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Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook: A Critique of Socialism or the Stalinisation of Socialism?

Doris Lessing'in The Golden Notebook İsimli Eseri: Sosyalizmin mi Yoksa Sosyalizmin Stalinizasyonunun mu Eleştirisi?

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Abstract

Even though it is a well-accepted fact that most socialists have been opposed to the one-man rule of the Stalinist regime, described as “a whole river of blood” by Trotsky (1937), the name of Stalin is deliberately manipulated and linked with socialism in order to implicitly charge Marxism with inherent despotic inclinations. In this context, the aim of this study is to unearth the fossilised hierarchal structure of the Stalinist bureaucracy, to investigate the impacts of the ideological hegemony of the Stalinist dogma on the revolutionary practices of socialist activists and to reveal that Stalinism, above all, victimised and tyrannised socialist activists, through a close reading of Anna's critical attitude towards the Communist Party in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. This study will also focus on the role of the left-wing writer in a mid-fifties communist milieu and examine the dogmatisation of Marxism and the widening gap between theory and practice in left-wing politics during the Stalin era. This will provide a framework to discuss whether the novel is actually intended or functions more as a critique of socialism or specifically of Stalinism. Over the course of the study, some short excerpts from Lessing's interviews and autobiographical work, *Walking in The Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962*, will be used.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, Marxism, Socialism, Stalin

Öz

Birçok Sosyalistin Stalin dönemindeki tek adam diktatörlüğüne – Trotsky (1937) bu durumu “kan deryası” olarak isimlendirir – karşı çıktığı bilinen bir gerçek olsa da Stalin figürü Marksist dünya görüşünün despotik eğilimlere sahip olduğunu belirtmek amacıyla bilinçli olarak manipüle edilip Sosyalizm ile ilişkilendirilmektedir. Bu noktada, bu çalışmanın amacı, Stalinist bürokrasinin fosilleşmiş hiyerarşik yapısını, Stalinist dogmanın Sosyalist aktivistlerin devrimci pratikleri üzerindeki ideolojik hegemonyasını ve Stalinist dünya görüşünün, her şeyden önce Sosyalistlere zulmettiğini, Doris Lessing'in *The Golden Notebook* isimli eserinde Anna'nın Komünist Parti'ye olan eleştirel yaklaşımını göz önünde bulundurarak ortaya koymaktır. Bu çalışma, aynı zamanda, 1950'lerin ortasında komünist çevrelerdeki sol kökenli yazarların eğilimleri üzerine odaklanacak ve Stalin dönemindeki Marksist dünya görüşünün dogmalaşmasını ve pratik ile teori arasındaki giderek büyüyen uçurumu inceleyecektir. Bu da romanın Sosyalizmin mi yoksa Sosyalizmin Stalinizasyonunun mu eleştirisi olup olmadığını tartışmak için teorik bir zemin oluşturacaktır. Çalışmada, Lessing'in röportajlarını da içeren otobiyografik eseri *Walking in The Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962*'den alıntılar da kullanılacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, Marksizm, Sosyalizm, Stalin

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Introduction

Published in 1962, read in many translations all over the world, and considered as one of the major works of twentieth-century literature, Lessing's magnum opus, *The Golden Notebook* is perhaps the most well-known novel of her works. The novel, depicting the life of Anna Wulf, the writer of *The Frontiers of War*, a "free woman", a Communist and a single mother in her thirties who suffers from political disillusionment and "writer's block" and struggles to find a way to attain wholeness, order and a coherent vision in a chaotic, fragmented and individualised social order, explores the socio-political, cultural, economic and historical circumstances of the mid-twentieth century. It focuses particularly, in its thematic emphasis, on the rise of anti-Stalinism, nihilism, gender issues, psychoanalysis, madness, colonialism and racism. In order to capture the immediacy of mental breakdown and fragmented consciousness in British society and to express it within a new narrative framework, Lessing, in the novel, uses a form-breaking and experimental narrative organisation in which each "Free Woman" section, written in the third person and chronologically fictionalising the lives of Anna Wulf and her friend Molly Jacobs in London, is followed by excerpts from the black, red, yellow and blue notebooks, written in the first person and covering the years 1950 and 1957, but now offered with a scrambled chronological order: the black notebook, recounting Anna's interior monologues about her first novel, *Frontiers of War*, parodied as *Forbidden Love*, and her memories of Southern Africa; the red book, concerning Anna's involvement with political issues, especially with the British Communist Party, and her satire of her own political stance and the party line; the yellow notebook, narrating Anna's unpublished novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, focusing on Ella and her friend Julia; and the blue notebook, functioning as a record of Anna's personal life and relations with her daughter, Janet, and friends. As Anna explains to Mother Sugar, the therapist, in the novel: "I keep four notebooks, a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which I make stories out of my experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary" (p. 418). This pattern of a "Free Women" section followed by the notebooks is neatly repeated four times in the novel. "The Golden Notebook" section, in which Anna puts an end to the compartmentalisation of the notebooks, attains integrity and wholeness and starts writing a new novel by getting rid of the "writer's block", comes as the penultimate section of Lessing's novel which ends with a final "Free Women" section¹ (Lightfoot, 1975, p. 279). In Lessing's words:

