I have to dwell on stones
darkening the earth,
on the river ruined in its
own duration ....
Pablo Neruda
“There’s No Forgetting”

“I feel that the writer is obligated to dramatize the political conflicts of his time in his fiction.”

The twentieth century has had many crucial and controversial events; of these the most central has been the Russian Revolution. The novel too imbibed its influence, though somewhat indirectly and belatedly. The contrast between early political hope and later disillusionment that the communist ideology generated has become a major theme in the post-war political novel. As an organic and broad revolutionary movement, it assimilated many writers and artists by opening to them their own avenues to experience. Among those who particularly highlighted the darker side of the revolution, the names of Orwell and Koestler immediately come to mind. Lessing utilizes her experience to probe the collective and individual consciousness so as to assail the forces unleashed by a disintegrating society. In the novels under scrutiny—*A Ripple from the Storm* and *Landlocked*—she is not so much obsessed with the failure or betrayal of the
revolution as with the structural processes which cause a reigning ideology
to dwindle and dissipate during a certain phase of history. The
disastrous political and social consequences of communism during the 50s
are fictionalised in *The Four-Gated City*, while the intellectual collapse of
the Party in the British context is delineated in Anna’s "Red Notebooks."

For the novelist today, ideology is not a symptom of some alien
disease; it is, as Howe puts, “the burden and challenge of history.” As the
creatures of time and historical sense, we cannot help confronting the
prevailing ideology. Lessing herself has emphatically stated that “it is
impossible to distance oneself from the strong currents of one’s time.” For
her, history is an almost personified force, invading our lives from the
outside and irrevocably shaping them. Its possibilities may be limited yet
within the confines of a given epoch, there are always significant ideological
choices to be made. Corroborating this view *A Ripple from the Storm* and
*Landlocked* examine, within an encapsulated time and space, the historical
dimension of human existence.

From the nineteenth to the twentieth century there has been a radical
shift in perspective, in the distance the novelist establishes between himself
and his material. For instance, Conrad and James probe beneath the
surface of society to measure the plebian threat from their positions of
isolated social comforts. Lessing, on the other hand, was actively engaged in
the struggles she portrays in these two volumes. In a sense, she is in her
major works: Martha is not Doris Lessing, nor is Anna Wulf, but some of
their problems are the problems of Lessing. One may say that in *Children of
Violence*, as in *The Golden Notebook*, she has "objectified her own mental
battles embodying ideas in people."

Martha, like Toby Hood in *A World of Strangers* (1958), establishes
her credo quite early in the novel sequence. Despite being different in kind,
these two characters are the product of similar ethos: they share an
atmosphere of same ideological flux and have a common distaste for the
patronizing liberalism of certain forward-minded whites. In Martha’s case
ideas help mould in advance her reactions and response to experience. Her extensive reading and an unfair political system combine to incline her towards a socialist and leftist way of thinking—"a disease natural to her age," observes Lessing (MQ.314).

A mind so formed naturally feels caged as soon as the film of romance allows her to see through her ridiculously "proper marriage." Her soaring spirit longs to carve out a horizon more glorious than her domesticity allows. This romantic idealism is obvious even during the germinal stage of her initiation into revolutionary politics: her first impulse when she visits Contemporary Politics Discussion Circle is to look from face to face in search of "a Lenin who might be among them and her spirits sank" (PM.210). The conscious decision to join the communist group is "like a rebirth. For the first time in her life she had been offered an ideal to live for" (PM.315).

Martha's developing political commitment in A Proper Marriage becomes an intense involvement with the communist ideology in A Ripple from the Storm, about which Lessing says, "... of all my books it is the most directly autobiographical." It is all about the workings and mechanisms of a small communist group, with a strong Marxist tilt, in the middle of war in Rhodesia. These tiny revolutionary sparks erupted all over the world during the thirties and forties. Though many of them merely a "ripple" in the "storm," they were not without their consequences. The very origin of Lessing's novel bespeaks its ideological background. The title itself is drawn from a Russian writer, Ilya Ehrenburg's The Storm, a significant novel about the Great Patriotic War that Russians went in for then. Lessing's novel may describe a phenomenon that is hard to explain, but it lucidly conveys "the taste, flavour, texture and smell of the time."
Ideological Fervour

As a symbolic transposition of lived experience, the third volume of *Children of Violence* captures the enthusiasm that ideology generates when it is taken as a positive weapon: a "Che Guevara-like enthusiasm" as Umberto Eco calls it. The entire focus shifts to the moral enthusiasm of political activists in the peculiar situation of Southern Africa. All their emotions spring from "that greater elation on which they had all been floating now for months, ever since the formation of the group" (*RFS*, 8). This mood of tense dedication and intense involvement can at best be described as a kind of madness, a lunacy, or the single mindedness of the undivided fanatics. But it is in *The Four-Gated City* that Martha comes closest to assessing the significance of Communism for people who weren’t in communist countries: "it was a kind of litmus-paper, a holdall—you took from it what you wanted" (*FGC*, 79).

Centrally placed within the sequence, it is not inadvertently that the third volume concerns with revolutionary politics; it has a direct bearing upon the central theme of the sequence. Though finished as a force, Communism represents the basic conflict of our time. In Lessing’s own words:

> It is this conflict which I am trying to explore in my series of novels, *Children of Violence* . . . where I was at pains to state the theme very clearly: that this is a study of the individual conscience in relation to the collective.¹⁴

All through, Lessing’s attempt has been to establish an integral connection between the personal and the social as reflected through political generalities. The collective engenders claustrophobic feelings in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, and all the conscious individual efforts are directed towards fleeing from its stifling hold. Contrarily enough, in *A Ripple from the Storm* the desire is to be assimilated within “the group” which enshrines all the communist ideals. It is only as represented in “the group” that the collective comes to have a positive aspect: not an inveterate
sucker of individuality but a purposeful medium for the fulfillment of finer human impulses.

