

The Dilemma of Maternity between Need and Duty: A Feminist Reading of Doris Lessing's the Fifth Child

Mohamed Fathi Helaly Khalaf*

College of Arts and Science, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA

Abstract: Doris Lessing is widely known as one of the most celebrated contemporary female writers in English literature. Unlike other feminist writers who advocate equality between women and men, Lessing's feminism is mainly concerned with defending women in the context of the different social pressures they are exposed to in a given society. The Fifth Child is one of Lessing novels in which she adopts the implicit feminist approach in portraying the character of Harriet Lovatt. Harriet Lovatt wants to lead a free life disregarding the conventions of marriage and maternal life in the sixties by getting married to David and having a large family. Therefore, she is scapegoated by her society for deviating from the prevailing norms. The main aim of the study is to analyze The Dilemma of Maternity between need and obligation, based on the Feminist Reading of Doris Lessing's the Fifth Child. The study demonstrates that how Harriet has to adapt to her adverse situation and, in doing so, she has to overcome a lot of hardships in the process of constructing a new self. In a word, Lessing wants to underscore how the condition of any woman who wants to live on her own is worsened just because of deviating from the prevailing norms in her community. Moreover, in this study, we attempt to point out the maternity dilemma in today's society, and finally, draw some conclusion.

Keywords: Scapegoat, maternity, dilemma, feminism, motherhood.

INTRODUCTION

Every individual has his own dreams and hopes that he aspires to realize. Of course, such hopes and dreams should be considered in light of his abilities, the social surrounding in which he lives and the conventions and the social codes that govern his community. However, if such aspirations are otherwise, social as well as political clashes of some sort will occur and such dreams will be a subject of criticism and contempt by the surrounding community. Such dream-holders have to suffer and their suffering will be great when they are criticized by the very people that once were sharers of their dreams and aspirations. In other words, such dream-holders will be scapegoats for others at different levels (Habiba and Akkad 2020). In this article, we seek out to investigate the Dilemma of Maternity between need and obligation, based on the Feminist Reading of Doris Lessing's the Fifth Child, and compare it with today's maternity issues.

Before embarking on discussing feminism as a theory that is concerned with the conditions of women in the society, it is noteworthy drawing a line of distinction between the three confusing words: feminine, female and feminist. First, the word feminist is associated with feminism which is a literary as well as a political movement that is concerned with making social changes in society and seeking to achieve equality between men and women. Second, the word

female is concerned with the biological features that distinguish a female being from the male being such as certain organs of the body and their look as well as their functions. Third, the word feminine is concerned with those cultural characteristics that distinguish between men and women. For example, in certain societies the job of the police is strictly for men while in other societies both men and women can occupy a job in the police. It is wrong to say a female job but it is right to say a feminine job. Simply, the word feminine is the opposite of masculine (Dogra, Singh, Arora and Aggarwal 2019).

Generally speaking, feminism is a socio-political movement that aims at bringing about some substantial changes in society in favor of women. Such changes are fundamental. They can be seen in women's endeavor to compete with men to get equal rights and positions in society. Doris Lessing is interested in exposing the individual in contrast to the collective. Watkins states that "a feminist reading of Lessing's works exemplifies transitions that have been important in feminist criticism and theory" (Hung 2012).

In fact, feminism has two different forms. The first form is concerned with calling for equality between men and women in social as well as political rights. The second form of feminism is concerned with defending women in the context of the social pressures they are exposed to in society. It is not concerned with the discrimination of women in politics or jobs, but with the influence of traditions and social conventions on their lives. The influence of traditions and conventions means those traditions associated with marriage and

*Address correspondence to this author at the College of Arts and Science, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA;
E-mail: fathihelalykhalaf@gmail.com, fathihelalykhalaf@mail.ru

maternal life. In brief, the former is called Explicit feminism while the latter is known as Implicit feminism. Implicit feminism is more concerned with depicting the impact of traditional marriage and traditional family life than with women's political rights in society (Yelin 1998; Alobaidli 2011; Cervantes 2010).

