


***Doris Lessing: Marksizmden Sufizme Bir Yaşam Felsefesi*, by Seda Arıkan, Konya/İstanbul, Çizgi Kitabevi, 2018, pp. 328, ₺38,40 (paperback), ISBN: 9786051961408.**

Şebnem TOPLU   
Ege University, Turkey

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In the monograph *Doris Lessing: A Philosophy of Life from Marxism to Sufism* originally published in Turkish, Arıkan's research covers Lessing's numerous novels and non-fictional works pursuing her philosophy of life. Contrary to various analyses drawn on Lessing's books such as postcolonialism, Marxism, feminism, Sufism, and recently ecocriticism and psychoanalysis, Arıkan's book includes them within the framework of philosophy. She scrutinizes Lessing's works as a portrayal of search and journey arguing that it leads the reader to a personal inner quest. Arıkan also contends that the metaphor of journey denoting to being on the way in Lessing's novels is underpinned by theoretical and philosophical references.

Arıkan illustrates how Lessing's personal quest is voiced by the characters projected in her massive twenty-seven novels written over a period of more than half a century, and how it resonates in the mind of the reader. Her exploration of the quest in Lessing's novels maps Lessing's own quest in her unsettled life. Thus, Arıkan's book is based on Lessing's biographical as well as analytical data exploring how Lessing meets Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and finally Sufism at certain times during her own quest, and how her novels directly or indirectly reflect those approaches. However, she claims, Lessing's novels are not strictly identified with any movement because each -ism is exposed as a deconstruction in her fiction. By scrutinizing her novels Lessing's criticism of grand narratives is traced and her turn to the spiritual and mystical path of the East is explored. Arıkan sheds light on Lessing's philosophy of life, which she states defends goodness of the species instead of self-interest, a

virtuous life rather than a materialist worldview, social morality instead of individualistic happiness, namely an ethical understanding that will unite all humanity. Thus, Arikan's research trails Lessing's life-long pursued question of "how to live well".

*Doris Lessing: A Philosophy of Life from Marxism to Sufism* consists of three main chapters titled "Quest," "Being Lost," and "Towards Salvation". Each chapter has subchapters which deal with Lessing's novels reflecting her intellectual phases. The first chapter problematizes the quest of the characters who mostly take refuge in ideological and political spheres. The first subtitle "Quest" reveals how individuality is lost within the realm of the collective drawing on the first three books of *Children of Violence Series - Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), and *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958). Arikan exposes these autobiographical works as an example of bildungsroman, leading the readers to conceive Lessing's own intellectual maturation. Accordingly, the protagonist's experiences going through Marxism and anti-apartheidism are analyzed in relation to Lessing's personal life. The theme of quest is followed by Lessing's ambivalent attachment to feminism explored in her world-renowned novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962). In parallel with Lessing's non-fictional works, especially her autobiographies, Arikan illustrates the quest of both the younger and the mature characters and how they search for an ideological or political meaning in life. This chapter concludes with a subchapter that exposes the internal quests of the characters upon which Arikan argues Lessing's own quest is reflected. Consequently, in accordance with biographical references to how Lessing began her inner quest in the late 1950s after leaving the Communist Party and loosening her ties with politics, this section focuses on individuals' ontological conflicts. In this sense, the analysis of *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973), *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1983), and *Love, Again* (1996) reveals Lessing's struggle in search of the meaning of life in death and death in life.

The second chapter titled "Being Lost" is laden with questioning how Lessing's novels problematize determinism which entraps human beings' strive to follow their own way in life. The first subchapter, including realist novels such as *Alfred and Emily* (2008), *The Fifth Child* (1988), and *Ben, in the World* (2000), as well as Lessing's epic novel *The Cleft* (2007), concentrates on determinist and anti-determinist approaches. Thus, this section explores the controversial viewpoints towards determinism or predestinarianism revealing Lessing's own attitudes towards them. Arikan maintains that Lessing's scepticism about freedom and free will begins as early as the publication of her first book *The Grass is Singing* (1950), and consolidates in the fourth book of *Children of Violence Series, Landlocked* (1965). However, the novels studied under this first subchapter are presented as significant examples of being lost because of proposing a strict determinism. The second subchapter deals with the motif of descent that Lessing asserts as a vital attempt of questioning the dark side of the self to mature morally. In this context, Arikan evaluates different experiences of descent that result in being lost in *The Grass is Singing*, *Landlocked*, and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), the most prominent example of the theme of descent. The third subchapter explores the theme of being lost in the context of politics. By examining *Retreat to Innocence* (1956), *The Good Terrorist* (1985), and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001) as of demystification of Marxism, Arikan points out