Collectively, the group looks upon itself as "the communist ideal" (RFS, 191). The commonality of ideas and purpose sparks off fellow-feeling and unites them in a universal brotherhood. Being part of a world-wide cause, they have a sense of shedding their narrow colonial existence and contributing to the revolution. They believe themselves to be the harbingers of a glorious future: "Upon us, upon people like us all over the world, the organised members of the communist party, depends the future of mankind, the future of our species"(RFS, 62). Their favourite vision, as Lessing mock-seriously notes, is thinking of themselves as contemporaries of Lenin:

They pictured themselves, moving fugitive from one hiding-place to another; saw the mob of ragged workers storming the Winter Palace; heard Lenin say: 'Comrades, we will now proceed to build socialism' (RFS, 38).

The ideas that fuelled them were the same as those of Communists or near-Communists everywhere during that time. The foremost among them being the belief that "socialism will cure everything"(RFS, 58). There will be no suffering and misery, no ragged piccaninny—he was protected because of their vision, which was that of "an ideal town, clean, noble, and beautiful, soaring up the actual town they saw"(RFS, 34). While it lasted, the fervour was genuine. It, however, is another matter that even when in their elated state of "joy and release"(RFS, 62), most of them continue being sceptical about the general impact of communism in Africa.

For Martha, the group renders her life purposeful, provides a platform to mitigate, if not nullify, the embarrassing consequences of the Empire's design. Her persistent refusal to acknowledge the operation of white ideology creates sufficient ground for soaking up socialist ideas. As she immerses herself in party activity, she is filled with the revolutionary longing to alter that ugly past which was "a record of misery, brutality and stupidity"(RFS, 62).
The group's explicitly intellectual and analytic idiom, as Lorna Sage has so rightly pointed out, provides Martha with a kind of context to probe another alternative of life beside sexuality—politics. At that point of time, it was not just an intellectual solace but an emotional refuge too. Her political involvements take her mind off her overriding personal problems—those related with her motherhood and femininity. It is in her ideological preoccupations that Lessing portrays how commitment to a cause can alter the world-view of the enthusiast. Living as Martha does, metaphorically speaking in the group, she feels as if she were invisible to everyone except her comrades. This is that brief phase when she is at perfect peace with herself, when thoughts and actions are nearly in full consonance:

For the first time in her life waking was not a painful process of adjustment... before she had opened her eyes she was already poised forward in spirit thinking of the moment when she would rejoin the group and her friends. 

Lessing thus is more concerned with the revolution as an "algebra of ideology," to use Howe's expression, and not so much with the first stirrings of dormant millions. Nor does her narrative format include those abstractions of ideology which tend to dehumanize individual lives. Her point of analysis, in this part of the series, is that insufficient, unrealistic and over-energetic response to a set of ideas which cools down a flaming ardour when tested against reality.

**Ideological Reflexes**

Ideology evokes different responses—a fact that has been commented on by various theoreticians. Robert Dahl, for instance, has neatly summed up:

the depth of commitment, the extent to which the implications of various tenets in the ideology are understood and the willingness to apply principles to concrete cases, all vary a great deal. 

By applying the principle of creative selection and elimination. Lessing marks out certain individuals and gives an insight into their life-process as
they flow along the current of the predominant ideology. Her intention is to show the relation between theory and experience, between ideology that has been preconceived and the tangle of emotions and relationship she is trying to present.

The form of the book (RFS) allows no sustained narrative. Events are presented from a single unified point of view which limits the possible signification of the text. The narrative emphasis is less on the individual’s progression through time and more on the decline of a faith, the death of an ardour. Naturally enough, none of the characters, not even Martha, has a commanding presence; she is there but only as one among the many. Though narrative keeps her in middle-distance focus, she is more interested in others’ lives than in her own. The group as a collective is also the single originator of meaning: the book, consequently, renders itself to the fixity of meaning since all hierarchies of discourse (ethical, psychological, aesthetical) are subsumed under the discourse of the political ideology.

The group itself is a heterogeneous structure comprising various kinds of individuals. Among them are political refugees from Europe, men from the RAF, and a countable few colonials. They have one thing in common: all of them are the victims of historical violence. In their suspended state, the formation of a communist group gives them room to develop. Understandably enough, those who subscribe to “the group” bring to bear upon their understanding of communism their own personal backgrounds. Manifest in it is quite a natural phenomenon of human psychology and a fundamental Marxist thesis that ideas and attitudes formed in the human beings are “necessarily sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.”

As much as their material circumstances, their revolutionary feelings evolve out of the dynamics of the situation—the world war, the prevailing political rot in Southern Africa, and the availability of an ideology to which a fervent and almost a religious faith had been transferred. These factors, in
rebound and interaction, create the situation for the formation of the communist group and also determine the level of allegiance of its different members. The narrative voice states that “they represented between them every variety of left opinion, each grade of it needing the most incredible tact and forbearance with the other”(LL, 137).

**Romantic Idealism**

Martha’s approach towards ideology, as we have already seen, is that of a romantic. To her, it is the only alternative to a violent society in which the “haves” and “have-nots” exist in the ratio of five to ninety-five. The noble ideas give her a mental-high but they do not bring about that inner transformation which she looks for in her other relationships. It has occurred to her even before the narrative has moved to *A Ripple from the Storm* that “joining a Communist Party did not make one a Communist.”20 Her predicament merely deepens as she realizes with dismay that “she had not been issued, as she had vaguely expected, with a completely new set of emotions”(*PM, 358*).

Martha’s idealism, therefore, remains paradoxical even when in the frenzy of political activity. Her thoughts hover between personal dilemmas and political activism. The resulting scepticism cannot be pushed back for too long as she is gradually surrounded by doubts and misgivings when high sounding tenets and reality appear irreconcilable: “There is something wrong somewhere, something I ought to be understanding . . . I must think about it. But how can I? I don’t know enough . . .”(*RFS, 192*). As the events unravel in the next book, her characteristic disharmonising dualism merely intensifies:

She read half a pamphlet about Japanese atrocities with an irritated boredom with propaganda which did not mean she disbelieved what she read. She absorbed a column or so of statistics about African education but with the irritation of impotence (*LL, 54*).

After her brief affair with Communism she is back to her doubting self; her political activities continue but without conviction and only as “a victim of the provinces”(*LL, 55*).
Presenting a sharp contrast to Martha's confusions is Jasmine; she is once-a-communist-always-a-communist type. Nothing can ruffle her unwavering faith in the ideology, which remains intact despite her reservation about the working of the group in Salisbury (RFS, 203). If it is a role all of them are playing—role envisaged by history—then Jasmine, along with Anton, plays it to the hilt.

