The South African Dilemma

That was the Africa we knew,
Where, wandering alone,
we saw, heraldic in the heat,
A scorpion on a stone.

William Plomer
“The Scorpion”

“Certainly everything that’s made me a writer happened to me growing up in Rhodesia, in the old Rhodesia.”

Lessing spent twenty five vital years of her life on African soil—percieving, absorbing, experiencing all that is part of growing up and much more due to her peculiar historical and geographical placing. No wonder a greater part of her oeuvre falls back upon this volatile phase to elucidate the individual’s predicament within the broad but overlapping structures of various coercive forces. Time and again Lessing has referred to politics as her earliest education, for it was in the very air. In her own words: “I can’t remember a time when I haven’t heard people discussing politics.” Echoing similar sentiments Gordimer says, “. . . in South Africa, society is the political situation.” Their ultimate points of view may differ but the atmosphere that provided impetus to their creative urges is not different at all. While Gordimer concentrates more on the characters and situations that are produced by the surface of two societies—black and white—in friction.
Lessing's area of interest chiefly includes the contradictions inherent in the white attitude. Africa thus becomes a background to take off from and to accommodate her multiple and intricately woven themes—from colonialism to the future of mankind. Her fiction, at least up to 1966, comes out of her African experience.

The African social-political milieu was naturally conducive to promote the creative tension and creative activity. Novels have, therefore, reflected or refracted socio-economic, political and cultural tensions that imperialist assault had brought to bear upon Africa. Emphasizing this aspect Abiola Irele has pointed out that the African writers, unlike their western counterparts, "engage a felt universe of life, a world involved more than ever in the tensions of a historical process." This is as much true of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo as of Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing and J.M. Coetzee.

Looking at Lessing from a South African angle, one discovers a close affinity with the tradition that began with Schreiner's *The Story of An African Farm* (1883): “liberal concerned tradition,” as Kenneth Parker has called it. Yet her work remains a class apart, for she easily manages to escape the pitfalls of clichéd approach in her denunciation of race and colour prejudice. There is none of Alan Paton's romanticization of white-black relationship, nor is there an obsession with miscegenation, first made fashionable by Sarah Gertrude Millin. Rather she displays a sense of balance in looking beyond the silhouettes to alternating social-political patterns. All this holds relevance if one views Lessing within the limited framework of South African fiction, but if her entire corpus is placed within the tradition of the English-language novel, she seems to be a worthy heir of Conrad, to whom belongs the richest collection of political fiction written in English since Sir Walter Scott.

The first four volumes of the sequence have African Zambesia as their fictional locale, and by taking a panoptic view of colonial scenario, they authentically articulate African dilemma. At the same time they
probe into the socio-political forces that determine the individual’s final assimilation, marginality or exile within the collective. As part of a vertically carried out search, the intention here is to explore various hues and shades of colonial politics as reflected mainly in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*. The texture of these two is particularly richly woven around this multi-pronged African dimension. *Martha Quest* critically brings out the social and political absurdities of the colony while *A Proper Marriage* focuses on the wide-ranging impact of the Second World War and its concomitant factors which impelled the colonials to question their biases and convictions. The scope that Lessing has chalked out for herself in *Children of Violence*—thematically as well as structurally—is vast, her concern being not with local issues but with the history of a period, with the exposition of a ground reality within a set political orbit.

**Historical Dialectics**

The political situation of Southern Africa is rooted in its history, and ever since British Imperialism this history has been a long chain of betrayals and denials. One such blatant denial of history in codified in *The Grass is Singing*. Charlie Slatter’s refusal to admit the possibility of a white person having a human relationship with a black is the silenced voice of that history.

*Children of Violence* works at two different planes: it analyses the causes, processes and consequences of the historical dispossession of the blacks while tracing out latent motives, inhibitions and constraints of the whites. At the same time, true to its contemporary nature, the novel implicitly questions the validity and value of what it records, and therefore, itself. The entire sequence, at a lexical plane, attempts to “fix” that which is fleeting.

How conclusive can be historical dialectics to the understanding of text is duly summed up by E. Said: “Each text has its own particular genius,
as does each geographical region of the world, with its own overlapping experiences and interdependent histories of conflict.6 Somewhat on similar lines Lessing’s *Children of Violence* series is a symbolic reflection of the idea that just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the shadows of history—history of one’s race, nation, and personal history.

The narrative in all the first four volumes is situated in that temporal pocket when the Westerners were beginning to rethink the whole process of colonization in the face of decolonization. The lie behind dishonestly formulated equation “Christianity equals civilization, paganism equals savagery” was slowly emerging from behind the “white” masks. Lessing points to this sense of racial and historical guilt in the very first part of *Martha Quest*. Mr. Quest, Martha’s father, seeks to assuage his troubling conscience through books which propagated the notion that “God has personally appointed the British nation to rule the world in His name, a theory which comforted his sense of justice” (*MQ*, 96). Himself a war-veteran and a man of liberal views, he obviously belongs to that section of the whites who had a heart and a conscience though these attributes often remained submerged under fear, prejudice and extremism.7 Whatever else, such attitudes compounded the enigma that Southern Africa has been, and it is this enigmatic aspect which finds verbalisation in Lessing’s work.

Lessing reflects something of the general nomadic uneasiness of the British people on the Africa landscape—“a band of explorers lost in a desert, quarrelling in an ecstasy of fear over their direction . . .” (*MQ*, 68). The Quests, for example, had come to the colony after seeing an exhibition in London, attracted by the rich possibilities of African soil (*MQ*, 24). They, like the Turners in *The Grass is Singing* and the Carruthers in “The Second Hut” or the Gales in “The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange,” (*CAS1*) are the people one comes across only in exile. All in their own way are fighting against “this damned disintegrating gaudy easy-going country get under one’s skin” (*CAS1*, 73). This genteel, vague rootlessness takes the form of
nostalgia for the older generation and a feverish, purposeless craving for sensation among the younger generation. Lorna Sage has aptly described the inhabitants of the colony as "refugees from history who, having misled their England, are fatally adrift."8

A writer of Lessing's dimension is never without the weight of history. The entire polemics of her narratives can be said to revolve round a double axis: (i) a nightmarish quality of human history since World War I and (ii) a futuristic vision of history that is firmly rooted in the anxieties of and about present. Even the Canopus series derives very strongly from Lessing's African past. "There are whole sections in Shikasta that are straight from Africa," as she tells Stephen Gray, "but the whole sequence is based on colonization. This is history isn't it? All history is the history of empires rising and falling" (sic).9

Referring to the impregnable bond between individuals and history, Lessing states that while being aware of her unique self, she at the same time has a view of herself in history, "as something which has been created in the past and conditioned by the present."10 Unlike the modernists' worldview that considers individual in terms of self-perpetuating psychological and social dislocations, Lessing prefers to portray the dialectical relationship that Marxism insists always exists between the individual circumstances of one's life and the material nature of the social/political and economic system within which one lives. (Michele Wender Zak has seen this connection in the context of The Grass is Singing).11 Thus Martha at fifteen seems to have inherited all the contradictions of her age:

She was adolescent and therefore bound to be unhappy: British and therefore uneasy and defensive: in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, and therefore inescapably beset with problems of race and class: female and obliged to repudiate the shackled women of the past.(MQ.18)

Burdened by her genetical past and uncertain future, Martha tries to locate the significance of her existence in various evolutionary and hereditary theories (MQ.18-19). What is being questioned is the role of the individual in the larger scheme of things.
The date and place of Lessing's own birth (1919, Kermanshah, Persia) refer directly to history—the history of the British Empire. It is in her autobiography, *Under My Skin*, that Lessing dwells upon the immensity of that era. In her own words:

I was part of an extraordinary time, the end of the British Empire in Africa, and the bit I was involved with was the occupation of a country that lasted exactly ninety years. People no longer knew what that time was like, even those who live in Southern Africa. Historical dialectics with all its political repercussions can impinge upon the life-force even before a child is born. Martha, like Lessing herself, is the product of 1919 war because war was what had brought her parents together. Theirs was a standard war-time romance, the kind so poignantly fictionalised by Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*. Mr. And Mrs. Quest—he a wounded soldier and she a nurse—are highly “mythologised” versions of Alfred Cook Tayler and Emily Maude McVeagh. These portraits have a character of being “historical clichés” both psychologically and sociologically. Lessing in *In Pursuit of English* describes them as “the grail-chasers of a very highly developed sort.”

World War I remains one of the most important influences on Martha just as it has been for her creator. Her parents' nostalgic murmurings about the Great War echo through her entire childhood till it “twined with her deepest self.” In spite of herself she feels absorbed in their “twin litanies of suffering,” and “the words 'no man's land,' 'star shell,' 'Boche.' touched off in her images like those of poetry” (*MQ* 39-40). Through her father who is obsessed with the memory of “the Great Unmentionable” (*MQ*, 54), Martha often finds herself unwillingly seeing “the landscape of devastation . . .” (*MQ* 124). Martin Green has pertinently pointed out that “through him she too is a child of violence though all her conscious and voluntary attitudes are directed against it.” The inspiring reminiscences of 1914 during that particular slot of time—the close of the 30s—strike only a single note for Lessing: “The dates, and the words Verdun, Passchendaele, the Somme—when uttered from the threshold of yet another war—were like a
bell tolling" (PM, 139). There are others who bear the scars of the war, each in his or her own way; but for all of them the First World War remains a gash in time, an open wound in the annals of the civilization.

If World War I is a nagging memory, World War II is a looming spectre in Martha Quest and a terrible reality in A Proper Marriage and A Ripple from the Storm. Lessing's point of concern is not the war itself but its impact on the individual and collective psyche. Remarque has told of a generation that was completely destroyed by the war: Lessing tells of a generation that witnessed a holocaust, felt its reverberations deep into its soul and was changed for ever. Perplexed by the fluidity of world-wide political events and lacking adequate information, the colonials cling to the romantic aspect of war.