that Lessing proposes politics as a trap for the spiritual freedom of the individual in these novels. Accordingly, the evaluation of these novels goes hand in hand with Lessing's autobiography. In the fourth subchapter, the phase of being lost is argued from a philosophical perspective considering the problem of evil and free will in the two novels of *Canopus in Argos: Archives Series -The Sirian Experiments* (1980) and *The Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire* (1983). Subsequently, Arıkan contends that these novels signify the impact of Sufism on Lessing's intellectual life, which propounds the basic dilemma of the human being as choosing between good and evil.

The transition from being lost to a possible salvation is focused on in the third chapter regarding Lessing's dystopic and/or apocalyptic novels. Arıkan's classification in this last chapter revolves around what Lessing calls her "space fiction," a genre that distorts time and space in the existing world and creates new geographical spaces, namely different cosmologies. Arıkan maintains that Lessing's aim is to depict the possibilities for the development, or in her own words "evolution," of the self by using those new cosmologies as metaphors for Sufi teaching. Therefore, this final chapter combines the analysis of inner space and outer space of the characters within new cosmologies. In that sense Arıkan concentrates on seven dystopic/apocalyptic novels: the last book of *Children of Violence* series (*The Four Gated City*) (1969), *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), three books of *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series *Shikasta* (1979); *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980); *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982), and two books of *Mara and Dann* series 1999-2005. Utilizing these novels, she highlights how Lessing embodies Sufi teaching and presents a philosophy of life; not a moralist but a moral understanding. Moreover, Arıkan reveals that Lessing's moral declarations in those novels are also supported by her non-fictional works such as *Going Home* (1957), *In Pursuit of the English* (1960), and *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* (1987). Hence, the last chapter represents how Lessing's ethico-philosophical point of view is clearly reflected in these selected novels. Regarding Lessing's mottoes, such as "In the world but not of it" (Lessing, *Small* 133) and "There is never anywhere to go but in" (Lessing, *Frontispiece* n.p.), Arıkan states that Lessing signifies the presence of hope and optimism in her dystopic/apocalyptic fiction since she believes in the spiritual evolution of human being.

To conclude, Arıkan commentates on the answers that Lessing tried to give in her works in response to what life is, what it should be, the place and purpose of wo/man in life, her/his relationship with other beings, and the connection of wo/man with the mystical dimension. In this sense, she delves into Lessing's fiction projecting how she portrays the journeys of individuals within different dimensions. Arıkan claims that Lessing proposes humankind should not be expected to achieve an all-encompassing salvation, but small and individual revolutions. At this point, instead of the idea of changing the communities as a whole with the economic and social revolutions, such as Marxism, *Doris Lessing: A Philosophy of Life from Marxism to Sufism* reveals in what way Lessing adopts the view of developing and changing individual consciousness that Sufism advocates. Arıkan infers that Lessing supports ethical judgment in literature because she believes that an author's works should have the function of turning the reader from a deteriorating path. Therefore, Lessing is claimed to

embrace the view that a novel should have a philosophical quality. In this context, Arıkan demonstrates by what means Lessing conveys a philosophy of life both as a writer and a thinker in her own life. Basically, Arıkan argues that the philosophy of life signified in Lessing's fiction in accordance with her own life is the concept "Being on the Way," based on Sufi teaching. Her evaluation of the characters' constant self-questioning and quest instead of arriving at an ultimate point or self-actualization supports that Lessing's philosophy of life requires a permanent quest for the spiritual growth and development of human beings, in that, the book embodies a philosophy of life within the domain of fiction. I believe Seda Arıkan's *Doris Lessing: A Philosophy of Life from Marxism to Sufism* is a well-researched significant contribution to Doris Lessing scholarship paving the way for further research on Lessing's work besides sparking off scholarly curiosity about the possibility of philosophical inclination on Sufism in other writers.

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