[Anna] keeps four [notebooks] ... not one because, as she recognizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness – of breakdown ... In the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation – the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity. (Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, p. 7)

This puzzling arrangement of the novel's parts, through which Lessing renders disparate and contradictory moods, thoughts, orientations and motives, reveals the divisions in the personality of Anna, while the dialectical synthesis of disintegration and unity within the golden-coloured notebook at the end of the novel symbolises the urge to impose an order on chaos, which creates a form-content split. The intricate and linguistically fragmented and disconnected structure of the novel is, for that reason, at odds with Anna's awareness of this formlessness and desire for a unified and coherent whole: "She could feel herself, under this shape of order, as a chaos of discomfort and anxiety" (p. 343). This state of mind, allowing Anna to appreciate chaos, destruction, power, art, altruism and order at the same time, is actually a sort of postmodern consciousness: "[It] is a jumble of contradictory moods – a wrenching nostalgia for the comfort of past forms, a paralysing fear of the formlessness of the present, a despairing sense of emptiness and futility, a positive will to conform chaos" (Draine, 1980, pp. 47-8).

Despite quitting the Communist Party in 1956, Lessing served on the editorial board of the *New Reasoner* and took an active role within the *New Left*. The *New Left* – the founding figures of which included Raymond Williams, E. P. Thomson, Perry Anderson and Stuart Hall – focused on Marxist interpretations

of media, communications and literature, rejected the dominant orthodoxy in the Labour Party and the legacy of Stalinism in the Communist Party, and put forward the view that engaging with culture could enable a greater understanding of society and its culture and create political change (Hoggart and Williams, 1960, p. 29). Written during the formation of the *New Left*, *The Golden Notebook* deals with similar issues that were the focus of the *New Left*, particularly the Stalinist dogma in the Communist Party and the role of culture in terms of progressive and radical transformation. Lessing was also heavily influenced by theories regarding literary forms, Marxist aesthetics, and modes of experimentation with fictional forms. However, this article, rather than exploring Lessing's changing attitude towards form and fiction, will focus on the role of the left-wing writer in a mid-fifties communist milieu, reveal the widening gap between theory and practice in left-wing politics and investigate whether the novel is actually a critique of socialism or Stalinism.

The Role of the Left-Wing Writer in a Mid-Fifties Communist Milieu

During the Stalin era, the state maintained an extensive and strict programme of censorship by means of several stages of supervision. The functions of the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press (Glavlit), which was established as an official censorship organ in order to secure state secret protection in 1922, were extended and tightened. In 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, claiming that the unions within literary circles "might change from being an instrument for the maximum mobilization of Soviet writers ... to being an instrument for cultivating elitist withdrawal and loss of contact with the political tasks of contemporaneity" (qtd. in Wallach, 1991, p. 75), dissolved all the unions and founded the Union of Soviet Writers that aimed to achieve party and state control in literature and defined socialist realism² as the true art form. All materials to be published were first to be submitted to the Writer's Union, then to the state-appointed commissar and finally to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in order to control whether they were thematically and formally consistent with the literary line laid down by the Party (Berlin, 2000). Focusing on censorship in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and giving examples from a number of different literary translations, Samantha Sherry (2012, pp. 164-8) points out that every text in the Stalin era was read closely and that any politically ambiguous passage that contradicted the Stalinist dogma or depicted it in a negative way was removed from a work. In Joseph Freeman's *An American Testament*³, for example, the following section was removed:

At this time Baldwin was opposed 'in principle' to the dictatorship of the proletariat. For him it was 'no better than' the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The classless society, after the state had 'withered away' was very fine. But the transition period with its 'force and violence', its absence of civil rights, its punishment of people who had committed no 'overt act', was, so far as he was concerned, no better in Soviet Russia than in capitalist America. (p. 328)

In another instance, the following sarcastic extract, regarding the story of two German businessmen, one of whom makes a trip to the Soviet Union, "the proletarian paradise" (p. 388), and promises his friend to send a letter and explain his experiences, was removed from Upton Sinclair's *Dragon's Teeth*⁴ because of its mocking attitude towards the Stalinist propaganda:

"But", objected the friend, "you won't dare to write the truth if it's unfavourable." The other replied, "We'll fix it this way. I'll write you everything is fine, and if I write it in black ink it's true, and if in red ink the opposite is true." So he went, and in due course his friend received a letter in black ink, detailing the wonders of the proletarian paradise. "Everybody is happy, everybody is free, the markets are full of food, the shops well stocked with goods — in fact there is only one thing I cannot find, and that is red ink." (p. 388)