The youth, in the colony, live through a euphoric phase during which their every gesture seems to be guided by the idea of war:

they danced and sang mindless . . . swallowed up in the sharp, exquisite knowledge of loss and impending change that came over the seas and continents from Europe; and underneath it all, a riding tide of excitement that was like a poison (PM, 78).

To the young men the idea of another war means what it would have meant to Mr. Quest—"they would shortly be expected to defend the honour of Britain in some way or another" (MQ, 276). It appears to them the ultimate call to their spirit of adventure, their yearning for heroism. The war gives them a sense of purpose and a long-cherished opportunity to get away from the narrow confines of the colonial set-up, to break the mad circle of meaningless courting and drinking. Those among them who cannot make to the front due to economic or professional reasons feel envious of the more fortunate ones and "spoke with rancour which was quite new" (PM, 98). To Martha this craving for war, without any ideological commitment, is like submitting to an instinct for violence.

The uncertainty that precedes war, in spite of its remoteness in space, influences minds and monitors even personal lives of the individuals, thus drawing them into the circle of history. Simultaneously it brings out that
public events can uncannily overshadow private decisions and indecisions. Martha’s inability to decide on a suitable profession is partly due to the approaching war: “Unconsciously, the coming war was there, before her, like a dark chasm in her spirit” (MQ.297). In contrast, the underlying mass hysteria manifests itself in reckless abandon. Consequently there is a sudden spurt of weddings in the capital city of a British colony (MQ.332). In March 1939 Martha too gets married in the same state of “wild elation, under which dragged, like a chain, a persistent misery” (MQ.331). Later, when time has sorted itself out, all that she can remember of the event is a sense of urgency at overhearing “that Hitler had seized Bohemia and Moravia” (MQ.332). Even a seasoned sceptic like Mr. Maynard, the judicious city magistrate, finds himself succumbing to “that brutal sentimentality which poisons us all in the time of war” (MQ.333).

Lessing’s major area of interest is the historical consciousness as it bears upon the social environment and its resultant mutation in the region of politics. In this light the collective response to an event of such dire historical as well as political significance could not have been minimized. The colonial’s political naivété and ideological shallowness is a constant target of Lessing’s relentless logic. In the peculiar colonial situation, the idea of war pushes to the foreground the whites’ immediate fears, thus highlighting their insecurity and cunning. The ordinary inhabitants of the colony are no better than rudderless boats. for the Zambasia News, “the voice of authority” (PM. 95), faithfully reflects the doubts and confusions of the British government. Views and opinions are often guided by selfish motives, such as the hope of a raise or a promotion. For example, a Jewess can defend “the Third Reich as an ally for Britain” in her fear of displeasing her husband’s superior (PM. 97). For the colonial administrators the most imminent question is the role of the native in the event of a war. Should the black be conscripted and allowed the use of arms? This leads to the terrifying thought—"if they learn to use arms, they can use them on us” (PM.66). Newspapers further add to the sensationalism by insinuating
threats of undefined enemy sweeping across Africa in “a swastikaed or—the case might be—hammer-and-sickle horde.” If this should happen, “the black population, always ungrateful to the British colonists, would naturally side with the unscrupulous invaders . . .” (PM, 99). The sedition-mongers, agitators and Fabian influences from England are accused of undermining the level to which natives can fall. But no sooner is the war declared, the authorities’ first concern is to explain to them, as Lessing ironically states, why it was their patriotic task to join their white masters in taking up arms against the monster across the seas in a Europe they could scarcely form a picture of, whose crimes consisted of invading other people’s countries and forming a society based on the conception of a master race (PM, 137).

But the settler’s desire to maintain the status quo was to prove a false hope in the face of change that the world war brings in its wake. The declaration of war on September the third, 1939, is described as the day that would slide back into past as “another note of the solemn bell pealing the black dates of history” (PM, 139).

The arrival of the Royal Air Force proves to be an event of immense historical and sociological import. Lessing captures the whole ambience of the times:

If the note of the First World War was idealistic dedication, succeeded by its mirror image, sarcastic anger, then the symbol of this period of the Second World War was a cynical young airman sprouting aggressive but flippant moustaches capable of the most appalling heroism, but prone to surprising lapses into self-pitying but stoic despair. . . (PM, 189).

This romantic individual is naturally accompanied by the ground-staff whose calm and commonsensical manner does not conform to the colonials’ idealistic standards of an airman or a hero. Unlike the immigrants to the colonies, they are not “glorious or rebellious individuals”; at the same time they are also not apologetic for being different (PM, 184). Their difference basically consists in their belonging to a reality which is beyond comprehension for those who still revel in their imperial glory. Their demeanour, quite unexpectedly for the colonials, reflects “a patient and sardonic criticism.” The reason is they do not have an idealized version of a
native land to fall back upon; they know England with all its inequities and inadequacies, and "the colonial's England is not the England that these men longed for. not the pubs and streets they were exiled from" (PM, 185).

Moreover, being unaware of the density of racism, these British Working men bring with them mores not merely unacceptable but shocking to the colonials. Lessing sums up the change in concrete terms in The Golden Notebook:

Not the least of the results of having hundreds and thousands of airforce men in the Colony for five years was that a number of Africans had it brought home to them that it was possible—well, among other things, that a white man could treat a black man as a human being (132).

On the economic front, the money they bring with them sends the country "on a boom of prosperity" (PM, 261). The RAF not only invades the social life but also ushers in an era of greater political awareness: their open outlook being equally evident in their professed political loyalties. One may say that the war was responsible for bringing European influence to the colony along with the ideology that was believed to be the saviour of mankind. Refugees—escaped Germans, Greeks, Polish—came together, and with the enthusiastic involvement of the airmen this cleared grounds for the creation of communist/socialist groups. The leftist discussion group was already working intermittently; it expands and grips the colony in a current of the dominating ideology of the time.

Retrospectively speaking, it may have been a temporary phase, lasting over a few years. but the colony was never to be the same again after the moderating influence of the RAF. The political uprisings world-over had caught on the indolent pace of the colonial life, and the first spark needed to start the process of revolution was sent off. If the period around World War I can be regarded as the zenith of the British empire, the tumultuous year before and immediately after World War II saw the twilight of imperialism. The wave of change, which manifested itself in the desire for self-rule and emancipation started in Asia and gradually spread over to Africa.
The Civil War that broke out in Spain in 1936 is another significant event from history referred to at various junctures in the narrative (*MQ*, 153:274,276). Mainly, it is a testing block for Martha’s shaping political consciousness. At the same time it stands for what it had been—a prelude to the larger struggle that followed very soon. It brings into sharp focus the triangular contest that had begun to rage between the ideological forces of Communism, Fascism and Democracy. Undoubtedly, Lessing too views it as an essential preliminary to “the great tragedy” that Edwin Muir’s quartet evokes as an introductory quotation to part four of *Martha Quest*.

In fact, by juxtaposing these political events of varied dimensions, Lessing wants to point out the comparatively somnambulistic approach of the colonials to most political events outside the colony: “Not the Spanish war, nor the Chinese war, nor Mussolini’s adventure in Abyssinia—these wars had no existence, in this place” (*MQ*, 276). In the beginning of 1939, the colonials discuss the impending war without really being clear about things, for they draw their views from the newspapers. The newspapers, at that stage, were “still placating Hitler, while the word ‘Russia’ was not so much the name of an enemy . . . as it was a synonym for evil” (*MQ*, 276). It was the role of Britain in the great conflict that seemed to make moral and emotional demands on their nationalistic feelings.

All these factors are fundamental to an accurate understanding of that tributary of history which seemed to wait with a bated breath at the Southern tip of Africa. One viable reason for this desire to fictionalise that momentous time-period can be attributed to Lessing’s persistent realization of the flimsiness of reality. In her autobiography, *Under My Skin*, she says: “I have been involved in a small way with big events, and know how quickly accounts of them become like a cracked mirror” (11). According to her, the novel although not a literal truth is closer to reality than even an autobiographical record. An objective and dispassionate appraisal of the events, particularly in the first three volumes, has enabled her to sift out the authentic and essential from the trivial and insignificant. Lessing sees the
colonial era for what it was—a brutal intervention in Africa’s history. Remarking on her flawless perception of history, Zimbabwean critic A. Chennells points out, "As always in a Lessing narrative, when the narrative voice allows itself the privilege of speaking with the hindsight of actual developments in Rhodesian society, the grasp of history is impeccable.”

This attribute is self-evident in her delineation of period-events in *Children of Violence*.

Etymologically “history” is associated with knowing and the novel implicitly asks questions such as “How and what do we know?”—“What should we know?” Besides being many things more, *Children of Violence* is an attempt to understand the terrible responsibility for what has been lost in terms of human and spiritual values. History cannot be repudiated but it can certainly be reviewed. As one of its substructures, Lessing’s novel-sequence reviews history, and while doing so reveals all the politics involved at various levels and at various points of time. Significantly enough, here Lessing uses history’s march through Southern Africa and utilizes it for the exploration of somewhat uncharted territory—the colonizer’s psyche, the conscious as well as unconscious gestures—as a metaphor for her own attempt to write a different kind of fiction.