**Communism as a Fictional Motive**

The thrust of the narrative at this juncture is to consider what a political discourse excludes as well as the assumptions which it includes. Communism acts as a fictional motive to probe the validity of the leftist ideology in its historical context and in relation to particular emotional responses. The narrative stance implies a retrospective acceptance of its limitations, especially the way it imprisoned thought.

This dimension is well-reflected in the behavioural complexities of Anton Hesse, who predominates the inner core of this amorphous socialist group. A German refugee and an embodiment of cold, cutting Marxist logic, "he had no romantic notions left about suffering and revolution" (PM, 326). His absorption of theory is so complete that it makes him contemptuous of the lesser mortals around him. Lessing says his posture of "contained intensity never failed to make people uncomfortable" (RFS, 36). Of the same psychological kind as Gottfried Lessing, Anton also shares with him the quality of being a fanatic, the likes of whom either cracked up or retreated so far back as to become anti-communist. However, nothing so dramatic happens in Anton's case; the persona of stern dedicated worker simply leaves him in *Landlocked* where he surfaces as an insecure and small-minded bluffer. Toppling all his socialist convictions, he merges himself unobtrusively with the capitalist way of life.

Where Anton supplies the theoretical backbone to the communist group, the RAF folks provide it with flesh and blood. Bound together by the feeling of being in exile and their good humoured contempt for that racialist city, they are more reckless in their politics, as they are in their social life.
The most remarkable among them being Jackie Bolton, the "perennial political maniac," whom Lessing describes as "the pike in a school of minnows." His fiery charisma is mainly instrumental in the creation of the communist group:

That quality in him which enabled him to inspire others seemed to put him in a category outside criticism; for to criticize Jackie—so he made them all feel—was to criticize the revolution itself (RFS, 10).

But most of the members of the group rebel against the suppression of individuality which political conformity seems to impose. Jackie Bolton, for instance, is defiance personified.

A class apart from all those and seeped in the revolutionary spirit is Athen, a Greek fresh from fighting in the mountains alongside the communist forces. His arrival, when the group is just beginning to stagnate, enthuses the activists with a new lease of hope: "He was a conscience for others. He burned always, a severe, self demanding steady flame, at which people laughed, but always with affection; from which they took their bearings" (LL, 42).

For most of them ideology remains mere ideology without becoming an integral part of "their intelligence and their passions, their drives and their goals," to use Marcuse's words. Some of the group members have firm ideological stands, but the rest were merely "buying a share in the current mood of optimism, which they felt but could not define" (RFS, 147). Jackie for one is not guided by any ideological conviction, but his hatred of middle and upper classes is expressed perfectly in communism. It is only in Athen that the need for radical change is rooted in his subjectivity. The war that he has waged is against capitalism which, he says, is "a beast who murders us, starves us, keeps us from the joy of life" (RFS, 173). A true revolutionary, he imparts to their brand of socialism that human colour which is missing from Anton's theory and logical analyses.

Lessing has given him the maximum simplicity, humanity and compassion as well as a harmony of being. It is in him that "consciousness and accomplishment are linked, go hand in hand, support each other"
Athen represents an idea deeply cherished by Lessing herself, evident in most of her writings and face-to-face talks: it is this humanitarianism, this looking upon others as one’s own self, that will save the world from ultimate disaster.

The narrative probes the question of social commitment through the contrasting attitudes of two white radicals—Mrs. Van der Bylt and Johnny Lindsay. As much human figures as representatives of certain ideas, they dominate the political scenario in *Landlocked*. Johnny has allowed himself to be submerged in his socialist ideas whereas Mrs. Van wants to play her cards safe. In the long run it costs her place in the Labour government and her credibility among the Africans. Her patronizing tone and half-humourously uttered cynical observations about “the white stupidity”(*LL*, 152) only serves to win her the reputation of despising the Africans; she fails to traverse the distance of a century of mistrust. Eventually, she becomes ineffective, as Lessing remarks: “Mrs. Van der Bylt had congealed and she knew it herself, into a figure, a set of words: she was a reactionary paternalist, who meant well”(*LL*, 217). It is, however, due to her initial gutsy efforts that she is able to carve out an identity for herself in the male-dominated “Labour” politics.

Johnny Lindsay, in the Africa of the 40s, is a *rara avis*: rare because he is one of those numbered few who had won the trust of the natives. Lessing informs that “two decades before isolated ‘progressives’ asked carefully chosen black people to their houses, that Johnny had virtually abolished the colour bar in his house”(*LL*, 148). He is a living proof of when an ideology no longer remains a mental outlook but becomes a way of life, a part of the individual’s spirituality, stirring him to passionate gestures and sacrifices. His open mindedness and an invincible faith in the basic goodness of humanity put him far above the “ordinary unregenerate mortals”(*LL*, 261).

There are other byproducts of revolutionary ideology, such as Solly Cohen—not one of the actual group, he is always present at its outskirts. A
compulsive exhibitionist and trouble-shooter, he displays a Trotsky-like element in his orientation; to him, a revolution without violence would be disappointing (RFS, 82). The naiveté of the politically uninitiated is represented in Tommy, the youngest member of the group. His attempts to imbibe socialist thought through literature fail to resolve the polarities of his situation: a white South African’s inherited imperialist ideology and that of a communist. The doubts which lurk at the boundary of others’ consciousness tear his perceptions asunder.30

Interaction of Ideology and Form

Within this conglomeration, there is a fairly wide range of humanity moving in and out of the narrative, representing every shade of ideological absorption. This brings us to the question of emergent structures as the ideology and form interact. The narrative exposition of ideological elements is no doubt vital to the progression of Children of Violence, thematically as well as structurally. For communism becomes a fictional motive in a dramatic sense as well. Against its background the characters do not remain static; the personal and moral conflicts attain a wider significance. For instance, as the narrative illuminates animosities prevailing amongst the rivals for the top slot—Jackie, Anton, Andrew—layers of human impulses and conflicting desires unravel. This interplay of ideological passion, when aflame or in retreat, lend life and vibrancy to an otherwise linear and single-tracked narrative.