A mother is the very source of warmth and the fountain of kindness and care for her children. She is driven by her motherhood instinct to care for her children equally regardless of their looks, mental abilities, ages, or even their degree of gratitude towards her especially when they are still young. In her care, a mother is guided by emotions and feelings rather than by logic and reason. Moreover, she does her best to bring up her children to be good members the society. Good socialization is the ultimate objective of a mother for her children. However, the existence of an abnormal child in the family will definitely bring about some unexpected changes at the domestic level. Such changes can be seen in how each member of the family is going to look upon this abnormality. Despite the fact that a mother must be unhappy with any abnormality on the part of any of her children, she is the only member whose care and love should be the least badly affected by this abnormality. On the other hand, the father is supposed to be keen on not showing any discrimination toward his abnormal child. As for the siblings, they should deal with their abnormal brother in a way that will not hurt him/her. However, when the parents of an abnormal child deal with him differently through showing discrimination of any sort, this is considered a green light for the rest of the family to show their continuous contempt toward him.

Of course, an abnormal child is never to blame for his abnormality. Biologically, he is born as such and this is why his mother is also not to blame. Yet, when values undergo a reversal, other things will change accordingly. This reversal of values occurs when the members of the family of an abnormal child as well as the outer society show only contempt and disgust toward him. Such a reversal reaches its peak when the parents themselves adopt the same disdainful attitude toward their own abnormal child. On the other hand, such reversal can also be seen when the other members of the same family cast blame on the mother because of giving birth to this child. Moreover, when the father himself blames the mother for the same reason, this implies the highest degree of the reversal of values. Thus, the mother is blamed and, in this way, she is considered a scapegoat by her own family for

giving birth to this child. Furthermore, she will become a subject of blame for outer society as well.

At another level, when the mother of an abnormal child finds that her child starts to be of a bad effect on the well-being of the family, she starts to feel confused and distracted. Of course, the instinct of motherhood makes her spontaneously sympathize with this abnormal child. On the other hand, when the rest of the members of the family, including the father, do not have the same sympathy toward the same child, the domestic atmosphere turns to be chaotic. Here, the mother finds herself in a dilemma either to continue sympathizing with her abnormal child and forget about the rest of the family, or change her attitude of sympathy toward the abnormal child and go to side with the rest of the same. She is split between the two different attitudes and this makes her dilemma great (Habiba and Akkad 2020).

In England, the decade of 1960s was a decade of unprecedented sexual liberation. It was a period that witnessed an increase in liberal sexual activities among the young. Premarital sex was widespread. The idea of saving oneself for marriage was not very much appreciated by the society during that time. A young man or a young woman who was not coping with this trend was seen as conservative or old-fashioned. He or she was considered as exceptionally odd because of not conforming to the norms in society. According to Fisher "The 1960s was when the idea of liberation was herald as a break from the repression of the past. This period is popularly thought of as the period before the sexual revolution" (Pode 2010).

Doris Lessing is widely known as one of the most important post-war writers in English literature. She was born in 1919. She wrote a good number of novels dealing with a variety of themes that reflect her own experiences throughout the different stages of her life. She first published her novel *The Grass is Singing* in 1949. She also wrote *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 which made her an international celebrity. In 2007 Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature at the age of eighty-two to be the oldest to win this prize. Lessing's novels focus on a quite good number of the 20th century issues ranging from the politics of race that she confronted in her early novels to the politics of gender which has led to her adoption of the feminist tendency. They are also novels that deal with the role of the family and the individual in society. Lessing is greatly involved in the changing patterns of culture. She is also greatly interested in the position of women in society

and their role in improving it. As a female writer, Lessing also shows a greater concern about the state of women's psychological health in marriage than about women's liberation in a political context.

Lessing's work and life show her as a feminist despite the fact that she is a feminist of an unusual kind, her novels show the difficulties that a woman might encounter when she tries to live a free life. Margret Drebbel points out "Lessing is one of the very few novelists who refused to believe that the world is too complicated to understand" (Hazelton 1982). Lessing does not advocate women's liberation from the point of view of the feminist ideology. Rather, she displays a faith in humanity by focusing on the problems faced by the individual female in opposition to what society requires her to accept. In Lessing's world, female characters have to overcome the consequences of their disconformity to the conventions of their society. As Raefipour remarks "Lessing's characters always find themselves in the face of an alien world with unusual elements. They like journeys and go in quest of reality. They question the values of their society and live alone in it" (Raefipour 2012).

