doris Lessing represents the role of women as being limited in a male-dominated society. There is Anna and her alter ego, Ella, who are writers with blocked creativity. In addition, there is Molly who is an artist who performs minor roles on stage. There are wives as well as a woman editor of a woman's magazine. However, there is

no woman doctor, woman engineer, or any woman topping such jobs. On the other hand, the highest echelons are men's monopoly. There is Richard who is a businessman; there is Paul who works as a doctor and also Ella's father who is an army officer. This distinction points out the fact that women are not free even in taking part in such top-notch jobs that are confined only to men.

Eventually, it could be concluded that the only fact that gathers all the characters is that in order to achieve wholeness, they have to admit fragmentation. In her book entitled *Women on the House of Fiction*, Sage states:

Gradually, we realize, this filing system undermines its own purpose - each notebook spells out the same message, that putting yourself in order is the problem, not the solution. Joining the party, or finding a genial Jungian analyst, or making up stories to live inside are all strategies for denying the underlying incoherence of things, or rather, their common ground in violence and diversity. You represent yourself best by letting yourself fall apart, crack up, and break down. (15)

Doris Lessing successfully mixes the form, the character portrayal and the narrative technique together to introduce the most important theme of the novel which is that of the 'cracking up' and 'fragmentation' of life as well as one's self and consciousness. As Doris Lessing thinks that the meaning of the novel lies in its form, she introduces an innovative form which is something new to the British fiction at that time. Although *The Golden Notebook* appears to be a conventional novel, Doris likes to introduce a new kind of form which is the formless one that resembles life and people, exemplified in her protagonist Anna Wulf who has a literary and psychological breakdown. As a result, she divides the novel into six sections, five of them are entitled 'Free Women', and each of them begins with a sentence that summarizes the plot. For example, Doris starts the section entitled 'Free Women: 1' with "*Anna meets her friend Molly in the summer of 1957 after a separation.*" (GN 3) and ends the novel with the section entitled 'Free Women: 5' that begins with "*Molly gets married and Anna has an affair*" (GN 617). Each of these 'Free Women' sections is followed by random extracts from four notebooks: black, red, yellow, and blue respectively. This succession is repeated four times after each 'Free Women' section except the last one which is free from this succession of notebooks. In addition, the sixth section is dedicated to the golden notebook which represents Anna's literary breakdown, the fragmentation of her personality and the beginning of her integration. This fragmented structure is a means by which Doris Lessing represents reality, i.e. the splitting and fragmentation of society as well as one's self and consciousness. This is summarized in "The Essential Library Night and Day" (1996) as follows:

The book dissolves into notebooks: black, red, yellow, and blue. They tell contrasting, contradictory stories: about Africa, radical politics, autobiography, breakdown and psychoanalysis. The aim is to reach the ideal notebook, the Golden Notebook, where these elements unify into a new kind of fiction. ...The confident social realism of the fifties was challenged. Novels no longer

had to be social records, or proclaim moral truths. They were open to contradiction, plurality, and breakdown. "The breakdown has real causes; the search for meaning is a genuine quest. Lessing's wide-ranging writing has since taken her in many directions (political realism, fantasy, science fiction) in search of wholeness. (32)

The structure of the novel allows the reader to read it in several different ways. First, it can be read as one block, from the first to the last page. The second way is to read the 'Free Women' sections altogether because they form a self-contained novel, followed by reading the succession of the notebooks in the same sequence of their arrangement. In a book entitled *Modern British Women Writers* (2002), Vicki Janik and Emmanuel Nelson describe this structure as follows: "This combination of flexibility of structure and coherence of meaning in the context of a foregrounding of the fiction as fiction makes *The Golden Notebook* one of the early successes of postmodernism." (200)

In addition to the form, the method of narration has an effective role in portraying the theme of fragmentation. Concerning *The Golden Notebook*, the black, red, blue and the golden notebook as well follow the first person method of narration, whereas, the five sections entitled 'Free Women' along with the yellow notebook are written in the third person narrative voice. However, towards the end of the novel, it is noticed that the 'Free Women' sections are written by Anna Wulf herself. Thus, Doris's Anna is Anna's Anna. Her conversation with Saul Green asserts this fact:

My mind went blank in a sort of panic. I laid down the pencil. I saw him staring at me, willing me, forcing me - I picked the pencil again. "I'm going to give you the first sentence then. There are the two women you are, Anna. Write down: The two women were alone in the London flat." (GN 610)

The last sentence in the above-mentioned quotation is the first sentence with which Anna starts the section entitled 'Free Women: 1'. Thus, the presence of Anna as a narrator is sometimes overt, using the first person narrator, and at other times it is covert when she uses the third person narrator, or when she dramatizes herself as a character called Ella.