**The Colonial Metaphor**

A greater part of *Children of Violence* owes its complexity to the fact that it attempts to explore the cultural psychosis which is the outcome of colonization in real, personal, tangible terms. As an aesthetic form the novel has had peculiar connection to the expanding societies. That it nurtured and blossomed in countries—England and France—which for a long time were symbols of Europe’s cultural dominance, has certainly not been a chance happening. A historical survey of the novel brings to light its immense importance in the formation of imperial attitudes. A fiction that drew heavily upon imperial urges for its thematic content belongs to
Conrad. Partly the effectiveness of his *Heart of Darkness* is contained in its politics and aesthetics, which as a matter of historical compulsion are essentially imperialist. In the closing years of the nineteenth century it was almost inevitable and unavoidable. But whereas Conrad wrote *Nostromo* during a period of Britain’s largely uncontested imperialist enthusiasm, Lessing was writing at a time when the imperialist glory was on the wane. Interestingly enough, among the books that Martha reads is *The Decay of the British Empire* (*MQ*, 84), whereas the books on “politics,” in her parents’ sense of the word include memoirs of Lloyd George, or histories of the Great War.

It is, however, in the third volume of *Children of Violence* that imperial attitude is summed up in Mr. Maynard’s outburst:

> We happen to be in power, so we use power. What is history? A record of misery, brutality and stupidity. That’s all. That’s all it ever will be. What does it matter who runs a country? It is always a bunch of knaves administering a pack of fools... (*RFS*, 54)

Maynard, as the only incumbent of the British government, echoes imperial tendency, but the confidence reflected forty years back by the European tycoon in *Nostromo* is missing. As for Martha, “she regarded him steadily like a specimen of horror from a dead epoch . . .” (*RFS*, 55).

**Exilic Marginality**

For objective reasons that she had no control over, Lessing grew up in African climate as an offspring of that generation who opted for voluntary exile just for the satisfaction of belonging to the ruling minority. This exilic sense is imparted to Martha as well: “The farm lay about her like a loved country which refused her citizenship” (*MQ*, 37). But the word “exile” in Lessing’s context does not refer to any kind of deprivation. On the contrary, belonging as it were to both sides of imperial divide enabled her to understand the binary opposition of both cultures and societies more easily. In this, too, she shares Conrad’s experience, who was born and brought up in Russian Poland and grew up in the shadow of revolution. Imperialist Lessing certainly isn’t, but she cannot even be called anti-imperialist, as one
would use the term for, say, E.M. Forster. Lessing’s subject is what comes after the judgement upon empire. Beginning with *The Grass is Singing* through *The Golden Notebook* and *Children of Violence* to her interior-space fiction, “her subject has always been England’s ruin—ruin in the wake of empire.”

As seen by some critics—Lorna Sage, Martin Green, Paul Schlueter—the colonial experience is central to Lessing’s identity as writer. The twin themes of colonialism and imperialism are minutely interwoven—one being almost always the consequence of the other. Without always discounting the overlapping experience of the settlers and the Africans, Lessing penetrates deep into the psychological as well as sociological implications of widely different cultural terrains in which the colonizer and the colonized coexisted and fought or tolerated the hostilities between each other.

The problem of point of view invariably confronts the novelist who writes on the colonial theme and whose “knowable and known community,” to use David Rabkin’s expression, is founded on cultural divide. Lessing tackles this problem by the only way possible: in her African writings she represents the experience of the colonial life from the inside, illuminated with the same moral realism that informs the novels of Mrs. Gaskell, Austen, Hardy, G. Eliot and Lawrence. It is by the dint of her sheer critical observational faculty that despite her affinity with the main character and her close proximity to most of the events and situations described, Lessing avoids the temptation to fall back on simplistic rules of thumb: here, the pitfalls of racism as an ideology while delineating characters.

In the case of *Martha Quest* and the following two volumes, one doesn’t have to seek out extraneous props to arrive at the intended meaning of the text because all referents happen to coincide with the author’s stance in life, viable during a certain period at least. When looked into carefully, one discovers that the segments of experience that Lessing uses as framework in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage* follow a twin-edged principle of selection. It strives to analyse the displacement that takes place
when social and political ideas are transformed into art through the material process of language. At the thematic plane, it seeks to bring out the colonial attitudes through contrasts, juxtapositions and informal debates placed strategically within the narrative. Lessing herself cuts out any possibility of being subjective in her appraisal by pointing out the danger inherent in the analysis of too close an observer. She writes in *Martha Quest*: "Now, it is quite easy to remark the absurdities and contradiction of a country’s social system from outside its borders, but very difficult if one has been brought up in it . . . "[64]. However, *Martha Quest* and her African stories certainly present "a reliable picture of the District in old days, from a white point of view," as she expresses in *Under My Skin* (162).

**The Paradigm of White Superiority**

Stroke by stroke, the African colonial milieu comes alive and unmasks a society bound by its own traditions. Conformism is the unspoken rule of the game, which Martha consciously fights against but unconsciously succumbs to (*MQ*, 38:80,85). Lessing has called it "the most narrow of societies" in one of her interviews; [21] while in another she speaks of the claustrophobia that one can feel in Southern Africa even when old order has given place to the new one. [22] For the farming community, life is circumscribed within a countable few abstractions: farm, weather and the native question; in the city it is sports, gossip and the colour-bar. To Martha this monotonous, narrow existence is most stifling and fills her with "a swelling dislike of her surroundings" ([MQ], 14). Her pent-up resentment is chiefly directed against her parents who seem to embody all the negations afflicting the colony, particularly her mother, Mrs. Quest. She infuriates Martha because of her reactionary racial prejudice, her conformist mentality and Victorian sense of morals.

While analysing the mechanics of colonial structure, Lessing’s realism pinpoints the fundamental psychological factor that impelled the colonizers to perpetrate inhuman atrocities. Alan Paton has diagnosed it as “fear” in general. whereas Eric Harber has particularised it as “fear of extinction.”
No doubt there are other very viable causes of Southern Africa's sickness such as "greed," "the legacy of history" etc., but more than anything else it is "fear" attracting to itself other motives. The native's brute strength, his oneness with hostile natural forces and his dark impassive features indented the white man's confidence, filling him with misgivings and self-doubt. To overcome his innermost fears, the colonizer was always on the defensive, and from that ensued his acts of injustice and cruelty. Moreover, to justify his goodness, he imbued the native with evil qualities—demonised him—so as to make him a valid target for his hatred. Attitudes such as these made Fanon remark that "the colonial world is a Manichaean world" and it is not just enough for the settler to delimit the native physically but he must also paint the native "as a sort of quintessence of evil."24

Martha's suggestion of walking down from the station to the farm is met with "What would happen if a native attacked you?" This verbal fencing, though brief in itself, is of immense semantic import (MQ, 56-57). The injustice and meanness that marks the colonial regime shows up. Mrs. Quest, an inveterate hater of the blacks, points out "... white girls are always being ra—attacked." Martha's rationalistic though angry retort unwittingly (but purposely on the part of the author) brings out the politics implicit in such a happening: "If a native raped me, then he'd be hung and I'd be a national heroine, so he wouldn't do it, even if he wanted to, and why should he?" (MQ, 57). Her next retort brings out the bitter colonial hypocrisy too starkly while hitting hard at the faulty judicial system for apprehending the blacks when guilty for the same crime: "Last week a white man raped a black girl, and was fined five pounds." This word exchange concludes with both her parents uniting front against her with such typical arguments as "... and so they'll drive us into the sea, and then the country will be ruined, what would these ignorant blacks do without us." The typical colonizer looks upon himself as a great benefactor, and the native as thankless, contemptuous creature: "They have no sense of gratitude at all for what we do for them" (MQ, 57).
The sentiments voiced here reveal another conceit on the part of the colonial: paternalism and its resultant illusion of being indispensable to the betterment of the blacks. With this evangelical zeal is mingled their self-glorification in looking upon themselves as “rebels against tradition.” Lessing points out the irony underlying the typical colonist’s attitude:

There is no white person in the colonies who has not arrived there for some similar reason: they are crusaders against tyranny to man. Which accounts for that shrill note of protest when the world suggests that it is both stupid and old fashioned to suppress native population; for when these same colonials are passionately engaged in fighting against a minimum wage of one pound a month or advocating the sjambok as a means of guidance for the uncivilized, they are always in the bottom of their hearts, quite convinced this too is part of their character as rebels against the tyranny and conservatism of the mother country which they left as adventurers into a free world (PM, 330).

While exposing the real and professed intentions in their appropriate historical context, it implicitly reveals the brittleness of the colonial enterprise. This, more or less, coincides with E. Said’s following analysis:

“Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formulations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination . . . .”

Martha’s assessment of McFarline’s exploitative ways gives another glimpse of the falsehood that the colonial regime survived on. McFarline is described as an extremely wealthy, charming and wicked old Scot mine-owner. He works his mine in a way “which cost him the very minimum in money, but a good deal in human life . . . . His native compound was full of half-caste children, his own” (MQ, 58). But the perverted sense of colonial morality discovers nothing objectionable in his lusty and licentious ways. When nubile Martha spitefully informs her mother of his covert advances, she is at once hushed by Mrs. Quest. In Martha’s fiery outburst is voiced a scathing criticism of the whole colonial system: “‘Damned hypocrisy,’ said Martha, ‘all this colour-bar nonsense, and Mr. McFarline can sleep with whoever he likes and . . .’ ” (MQ, 77). That such waywardness must not be commented on is how the colonials seek their self-evaluation and self-
justification in maintaining civilized standards—"provided all the lies and ugliness are covered up" (MQ.77).

The incident not only highlights the duplicity intrinsic to the feudalistic tendencies of this society, it also speaks volumes of Africa's colour-coded value system when viewed against the context of The Grass Is Singing. Mary Turner is beyond redemption because she has broken "the first law of white South Africa, which is 'Thou shall not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are' "(GS, 190). This hypocrisy which manifests itself in different ways—often through its evangelical and philanthropic claims as the given motivating factors—is bound to react on Martha's romantic idealism. She is disgusted with her parents' Christianity and what they do in practice (the inhuman tactics employed to keep the native at his place). This dualism and persistent attempt at whitewashing the harsh colonial realities are "the terrifying extreme outposts of her development" (MQ.78).