Lessing's female protagonists are engaged in ambivalent relationships with other female characters. They show this ambivalence in their attitudes toward the prevailing norms especially those associated with motherhood. "They examine their female experience within the terms of collective life" (Hung, 2012). She is interested in seeing the female individuals in contrast to the surrounding society. Natasha Walter remarks "Lessing's work raised women's consciousness that they were not alone in their struggle to reach some kind of independence and honesty in their dealing with men" (Walter 2001).

The Fifth Child is one of the most celebrated books written by Doris Lessing. It deals with the history of a middle-class family. In this novel, Lessing is depicting women in traditional English society during the sixties. Here, the protagonist is defining herself according to the different roles she is performing in life. Lessing is very much concerned with pinpointing the destructive process that the protagonist has to undergo both at the social as well as psychological levels. This protagonist has to face a lot of difficulties regarding marriage and maternal life in her role as a wife and a mother (Hung, 2012).

Harriet and David are two young unmarried persons during the sixties. Both of them do not believe in the prevailing conventions regarding sexual liberation and

maternal life. To Harriet, David is an exception as he can understand her choice and accepts it. Of course, this creates some bond between them immediately the moment they have met. They go to stand in opposition to the prevailing norms in their society. This bond enables them to dream together and seek to fulfill their dream. They maintain their own traditional values in their society. They get married not long after they have first met as a result of their shared belief and their faith in the possibility of achieving their dream of having a traditional large family.

Harriet Lovatt is regarded as an old-fashioned woman who is adhering to the view of having a traditional big family. Here, Harriet's view is against the modern idea of the time she lives in. She appears strong enough to resist the criticism wreaked upon her by all those around her. She makes choices that the imply rejection of the sixties and of the accompanying social changes regarding maternity and family construction. Harriet's dream is based on her own belief that having a big traditional family is the greatest goal that she wants to achieve in her life. However, both her dream and belief are threatened by the social changes taking place in the outer society. She states "This is what everyone wants, really, but we've been brainwashed out of it. People want to live like this really" (Lessing 1988). Harriet emerges as a strong female even before marriage. She asserts herself in opposition to the mainstream ideas regarding sexuality and femininity by rejecting the values and conventions of the surrounding modern society. In this due light, Cervantes points out "Harriet lives in an era of great feminist debates, the bulk of society had changed its mind in relation to women and the family" (Cervantes 2010).

Harriet wants to construct a family according to her own perception of how she wants it to be. She has her own vision of an ideal traditional family which is also shared by David. Both dream of having an ideal big traditional family. In doing so, they blind themselves to the reality of their conditions and develop a desire beyond their actual economic abilities. As Mikaela Kyle remarks "David and Harriet perceive the world in a way to see a reality that suits their way of life. They live in a fabricated world of their own blocking out the realities and imperfection of life in order to create happiness (Kyle 2011). In the beginning both Harriet and David emerge as a very caring and loving couple who are living in a world of their own disregarding the outer world with its conventions. As Hung puts it "The Lovatts try to create their own micro-universe in their domestic

world. Like good liberals, they believe in the possibility of separating the private from the public” (Hung, 2012).

Harriet and David lead a very happy life for a considerable number of years. They are blessed with four children who become the center of their concern in life. The whole family is overwhelmed by happiness. Harriet is a very caring mother and a loving wife. David is a loving and caring husband as well. As the story tells “When he bent to kiss her goodbye, and stroked like head, it was with a fierce possessiveness that Harriet liked and understood; for it was not herself being possessed or the baby, but happiness. his and hers” (Lessing, 1988 24). Both parents show a lot of love, affection, understanding, and responsibility toward one another as well as toward their first four kids. Despite the fact that the income of the family does not meet their needs, they are leading a happy life. David never shows any regret regarding having a big family.