A book of revolution, A Ripple from the Storm is also a book of conversions, that is of persons whose idea of revolution is at issue. The ideological experience proves a watershed in Martha’s personal evolution. Mona Knapp has seen it as “a mooring post and sounding board for the raising of Martha’s consciousness.”31 But Martha is not the only transformed person in the third novel of the sequence. All its leading characters have passed over into conditions that estrange them from their former selves though on different psychic levels. Martha, at the end of A Ripple from the Storm is mentally estranged from Anton; and he, as we’ve seen, is drifting
out of his phase of political commitment to Marxism. In *Landlocked*, all are engaged in trying out in action the implication of a new position: Athen is going back to Greece any day now (*LL*, 198); "Thomas, waiting to go to Israel; Martha, waiting to go to England . . ." (*LL*, 216). They are people filling in time as political fervour gives way to a phase of "dryness and disintegration" (*LL*, 22).

Bringing ideas or ideologies to life is always a challenge for the writer who takes up politics as his theme. One is walking on a tight rope; a little bit of overemphasis will make it (writing) into propaganda and raise questions about the writer's commitment: Should it be to art, the principle of veracity, or politics? For it is in becoming a mouthpiece that the writer defeats himself/herself. Lessing is able to meet this challenge successfully in the portrayals of Martha, Athen, Anton, Johnny; and later, Thomas Stern. It is with the novelist's lucid, disillusioned eye that she has described the group activities, shorn of all idealistic sheen and without binding her vision to a closed and definitive political doctrine.

Lessing is able to take up a radical analysis of the group's interaction with ideology not for having been an active "red" but because of ceasing to be one. It is this marginality that enables her to achieve a distance from ideology, much in the same way as it enables her to scrutinise dispassionately the colonial's racial ideology and the Londoner's fragmentary existence.

This does not, however, mean that ideology is discarded for experience. The novel directly generates an opposition between political commitment on the one hand, and artistic integrity on the other—a problem that is taken up further in *The Golden Notebook*. With what Lessing has to say about *A Ripple from the Storm* in her autobiography, there remains no doubt about the relationship of Doris Lessing to the narrator. In building upon autobiographical material, Lessing might be experimenting with representational value of reality and probing the narrative possibility to shape and produce personality. It is not a question of the narrative
commanding authorial assent but that of the author's analyses in retrospection colouring the narrative with that impersonal ironic note that reveals rather than conceals the narrator's superior knowledge. There is, however, a constant undercutting of experience—as if the author were on a self-demolition spree.

But this does not, in any way, detract from the book's deep experiential value; its well-spring, without fail, is the alienation that follows the death of a political faith. This accounts for the realistic temper of the novel. Readings' observation is relevant in this context: "Each ideological narrative can be referred to the metalanguage of political activity, which is not in itself simply a question of effect but of mimetic adequacy of telos."32 The manner in which *A Ripple from the Storm* touches on the social implications of communism without eliminating the ideological element, it can indeed be looked upon as a "triumph of realism."

**The Inner Contradictions**

All the way through the two volumes, the writing about the communist group, if generous in places (particularly in *A Ripple from the Storm*), is essentially diagnostic. The author's stance is evident in the narrative tone itself. A subtle mockery and a patient understanding accompany her characteristic objective and ironic appraisal of the socio-political context. Yet it is with a humane outlook that Lessing handles the flaws and eccentricities of individuals coping with ideological complexities. Taking a dig at Anton's stiff-necked pedantry, Lessing writes:

Anton Hesse spoke for more than three-quarters of an hour. It would not be said of him that he was carried away—he was not, but his words had the power and passion of the great men from whom he had taken them . . . (*RFS*63).

About Martha's response to this inspiring speech, she remarks:

The calm voice was linking her with those parts of her childhood she still owned, the moments of experience which seemed to her
enduring and true; the moments of illumination and belief (RFS, 62).

Implicit within these bits of narrative is one of the reasons that the enthusiasm soon ebbed away—the communist clichés were adopted too readily, without proper analysis and reflection. “A communist must consider himself a dead man on leave,” “the working people of the world are the inheritors of all culture, all knowledge, all art” (RFS, 37); “Marxism is a key to the understanding of all phenomena” (RFS, 63) and so on—these haloed words are lapped up without grounding them sufficiently into the tenets of theory. This is felt quite early on when Anton points out: “We have merely rushed into activity spurred by revolutionary or so called revolutionary phrases” (RFS, 36).

**Theory Vs Practice**

Even at its best their enthusiasm remains a makeshift substitute for knowledge and experience: most of them, rather all of them, essentially lacking adequate vision and passionate involvement to transform theory into practice. They tend to miss those “nodal points” where theory becomes practice and practice becomes theory (RFS, 65). Moreover, they seem to be equally unclear whether their revolutionary enterprise was directed against international capitalism or against domestic imperialism. Also missing is a strong sense of class-consciousness which a socialist organisation presupposes (RFS, 91).

One of the debilitating factors afflicting the group turns out to be that their claims of “red revolution” do not get translated into action. The colonial set-up does not allow them much space to expand their political activities. Racialism, paternalism and conservative attitude pose major blocks in practising socialist theories. Since the political structure does not permit any contact with the Africans, “they must work in the progressive white organizations” and with the Coloured who are physically accessible (RFS, 90). Among them, too, their revolutionary activities must be restricted to selling *The Watchdog* or distributing propagandist literature. Thus, they
remain the dwellers of what Caudwell calls, "the shadow world of thought, or ideology." Most of them continue feeling, deeper than anything else, "a continual hurt and embarrassment on behalf of the Africans" (RFS,166), but the attempt to incorporate them miserably fails. That the number of the whites, in the group, far exceeds the blacks proves self-defeating to its socialist structure.

Also, due to insufficient information, the group finds it hard to decide on its stance in the face of world-wide instability. Confronting them was the riddle that history had become during that particular slot of time (the 40s). Should capitalist propaganda be believed or should Russians be believed (RFS,81-83)? How should Stalin’s role be explained? Their colonials’ limitations—as discussed in second chapter—violate any possibility of sound answers to such complex questions. To cover up their discomfiture, they come out with such inane arguments as "the Russian communist party knows best," or "Comrade Stalin must know what he is doing"—thus exposing their own hollow ideological base.