As Martha moves to the city to other avenues of existence, we get an inside view of that "bigoted, narrow, colour-bar society" comprising of the governing class, the English civil servants and the colonial administrator. They are all chasing time and in their turn being chased by history. The preponderant concerns of the era converge in the privileged "Sports Club crowd." Politically hollow, this society during the mid 30s still thrives on the illusions of imperial grandeur. The idea of sports club had been conceived as "a large shadowy veranda with native servants standing like willing statues . . ." (MQ.180). It, however, actualizes into a sprawling colonial-style building, with several acres of playing fields, where English brats can channel . . . their leisure and aggression into such time-killing pursuits as drinking and flirting. Martin Green has called it "a Kiplingesque colonial institution which Lessing subjects to brilliant erotic analysis and mockery." Thoughts or ideas of any kind have no place in this club. It is "an enclosed magic circle" inside which memories can not intrude—"inside it nothing threatened, for some tacit law made it impossible to discuss
politics here . . . . In fact, it might be said that this club had come into existence simply as a protest against everything Europe stood for” (MQ.190).

The club-culture, with its ethics of joie de vivre, is anti-individual; it thrives only on assimilation. A symbol of British snobbery, it is founded on that need for conformism on which rests the entire colonial structure. It represents the collective attempt to evade the unsavoury past, as if forgetting itself could exonerate them of their sins against the blacks. The paranoia that young people of Martha’s generation suffer from is as much due to their oppressive colonial past as an uncertain future in the event of war—“they all behaved like licensed lunatics, as if there was no future . . .”(MQ.207). They were trying to run against history, but “this new wind blowing, this disruptive force” could not be evaded for long. The events world-over were heading towards a direction that soon it would no longer be possible to follow the unwritten code “that there should be no politics in the sacred circle "(MQ.230).

The always unspoken condition of the club’s existence, as noted by Lorna Sage, is the act of violence on which the colony is founded.28 This becomes evident in the incident that emphatically brings out the precarious situation in which the colonials live, the thin line that demarcates their joy and hysteria. Perry, one of the club gang, in his wild exuberance compels a black waiter to perform a “native war dance” to the tune of “Hold Him Down, the Zulu Warrior.” As his good natured coaxing and exhortations fail to bring spontaneity to the strained and terrified black’s movements, he loses his temper and angrily bursts out: “You damned black”(MQ.281). Being unused to any such confrontation with reality, he is baffled and feels diminished at having been misunderstood. The situation highlights the lie inherent in the pretense of normalcy that the colonizer makes an effort to create. It also reflects the truth of Aimé Césaire’s analysis that between the colonizer and the colonized “there is no human contact but only the relationship of domination and submission . . . there is only room for
intimidations, pressure, scorn and distrust.” This highly suggestive incident is of focal significance to the understanding of Lessing’s key concerns—colonialism and racialism.

From Lessing’s minutely drawn portrayal of the young men during the latter half of 1930s, there emerges a distinct colonial personality. The original migrants had come to the colony with a dream in their heart, impelled by a spirit of adventure sometimes, and sometimes by sheer appetite of force. They brought with them the characteristics of their races—Welsh, Scots, Irish—and tried to make the best of an alien soil and alien climate. Among them were successful McDouggals or McFarline, not so successful Quests, and complete failures like Dick Turner in The Grass is Singing. But the young in the 30s present quite a contrast. Brought up and bred amidst the perplexing realities of a closed society, they lack the conviction and dogged determination that had enabled their elders to survive in this hostile land. They have only inherited a debilitating sense of superiority, which too fails them as soon as they encounter life in its tough, sordid aspect. This is brought out in full intensity in A Proper Marriage. The same young men who take pride in being “wild colts” and “wolves” among the Sports Club gang, simply crumple and crumble when faced with the ignominy of being “returning crocks.” The composite picture that emerges from Lessing’s description is that of a fretful individual despite all show of gaiety. The young men and women of the period try to cope with their historical consciousness against their perilous situation as rulers of “confiscated lands” and “trampled cultures,” to use Aimé Césaire’s expressions.

The consequences of colonialism that the likes of Césaire and William R. Frye so passionately articulated and Fanon so profoundly analysed, Lessing has been able to fictionalise subtly but surely.
Socio-political Schism

The social chasm prevailing in the South African society has been a logical consequence of three inter-related causes: (i) The persistent rejection of the challenge of Africa—the tools that the English-speaking European brought with him for measuring and interpreting reality proved insufficient in this land of the fierce sun and dark bush, but he did not care to invent new ones. (ii) The positivism and subjective romanticism imparted at British education institutions had no relevance in the African context. (iii) Finally, related to other factors and accentuated by the settlers' political prejudice and timidity, was racialism.31

This socio-political schism works at two levels—psychic and conceptual—and its ramifications in the fragmented colonial set-up may range from forced politeness to total ostracization of a group or community. Both these behavioural extremes are evident in the contempt that Britishers show towards "the Afrikaans group" and the non-human status attributed to the native. At psychic level, it affects the unconscious, creating a rift in the personality and often leading to conscious actions which contradict all cultural traditions. Mary Turner (GS) is a study of the neurosis resulting from deliberate social ostracization comingled with unresolved political dilemmas. The political predicament of Mary and Martha is the same but Martha has imbibed her historical contradictions too well. She is aware of her own divisiveness, but the intellectual props that she has given herself and the ideological training that her mind has undergone, under the supervision of Cohen brothers, enable her to submit herself to exhaustive self-scrutiny.

At the conceptual level, socio-political divide manifests itself through race, class, colour, and even linguistic prejudices. The entire colonial metasociety with its various sub-groupings and levels of segregation comes into Lessing's narrative frame in the first volume of Children of Violence.32 It is their acknowledged authority over the land and its people that unites the
British community, but even among them families take pride in their separate ethnic heritage. Their pretense at being united has "a touch of hysterical necessity in it" (MQ.64). The understated fact is that their parochialism is endemic to their very existence, hence their communal gatherings are "false tokens of community—for what is a community if not people who share their experience?" (MQ.64). Amongst the British farmers it is the material wealth that decides the status and class of a family. Highest on the social ladder are the rich tobacco families and successful mine-owners, and farthest down the rung are those who cannot make their farming pay. The District is thus "divided into several separate communities, who shared nothing except Christian names, cards at Christmas, and a member of Parliament" (MQ.65). Lessing’s Zambesia takes on the aspect of a microcosm of our world: in its races, its religions, its political beliefs, and its economic disparities.

**Racial Divide**

The socio-political chasm is visible at its sharpest in the interaction between the English and what the British referred to as "the Afrikaans element"—"a close-knit, isolated community of Dutch people" who had small holdings and large families and "who built their own hall, and a thatched church where they worshipped their angry God "(MQ. 66). They subscribe to nationalist papers and nationalist ideology. Having lost to the Britishers in the Boar war, the Dutch still suffer from the wounded ego and the self-consciousness of the defeated. Their contempt is, therefore, mutual and rooted in their colonial history. This phobia that they suffer as a group is reflected in their tendency to ghettoize (MQ.66). The closeness of this group also expresses itself "in the look of dogged self-sufficiency, the look of the inveterate colonizer" (MQ.67). The instinct which compels them to subdue and tyrannise the native is the same instinct for self-preservation that keeps them apart from the Britishers. The socialising between the two communities, if any, takes place at the risk of incurring group animosity.
The Van Rensburgs' party pointedly reveals the tensions working beneath the calm surface. From a girl making her debut, Martha is suddenly transformed into a group representative. She is held answerable for the biased, narrow outlook of the Britishers. Mr. Rensberg accuses the English of behaving like brutes in the Boer war, to which Martha counter-questions: “If you dislike us so much, why do you come to the British colony?” (MQ.104). The simmering political situation comes to the fore when demands for “equal rights” and “rights for both languages” are put forth by the Dutchman. His son, Bill Van Rensberg, leads the same discussion into deeper waters by pointing out Martha’s inability to speak Afrikaans. He takes it as a personal affront when Martha remarks on the equal legitimacy of a dozen other native languages. At subliminal level, the text here touches upon another dimension: how important language is to a group’s identity and for the assimilation of its culture. In fact, concentric layers of political divide surface in this verbal encounter, and one discovers the kind of intellectual and spiritual moat that surrounds the Southern African society.

Another community whose sequestered existence, in this graded social structure, is critically observed again and again is that of the Jews. Lessing handles the Jewish question from various facets, treating it for multiple points of view so as to arrive at a clear perspective. As compared to the Afrikaans, the historical and economic situation of the Jews places them in more complex relationship with the white settler community. Mrs. Quest is not the only one who has a strong anti-semitic feeling (MQ.20; 50). She, however, has failed to impart her prejudices to her daughter just as she fails to curb her rebellious spirit. Martha’s friendship with Cohen boys is a constant pain in her neck. For Martha, Joss and Solly Cohen—one a socialist, other a Zionist—are her political and intellectual mentors. Despite her well-formed ideas, “this question of anti-Semitism, this shrinking nerve, put her on guard against herself” so that her manner with elder Mr. Cohen is always strained (MQ.59). Once again she looks upon herself as a
representative; racial guilt weighs heavily upon her and she "feels apologetic for herself and for her parents" (MQ.62). The apartness in which the Jews are compelled to live is partly racial and partly colonial.