As a mother, Harriet emerges as a very caring one. She considers her children as the only source of happiness in her life. She has already given birth to four children. Her care for her four children is an equally balanced one. She loves all of them as a good mother that loves her children. Everything is going smoothly at the domestic level. She has the pleasure to be defined through her love and care for her children or family. She goes to fulfill her desire of maternal instinct with the first four pregnancies despite the increasingly stressful economic pressure. She still insists on making her desire and aspiration as realistic as she can.

On the other hand, Harriet is viewed as a criminal by her society because of advocating the greatness of a big family in a society whose conventions do not welcome the same. In this due light, Zhao remarks:

This troubled world is penetrating the Lovatts’ fortress. Harriet has been referred to as a criminal who is somehow breaking the laws of society. Her crime is attempting to have a perfect life in an imperfect world. The high expectation in this imperfect world is the background put forward by the implied author’s attitude (Zhao 2012).

Thus, Harriet’s desire to have a big family is not welcomed by her society. Therefore, she criticizes society for making people suppress their desire of raising a large family.

Although Harriet’s dream of a large family has come true, it is not to continue unharmed. It turns to be a

nightmare. She has willingly and happily given birth to four children but she is not planning to have any more children in the future. Unwillingly, she carries a fifth baby that she has not desired. Therefore, the unplanned arrival of the fifth child has turned everything upside down. The dream turns out to be a gloomy nightmare. Primarily, she rejects this fifth child (Ben) even during pregnancy. She rejects Ben even before he comes to life. She has neither that sense of attachment nor that feeling of warmth toward the coming baby. Hence, an attitude of rejection toward the coming baby is immediately established. As Cervantes puts it “Harriet’s dream of an idealized family and motherhood turns to be a nightmare with the birth of the fifth child. Her wish suddenly escapes her control through going beyond her expectation and leading her to a life of misery, disintegration, and chaos” (Cervantes 2010).

The fifth pregnancy marks a turning point in Harriet’s life as a mother and a wife. Initially, Harriet starts to feel as if something strange exists inside her. She feels physically restless. Moreover, she feels uncomfortable both mentally as well as psychologically. She realizes that what she is suffering from now is contrasted with the pleasure and comfort that she has experienced during her four previous pregnancies. While being examined, the initial reaction of the doctor to her condition frightens Harriet that she realizes that there is something wrong with the fetus she is carrying “On the doctors face, she saw what she expected: a dark fixed stare that reflected what the woman was feeling, which was horror at the alien, rejection by the normal for what was outside the human limit. The Horror of Harriet, who had given birth to Ben” (Lessing. 1988 106).

Harriet develops some sense of disgust and hatred toward the fetus inside her womb. She feels that she is carrying something that is tormenting her. This unplanned pregnancy makes her irritable and temperamental. She feels that she is carrying an unusual baby because of the pain she is experiencing as a result of its movement. In this due light, Emily Clark states “Significantly, it is only with the fifth child that Harriet’s pregnant body seems to violently turn against her and, indeed, it is not her body which imprisons her so much as the body within her, and a very specific body at that” (Clark 2013). Harriet’s attitude toward the fifth baby is an antagonistic one. “From the first, the dramatic physical suffering of Ben’s mother and her antagonistic relation to the developing fetus during her pregnancy challenge stereotypes of

the caring mother which is central to the traditional concepts of care" (Hung, 2012).

Harriet realizes that the baby she is carrying is different. She states "This new being is unlike anything" (Lessing. 1988 36). She also describes it as "a being of a different substance" (Lessing. 1988 50). When only a five-month old fetus, Ben is already so active that it causes a lot of unbearable pain inside his mother. As the story tells "She was bruised- she knew it, inside she must be one enormous black bruise. And no one would ever know" (Lessing. 1988 59). Thus, an adverse attitude toward the fifth child is established right from the beginning of pregnancy. Here, the reader develops some feelings of sympathy toward Harriet as a result of her continual sufferings. Harriet is haunted by what she is carrying. She is also obsessed with how she is going to mother this baby.