In this historical context of the mid-century, *The Golden Notebook* questions the role of the writer in the mid-fifties' communist milieu and celebrates subjectivity against reductionist commitment by giving a powerful anti-Stalinist message. In the novel, as the Communist Party is further distorted by the Stalinist atrocities, Anna becomes disillusioned with its practices and questions the pressure on writers in relation to the developments in Soviet Russia that have contributed to her writer's block: "I am back inside a nightmare which it seems I've been locked in for years ... it cancels all creative emotion" (p. 308). Anna's personal experiences in the Party, reminding the readers of the fossilised hierarchical structure of the Stalin era⁶, unfolds as a strained and skewed interrelationship of political commitment, artistic integrity and a preoccupation with the revelation of truth. In an episode in the *Blue Notebook*, Anna meets Jack, "a kind of administrator" (p. 306) in the publishing house of the Party, and John Butte, an elderly man who has been set over Jack by the Party in order to report on two books. Although Anna knows that the final decisions about what will be published have already been made in the Party HQ and that the *Daily Worker* will praise it as "an honest novel of Party life" (p. 309), they discuss whether the book, *For Peace and Happiness*, written by a young worker, should be published at all by the Party. Anna points out that the style of the book is very bad and "lifeless" and that the book does not touch upon reality because it describes all the cities of Britain as if they are all locked in deep poverty, unemployment and brutality and gives the impression that all the workers of Britain are communist and recognise the Communist Party as their leader. She observes how the content is "a very accurate recreation of the self-deceptive myths of the Communist Party" (p. 309). Feeling challenged by Anna, Comrade Butte remarks that the book is a good one – and will be published – by lifting his fist and suddenly crashing it on Jack's desk: "Publish and be damned" (p. 310). This incident, after which Anna decides to leave the Party, actually symbolises the crystallisation of the intellectual rotteness of the 'communist' bureaucracy, which defends the publication of "a lousy lying book by a Communist firm" (p. 310), and explicates how the authoritarian tendencies within the Party might either "absorb" "fresh young revolutionaries" or turn them into a group of "hardened men" with "dead" and "dry" thoughts (p. 309).

In the Party, it is explicitly dictated that art must be communal, realist and "healthy" and that it must defend "the purity of working-class values" (p. 309), by suggesting positive and optimistic solutions for the problems of society: "The pressure on writers – and artists – to do something other than write, paint, make music, because those are nothing but bourgeois indulgences, continued strong, and continues now, though the ideologies are different, and will continue because it has roots in envy" (Lessing, 1998, p. 23). For example, Anna thinks that she would be labelled as a "successful bourgeois writer" (p. 309) since her novel, *Frontiers of War*, described as an example of "the capitalist publishing racket" (p. 309), fictionalises her own personal experiences and does not follow the Party line, the "joyful communal unselfish art" (p. 312). In a similar way, communist reviewers criticise the book for being "negative" and indifferent to the struggle of freedom in Africa, and they argue that the book should have employed an African working-class heroine: "[T]his author must learn from our literature of health and progress, that no one is benefitted by despair" (p. 393). The idea that fiction must reverently be related to the "new art" (p. 312) of the century, the central philosophy of the "desperate, crazed spirit of struggle ... [of] Stalinism" (p. 306), exerts so much pressure on Anna that she even starts to have a conversation with her imaginary visitor about writing political and historical circumstances in solidarity with those comrades fighting for socialism: "It could be a Chinese peasant. Or one of Castro's guerrilla fighters. Or an Algerian fighting in the F. L. N. Or Mr. Mathiong. They stand here in the room and they say, why aren't you doing something about us, instead of wasting your time scribbling" (p. 554). For Anna, this sort of committed literature, referred to as "the oppression of decent writers by Soviet ideology" (Lessing, 1998, p. 61), destroys intellectual seriousness and individual conscience and results in "mass of dead literature" (p. 312) which is "sapless" (p. 307), "banal" (p. 315), "flat" and "tame" (p. 311). To illustrate, in one of the Party Magazines, it is declared that a company, Boles and Hartley, will publish novels as well as sociology and history books, and the Party is flooded with manuscripts all at once. As part of her "welfare work" (p. 315) in the Party, Anna, thinking that "every member of the Party must be a part-time novelist" (p.315), reads the letters

and emphasises that most of the novels are intolerably dull, “pretty bad” and “ordinarily incompetent” (p. 315) since they try to stick to the Stalinist demand for socialist realism. In one of the letters, a Party member even complains that his wife agrees with the “pundits” of King Street, the headquarters of the British Communist Party, and that a comrade is “better occupied distributing leaflets than wasting time scribbling” (p. 316), which basically unveils the position of the Party towards writing fiction: “When I began writing there was pressure on writers not to be ‘subjective’ ... ‘Bothering about your stupid concerns when Rome is burning’ is how it tends to get itself expressed, on the level of ordinary life” (*Preface*, p. 12). Rejecting this narrow Stalinist view of art, Anna, on the other hand, indicates that art without deep and intense emotion is not genuine: “[T]he flashes of genuine art all out of deep, suddenly stark, undisguisable private emotion” (p. 311).