In the town, the professional and business acumen of the Jews is the determining factor for their assimilation in the main stream of social life. Martha works in the office of "Robinson, Daniel and Cohen," the oldest legal firm in the city. As rich partners of the firm, Mr. Jasper and Mr. Samuel Cohen enjoy a prestige that would be a ticket to anywhere amidst the white city-dwellers. Among the Sports Club crowd Martha is introduced to Stella, "a striking looking dark-eyed Jewish girl" (MQ.217), married to Andrew Matthews, a Scot. In that race-ridden colonial society, Stella can carry herself so confidently because she comes from "an old English family, she's not a scum from Eastern Europe" (MQ.246).

The crisis of Jewish identity is captured in Martha-Adolph episode. Adolph King, a Jew musician in the band at Sports Club, is in every way Stella's antithesis. Always apologetic of his Jewishness, he is the consistent target of the younger lot's anti-Semitic outpourings. Bitterly conscious of his pariah-status, he suffers from an acute inferiority complex, and all his attempts to conceal his racial identity only proves counter-productive (MQ.256). Martha, motivated by her romantic idealism and impelled by her non-conformist self, plunges into an affair with him, ignoring the ripples that she creates in her elitist social circle. All the while her feelings towards him remain mixed: "By turn she pitied him, hated him, felt protective, despised him, while all the time her imagination was at work making him into an interesting and persecuted figure" (MQ.244). In this aperçu Lessing lays bare the complexity that defines human motives.

The collective, however, does not allow an individual to digress so easily. The affair is abruptly cut off by the intervention of the very crowd she was rebelling against. Interestingly enough, it is Stella who takes upon herself to catechize Adolph for seducing an innocent English girl, precisely because being a Jewess she has the right to say (MQ.262). The whole
episode, in its subtle undercurrents, corresponds to Leo Kuper’s thesis that “segregation interstimulates and mutually reinforces, as in collective rituals, extreme sentiments of racial superiority.” Here it is not just the dominant group asserting its racial superiority but economy based social hierarchy superimposing itself on ethical structure. From the white settler’s viewpoint, all the conditions of social cleavage, cultural diversity and ethnic hostility are found at play in this incident.

Adolph’s awareness of his apartness and his consequent loneliness is heightened by a negative group identity. The contrast that he presents with other Jew figures is contained within the text itself. The Cohen brothers have sharpened their intellect and are well-armed with the weapons of knowledge, hence they are able to transcend any such negative identification. Besides Solly and Joss, there is Thomas Stern, also a Polish Jew, who figures in *Landlocked* and remains one of the most positive and convincingly drawn male characters in the entire sequence. Martha, on her part, can afford to be scornful of Adolph’s “persecution complex” because “she saw these distinctions from the heights of her British complacency” (*MG.246*).

**The Coloured Predicament**

A striking aspect of the stratified structure of nearly all colonial societies is the emergence of a population with a mixed biological inheritance. Politically the group has none of the power and privilege of the dominant, non-marginal group, but it does absorb and practise the latter’s culture with variations and speak the same language. Some examples are the mulatto population of Brazil, the mestizos of Mexico, and the Coloureds of Africa. In the case of Southern Africa such populations have been the result of exploitative sex relations between the colonialists and natives or slaves. Lessing’s story “The Antheap” is a profound study of the antithetical forces which mobilise the white and the black. Through compelling imagery it postulates a synthesis between these two antipodes in the partial rehabilitation of Dirk, the half-cast, at the stubborn insistence of the
sensitive Tommy. Gordimer’s A Son’s Story studies their cultural predicament in terms of socio-political structures while Toni Morrison in Beloved and The Bluest Eye evocatively lends words to their racial loneliness and a passionate need for acceptance by the dominant group.

The miserable plight of the coloureds, their marginal situation in the African social structure, is depicted through scattered glimpses of the coloured community in A Proper Marriage and A Ripple from the Storm. The compound of the white settler, where coloured children may grow up into potential forces of production, transmutes into “the coloured quarters” in the city, where they live as a community barely trying to eke out a subsistence. These quarters are situated, as Lessing informs time and again, in “the most squalid part of town”. Here Solly Cohen initially experiments with his socialist theories in a “communal settlement” ironically called “Utopia” (PM,46-47). However, he admits the ineffectiveness of his group’s ameliorating activities; it is “a waste of time.” According to him, “in their position half way between the blacks and the white Herrenvolk, they are bound to be unstable, they are petty bourgeois to the core...” (PM,50). All that the whites can think of doing for them is “dishing out charity” from their lofty position. In the situation the question that puts itself before critically observant individuals, like Martha and Mr. Maynard, is why their reformative zeal should direct itself towards a few thousand coloureds as compared to several million miserable blacks. But no one has any specific answer. The white elite of the colony lack the moral courage to admit that they considered the blacks far too beneath them to need their charity. So a coloured children’s concert is arranged to raise funds and to introduce one section of community to another” (PM,329).

In the colonial set-up, helping the coloured children is the right sort of politics to be engaged in, while the leftist politics is considered dangerous, and therefore suspect. The settlers’ psyche that works behind such insignificant gestures of goodwill is summed up by Martha, who is by then under the spell of communist ideology: “‘Charity’, said Martha
aggressively 'has always been an expression of the guilty consciences of a ruling class' "(PM,331). This missionary zeal is inspired by their glorified vision of themselves as a “fearless and progressive people” (PM,330). The belief in their own goodness needs to be nourished by “action” now and then.

The sordidness of the coloureds’ existence is captured through Martha's eyes: “Extreme poverty lay a hundred yards from wealth—as, indeed, it tends to do, but in this case it coincided with a physical ghetto . . . . This was still the nineteenth century” (PM,357). The author’s social concerns, particularly her humanitarianism and compassion for the downtrodden, are eloquently expressed in the words: “This was the other world—or rather, how nine-tenths of the people of the world lived” (PM, 357).

Lessing is often unsparingly critical while analysing emotions to arrive at the truth, no matter how bitter. Martha's response to the squalor all around is typically European. To her “poverty was boring; there was no need for it to exist, and therefore she felt as if it already did not exist” (PM, 358). This realization in itself evokes dismay as Martha scans her inner self for a new set of emotions under the influence of socialism. The concert turns out to be a pathetically flop attempt in setting into motion an acculturation process between the coloured and white groups. In the event it so happens that the idealistic fervour, supposed to be the motivating force behind the concert, misfires badly. Lessing is able to bring out the superficiality of a whole system that takes refuge in high-flown words: “... art was the greatest of the barrier-breakers . . . . It [the concert] was a landmark in the cultural life of their city . . . . Times were changing . . . ideas were abroad” and so on (PM,360). The narrative stance reflects one of the central South African dilemmas, namely the redundancy of white liberal politics. The obliqueness underlying Lessing's delineation of such complex situations must have inspired the comment that "her prose is at its finest when examining the political relationship between individual and the historical process."34
Cultural Sterility

Instead of creating any new sociological possibilities, the concert merely highlights the dichotomous structure of the colony. It rather implicitly refers to the political and cultural sterility which forms one of the major themes of *Children of Violence*.

The wave of rebellion that had the world in its grip during 1939 had not left the colony’s coloureds untouched. The “mime” which turns out to be the bitter but befitting climax to the entire performance, attempts to expose the chief atrocities—“Hunger, Poverty, Misery”—perpetrated by the white civilization under imperialism. In very suggestive manner, white patches in darkness shrilly cry out “I am Africa,” “I am Asia,” “I am India,” to the seething indignation and embarrassment of the whites.

As we move on to *A Ripple from the Storm*, we have a closer view of the coloured community. Martha and her communist co-workers establish a direct contact with the coloureds. By then, due to the wind of change that blew all around, the coloured quarters were no longer just “a breeding ground for disease”, but under the influence of communist forces, they were fast becoming a breeding ground for revolutionary ideas (*RFS*,68;90).

In certain cases the merging of cultures and the merging of physical types does create important sociological possibilities. But not in the narrow colonial society so factually described by Lessing. The instances of knocking away the boundaries are rare, and equally bleak is the likelihood of the emergence of a shared culture. The whites and the blacks occupy the two extreme poles of that stratified set-up. The coloureds, on the other hand, are just a fringe group, a subject for disdain and charity but never for social participation. There is just no allowance for any finer gradations in that closed and politically fortified social structure. Acculturation process, if any, is purely one-sided.

One, therefore, cannot take an over-simplistic view of the cultural diversification as it existed in Southern Africa during the 30s and 40s. While the social-political order in the colony rested mainly upon a number of
culture patterns of differing historical origin, what really mattered was how the dominant group involved the lesser groups within its ambit of power, how it asked the sub groups to share that authority and esteem. This negativity of colonial structure is more thoroughly analysed by Lessing in her treatment of racial prejudice as directed against the natives.

The Native Question I

In the very opening sentences of *Martha Quest*, all linguistic signifiers point to the problem characteristic of Southern Africa—the problem of colour prejudice. Lessing writes: “Inside this coloured barrier was a darkened recess . . .” (*MQ*.9). The sentence conveys a lot more than it states: in one stroke it brings to the foreground the restrictions imposed on the darker humanity, the blacks, by the Caucasians.

A few pages ahead Martha watches a team of oxen being manipulated by a native driver, at the head of the team is a small black child. She cannot feel anything for the driver who used his whip with too much zest, but “the pity she refused herself flooded out and surrounded the black child like a protective blanket” (*MQ*.21). Her contemplations reflect the essential attitudes that her creator has subtly imparted to her. Instead of one black child, she saw a multitude, and lapsed into her familiar daydream: “a noble city, set foursquare”, where citizens of various colours—black and white and brown—mingled harmoniously and “the blue-eyed, fair-skinned children of the North” played hand-in-hand with “the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the South” (*MQ*.21).