Factionalism

All these were more or less situational hazards that the group could not but face in the circumstances. But compounding the problems and confusions is the “factionalism” (RFS,67;137) which Anna refers to as “a self-dividing principle” inherent in the structure of a Communist Party or group anywhere (GN,85). Close-knit at the core, it always remains frayed at the edge, thus leaving ample scope for self-doubt and hostilities among those at the fringe. The inner divisiveness first becomes obvious in the belligerent attitude of the airmen. Feeling thwarted in their revolutionary aspirations due to the cautious approach of the civilians, they accuse the group in town for being "petty-bourgeois social democrats infected with Trotskyism, right-wing deviationism and white-settler ideology . . . ." (RFS,165). They adopt a defiant posture which is expressed through their contempt for party-discipline. In the circumstances, the fragmentation of the group is a well-foreseen and logical inevitability (RFS,125).
Commenting upon this divisive principle, Lessing says: “This two-way process, a simultaneous loosening and tightening, was showing itself in other ways” (RFS,166). For instance, mutual criticism is dropped from their programme quietly. More significantly, the social life of some of the members begins to diverge towards those who were looked upon as enemies of socialism. This “loosening” is also felt in a fundamental change of policy. Slowly and unobtrusively there is a merging with one segment of the Labour Party. First Jasmine, one of the undesignated core, is invited to attend the Party meeting as an observer; soon five others are also co-opted. This alters the balance of the group activities completely (RFS,173).

“The atmosphere of total self-dedication” is left behind as the group finds itself being introduced unexpectedly to “a feeling of power” (RFS,175). They suddenly experience the pulls, manoeuvring and manipulations of various factions since party is itself divided over basic policy matter, i.e. whether or not the Africans should be given its membership.38 It doesn’t take long for the “reds” to discover that they were “pawns in some internal battles” (RFS,176), and their co-option was mainly due to their anti-racial stand. At this stage, the Labour Party politics overlaps the communist group, thus negating its existence as a reasonably cohesive unit.

The first political meeting ever to be held in the location (under the auspices of Social Democratic Party) proves to be crucial for the group (RFS,190-204). It is the summation of all earlier hectic activity described in A Ripple from The Storm. The self-image that it throws back to the political activists is that of Don Quixote fighting against the windmills. For the members of the Labour Party, the meeting sends wrong signals: a minority of them get isolated for their anti-racist stand and “forever marked as Reds and communists, kaffir-lovers”(LL,149). For the group, it proves totally disorientating. “Ever since ‘the meeting of the location,’” Lessing states, “the group had been shaken, pressured, squeezed this way and that...” (RFS,227). The underlying fact is that the assimilationist politics
was not quite the need of the hour. Caudwell has analysed this dimension of the group psychology:

The consciousness which remains adhering to the pole of the ruling class contracts and stiffens because it is separated from its organic nexus. It becomes academic, reactionary and fascist and petrifies in a living death.39

Short of becoming fascist, the rest of the observation remains accurate in terms of the group’s fate in *Landlocked*. The immediate consequence is that mixing up with the Labour politics distracts them from their own purposes and diffuses the spirit of revolution.

Despite the threatening internal factionalism, the “reds” had kept their evangelical zeal alive:

In five years there would be a communist Europe. They imagined it as a release into freedom, a sudden flowering into goodness and justice. They already felt themselves to be part of it (*RFS*, 167).

But, now an inexpressible frustration sets in at the realization that all their socialistic dreams were futile and that the Africans were far from rising in revolt against the crushing imperialism. In a moment of bitter truthfulness, Jasmine voices the meaninglessness of their gestures, with which Martha mentally acquiesces: “It doesn’t matter what one does in this bloody place,” she burst out, “all we are is a bunch of do-gooders uplifting the poor” (*RFS*, 203). Lessing seems to suggest that just surrendering individuality to a collective ideal, a political faith, is not enough. It can neither sustain the enthusiast nor the ideology when “social consciousness is torn from social action like flesh from bone.”40

The political activities go on for quite some time, but the group as an entity has fallen apart. The general mood at the depletion of an enthusiasm is summed up in Martha’s state of mind:

Martha felt herself cut off from everything that had fed her imagination: until this moment she had been part of the grandeur of the struggle in Europe, part of Red army, the guerrillas in China, the partisans in Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece (*RFS*, 278).

A sense of futility overtakes her, as her ambivalent, self-denigrating aspect reappears in full force. The existential despair at the retrogression of an
ideology in the changing historical scenario becomes the leitmotif in *Landlocked*.

**The Disenchantment**

While diagnosing the process of drifting out of communism as a world-wide phenomenon, the fourth volume also strikes the note of post-war political disillusion. The parallel emphasis is on Martha's somewhat inconsistent efforts to regain emotional autonomy after an impassioned submission to a faith.

Referring to the gestation period of *Landlocked*, Lessing calls it a "bad, slow, frustrated, blocked time." This accounts for the change in the narrative tone. As compared to *A Ripple from The Storm*, where even language is enthused with ideological fervour, the tone in *Landlocked* is "flat and heavy and rather disillusioned," implying a sense of outer activity but inner deadness. The vigorous activity of the third volume that controls the narrative pace is sharply contrasted with an atmosphere of silent, subdued waiting in the following one. In this, it is reminiscent of O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*: Harry Hope's saloon being the place where all wait for a hopeful tomorrow. So much so, Larry's confession about the reasons for quitting the Movement echoes Martha's predicament vis-à-vis communism. Like him she too is one of those who have to see all sides of a question. When you're damned like that, the questions multiply for you, until in the end it's all question and no answer. Martha, however, has certain other aspects to her personality, which further complicate the matter. For her, too, it is a phase when she must "preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration"(*LL*, 22). Her mood coincides with the general prevailing atmosphere: "The continuity of Martha now was in a determination to survive—like everyone else in the world these days . . . "(*LL*, 21). Disenchanted with communism, she is waiting for the time when she would leave the colony. Trying to maintain a precarious
equilibrium in her marriage, she is waiting for "someone who would unify her elements" (LL, 76-77).