Left-Wing Activism in The Golden Notebook

Revealing the widening gap between theory and practice in left-wing politics, *The Golden Notebook* functions as a critique of the lack of synchronisation between the ‘revolutionary’ intellectuals and the masses and condemns the superficiality of socialist reductionism as well as the dogmatisation of Marxism. In order to articulate how the steady growth of totalitarianism, centralisation and hypocrisy under the ideological hegemony of the Stalinist dogma in the 1950s changed and distorted the ‘revolutionary’ practices of socialist activists, it is first necessary to explore the stereotypical representation of the ‘revolutionary’ characters. In the first Black notebook, Anna provides a detailed account of her experiences in Rhodesia and writes about a group of ‘communist activists’ split into two after a “terrible” fight triggered by “something ... unimportant” (p. 81) in the Party. Playing the role of a communist intellectual leader at the centre of the group and coming from an upper-class family, Willi Rodde is “a master of dialectic”, subtle and intelligent as well as being “stupidly dogmatic” and “heavy minded”. Willi is also for “order”, “correctness” and the “conservation” of what exists, and has no sympathy for the “emotionally weak” or “deprived” or “for the misfits”, which, in a way, suggests the influence of the iron fist of Stalin upon ordinary socialists. Despite mastering the official socialist jargon and labelling himself as communist, Willi’s practical attitudes in everyday life contradict his ideals and enthusiasm for an egalitarian society, which basically debunks the Marxist principle of the unity of theory and practice. In one episode, Willi and Paul – a young “snobbish” (p. 111) socialist with “an upper-class arrogance” (p. 87) – treat a waiter at the Mashopi hotel “as a servant” by perpetually ordering him around and making unreasonable demands (p. 97). When Ted, who always behaves as if he lives in a “full-blown communist society” (p. 90), starts to talk intimately to the man “as a human being” (p. 98), Paul and Willi makes fun of Ted: “Do you imagine, Ted, that if you are kind enough to servants you are going to advance the cause of socialism?” (p. 98). In another instance, like a capitalist rather than a socialist, Willi, proud of having a good “business sense” (p. 94), instructs Mrs James how to run the hotel and what to invest in all over the city, and Mrs James, called “a silly goose” (p. 94) by Willi, becomes a rich woman by the time Willi leaves the hotel. Richard Portmain, the ex-husband of Molly and one of the financial powers in the country, also exemplifies the way in which a ‘revolutionary’ activist, unable to internalise true socialist values, might turn into a ruthless, “cold” and “heartless” (p. 92) capitalist. Despite being an active part of the communist movement in his youth, as a consequence of which his family cuts off his allowance, Richard decides to inherit a position in his family company, and his sudden “revulsion” (p. 36) against left-wing politics results in a radical change in his life style. He buys a cottage in the countryside, plays golf and tennis only for business reasons, organizes “posh dinner parties” (p. 46) and tries to impress girls with his new Jaguar, “high life” (p. 60) and a “bloody great mansion with two maids and three cars at Richmond” (p. 60). Meanwhile, Marion, the “unhappy” (p. 45) and “dreary” (p. 60) wife of Richard, brings up three children and assumes the role of entertaining the business friends of her ‘husband’ although Richard is “awfully mean” to her and constantly makes her “feel stupid” (p. 44).

In *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), a historical materialist analysis of the institution of family and one of the most significant analyses of family economics from a