In *Liberating Literature* (1994), Maria Luret describes Doris Lessing's use of such form and method of narration in *The Golden Notebook* as follows:

Lessing's formal innovations in *The Golden Notebook* likewise influenced feminist writing. The mixture of first person voice in some of the notebooks, third person fictional narrative in others and the Russian doll-like framing technique of novels within the novel, makes for a complex multilayered text which not only mirrors the many layers of Anna Wulf's subjectivity but also collapses realism into modernism and modernism into postmodernism. (109)

Another technical feature that appears in the novel is Doris's language and her choice of words. In the five sections entitled 'Free Women', the titles are symbolic and ironic at the same time as they reflect the writer's unfulfilled wish to be free from anything that can prevent her from attaining her freedom. It is obvious when noticing the 'Free Women'

sections that the language and the choice of words are free from any difficulty although Doris Lessing does not intend to choose such plain and easy words or style, given the fact that she has written under the pressure of thought and emotion. But what is ironic is that the language, the choice of words and the subject matter are all free except the women themselves who are in fetters. The idea of being not free is always highlighted through the recurrent conversation between Molly and Anna: "*Free women*" said Anna ... *they still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them.*"(GN4)

As everything is cracking up during the fifties and sixties, also the incidents that are taking place in the novel are very few and unrelated. They function as a reflection of the fragmented souls during that time. For example, nothing is known about Molly Jacobs, who is the second free woman in the novel, except few disparate events. She is an actress and a divorcee who went abroad for a year, and was once a member in the Communist Party. Nothing more is known about her. In addition, the incidents themselves are inconsistent, mirroring the fragmented self of Anna Wulf. For example, the golden notebook ends with Anna starting to write a novel entitled *Free Women*. Nevertheless, 'Free Women: 5' section ends with Anna's decision to quit writing and to join another job: "... and I'm going to join the Labour Party and teach a night class for delinquent kids" (GN 635). Moreover, there is no consistency in mentioning the age of Molly's son, Tommy who, as in 'Free Women: 1' section is described as: "*He was over nineteen*" (GN 17) during the year of 1957. However, in the blue notebook and exactly on the 7th of January 1950: "*Tommy was seventeen this week*" (GN 217). Then, he traveled to Sicily and nothing more is known about him. Thus, such inconsistencies in relating these events are nothing but a reflection of Anna's distorted and fragmented mind. In an article entitled. "Self-Analytic Women: *The Golden Notebook*" (1986), Paul Schlueter claims:

...attempts at resolving such inconsistencies must ultimately be impossible; they seem to be part of the attempt on Anna's part to reflect and emphasize certain parts of life, not to mirror them perfectly in all respects. (51)

Concerning the details, Doris Lessing is very much interested in the minute details, perhaps because the fragmentation of the society leaves little room for real, momentous incidents to happen, forcing the author to focus only on minute, perhaps less important details. She is keen on describing everything in people's lives like food, clothes, love, marriage, war, politics and things of the sort. Such meticulousness reinforces the themes and ideas of the novel. There is a conversation between Anna and Saul in the golden notebook that reflects how heedful Doris Lessing is of specifics: "It should be a delight to feel the roughness of a carpet under smooth soles, a delight to feel heat strike the skin, a delight to stand upright, knowing the bones are moving easily under the flesh." (GN 585)

Furthermore, Doris Lessing's description of food and the way it is eaten is very figurative. For example, in the section entitled 'Free Women: 1', her detailed description of the bowls of strawberries reflects the characters' physical pleasure and strong friendship:

Molly swiftly filled glasses with wine and set them on the white sill ... and the two women sat in the sunlight, sighing with pleasure and stretching their legs in the thin warmth, looking at the colours of the fruit in the bright bowls and at the red wine. (GN 13)

On the other hand, there is Molly's son, Tommy, and his way of eating which reflects his distorted and weird state:

Tommy ate his strawberries until they were not left, berry after berry. He didn't speak, and neither did they. They sat watching him eat, as if he had willed them to do this. He ate carefully. His mouth moved in the act of eating as it did in the act of speaking, every word separate, each berry whole and separate. (GN 33)

Another technique that Doris Lessing uses in the novel is that of dreams. Doris uses this technique in an attempt to explore Anna's inner life. The dream technique is used to represent the uneasiness which the protagonist faces in her inner world and helps her to see through herself and her dilemma. It also helps in highlighting the main theme of the novel. On the other hand, the film sequence is used by Doris Lessing to connect the disintegrated events.

Doris Lessing thinks that there is a close connection between her use of dreams, representing her daily life, and resolving the artistic block. Anna has several dreams that reflect different periods in her life. For example, she dreamed of her disillusionment with the Communist Party; she dreamed of her artistic block, and the desertion of her lover, Michael, as well as her will to be a free woman.