The whole process of disillusionment with ideology, through all its essential stages, was experienced and perceived by Lessing from very close quarters. For her, Marxism has been a religion by virtue of being the only system of thought that looks upon "the world as a whole and see[s] the different parts of it interacting." Over the years she has felt distanced from it because of the abounding disparities between theory and practice. This strand forms one of the major facets of Children of Violence:

My series of Martha Quest novels . . . depicts my own development towards Marxism and away from Marxism, a process of disillusionment. I've long realized that salvation of the world cannot lie in any political ideology. All ideologies are deceptive and serve only a few, not people in general.

What Lessing experienced during this period (after the war) was more of an historical inevitability, for if the thirties had been a decade of commitment, the 40s was that of betrayal. Arthur Koestler has voiced nearly similar feelings when he charts out the graph of his journey into and out of Communism in the first volume of his autobiography, Arrow in the Blue.

**The Aftermath of War**

The historical momentum that Lessing gives herself irrevocably, in this part, is not communism but the Second World War, particularly its aftermath. It is the ideology of violence and inhumanity that comes under Lessing’s microscopic lens. The glorification of war by the Sports Club crowd in *A Proper Marriage* is cancelled out by some sordidly realistic and evocative pictures of the travails of war in various parts of Europe. The narrative takes the form of a camera-eye as all the barbarity and sadness is depicted in the newsreels that show the vanquished Germans in their miserable plight. The "jeering and sneering" voice of the commentator goes on about the end of the menace called Germany, while the camera pans across defeated men,

men in the last extremity of hunger, cold and defeat, thousands and thousands of hollow cheeked ghosts, a ghost army . . . in the cold.
cold wind of that frigid spring at the end of the European war (LL,63).

The documentary is an occasion for Lessing to subject the atrocities of war to a multiple point-of-view. Collectively, it arouses mixed feelings—"the whole cinema seethed frustration, anger, resentment, discomfort" (LL,64). Individually the responses vary according to the psychological make up and ethnic background of a person. The question that Lessing wants to raise is: can brutality mean anything but pain and anguish, and can the face of suffering be different for a Jew or a German or a Russian?

This drastic human tragedy is recalled and recaptured again and again—the very repetition of the event intensifying the madness implicit in it. All the viewpoints intersect in the narrative voice’s soulful description of human instinct for violence:

During five years of Martha’s time, of days when, for the most part she had been bored, waiting for life to start, forty-four million humans had died, had been murdered by their own kind. The world was peopled by a race of murderers who had done their best to annihilate each other (LL,237).

The passage, though heavy with pessimism, points to Lessing’s commitment to something larger than individual consciousness—a commitment to link private consciousness with historical situation. Probing further into the mechanics of violence, she pauses to ponder over its corroding effect on the collective psyche—a consistently growing immunity to violence. A numbness of conscience displays itself in the casual, matter-of-fact attitude to death and suffering. She says,

If in this city, white and black began murdering each other, then it would be another city in the grip of war, that’s all. Just as these mornings one read that in Israel another British soldier had been shot in ambush by men presumed to be the members of the Irgun or Stern gangs (LL,238).

These words directly relate to Lessing’s firm conviction that the world must find another less dangerous and more sensible alternative to war. Hidden between these lines is also perennial Lessing-query—"what is the matter with us all?" Landlocked does not offer a clear answer, but it is a “signpost” reflecting human attitudes and propensities as well as warning us
of the danger inherent in our situation—it is "a powder keg we live in" (LL, 311).

This human dimension of war is counterbalanced by a purely political analysis. War is seen as a capitalist strategy, the result of the conflict of rival ideologies. The social chronicler in Lessing perceives the danger that lies in the obsessive possessiveness of an ideology and the general intolerance of those subscribing to an ideology different from one's own. The affiliations and disaffiliations of the period were also oblique consequences of the ideological disparity between the capitalist powers and the communist bloc. This reveals itself in Athen's impassioned assessment of the situation towards the fag end of the forties:

—do we have to be told . . . that now the war is over, America and Britain will again try to harm the Soviet Union? Is not America now, as we stand here, pouring out her millions to destroy the communist armies in China? (LL, 111).

Athen's apprehension becomes an actuality in The Four-Gated City.

It is, however, in the hostile response to Professor Dickinson's speech (LL, 103-8) that Lessing speculates on the changes in the public outlook as a reflection of the changed political imperatives of the era. The way the audience reacts to the very mention of communism only indicates "how suddenly the season of belief can turn. Into its own opposite the rule seems to be . . ." (LL, 103). The "fickleness of mob," so emphasised in Shakespearean plays, has metamorphosed into the variability of public opinion in the twentieth century. A clear evidence of it being the pervasive distrust of communism; Lessing writes

A chill wind blew—that was all. The atmosphere had changed. 'Public opinion had changed.' What people were afraid of—that is what had changed. Fear had shifted its quarters (LL, 106).

The "fear" was directed against communism, against the ideology that was identified with the Soviet Union, which no longer stood for "the good" and "the true."
Ideology as False Consciousness

Communism as a force progressively loses its relevance in the colonial town. The group—"that ridiculous little organism" (LL,104)—ceases existing though the members have been labelled forever as "Reds". The reasons for this fragmentation are not that easy to trace because both the nature of the African proletariat and its revolutionary character were very complicated. The crux of the matter remains that a potentially revolutionary group fails to develop into a sustained revolutionary force in the Zambesian situation. Lessing's analysis is that "Communism was too abstract and inhuman an idea to satisfy Africans—and in fact, when later there was Communist or Marxist regimes, they did not last long." The indications within the text make it clear that this abstraction sprang from, what Raymond Williams calls, "an epochal rather then a genuinely historical consciousness of ideas." In its practical dimension, communism could not become an ideology within which the Africans could see the reflection of their interests and conflicts.

One may say that ideology, in the context of the communist group in Salisbury, proves a false consciousness, to use Marxian term, because it remains at odds with Zambesian facts. As the news of Stalinist excesses pours in, the faith in the socialism of Soviet Russia receives a great setback. To this also contributes books—journalistic and autobiographical in nature—which claim to expose the intransigence of the communist regime in Russia. One of the kind, written by Timofy Gangin (LL,272-275), reaches Martha's cronies and snuffs out their ardour finally. It is the power of the "Word" that the narrative celebrates—a point that gains in significance in the following two volumes culminating in Anna's authorial ventures in The Golden Notebook.