Marxist perspective, Engels provides a theory about the origin of the family by focusing on the norms of female sexual morality, pointing out that the institution of family has moved through a number of different transformations throughout its history and that the bourgeois family model is simply the latest and therefore most likely transitory family structure. As an outcome of the development of capitalism and private property, a patriarchal structure leading to the subordination of women within the constraints of traditional gender roles has been created and institutionalised within the nuclear family. Marxist ideology, in this context, questions this bourgeois family structure as part of its demand for gender equality and fight against sexism, male supremacy, discrimination, violence and the oppression and subjugation of women as part of its claim that individuals are the products of material and historical conditions, that these conditions are expressed through capitalist and patriarchal relations in society and that only a socialist revolution can eradicate gender oppression and create gender equality. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia similarly struggled to recreate a society which was based on the principles of equality and aimed to liberate women from their domestic roles and integrate them into the public sphere (Goldman, 2002). Considering this argument, Richard's misogynistic practices and moral hypocrisy such as stigmatising Molly as "immoral, sloppy and bohemian" (p. 36), because of her lifestyle; neglecting his wife, Marion; and treating her "like a housewife or a hostess, but never as a human being" (p. 41) are also fundamentally in contradiction with socialist values.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, as a communist, Anna, asserting that she fights against the colour bar and struggles for a progressive social order, exhibits contradictory behaviours. On one occasion, she thinks that she is literally and socially "more sophisticated than the Colonial girls of course", despite admiring their "colonial quality" and "good-humour" (p. 82). In another episode, she reveals her strong proprietary emotions: "Mine. Property. Possession ... my property" (p. 356). She dislikes one of her tenants, Jemie from Ceylon, but cannot "bring herself to give the notice because he [is] coloured" (p. 356), whereas she does not like her new tenants much either, partly because they are homosexuals. Anna's personality is actually fragmented across her competing emotional needs, her evidently chaotic inner self and the insights of her intellect, which is itself also unveiled at times as in voluntary submission to the prevailing concepts of masculinity and patriarchy. As a "free woman", Anna complains about the lack of "real men" (p. 356), suffers from "the housewife's disease" (p. 298), and cannot free herself from domestic routine, particularly because of her daughter, Janet, all of which consequently lead to a feeling of some sort of inescapable obstruction preventing her from enjoying her daily life. (Libby, 1974, p. 110). As "Michael's mistress" (p. 301), she sensuously enjoys buying food, cooking for Michael, sweeping the room, making the bed, changing the sheet and even rolling her tampons into her handbag and concealing them under a handkerchief:

I imagine the meat in its coat of crumbs and egg; the mushrooms, simmering in sour cream and onions, the clear strong, amber-coloured soup. Imagining it I create the meal, the movements I will use, checking ingredients, heat, textures. I take the provisions up and put them on the table; then I remember the veal must be beaten and I must do it now, because later it will wake Janet. (p. 303)

Likewise, Ella, the literary creation of Anna, teaches herself not to look at men even casually, but changes her whole personality and feels "like a protected indoors woman from a Latin country" (p. 277) with Paul who, in his unconscious fantasy, builds up a picture of an "invisible ... and a serene, calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding woman, full of resources of happiness inside herself, self-sufficient, yet always ready to give happiness when it is asked for" (p. 193). This dependency complex of Ella and Anna, feeling inferior and incomplete and accepting men as 'providers' in the "damned mother-ridden" (p. 37) society, is illustrative of the way in which women cannot achieve a decolonisation of their minds and thought processes without genuinely rejecting the real nature of capitalism in all its subtlety; they cannot secure their liberation from the oppressive and unjust instruments of patriarchal society without challenging the hegemony of dominant ideologies at the intersection of highly complex

and often seemingly contradictory systems of oppression. As in the case of Anna and Ella, reducing the concepts of freedom and emancipation simply to that of maintaining sexual and emotional relationships with multiple men, on the contrary, brings about superficial solutions to the problems that women experience and further creates alienated and mechanised individuals: “[S]he saw him as all flesh, a body of warm, abundant, exuberant flesh ... in bed, it was a delightful shock of warm tense flesh” (p. 290).

Some of the socialist characters, claiming that they defend the rights of the working class, behave arrogantly and keep themselves aloof from ‘ordinary people’ – another ironic example of the gap between theory and practice in the current left-wing politics laid before the reader by Lessing. Canvassing in a working-class area, “a dozen or so housewives” (p. 159) from the Communist Party, for instance, have a discussion about the right way to dress when out canvassing, and some of them fear that others turn up ‘too posh’ at front doors in “a very ugly area of uniform, small, poor houses”: “I don’t think it’s right to dress differently than usual ... it’s a kind of cheating” (p. 159). In another episode, Molly, with a patronising and haughty attitude, compares her son with that of the milkman, “one of those bloody working-class Tories” (p. 31), and becomes unhappy because her son, Tommy, “just sitting” on his bed all the time, is not better and cannot even see his way forward in life even though he has been given “all these advantages and all that education” (p. 31). Prioritising Tommy over others, at this point, also symbolises one of the functions of the institution of family in terms of legitimising the cults of capitalism such as individualism, egocentrism, private property and the culture of competition.

The Critique of Socialism or Stalinism?