Generally, in *The Fifth Child*, the division in the family starts with the pregnancy with Ben. Both the physical as well as mental pains that Harriet is experiencing are so great. Of course, this affects the well-being of the family. David who used to be a very loving and caring husband toward Harriet throughout her previous pregnancies is no longer one. He considers the baby that Harriet is carrying a monster. He feels helpless toward helping her. He even fears to touch her body any more. As the story tells "He had stopped putting his hand on her stomach in the old companionable way for what he felt there was beyond what he could imagine" (Lessing. 1988 49). Moreover, with the unplanned pregnancy with Ben, David feels that Harriet is "possessed and gone right away from him in the battle with the fetus" (Lessing. 1988 50). Of course, it is a battle that he cannot share. David realizes the greatness of Harriet's pain "At night, David heard her moan, or a whimper, but now he did not offer, for it seemed that these days she did not find around her any help, but nothing he said seemed to reach Harriet who, he felt, was possessed" (Lessing.1988 49).

Previously, Harriet's endeavor to build a big family has been received by a lot of rejection by the people around her including her close relatives. The whole community has condemned her. She is scapegoated as a result. Furthermore, with the unexpected arrival of the fifth child, Harriet is also blamed by her own husband who ceases to be a loving one. She is no longer attached to her husband. As the story tells "David tries to avoid looking into Harriet's eyes. He no longer speaks to her. She was longing for him to

reassure her but he only nodded and did not look at her" (Lessing.1988 116). Here, David's attempt to avoid looking at or speaking to Harriet signifies his attempt to exclude her from his life. In a word, Harriet has become a scapegoat for her husband.

From an implicit feminist point of view, Harriet suffers from both social as well as psychological pressures. She is suffering from social pressure because of her concept of a large traditional family on the one hand, and her psychological pressure as a result of being condemned by the same people about the abnormality of her baby on the other. Thus, Ben's existence in the family is accompanied by a lot of changes at the domestic level. Therefore, the unplanned arrival of Ben marks a change in the process of self-construction. It marks a new phase in both Harriet and David's inner development which comes to destroy all that they have previously constructed.

Before embarking on discussing the attitudes of the different members of the Lovatts toward Ben, it is noteworthy shedding light on Ben's character as a child and his abnormality as well as the Lovatts' reaction to it.

Initially, Ben is not welcomed by his family including the mother and the father while he is in Harriet's womb. After birth, Ben proves to be really strange. While he is still a baby, he shows a lot of violence toward his siblings as well as the pets bred by the family at home. He attacks his other siblings and smothers a cat to death. Moreover, he attacks the kids of the guests who come to visit the Lovatts at their house. Ben grows up and is seen as a freak by his family. He finds no other means but violence to express himself. He is unable to develop a sense of being because of his inability to communicate with the people around him in a normal way. He is also unable to establish a sense of belonging to his family because he sees how he is rejected by them all including his parents. As Shu-Ming Hung remarks:

Ben is presented as an outsider because of his distinctive appearance and odd behavior; he is treated like the "Other" because of his difference from those around him. He is unable to establish a sense of belonging to the family because he sees himself in terms of "otherness" through the gaze of those around him" (Hung, 2012).

Ben is abnormal and his abnormality makes him not only an outcast from his family but also an outcaste

from the world. He is considered as a source of danger. For him, the house has become a prison or, as the story tells, a "cage" that confines him behind its bars. He does not receive enough love or care from his family. He is unable to connect with his family properly. Emily Clark remarks "Ben's corporal difference is marked primarily by his physical in conformity to the aesthetics of a real baby child, but even more by his inability or unwillingness to exhibit appropriate effective behavior toward his family members" (Clark 2013).

In many places in *The Fifth Child*, Ben is referred to as "goblin, grotesque, unusual, odd or abnormal". It is true that he is abnormal because of his odd behavior. However, the degree of his abnormality depends on how he is looked upon by those around him. In other words, Ben's abnormality depends mainly on the parameters of the people around him. As the story unfolds, Dorothy (Harriet's mother) says "He may be normal for what he is, but he is not normal for what we are." (Lessing. 1988 65) Ben is outside of the normal and this is why he is seen as different. As Shu-Ming Hung points out "Because Ben disturbs the normal boundaries through being neither human nor non-human, his effect is that of being uncanny, encouraging the intersubjective responses to him as if to the object (Hung, 2012).