Herein lies the major aesthetic ideal that forms the mobilizing force of the sequence. It is the same ideal that inspired William Blake’s “The Little Black Boy.” No doubt the “text” is irreducible, yet the implicit authorial intention becomes all the more obvious when viewed in the context of what Lessing has to say about *Children of Violence*: “Consciously or unconsciously we keep two thirds of mankind improperly housed and
In its central theme the sequence touches on a concern which is crucial to the South African novel and which exploded into artistic form in the late forties and fifties. Its raison d’être lies in the history of the continent itself, for the fact cannot be overlooked that for decades, indeed for centuries, South Africa has been the only place in the world where racial discrimination is “enforced with the ruthless power of the state, and practised for the purpose of keeping one race on top of all others.”

The Colour Bar

The colour problem is a recurring theme in Lessing’s fiction and manifests itself in various guises. It is vividly there in the subtle power that Moses, the native house boy, comes to have on Mary (GS), and obliquely present in many of her African stories. The novel that Anna has written with a reasonable success is “about” a colour problem (GN, 82). It is, however, in Anna’s critical observations about her own work that Lessing expresses her reservations about this over-emphasised theme: “the area of colour-bar hatreds and cruelties has been the best documented in our fictions” (GN, 79). Attributing it to her Southern African experience, she argues that a part of her work has been set there, and “the salience of colour clash made it inevitable that those aspects which reflect the colour problem should have overshadowed the rest” (CAS1, 9).

Both in Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage, Lessing subjects the white settlers’ society to a tunicate analysis and brings out the long-reaching impact of the racialist tendencies of the colonial structure. Criticising this colour-bound society in which she was never able to fit, Lessing reveals: “The blacks themselves didn’t exist, according to the law: their world remained hermetically sealed off from us.” This bitter reality is best documented in one of the most remarkable of her stories—“The Old Chief Mashlanga”:
The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass, mingling and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say 'Yes, Baas,' take their money and go (CAS/1.196).

Martha herself is unable to escape completely the pulls of received ideas. So deeply ingrained are the group affiliations that despite her strong distaste for the hypocritical attitude of the colonials, it was difficult for her to evade the deep-seated collective fears and prejudices. Outwardly and consciously, she opposes racism. Her budding ideological preferences, at the young age of sixteen, become apparent in Joss's abrupt inquisition of her:

'Yes repudiate the colour bar?'
'But of course.'
'... You dislike racial prejudice in all its form, including anti-Semitism'.
'Naturally'—this with a touch of impatience.
'You are an atheist?'
'You know quite well that I am.'
'You believe in socialism?'
'That goes without saying.'...

(MQ, 62-63).

But a little later, in a self-diagnostic frame, she admits that "she could not remember a time when she had not thought of people in terms of groups, nations, or colour of skin first, and as people afterwards" (MQ, 67).

No doubt her subsequent liberalism is a tangential alternative to the colonial prejudices, but initially she cannot help feeling "the striving forces in her own substance," and "the effort of imagination needed to destroy the words black, white, nation, race, exhausted her..." (MQ, 68). Often it is difficult to ignore the "voices of her upbringing": an altogether unreasonable protest is aroused in her and "an entirely new fear" grips her when she realises that the "gap" between her and Charlie, the black office boy, was seven pounds and ten shillings. It was unprecedented for a farm dweller that a native should be paid more than twenty shillings. Her twelve pounds and ten shillings, therefore, seemed to be precariously balanced against Charlie's five pounds a month (MQ, 121).

Colour-predicament is no doubt just one dimension of the plurality of Lessing's text, but situations placed at strategic junctures do elucidate the
magnitude and pervasive nature of this consequence of colonialism. One such situation that lies like a time-bomb in the text is the dance scene—the misery and awkwardness that the native waiter feels when compelled to dance by Perry (*MQ*,280-81). By forcing him to perform Zulu dance, Perry inverts an essential community rite which, through gestures and body language, was a group’s expression to exorcise itself and to explain itself. The scene has wide socio-political implications as the sentiments that it seeks to interpret—humiliation, anger, hate, fear, violence—are the emotional and physical by-products of colour-prejudice and discrimination.

In revealing dehumanization of the native, Lessing’s intention is not so much to evoke empathy for the blacks as to criticise the cultural and moral decadence of the whites. Rendering the white attitude to unsparing diagnosis, Lessing also voices her intense humanism:

> while the cruelties of the white man towards the black man are among the heaviest counts in the indictment against humanity, colour prejudice is not our original fault, but only one aspect of the atrophy of the imagination that prevents us from seeing ourselves in every creature that breathes under the sun (*CASJ*,10).

Equally illuminating is the incident that concludes *Martha Quest*: Binkie Maynard’s car knocks down a black man. The whole scene, though of low key, is observed through Mr. Maynard’s eyes who is worried over both the political and the ethical aspect of the situation. It sufficiently brings out the younger generation’s inherited callousness towards the native (333). As part of the culminating episode of *Martha Quest*, it also points to the self-doubt that had begun to ruffle the imperial confidence during the preceding years of the Second World War.

**Politics of Language**

The intricacies of relationship between the white master and the black servant, its cross-impacts, are more deeply explored in Lessing’s African stories, particularly the familiarity of the feudal relationship which could be possible only in the agrarian set-up of the veld. In *Children of Violence* Lessing includes within her broad perimeter “the crude brutality of the newer impersonal relationship” (*GN*,132). This is reflected through the
derogatory expressions that the colonials use for the natives. "Nigger," "Kaffir," "damned black" ($MQ$, 276; 281) are the terms that tend to degrade, humiliate and dehumanize on the one hand and reaffirm white supremacy on the other. They make up the language of prejudice because "discrimination is nothing but prejudice translated into action." In *Children of Violence* sequence, only people with very liberal views refrain from using the word "Kaffir." Martha is accused of becoming a "nigger-lover" ($MQ$, 282). This politicisation of language is carried a step further in Anna’s "Black Notebook" when George Hounslow insists on using the word "mistress" for his black paramour and remarks in all seriousness: "Well why not? Surely if one doesn't like the colour bar, she's entitled to the proper word, as a measure of respect, so to speak" ($GN$, 139).

Another instance of how language gets politicised is the practice of equating Africans with "baboons" ($GN$, 115) or with animals ($PM$, 27). This also indicates the extreme form of their dehumanization—a concept that includes within itself Aimé Césaire’s "thingafication" and Leo Kuper’s "objectification." Stella in *A Proper Marriage* is horrified to learn that Dr. Stern treats kaffirs, for "everyone knows they are nothing but animals, and it doesn't hurt them to have babies" (27). This remark indicates to what inhuman level prejudice can be carried; it denies the natives even the right to feel physical pain. In a self-explanatory passage, Lessing describes the total segregation of the blacks as evident in the distribution of space on the train, "that perfect symbol of the country": "At the extreme end, there was a long truck, like a truck for cattle, confining as many black people as there were whites in the rest of the train" ($PM$, 141).

*Native Through White Eyes*

Objectification of the native as a creature lacking the fullness of human quality and human dignity is depicted in the manner the native orderly is bullied and ill-treated by Douglas and Perry ($PM$, 3.3). He becomes an object to take out their frustration for having missed their chance to fight in the war: "Perry heaved his shoulder dispassionately into the man's chest..."
without looking at him" (PM, 242). His bruised male ego derives a sadistic satisfaction by intimidating another human being (PM, 243). But a little later the same orderly is seen with a book—a child’s reading primer—learning the language of the masters. This marks the native’s desire for self-improvement, it also marks a stage in the process of westernization that had set in with the denigration of their tribal culture by the missionaries. Above all, it shows the desire to control, his striving for the right to self-regulation; for language is power.

Another aspect of the native’s overshadowed existence is brought out when Martha happens to watch from her door the black prisoners (men and women), handcuffed, barefooted and shabby, being escorted to the magistrate. They are guilty of moving about during night after curfew, or “forgetting to carry one of the passes which were obligatory, or—but there were a dozen reasons, each as flimsy” (MQ, 226). Fictionalised here is another form of objectification which insists in the native’s subordination to a document—the pass which governs the very right to move. In itself a familiar enough sight in the colony, yet Martha cannot help feeling a slow, patient anger. Trying to identify with those oppressed blacks, Martha marches “in imagination, down the street, one of the file, feeling the oppression of the police state as if it were heavy on her...” (MQ, 226).

It is in reference to these dehumanising situations that Lessing says in one of her interviews: “South Africa is a fascist paradise. It’s one of the most brilliant police states in history.”42 Her protagonist, Martha, with a deepening anger, realises that “the noble and terrific indignation” described in Dickens, Tolstoy, Hugo, Dostoevsky and a dozen others has achieved nothing: “the shout of anger from the nineteenth century might as well have been silent.” In her profound mental gloom she reads poems, which again bespeak the author’s predominant concerns:

There is no consolation, no none
In the curving beauty of that line
Traced in our graphs through history where the oppressor
Starves and deprives the poor (MQ, 227).
The white antipathy against the blacks further surfaces up in a casual conversation among the matriarchs of the town in *A Proper Marriage*. It highlights the deeply ingrained nature of colour-prejudice in the socio-cultural matrix of Africa. At the same time, democratic structure as the political alternative to colonialism is vaguely hinted at as a possible solution to the predicament of Southern Africa. Mrs. Lowe-Island objects to the presence of "niggers" at the meeting of Left League Book Club; to which Mrs. Maynard indolently reminds her "that there are parts of Africa where Africans sit in Parliament."

'But we don't want that to happen here.'
'It surely depends *how* it happens?'...but Mrs. Lowe-Island snapped, 'I wouldn't sit down in the same room with a kaffir'. 'No one has asked you to yet.' (206).