There is a tendency for reactionary critics to associate characteristics such as totalitarianism, despotism, dictatorship and repression of civil liberties with socialism. However, many of these arguments against the socialist worldview derive fundamentally from responses to the atrocities of Stalinism: the Stalinist regime in the USSR was characterised by a one-party system, forced labour, iron fist policies, violent suppression of millions of people, imposed restrictions on any kind of freedom of speech, and the spreading of ‘communism’ through military occupation. In order to identify socialism with inherently despotic tendencies, the name of Stalin is intentionally manipulated and linked with socialism in spite of the fact that authentic socialists have always been opposed to the one-man rule of the Stalinist regime that was an exploitative system using the rhetoric of socialist values in order to legitimise its own tyrannical existence. Another concept intrinsically used to reveal the dictatorial inclinations of some so-called socialist leaders is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Referring to the self-government model of a potential socialist regime of the working class, in which local councillors, largely consisting of persons from a working-class background, are elected by vote and their constituents have the right to recall those elected councillors (as in the example of The Paris Commune of 1871), this ‘dictatorship’ has nothing to do with what Stalin or other so-called socialist ‘leaders’ perpetrated in the name of socialism in their own countries. It is, on the contrary, a transition period corresponding to the abolition of all classes and the creation of a classless society on behalf of ‘ordinary’ people.

Anna’s critical attitude towards the Party in the novel, in a way, justifies the above arguments since Anna, as a member of the Communist Party, advocates democratisation and self-management in the Party, direct participation in political action and socialism from below – to use Hal Draper’s concept – in contrast to Stalinism. Anna emphatically rejects the centralised and authoritarian structure of the Party, the dogmas of Stalinism⁷ and being “in the service of uniformed man” (p. 479). Becoming a communist because “the left people were the only people in the town with any kind of moral energy, the only people who took it for granted that the colour bar was monstrous” (p. 82), Anna does not become disillusioned with socialism, but instead she harshly criticises “a group of dead bureaucrats” (p. 152), running the Party in a “tight, defensive, sarcastic atmosphere” (p. 152) and accusing everyone of being an agent to communism, and the ideological hegemony and domination of the Soviet Union and Stalinism in the Party. She even struggles to start a new “really British” Communist Party as an alternative to the existing Communist Party that is “corrupted by years of work in the Stalinist atmosphere”:

I again find myself among people filled with excitement and purpose ... the plan can be summarized thus: (a) the Party, shorn of its 'old hands' who are incapable of thinking straight after so many years ... should make a statement repudiating its past ... (b) to break all ties with foreign Communist Parties, in the expectation that other Communist Parties will also be rejuvenating themselves and breaking with the past. (c) To call together the thousands ... of people who have been communist and who left the Party in disgust, inviting them to join the revitalized party. (p. 394)

Stating that there are certain types of 'socialists' who are "political out of a kind of religious reason" and act as if they are "God-seekers", Lessing implicitly denounces the religionisation of socialism on a number of different occasions in the novel. To exemplify, most of the Party members in the novel are presented as "deadly" (p. 394) loyal to Moscow, carefully educate their children in the Party line and attempt to legitimise the "old" (p. 422) arguments of the communist bureaucracy: "[W]hile most of the criticisms of the Soviet Union are true ... of course there is no Party member I could say this to" (p. 156). In an episode, Comrade Harry, one of the top academics in the Party, goes to Russia to find out what has happened to the Jews⁹ "in the black years" of Stalinism (p. 421). When he comes back with "terrible information" (p. 422), The Party does not want to publicise it in pursuance of the solidarity myth of the Soviet Union, which is, for Harry¹⁰, one of the reasons why the Communist Parties of the West have collapsed since they are not capable of telling the truth about anything, have the habit of telling lies to the world and cannot "distinguish the truth even to themselves" (p. 423). In another instance, Ted, a strictly committed and faithful comrade, is chosen to go on the teacher's delegation to the Soviet Union, the "first Worker' country" (p. 273). Feeling proud, excited and honoured, Comrade Ted is taken to the towers of the Kremlin in the middle of the night, goes up a "magnificent marble staircase with works of art on every side" and then into "a small side corridor that [is] plain and simple", stops outside "an ordinary door, a door like others" and meets "Comrade" Stalin sitting behind "an ordinary desk" (p. 274). Welcoming Ted with an "honest kindly face" and "twinkling eyes" in a kind way, Stalin, "a great man" (p. 275), expresses his regret for disturbing Ted so late and would like to take advice about the policy of the Soviet Union in Europe like a "real Communist Leader". According to Comrade Ted, such different experiences regarding the Soviet Union are actually related to the narratives in the capitalist press since the members of the Communist Party are all infected by "this poison" (p. 274). Thinking that Stalin is "mad" and "a murderer", Anna similarly remembers that "this is a time when it is impossible to know the truth about anything" (p. 273).