Ben is seen as a monster by his family. He awakens Harriet and David from their dream. He disturbs this dream by embodying fear, madness, and violence. As a mother, Harriet has to bear the burden of disruption while the rest of the family go to distance themselves from Ben. That is to say, Ben comes to embody what his parents have tried to avoid in their dream of a large family. They see Ben as a punishment because of their distinctive dream. As Kyle remarks "The reality that Ben presents is far from the perfection that the Lovatts have created. It is a reality full of violence, fear, and failure" (Kyle 2011).

Again, the unplanned arrival of Ben represents a threat against the well-being of the family as a whole. He becomes the source of the family's misery and distress. David and Harriet are no longer attached to one another as they used to be. Harriet has to face a lot of difficulties to keep a balance between her duty toward her new child and the rest of the family members, on the one hand, she has also to face a great problem in her attempt to satisfy her need as a mother and a wife toward the other members of the Lovatts on the other. She cannot ignore the threat that Ben represents. She is aware of losing the mutual

understanding and love between her and David. She finds it better not to share her thoughts and feelings with her husband. She realizes that David is not a loving husband to her or a caring father for the new baby. David ends up abandoning his dream. On the other hand, the elder children of the Lovatts decide to leave the house and go to boarding schools as they cannot adapt themselves to the new conditions at home. The members of the extended family are no longer interested in paying visits to the Lovatts' house during Christmas or Easter. Therefore, Harriet realizes how she has brought destruction to the family as a result of giving birth to Ben.

Like any mother, Harriet's self-construction and identity are defined through her life with her children or family. She finds some difficulties in adapting to the kind of life brought with the coming of Ben and she starts to suffer a crisis with her identity. As Giles remarks "Harriet struggles in embracing her role as a mother after the birth of Ben. It is Ben who forces her to question her capability and her identity" (Giles. 1988 5). However, despite the fact that she is condemned by her society for having a large family, she decides to be a full-time dedicated mother. Also, despite being aware of the danger that Ben represents, she persists in her heroic endeavor trying her best to keep the stability of the family under exceptional circumstances. Thus, Harriet emerges as strong in exercising her motherhood abilities under social and domestic pressures.

As a dedicated mother, Harriet finds herself in a dilemma split between the biological and instinctive demands of motherhood, on the one hand, and the demands of her family: physically, socially, and emotionally on the other. In other words, Harriet has to choose either to go on defending her identity as an ideal mother by caring for Ben regardless of whatever abnormality he has or to abuse this identity by neglecting him by caring for the rest of the family including the father and defending the kind of life she has been dreaming of. According to the story, Harriet's dilemma grows greater in the course of the novel as she is unable to reconcile both feelings and, of course, this affects her identity as a mother and a wife. She is distracted in many ways. As Emily Clark puts it:

She does not want her children the way a mother should; she does not refuse her child for the sake of her other children and marriage the way a mother should; and finally, she is ultimately held responsible for Ben's existence and indeed is categorized as

“other” and “less” than human by literal associations (Clark 2013).

Ben represents a continuous source of danger to the settlement and well-being of the family. Because of the so much disruption to the family at home as a result of Ben's abnormal behavior, all the Lovatts members decide to get rid of Ben by sending him to an institution. Driven by the instinct of motherhood, Harriet is the only member who does not welcome the decision. She says “He is a little boy He is just a child” (Lessing. 1988 90). Despite her awareness of the danger that Ben represents, Harriet shows contempt toward the decision simply because she is his mother and he is her son. However, her objection to this collective decision is welcomed neither by David nor by the rest of the family. Though she is against the idea, Harriet finds herself obliged to accept it as her marriage is at stake. She unwillingly accepts it because of her feeling of guilt that is caused by a sense of social injustice. “It was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights for not being able to find one little spark of feeling” (Lessing 1988). As Ben is away from the house, Harriet never feels comfortable. It is true that the rest of the family, including David, were back to the stream of life during Ben's absence. Yet, Harriet grows gradually more and more restless.