Concerning her disillusionment with communism, there is a dream in the red notebook which represents Anna's despair with communism and her feeling that her political activism is nonsense. In that dream, there was a picture of a map of the Soviet Union coloured in red and other colours for the rest of the world, and then these colours melted and dissolved into one another:

This is a moment of almost unbearable happiness, the happiness seems to swell up, so that everything suddenly burst, explodes - I was suddenly standing in space, in silence...the slowly turning world was slowly dissolving, disintegrating and flying off into fragments, all through space, so that all around me were weightless fragments drafting about, bouncing into each other, and drifting away. The world had gone and there is chaos. (GN 285)

In addition, there is another dream which represents Anna's artistic block. In the blue notebook, Anna dreamed as if seated at the piano in a concert hall, but unable to play the note in front of the audience, which clearly reflects her artistic block. When Anna narrated this dream to her psychoanalyst, the latter attributed it back to the "lack of feelings." (GN 221)

Another recurrent dream is that of Anna's dilemma to be a free woman. She usually dreams of a malicious, dwarf-like old man with protruding pennies, who tries all the time to haunt her, leading her to scream and wake up. Mother Sugar thinks that this dream refers back to the men who have entered Anna's life, especially Michael whose five-year relationship with Anna has affected her a lot. The defeat which

Anna usually faces in her dreams allows her to declare: "I was an Anna who invited defeat from men without even being conscious of it. I was stuck fast in an emotion similar to women of our times that can turn them bitter or lesbian or solitary." (GN 459)

One can notice that the dreams in this novel are not only mentioned but analyzed by the psychotherapist, Mother Sugar. It is a means used by Doris Lessing to explore Anna's inner world. In one of the interviews, quoted in *A Guide to Contemporary English Novels* (1972), by Karl Fredrick, Doris Lessing's description of the process of producing dreams is:

I fill my brain with the material for a new book, go to sleep, and I usually come up with a dream which resolves the dilemma ... a dream can define the whole of one's life, and warn us of the future, too. Anna's dreams contain the essence of her experience in Africa, her fears of war, her relationship to communism and her dilemma as a writer. (296)

Another technique used by Doris Lessing is the film sequence which appears in the golden notebook, in which Anna looks back at her life and watches it as a film sequence of which she is the female director. She recalls different films: the Mashopi film which involves the characters of the black notebook: Willi, Paul, Mr. and Mrs. Boothby. It also involves some main events like the hydrogen bomb and the explosion of the Mashopi hotel. She further recalls several films like that of Paul and Ella, Ella and Julia, Anna and Molly. All these help Anna to face the problem of trying to create order out of chaos.

Creating order out of chaos and connecting the disjointed plots through achieving unity between the form and the content, all these allow Anna to be an integrated person and help her to fulfill her artistic ambition which is to get rid of her blocked creativity.

To sum up the whole technique, Patricia Spacks in *Doris Lessing*, states: "Although *The Golden Notebook* is experimental in shape, it is realistic and conventional in texture, syntax and incident and plays on the same responses a realistic novel might elicit." (114)

The Golden Notebook is a novel that represents the character that is found in everyday life in the British society. It is a character that is affected by the political situations that are happening around her, in addition to the male-constructed society she is living in. All the surrounding conditions lead her and all the people around her to experience a sense of fragmentation which they all are trying to get rid of and attain wholeness. However, attaining such wholeness could not be achieved except when admitting such fragmentation.

CONCLUSION

This study under the title of "Female Identity in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*" is an analytical study of Lessing's autobiographical novel through the problematic and debatable critical approaches of feminism, women writers and exile. In other words, this novel is examined and analyzed to uncover confusing issues related to

gender, feminism, oppression and alienation. The study traces the features of the two intermingled concepts: female identity and exile. These two concepts are correlated because Lessing is both physically and psychologically alienated as a result of the oppression as well as the rigorous conditions she has passed through. For instance, political feminism is obvious in her novel *The Golden Notebook*.

Tracing female identity and exile in Lessing's novel leads to a number of results. The political conditions which Doris Lessing has experienced form a kind of oppression over her writings which, in turn, spawns her sense of physical and psychological exile. Doris Lessing lives in a fragmented and disintegrated society. She explores the destructive relationships between men and women after the explosion of the Hiroshima Bomb and the fall of the British Empire. In addition, she mirrors the lack of coherence and order in a fragmented, materialistic century which is the main theme of the novel. Men are destroyed from inside thus, they exercise oppression on the weaker parts.

Doris Lessing presents her novel in a disintegrated and disconnected structure – a state which resembles her society as well as her consciousness. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing reveals the dangers and difficulties women encounter when attempting to live a free and independent life in a world ruled mainly by men. This disintegration leads Doris Lessing and all the female characters in her novel, to try to free themselves from the authority of men. Falling under male oppression is what pushes Lessing to feel psychologically alienated. The writer divides her novel into four notebooks: black, red, yellow and blue. Each of these notebooks is set in a different setting wavering between London and Africa which intensifies the sense of exile, psychologically and physically. Moreover, each notebook has a different colour that reflects chaos and disorder. Therefore, it is the political conditions and the disintegration of her society that resulted in male oppression and, consequently, the sense of alienation. Doris Lessing could be categorized under the subtitle 'political feminism' as she believes that political forces after the Hiroshima bomb led to her sense of oppression and alienation. With some improvements in her society as well as in the world, oppression and alienation will have no existence.

To sum up, the study tries to prove that female identity and exile are two of the most currently debatable terms that are intermingled and affected by each other. To a great extent, this study is essential to clarify and unveil a number of questions related to gender, feminism, oppression and exile.

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