In the "frozen" (p. 33), "grey" and "faceless" (p. 168) streets of London, ruled by "fear" and "ignorance" (p. 168), the characters in *The Golden Notebook*, feeling "locked up" (p. 33), "empty" (p. 41), "remote" (p. 187), "alone" (p. 62), "isolated" (p. 156), "lonely" (p. 401) and like a "stranger" (p. 188) to others, run through alienation and suffer from "the emptiness of emotion" (p. 439): "Crowds of people. The man selling newspapers has no face. No nose, rather, his mouth is a rabbit-toothed hole, and his eyes are sunk in scar tissue" (260). In order to put an end to the "split, divided, unsatisfactory way [they] all live" (p. 157), to compensate for this sense of "meaninglessness" (p. 439) and unpleasantness and find "a purpose in life" (p. 161), therefore, many of the key characters in the novel have aligned themselves with the Communist Party and made it the centre of their lives; so, it is the Party itself that functions as the major outward escape mechanism through which they seek to nullify the negative impacts of such an alienated existence on their lives and assert, albeit through modes of illusionary self-actualisation, their basic recreational functions: "The Communist Party is largely composed of people who aren't really political at all, but who have a powerful sense of service ... there are those who are lonely, and the Party is their family" (p. 162). In this context, the novel suggests that the reason why the members of the Party perceive any attack on the collective ideology as absolute loss and cannot, therefore, tolerate any sort of criticism against the Party or the Soviet Union, is essentially linked with the

problematic relationship between the individual psyche and the collective dream. In other words, the fantasy of being acknowledged by a senior politician in the Party and of being recognised by Stalin inhibits the process of liberation, overwhelms the “individuated personality” and causes individual consciousness to be swallowed up by “the clutches of the collective consciousness” (Cederstrom, 1990, p. 123).

Also called the Third International, the Communist International (1919-1943), abbreviated as the Comintern, was an association of national communist parties that advocated world communism by fighting against the international bourgeoisie with all available means in order to create an international Soviet Republic as a transition stage for a classless and stateless world. Gregory Zinoviev was the first elected chairman of the Comintern; however, Zinoviev, after having served for seven years, was replaced by Nikolai Bukharin because of his support for the ideas of Leon Trotsky. In 1928, Bukharin was dismissed, and Stalin, the general secretary of The Communist Party at that time, became the head of the Comintern. In order to be part of the Comintern, the Communist Parties had to accept a number of obligations such as conducting true and collective communist propaganda through extensive dedication and consultation under the leadership of the Communist International, rejecting centrist opinions and removing reformists and traitors from the Parties:

Communist parties ... must do their utmost through major campaigns to completely overcome the influence of the social-traitor leaders over the working class and to bring the majority of the working masses under communist leadership. To unmask the social-traitor leaders, the Communist Party [must demand] ... before the proletariat an answer as to whether these leaders--with their supposedly powerful organizations--were prepared to take up the struggle together with the Communist Party against the obvious impoverishment of the proletariat. (12 July 1921)

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing implicitly mocks the obsession of the Third International with treachery and betrayal by revealing the paranoia in the Communist Party in the 1950s over potential traitors to communism or those who might really be capitalist spies. She explores how this paranoia was rationalised by means of reasonable explanations and arguments among the Party members, as a consequence of which the genuine communist intellectuals¹¹ had to leave the Party – as Anna does in the novel – and the Party was subsequently occupied by those full of “that awful dilettantish spite” (p. 156): “[T]he fact is that literally millions of perfectly sound human beings have left the Party (if they weren’t murdered first) and they left it because they were leaving behind murder, murder, cynicism, horror, betrayal” (p. 269). Jack Briggs, once apolitical journalist on *The Times* before the outbreak of the war, is, for example, influenced by the communists he meets, and he moves steadily to the left. Refusing several highly-paid jobs in conservative newspapers, he works instead for a left-wing journal in return for a low salary. When he wants to write an article about the circumstances in China, he is put in such a bad position that he has to resign and is unable to find another job since his name somehow comes up in the Hungarian Trial as a British agent conspiring to overthrow the communist system. Despite being regarded as a committed communist journalist, “the rumours and spiteful gossip” (p. 154) about Briggs continue to flourish in Party circles, and he is left in total isolation and treated with suspicion even by his friends. In a meeting of the writers’ group, Anna and John would like to discuss this issue with Bill; however, Bill, stating that he will “make enquiries”, remarks that anyone, including Anna, “could be an agent” (p. 154). In another episode, Michael, in search of his old friends, visits East Berlin, a “terrifying place” with a “bleak, grey, ruinous” atmosphere with “lack of freedom like an invisible poison” (157), with Anna. His ‘friends’ in East Berlin greet him with “hostility”, “fear” and “hate” because Michael has been friendly with the hanged men in Prague, which means Michael too must be a “traitor” (p. 157).

Conclusion

The Golden Notebook reveals and opens up a particular perspective on economic, social and cultural contradictions and conflicts and helps articulate the historical textures and socio-political forces of the Stalin era mediated through the represented experiences of the characters. Considering the fact that Anna does not become disillusioned with socialism and that, on the contrary, she struggles to start a new Communist Party as an alternative to the existing Communist Party, Lessing's novel, fictionalising the victimisation processes of the revolutionary characters by the Party itself and rejecting the dogmatisation of the Marxist worldview, seems to be a critique of socialist reductionism and of the centralised and authoritarian structure of the Communist Party under the ideological hegemony and domination of Stalinism. The examination of the domestic, cultural, political and social tendencies of the characters further suggests and even perhaps indirectly advocates that a progressive model, which will not suppress liberties or prevent the processes of direct participation and democratisation, should be reinforced and put into practice through a materialist articulation of left-wing politics.