The conversation is suggestive of that stubborn, self-righteous placidity which cannot stand against winds of change for long. Mrs. Lowe-Island’s attitude is juxtaposed with Martha’s experience a few pages later at the leftist organisation, loosely named Contemporary Political Discussion Circle. The narrative voice states that in her twenty one years spent in the colony where nine-tenths of the population were dark-skinned, it was for the first time that Martha had sat with a dark-skinned person as an equal (*PM*,211).

The reference here is to an African, Mr. Matushi; he is what Mphahlele would like to call the detribalized, urbanised, paradox of Africa. During the discussion on “Popular Education,” Matushi hits the nail on the head by floating the realistic idea that instead of feeding the blacks on the myths of white superiority if someone took care to inform them of unpleasant realities, e.g. the actual condition of the English working class, they would perhaps then not look upon themselves as so very down the evolutionary rung (*PM*,214). To people like justice Maynard, this compelling need on the part of the native to see themselves in their proper dimension signals danger.
This reluctance to confront the political realities comes to the fore at Colonel Brodeshaw's sundowner party (PM, 55-71). A gathering of the colonial elite, it suddenly becomes a forum for discussion when, using the audience as "a sort of sounding board," Mr. Maynard draws them into the legal subtleties of the nature of punishment deserved by a native for stealing some clothes. The moot point is: "Should the sentence be prison or an official beating?" Associated with it is the ethical side of the law—"whether a sentence should be regarded as a punishment or a deterrent" (PM, 60). Understandably enough, there are differing opinions—for and against whipping—but in the course of the conversation, the native question is thrashed out from various angles.

Of immense import is the fact that the discussion is presided over by Mr. Player "who was the head of the big company which in fact controlled the colony..." (MQ, 207). Martha is quite amazed to hear the liberal point of view from this "pillar of reaction, this man who was a symbol of the 'Company' " (PM, 62). But soon the capitalist conspiracy exposes itself in Mr. Player's summing up: it served nobody's purpose if the natives were "ill-fed and ill-housed into a condition where they weren't fit to work" (PM, 63). While unmasking the reality of the situation, it proves that "in the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure." What is conspicuously missing is the "right intention," the "humane touch," which would enable the colonials to penetrate beyond the obvious profit motives.

Martha, in her compassionate attitude towards the blacks, is a grown up version of the girl-child in "The Old Chief Mashlanga." She is that much needed conscience, the pricking of which alone can lead the native out of his misery, out of the darkness of slavery into the light of freedom and self-respect. Youth or the white child is often the messenger of hope in Lessing's fiction, as Mona Kanpp has pointed out. Tommy in "The Second Hut" is able to bridge the colour-bar where Carruthers fail, a factor that can be attributed to his innocence and young age (CAS1).
A panoptic view of *Children of Violence* reveals that Lessing’s picturisation of African paradoxes lacks the razor-sharp edge, the kind evident in *The Grass is Singing* and some short stories. Unrelieved tension of her first novel is missing in her portrayal of social-political tensions in this long sequence, for we do not come close to the bone of sheer physical and mental suffering. The obvious reason is that in this series her artistic intention is different. Rather than presenting the psychological and physical implications of force, she is more concerned with analyzing the political implications of oppression and aggression in a historical context. Structural analysis of motives and actions, ideas and their representation, becomes her primary concern.

The Native Question II

A natural question that frames itself while talking about any South/Southern African writer in English is whether he/she has succeeded in creating an African character “who, lives as an independent person; whose presence before the reader is not refracted through European prejudice.” In *Children of Violence* one gets the feel of the colonial atmosphere but there isn’t any such African character who would stand out among the galaxy of characters as, for example, Steven Sitole does in Gordimer’s *A World of Strangers* (1958). Lessing comes closest to achieving masterly individual studies (of black figures) in various stories collected under the titles *This Was the Old Chief’s Country* and *The Sun Between Their Feet*. Some of the characters which spring to one’s mind are: Mashlanga, the old chief; Gideon, the cook in “No Witchcraft for Sale,” and little Tembi. Jabavu in “Hunger” is the only black character who is seen not from the point of view of his interaction with the white but as an individual though not so successfully as Lessing would wish for. Nevertheless, he is portrayed as a victim of the cross-cultural influences: the dehumanising
tactics of the colonial rule and that subdued historical anger which each African must feel (Five).

Lessing herself supplies the reason for the absence of any outstanding black character. As a white person in Rhodesia her "contact with the blacks was just non-existent. It was always either as an employee or as a rather patronizing person simply because that was how you were situated."47 The basic difference in the patterns of their lives—the restrictions that the blacks had to live with—cancelled out any possibility of an equal relationship. So she has written of them as and in which capacity she knew them best.

But one has to concede that without really creating a pulsating black figure, Lessing has narrated the story of Southern Africa, its bewildering social, political and moral choices or evasions through her deft portrayal of the colonial scenario. Nowhere does she succumb to the arrogance with which foreigners take it upon themselves to pass judgement on Africans and their continent. Her fiction is also not orientated towards the objectification of the blacks, rather she laments the loss of their real dignity, the loss of their myths and magic. It is her special combination of indignation and compassion that comes to the surface in the portrayal of Africa and its people. Her achievement lies in bringing to the reader an expressive realist document of a place and period that marked one of the peaks of violent action in human history.

**Dynamics of Space**

Africa struck Europeans as simply space—empty space to rest their spirit in—waiting to be shaped by their creative will. Its "bigness and silence" seemed to stimulate the white man's lust for having and subduing. As for the writers, Lessing states, Africa is like "an old fever, latent always in their blood; or like an old wound throbbing in the bones as the air changes" (*CASI*,10). The nostalgia and burning anguish that she herself feels
while in London is not for a geographical entity but for the landscape, the physical world, which in its very remoteness intensified its fearful mystique and resultant antagonism.48

This menacing, threatening aspect of African landscape—its untamed emptiness—is captured in a single image, that of the “hawk”: “... nothing to disturb that ancient, down-peering eye, nothing that a thousand generations of his hawk ancestors had not seen” (MQ.11). It is also the “hawk’s eye-view” that Lessing uses while defining and describing African space. The image recurs again and again as the symbol of perplexing, mysterious vastness (MQ.73) or as the only witness to the awe-inspiring cosmic union (MQ.311).

Space in any work of art is never just a “frill.”49 It is rather directly related to the manifest conscious intention of an author and the objective ideological function of the text. In Lessing’s case, it is the human dissonance with the engulfing African space that interests her and brings about the final enactment of the themes that she is committed to: a social democratic critique of her society, colonialism, racism and psychic derangement.

Elaborating on the spatial dimension, Benedict M. Ibitokun points out that historical phenomena could turn our physical world into an “espace-refuge,” as Africa has been for the white settler, or in its worst manifestations into an “espace-vertige,”60 such as all blacks experienced during the Arab-Islamic and European-Christian imperialism. Their rightful space was usurped by the white man, where upon they were pushed deeper into the bush, to “a proper native reserve” (CASL.24).

The settler, on the other hand, devised various strategies to establish his territoriality and to acclimatize himself in an alien space. Among them was the habit of naming tracts of farm lands, even fields and other patches: “The Twenty Acres, the Big Tobacco Land, the Field on the Ridge, the Hundred Acres, the Kaffir Patch, the Pumpkin Patch . . .” (MQ.37). It shows the inclination not so much to humanise land as to penetrate the mystery of silent space by personalizing it. Typical examples of this tendency are the historical associations of the city (after Salisbury) and the colony (after Cecil Rhodes).
Lessing rejects the bias that is embedded in these names by altering her fictional locale from the English-imposed Southern Rhodesia in *The Grass is Singing* to African Zambesia in *Children of Violence* sequence. Claire Sprague reads deeper meaning into it: the change in locale "metaphorically denies white appropriation of the land and returns it to its owners." This denial has further significance: true to the liberal spirit of the later half of the 20th century, it negates the superimposition of the history of the empire on the cultural history of Africa.

Referring to the liberating aspect of space Lessing informs that the open-air people, the men of soil, had a greater air of confidence than the townsmen, the shop-keepers or small-time traders: "they moved magnificently, at ease, slowly, to match the space and emptiness of the country..." Very isolated white farmers lived immense distances from each other in the district. This provided them plenty of space to spread themselves out mentally. Lessing remarks, "People who might be extremely ordinary in a society like England's where people are pressed into conformity can become wild eccentricities in all kinds of ways they wouldn't dare try elsewhere." A number of these "gentle maniacs" are described in *Martha Quest*.

Paradoxically enough, the vastness and the inscrutability of the African bush combined with its elemental intemperance can have an ominous and oppressive influence on people, particularly those who cannot cope with their uprooted, lonely selves. Among them are people like Carruthers in "The Second Hut" or Mrs. Carson, Martha's landlady in *A Proper Marriage*. An extreme example is Mary Turner whose feeling of being "trapped" and "cornered" develops into a terrifying neurosis. Her last thought is: "And then the bush avenged itself" as "the trees advanced in a rush, like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming" (*GS*,218).

In Martha's case—a character so unlike Mary in every way—spatial dimension forms a significant aspect at various levels of the plot, in terms of atmosphere, landscape and in the political dimension of the story. In this
context Lyotard's summing up of the socio-political provides an interesting insight. According to him the socio-political is 
the empirical space of intuitions and representation. It is not the 
space of the system which supports it and hides itself there; it's the 
space where social relations are lived, where the class struggle takes place.53

Space thus becomes a metaphor, a carrier of message. Cultural definitions 
of space tend to be different, and space is organised differently in each 
culture. E.T. Hall has dwelt on this aspect in *The Silent Language*. He also 
speaks of the eloquence of space and relates its communicability to its 
ethos. In the African context this attribute reflects itself in the contradictory 
response that space evokes among the whites and the blacks. Anthony 
Channels has summed it up as: “What to blacks was structured space, was 
to the whites wilderness.”54

Equally significant is the “narrative space” for looking into the artistic 
 delineation of various phenomena and responses. The meaning of a text, to 
quote Barthes, “is not ‘at the end’ of the narrative, it runs across it.”55 Thus 
spatial dimension is as significant as its fictional, conceptual and temporal 
elements. Spatial changes enable Lessing to expand thematically and 
include her shifting focuses within the narrative frame. When the locale in 
*Martha Quest* and the subsequent books shifts from the veld and koppies to 
the systematically arranged metropolitan space, it does so with a purpose. 
On the one hand, it extends horizons for Martha’s development; on the 
other, it also enables Lessing to reveal the working of imperialism as a 
system. The colonization of Southern Africa is in itself an instance of the 
power that man acquires through dominance over physical world, the real 
 space. Martha’s progression from the farm to city and from there to 
England is as much impelled by a need to counter the narrowing of space as 
by the inner dynamics of the narrative.