As Harriet's dilemma is growing greater in the absence of Ben, she decides to move one step forward toward rescuing him from the institution. Of course, this makes her predicament greater and greater. She takes an individual decision to fetch Ben from the institution. It is a decision that results from her instinctive feeling as a mother toward her son. There, in the institution, Harriet finds Ben treated like an animal and he is almost paralyzed because of the big doses of drugs they have been giving him. As the story tells “His pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead while greenish. Everything –walls, the floor, and Ben were smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pullet which was soaked” (Lessin.1988).

Here, it noteworthy highlighting that Harriet's decision to fetch Ben originates from her instinct as a mother more than from her love for him. She wants to save him from death. “A guilt-ridden goes to retrieve him after his parents have arranged for Ben's institutionalization, an institutionalization which consists of solitary confinement, physical restraint and extreme medication that will most certainly result in Ben's death (Clark 2013).

Of course, the individual decision taken by Harriet in the face of the collective decision made by the family increases the greatness of her dilemma. It is a decision that is welcomed by neither David nor any other member of the family. They have made their decision for the sake of their own comfort regardless of its result on the poor child or the afflicted mother. However, Harriet, like any mother, will never feel comfortable with what they want. They are unable to understand her instinctive desire as a mother to save her own child. As Emily Clark points out “Harriet's decision to save Ben from the institution where he was destined to die functions as a parallel to a woman's choice not to abort a fetus that has been diagnosed as disabled, a choice that is deemed irresponsible” (Clark 2013). They do not realize that a mother should care for her child regardless of whatever danger he represents. Moreover, they go to cast blame on her and look at her as a criminal for carrying and delivering such a child. This is the reality of motherhood that she cannot escape. Yet, at times, she has to accept what the world imposes on her.

Having brought Ben back from the institution, Harriet is seen as a culprit and the real criminal behind the suffering of the family. Bringing him back drives all the members of the family to react in a way that would keep them away from the house. As the story tells “Because she had him home, this house had emptied itself, and everything had gone away, leaving her alone” (Lessing 1988). The three elder children leave the house and go to live with their grandparents. They develop some fear of Ben and become quite upset about his presence. They consider him as a source of danger that threatens the well-being of the family and brings about its devastation and destruction. They are also not happy with their mother and think of her as responsible for helping Ben to destroy the family. Hence, all the siblings are not caring toward their brother Ben. They develop some detachment from him since he has been a baby and, gradually, they develop the same toward their mother. They welcome the decision of sending Ben to the institution. They say “They are sending Ben away because he is not one of us. It will be all right now that Ben is not here” (Lessing 1988).

David, the father, goes to react to the decision of bringing Ben back by withdrawing from family life and detaching himself from Harriet. Initially, David has never been a loving father for Ben. An emotional distance is already created between the son and the father from the very beginning. There is no

communication between them at all. David is so indifferent to the existence of Ben even before he is sent to the institution. He thinks of him not as his child. He sees him as a source of danger that threatens the stability of the family. He considers him as the reason for missing one promotion in his job. Of course, David does not welcome Harriet's decision of getting him back. He is shocked to see him back at home again. He considers Harriet's decision as an act that defies his authority as a husband. In this regard, Holmquist points out "By making the decision on her own without consulting David, Harriet increases her own authority by undermining him (David) as a man and a father. This would in its turn lead to David feeling like less of a man, hence making him feel emasculated" (Holmquist. 1990 66).

The house becomes an uncomfortable place for David. He spends most of his time away from his family at work. Moreover, he finds an extra job to stay as much as he can away from the house. He has become, as the story tells, "The sort of man he had once decided never to be" (Lessing. 1988 135). In this due light, Ponde remarks "By failing as a father, when his children move away and failing as a husband in losing his loving bond with Harriet, his work becomes the only thing that can give him ratification" (Ponde. 2010 14). David sees Ben as the biggest problem of his life. He detaches himself from Ben referring to him as "not mine" and in another situation as "someone just dropped from mars" (Lessing. 1988 90). David never regrets this feeling toward his own son. He never cares for him and he goes to care for his other children. Yet, he gradually starts to lose control over his family as a whole. As Sundberg puts it "When David is about to lose control, anger, sarcasm and psychological violence become means for him to regain that control" (Sundberg 2011).