Notes

¹ In *Of Grammatology*, J. Derrida focuses on the word “la brisure” and proposes that it means not only the “broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment” but also the “hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work”. This term, therefore, signifies both “difference” and “articulation”, which linguistically reveals that language is articulated through the process of producing meaning by making use of a different sound (1976, pp. 65-66). In this regard, P. Schweickart (1985, p. 268) puts forward the idea that the structure of *The Golden Notebook* is similar to Derrida's concept of ‘the hinge/ la brisure’ in the sense that it is “cracked, broken in pieces, and, at the same time, hinged, held together by folding- joints” with a “relative autonomy”.

² First defined in the All-Union Congress of Soviet writers in 1934 as “the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism” and focusing on “the truthful [and] historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development ... with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism”, the doctrine of socialist realism is a style of realist art which promoted the glorified portrayal of communist values, the bravery of communist heroes and the emancipation of the proletariat.

³ Freeman, Joseph. *An American Testament*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936.

⁴ Upton, Sinclair. *Dragon's Teeth*. New York: Viking Press, 1942.

⁵ In an interview, Lessing, revealing the approach of ‘socialists’ to writing and literature, remarks that ‘socialist’ movements were generally sceptical of writers and that anti-intellectualism was “rife” in Stalin's Russia: “Western communists ... were hostile to intellectuals. They thought writing was inferior to political organizing, that writers should feel ashamed and apologise for writing books. They assumed that all bourgeois writers wrote trash. Active socialists who wanted to write had to make a choice, they had to decide whether they would organise the working class or write books ... I find it difficult to write well about politics. I feel that the writer is obligated to dramatize the political conflicts of his time in his fiction. There is an awful lot of bad socialist literature which presents contemporary history mechanically” (1994, p. 74).

⁶ In her autobiography, Lessing writes about her invitation to the Soviet Union. In order to participate in the Authors World Peace Appeal, Lessing goes to Russia, and her experiences there exemplify the pressure of Stalinism on every single individual and writer: "They attacked with their creed: literature must further the progress of communism, the Communist Party's right to decide what should be written and published, the Party's responsibility for the glorious future of all humankind ... Stalin's name could not be used without a string of honorifics – The Great, the Glorious, and so on ... Stalin had spoken for five hours and the applause lasted for half an hour, we were incredulous" (1998, pp. 63-4).

⁷ In an interview, Lessing points out that repression has always been part of the history of Stalinism: "In the Soviet Union opposition is regularly destroyed. Also, in our time, radicals have been destroyed by their own side. Stalinism destroyed the lives of thousands of people. Every time we have a war, liberties go to hell. In the meantime, we go on battling. I'm concerned with the preservation of liberties. I realize that to you that sounds like an old-fashioned liberal bleat, but I've seen liberties destroyed and left-wing people suppressed too often" (1994, pp. 77-8).

⁸ In *Walking In The Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962*, Lessing similarly criticises the commitment of educated and intellectual Party members to Stalinism: "[I]t was the most sensitive, compassionate, socially concerned people who became communist. (Among these were a very different kind of people, the power-lovers). These decent, kind people supported the worst, the most brutal tyranny of our time ... Hitler's Germany ... was an infant in terror compared to Stalin's regime ... the leadership of the Soviet Union had become corrupt ... Stalin is a monster ... I have come to think that there is something in ... communism that breeds lies, makes people lie and twist facts ... Stalin, the great deceiver, was ... responsible." (1998, pp. 52-9).

⁹ Lessing refers to the Stalinist era as "the Black Years" because of injustices, tortures and murders: "While writing this, I read that the mass graves recently discovered and acknowledged were because Stalin, continually imprisoning hundreds of his people, was told the prisons were overcrowded, did not feel inclined to waste money on building more, and solved the problem by having the prisoners shot and then beginning again" (1998, p. 62).

¹⁰ Harry divides the truth inside the Party into two: "[O]ne, a mild truth, for the public meeting of forty, and another, a harsher truth, for a closed group" (p. 423). He also speaks of the tortures, "the beatings-up" and how the Jews are locked in cages, designed in the Middle Ages, and tortured with the instruments taken from museums (p. 422).

¹¹ In her autobiography, Lessing explains how surprised Sam Aaronivitch, the cultural commissar of the Party in King Street, Covent Garden, was upon seeing a passionate "intellectual" who wanted to join the Party since most of those intellectuals were leaving the Party at that time (1998, p. 56).

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