Lionel Trilling's analysis of the gradual recession of an ideological faith throws significant light on the group's final disenchantment. Martha and many like her had been attracted to communism because it spoke boldly to their love of ideas and ideology. In Martha's case, it remains
particularly true that she takes politics to be "an idyll," only to discover, like many others, that instead of "a political pastoral it was really a grim military campaign or a murderous betrayal of political allies." This is what Fredric Jameson refers to as the mystification of ideology. For people like Martha, ideology conveys "the notion of a kind of floating and psychological world-view, a kind of subjective picture of things already by definition unrelated to the external world." Something to the effect is mentioned in Mrs. Van's accusatory words; it is through her that Lessing questions the logic of earlier enthusiasm and later disillusion in the final chapter of *Landlocked*:

'...you are romantics, every one. You exaggerate, you have no sense of proportion, you think anything is justified if enough people die for it....You all go on as if the Russians were the whole human race. Just because they've made a mess of things, you behave as if socialism itself has failed.' (*LL*, 331).

The point that Lessing wants to stress here is that mystification of an idea may sometimes lead to its distortion. For it has been said that "the idea too is capable of blackmail; likewise the theory, it will soon disown itself. Ideology has its subconscious, its secret corridors. Its neuroses contrive amalgams."Quite a considerable space in *Landlocked* is devoted to the political activities of the Africans. The brief span of the revolutionary ideology was not without its consequences. It did light a spark of political awareness even if it couldn't bring about a total transition in thinking. As a result the Africans' dissatisfaction with the imperial rule had begun to acquire a sharper edge. It was evident in the fact that they had started organizing themselves into "groups," though of dubious credentials (*LL*, 108, 148-51). Mostly study groups, they were nationalists and not socialists in spirit. Mrs. Van's "reactionary methods of education" were no longer acceptable to them; their interest was in only one type of instruction—"How to get rid of the present white government, by (a) fair means or (b) foul means" (*LL*, 151). The only ideology that politically conscious Africans could understand, during this phase, was that of hatred and their own racial humiliation. This
basic antagonism surfaces openly and dangerously during political discussions.\textsuperscript{54}

The culminating event in \textit{Landlocked} is the black workers' strike (\textit{LL}, 4.3). The pulls of power among the African groups, with some behind-the-scene efforts of certain militant whites, bring the things to such a pass that the situation for a black workers' strike is created. A complicated business in the best of times, the strike sparks off innumerable currents. Describing its fantastical aspect in the African context, Lessing remarks, "The note of farce, of grotesque improbability—the characteristic of every event in that unfortunate country was struck from the very first moment" (\textit{LL}, 299). The event enables Lessing to venture into the unexplored regions of public mind while delving into the psyche of fear. To the imperialist stratum, the strike is an insult and a threat simultaneously (\textit{LL}, 103). The blacks, on their part, hardly understand the situation—many just run off to the veld to sit out any trouble there (\textit{LL}, 328). In this way the mutual distrust of the ruler and the ruled makes them equally panic-stricken. After some days it comes to an end without any sensational happening. In Lessing's words: "Perhaps it was the absurdity of the situation that ended it" (\textit{LL}, 327).

The incident that closes \textit{Landlocked}, though of seemingly low key, is nonetheless closely related to the thematic structures of the novel. Martha, on the verge of leaving the colony, goes to attend a meeting\textsuperscript{55} arranged by an upcoming group, only to realise that their presence is just tolerated as the "members of the old guard" (\textit{LL}, 339). Anna captures this retrogression in quite concrete terms: they had "fossilized" (\textit{GN}, 339).

The surfacing of a new group towards the termination of a historical phase acquires symbolic dimension. It is an occasion for Lessing to reassert her hope in socialism while suggesting the continuity of life-force against all currents of political ideas. As she observes in \textit{The Golden Notebook}: "The core of deadness, of dry thought could not exit without lively shoots of fresh life, to be turned so fast, in their turn into dead sapless wood"(339). For
Martha, it signifies that she has finally outgrown her communist phase: she can draw parallels with the other group without nostalgia or pain. At the same time, the implied progression of socialist ideology ratifies their moral faith, lending greater authenticity to their past political activities.

**Humanization of Ideology**

Though ideological strand is the predominant one in the third and fourth volumes of *Children of Violence*, ideological abstractions are not allowed to supervene experiential and human aspect. Even the best of doctrines remains "much too remote and narrow a base for literature as there can be no denying that literature relates itself to life through experience and only secondarily through ideas." In Lessing's novel-sequence, commitment and temptation, the individual and the collective, emotion and ideology are in delicate, often poignant, counterpoise. The emphasis may keep on shifting from novel to novel, but these binary oppositions are ever present. For even as Lessing reaffirms her hope in socialism, and insists that political and personal cannot be separated, she sees life as essentially tragic. "Children" and "violence" are the perpetually unbalanced terms in the equation of present day existence.

The distinguishing point for a novel dealing with politics is the complex interplay between emotion and ideology. Without the usual representation of human behaviour and feeling, it would be hard to absorb the abstractedness of ideology within its narrative flow. In *A Ripple from the Storm*, all political activity is viewed through the collective reflexes; intensity of relationship is subordinated to ideological considerations. *Landlocked*, however, is different. Despite its seemingly linear format, it has a concentric narrative pattern. The outer historical and political orbits encompass many rings of relationships and emotions. At the centre is Martha-Thomas connection, an interesting counterpoint to Martha's other relationships. Their interrelation supplies the emotional pole as a counterbalance to the
political one. There are other interpositions of life—in the form of Johnny-Flora, Athen-Maisie, Martha-Anton—which bring ideology and experience in direct conflict and lend the novel an aura of high drama.

At this juncture it becomes essential to elaborate a little on Thomas Stern's character because he enshrines Lessing's concept of a composite being and represents man's fate in the present political and social context. His humanist disposition and his need for dignity lead him to political struggle, only to come to the despairing realization that political struggle is not the true end of man's life, and he can't see any other. Even more than Martha, Thomas's life has been determined by violence, but this has not deterred him from practising his all-inclusive humanity on plants and the natives alike.