Sometimes the spatial form reflects the sociological and economic 
realities of a country. In Lessing’s novel-sequence space becomes a major 
signifier as it gradually unfolds the politics inherent in the distribution and
occupation of territories. Sharp gradations of the colonial system are visible as one moves from one space category to another. The area marked out as the location or “Kaffir town” is isolated from the white town and maintains low profile as if apologizing for its very existence. It is “another expanse of sparsely lit country, though this time there was no neat patterns of streets, only an apparently limitless darkness regularly marked by small yellow lights” (MQ, 146). The town itself—metropolitan space—is meticulously charted out, spoken for and inhabited by a hierarchy of urbanized colonials from volume to volume:

Cecil John Rhodes Vista spreadeagled at its upper end into a moneyed suburb . . . . In the lower town it expired in a sprawl of hot railway lines . . . beyond which, side by side, lay the white cemetery and the native location (RFS, 68).

The location’s close proximity to cemetery categorically brings out the moribund values of the settler. The imagery used here—“spreadeagled,” “expired in a sprawl,” “moneyed suburb”—is amply suggestive of the decay that had started hollowing out the roots of European civilization.

Encapsulated in the first two volumes is the entire divisiveness that marked the heterogeneous substrata of the colony. In *Martha Quest* the socio-political divide, even between various white ethnic groups, is immediately recognizable as what Hall calls “a territorial entity” (168). For instance, the Jew’s store is an anathema to the English-speaking community because it caters for the “Kaffirs”; they prefer the Greek’s store for their weekly purchases. Probably the most reality-negating spatiality in *Children of Violence* is the Sports Club where the colonials collectively indulge in a kind of “seance” to evade past and to create a dream world for the present. In *A Proper Marriage* Martha’s window overlooks “at least three worlds of life, quite separate, apparently self-contained, apparently linked by nothing but hate . . . .” These three worlds are “the big blocks of flats of the whites,” “the tin-roofed shanties of the coloured town, which marked the confines of order,” and “the struggling slums where the Africans were” (39). This spatial view of the town reappears, in slightly altered form, in all the
four volumes. It not only scales down the dimension of objects for Martha but also enables Lessing to interpret her experience in terms of space and time.

The manipulation of nature, the cosmic space, is also directly related to the ideology that a writer desires to project. Adolescent Martha’s romantic-idealistic perception of nature acquires more depth and profundity when viewed through Simone De Beauvoir’s interpretation of the affinity between nature and feminine consciousness. She writes:

Unconquered inhuman nature subsumes most clearly the totality of what exists. The adolescent girl has not yet acquired for her use any portion of the universal: hence it is her kingdom as a whole; when she takes possession of it, she also takes possession of herself.56

Beauvoir directly relates the portrayal of nature and its impact on the protagonist to the conscious or unconscious intentions of a writer. Lessing’s depiction of unspoilt nature is not incidental: Eve Bertelsen has viewed it as a continuation of European developmental or evolutionary idea, which can be traced back to Rousseau.57 Its disparate shades are visible in Blake’s innocents, Wordsworth’s rustics, Dickens’ children, and Tolstoy’s peasants.

Similarly it is the space that renders Martha’s consciousness, her individualism and humanism, meaningful. For a brief, fleeting moment she experiences a unique sense of oneness with nature. It is a rare experience, "a difficult birth into a state of mind which words like ecstacy, illumination and so on could not describe"(MQ.74). Her consciousness percolates through the cosmic space: “. . . the rivers under the ground forcing themselves painfully along her veins . . . her flesh was earth, and suffered growth like a ferment . . .”(75). In that exceptional moment she goes through “a slow integration, during which she and the little animals, and the moving grasses . . . and the stones of earth under her feet become one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms”(MQ.74). This mystical realization about her place in the larger scheme of things pushes her personal dilemmas farther back, “for during that space of time (which was timeless) she understood quite
finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity” (MQ.75). This is quite in tune with Lessing’s own assertion in the preface for the 1964 collection of African stories, and enables us to see that representation of nature is structural to her interpretation of reality. She says about Africa:

That is not a place to visit unless one chooses to be an exile ever afterwards from an inexplicable majestic silence lying just over the border of memory or of thought. Africa gives you the knowledge that man is a small creature, among other creatures, in a large landscape. (CASI, 10).

Despite her personal nostalgia for the vastness of the African space, there is no attempt at mythologizing the African landscape or at creating a spatial mystique. Lessing rather brings out the myriad responses that the African bush evoked in the white settler, particularly the alienation and disorientation that some of the weak in spirit suffered.

In Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage we witness the same romantic antithesis of “natural” versus “social” which provides the underpinning tension to George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss, or many of Hardy’s and Lawrence’s novels. The social pole in this tension is provided by the farming community in the veld and by the town with its brittle and complacent culture, its veneer of European conventions and various pseudo-political organisations. The natural pole is supplied by the African landscape and, from time to time, by Martha’s retreats into nature. One remarkable example occurs in A Proper Marriage where Martha and Alice are shown wallowing in slush and rain in the fullness of their pregnant state (152-54). In the Heart of Darkness, the narrative imbibes much of the denseness as Marlowe’s ship slowly cuts through marshes and enveloping mists; likewise, Lessing’s otherwise direct and somewhat heavy prose acquires a fluidity and sensuousness, reminiscent of Lawerence. African landscape is captured as “this naked embrace of earth and sky, the sun hard and strong overhead . . . so that the swimming glisten of heat is like a caress made visible . . . ”(MQ.311). And in A Proper Marriage, as Martha succumbs to the nature principle in a rare moment of abandon, Lessing
writes: "... she loosened deliciously in the warm rocking of the water" (153). The flow and shift of emphasis, in this way, varies and affects the tone of Lessing's prose.

Her quest for a universal ideal, a utopian space, is an artistic response to the turbulence all around. Essential to the adequate rendering of Lessing's pre-eminent thematic concern is space as imagined in Martha's dreams. After her first disappointing visit to the Left Book Club meeting, Martha dreams of a large city, a city that shared the features of London and New York and Paris, and even the Moscow of the great novelists, where people were not at all false and cynical and disparaging ... where people altogether generous and warm exchanged generous emotion (MQ, 162).

Immediately follows the old dream of that golden city whose locality remains vague, as Lessing suggests, but which until now had been situated somewhere between the house on the Kopje and the Dumfries Hills ... the white-piled, broad-thoroughfares, tree-lined, four-gated dignified city where white and black and brown lived as equals, and there was no hatred or violence (MQ, 163).

This imaginary city forms the most significant unifying link as far as the structural components of the novels are concerned. The idea of a utopian city, developed to its maximum potential in The Four-Gated City, lends that note of optimism which remains the only redeeming feature of our cataclysmic times.

The dynamics of space is, therefore, vital to the understanding of Lessing's fictional world, for the progression of time-period that she seeks to evoke can only be perceived through the happenings in space. Her manipulation of space-time fusion raises the Children of Violence sequence to the level of a cultural treatise examining the present predilections of the white community in the light of past "givens". It has been rightly pointed out that literature itself constitutes the symbolic space in which a self-justification of real-life becomes possible ... In this respect literature approaches the role of dreams in manifesting the deepest desire of persons about the configuration of the course of their existence.58
The entire novel-sequence constitutes the "espace connote" where using first Africa and then London as the background, Lessing orchestrates the manifestations of time in terms of colonialism, racism, communism and World War II.

In the following two volumes—*The Ripple from the Storm* and *Landlocked*—space remains the same, only time moves ahead. Consequently, some of the themes spill over to these volumes; but communism as the predominant political ideology becomes the main refractive component for the historical dialectics of the Second World War and its aftermath of destruction and disillusionment.
Notes


10. Doris Lessing “The Need to Tell Stories,” Ingersoll 76.


17. Edward Said has analysed this aspect in *Culture and Imperialism*.


22. Doris Lessing, “Drawn to a Type of Landscape,” Ingersoll 190.


27. Green 177.


30. Césaire, Markovitz 41.

31. Here I have adopted some of Eric Harber’s insights about the white settler’s sensibility; any further elaboration is my own.

32. Lessing remarks—“it was as if the principle of separateness was bred from the very soil, the sky, the driving sun,” and “each group, community, clan,
colour, strove and fought away from the other, in a sickness of
dissolution . . . " (MQ 68).

38. No sooner do the colonial brats realise that the native is not badly hurt,
they try to retrieve the situation by "flinging handfuls of money at him . . . "
(MQ 333).
39. Fred R. Holmes, comp., Prejudice and Discrimination: Can we eliminate
42. Doris Lessing, "The Inadequacy of Imagination," Ingersoll 16.
44. Fanon 31.
45. Knapp 34-35.
46. Harber 64.
50. Gérard Genette, qtd. in Ibitokun 409-10.

54. Chennells, Sprague 25.


59. Génette, qtd. in Ibitokun 410.