By nature a reflective man, he has—like Kyo in Man's Fate—the rare gift of being able to surrender himself to historical action though he senses the vanity of all action when measured against the certainty of death (LL, 209). His suppressed response to brutality while watching the newsreel (1:2) is culminated in the agonized cry voiced in his notes: " 'Vermin, Vermin.' . . . 'the world is a lump of filth crawling with Vermin.' 'Death here. Death there too. Everywhere' "(LL,336). His existential musings (interspersed throughout the text) and his consciousness of being in exile place him in the category of Camus and Kafka's heroes. Totally enmeshed in political strife, he first travels to Israel, then goes to voluntary exile in an African village, only to die Kurtz-like amidst caring and considerate tribals (LL,307).

It is in Thomas Stern and Athen that commitment to an idea is depicted as it brushes against the commitment to compassion and the commitment to revolution respectively. Amidst the clamour of ideology, war and violence, it is the basic humanity, the raw spirituality that Lessing is able to highlight as her ideological conviction. The implied message is that it is the humanization of ideology that is needed in the present age. The idea is further corroborated in the "Appendix" to The Four-Gated City which,
besides other things, also provides a retrospective analysis of the communist ideology (FGC, 625).

Lessing thus challenges the capacity of Communism to impart lasting world-view and to provide viable answers to all the material and spiritual questions that perturb modern mind. As a critique of post-war scenario, *Children of Violence* seeks to explore and analyse the problematic centres of culture. One such focal aspect is that of gender relations, which has come to be looked upon as an arena of clashing personal needs and interests. In this sphere of sexual politics, too, Lessing challenges some major central assumptions and power structure of a culture that remains male-dominated.

Before moving on to *The Four-Gated City*, it would be worthwhile to take into account the effect of the political on the private self as it emerges through various gender equations in the sequence. The idea is to understand the processes of "disconnection" in personal relationships by reviewing the split between the public and the private.
Notes


5. Lessing, *Under My Skin* 263.


8. At fifteen Martha’s reading spreads over Havelock Ellis, Engels, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Thoreau and Whitman besides the great Victorians (*MQ*, 10, 43, 80, 163, 271-73).

9. Their marriage has a false basis. Martha mistakes *The New Statesman* lying in Douglas Knowell’s office as a reflection of his political awareness. She is thrilled to feel—“We are members of the same brotherhood,” and mentally accepts him as a partner (*MQ*, 294-95, 304, 318).


This aspect has found various representations in the contemporary novel: Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* is an unsparing record of the ruthless logic-chopping of ideology, and much of Solzenitsyn's writings celebrate man's emotional self as against the desensitizing tactics of Russian Communism.


For example, her response to poverty is typically European—"poverty was boring; there was no need for it to exist and therefore she felt as if it already did not exist (PM,358).

She first makes a brief appearance in *Martha Quest* and figures as a prominent group member in *A Ripple from the Storm*. The living model for her was Dorothy Schwartz. See *Under My Skin* ch. 13.

Lessing introduces him in *A Proper Marriage* as one who "had spent the last fifteen years in the political struggle in Europe, with the most sophisticated revolutionaries of his time"(326).

The name of Lessing's second husband, on whom Anton is partly modelled. A fine summing up of Anton's personality is given by Andrew (RFS,136).


Portrayed with very deft strokes, he is a prototype of Frank Cooper, a product of the hungry thirties in Britain. See *Under My Skin* ch. 13.
26. Lessing, *Under My Skin* 274


28. See *A Ripple from the Storm* 127-142.

29. Both first appear in *A Ripple*: Mrs. Van is described in quite some detail—(*RFS* 3. 4); Johnny, on the other hand, appears prominently in *Landlocked* (2. 3 onwards). He dies during the worker's strike in his attempt to send some help to the striking Africans (*LL*, 327).

30. See *A Ripple from the Storm* 64-65; 79-83.


33. See Leo Kuper, *Race, Class and Power* (London: Duckworth, 1974) 208-11. Kuper, while dwelling on the limitations of communism in African situation, has highlighted the inner paradoxes, which are very much similar to those reflected in the workings of "the group" in *A Ripple from the Storm*.

34. For instance, "Help for our Allies," "Sympathizers of Russia," "Medical Aid for Russia" (*RFS*, 12).


36. The one man they include—Elias Phiri—turns out to be government mercenary (*RFS* 120; 163-64).

37. An in-depth analysis of the causes that lead to the split in the group appears in *The Golden Notebook* (84-86).

38. The liberals, such as Mrs. Van and Jack Dobbie, favour it; but the reactionaries, who don't want to jeopardise their chances of sitting in the parliament, resent it.


40. Caudwell 297.

42. Lessing, interview with Eve Bertelsen 159.


44. Doris Lessing, "Running through Stories in My Mind." Ingersoll 97.


46. Solly, as a Jew, can be nonchalantly gay watching all that human misery; on the other hand, Anton, the German, pretends studied indifference. Thomas Stern displays the most complex reactions: he vibrates with anger muttering, "Bastards, bastards, bastards." His is a historical anger, directed against violence and inhumanity.


48. The communist activists' compulsion to work through intermediaries, politely dubbed as "contacts," speaks of their limited achievement (LL,44).

49. Lessing, *Under My Skin* 279.


54. For all the credibility that Johnny Lindsay enjoys among the Africans, his narrative of the worker's strikes in 1913 is bitterly criticised by a young African. His angry retort is: "And where were the black miners during the
struggle? I understand that every year at that time 8,000 Africans were killed in accidents" (LL, 157).

55. It is a near repeat of the earlier meetings of "the group" during its heydays, with more or less the same dramatis personae; except that they are younger and their idealism is still intact.

56. Rahv 309.

57. All his family was exterminated in the concentration camps—a fate which he and his brother narrowly escaped (LL, 209).

58. The dehumanization of the native fills him with black anger as does the callous complacency of the white in power (LL, 177). His encounter with violence has marked him permanently, but he tries to make sense of his isolation by identifying himself completely with the miserable plight of the rural Africans (LL, 289; 333).

59. He has interiorised the turmoil of the world around. His reflections include observations such as "how hard it is to escape one's fate" (LL, 103) and "...there are things you can't do something about, you come to the end of things in yourself" (LL, 207).