After coming back from the institution, Ben develops a lot of hatred and despise not only towards his father and siblings but towards his mother as well. Still, he has the feeling that they are opposing him and that he is like a prisoner in the Lovatts' house "Ben was always in his room, like a prisoner" (Lessing.1988 75). In other situations, as the story tells "Heavy bars were put in, and there Ben would sit gripping the bars and shaking them, and surveying the outside world letting out raucous cries" (Lessing. 1988 73).

Despite the fact that Harriet defies the family by bringing Ben back from the institution, and despite the fact that she decides to save him regardless of the

danger he represents against the stability of the family, Ben does not see Harriet as a loving mother. He does not find comfort in looking at her face. As the story tells "Harriet's face does not evoke anything in him as if she does not exist..... When she put her arms around him, there was no response, no warmth; it was as if he did not feel her touch" (Lessing. 1988 11). Ben never appears a grateful son to his mother. Despite giving him most of her time, Ben does not feel that the emotional and psychological bond that exists between a mother and her child. He is not even able to communicate with her properly. When Ben is already an adolescent, he finds some difficulty in communicating with his mother:

Did he feel her eyes on him, as a human would? ... She would put into her gaze these speculations, these queries, her need, her passion to know more about him whom, after all, she had given birth to, had carried for eight months, though it had nearly killed her, but he did not feel the question she was asking. Indifferently, he looked away again, and his eyes went to the faces of his mates, his followers (Lessing. 1988 157).

Thus, on the whole, Harriet represents the epitome of a scapegoat as she is exposed as a victim of what others want to inflict on her despite having no hand in it. She is victimized by her society, her extended family, her own family including her husband and even by Ben for whom she has been suffering. She is considered an outcast by her society. She is considered a criminal by the members of her family and she is not viewed as a caring mother by Ben who has been the only source of misery to her and her family. Harriet is seen as responsible for bringing unhappiness to the whole family and this makes her feel guilty most of the time. Everyone around her has a look of condemnation towards her. She thinks that giving birth to Ben is a matter of misfortune for her. She states "I have suffered a misfortune. I haven't committed a crime" (Lessing.1988 94). In another situation Harriet remarks "I feel I have been blamed for Ben ever since he was born. I feel like a criminal. I've always been made to feel like a criminal" (Lessing.1988 125). She is seen as responsible for the breakdown of the family. "Harriet was paying the price of mankind of cynicism and boldness. As a woman, she was the target of an unjust male-dominated world that is oppressing women" (Zhao 2012). Harriet is seen as the destroyer of the family who has to bear the burden of the family's flaws. She is not judged on what she has done but on what nature has made of her. She is condemned by the family because of her inappropriate upbringing of Ben.

In a word, she is scapegoated by her own family because she is forced to exercise her mothering abilities under both domestic and social pressures. These pressures have come to contradict with what she has previously planned.

RESULT

Thus, both Harriet's social and psychological sufferings have been traced. She has emerged as the real scapegoat of on both the family as well as the outer society which want to inflict on her before and after the birth of Ben. From an implicit feminist point of view, Harriet endures both the social and psychological pressures because of the lifestyle she has adopted. As Sundberg points out "One of Lessing's messages is that it is not necessarily men in a biological sense, who are dominating and strong in society, but women who have acquired traditional qualities can be that as well" (Sundberg 2011). Here, Lessing is so much concerned about understanding the undermining process that Harriet has gone through because of the different attitudes of her husband, children, and other people around her toward her in the process of self-construction. Lessing has also pinpointed Harriet's mental suffering as a result of the insensitiveness and lack of understanding of the people around her regarding her suffering as a wife and a mother and how this has culminated in undermining her psyche.

It is true that Harriet is condemned for deviating from the common norms of her society. However, she persists in doing so out of her conviction that what she has been doing was consistent with her own set of values as a married woman aspiring to lead a free kind of life. At another level, what happens to her as a mother could happen to any mother. Giving birth to an abnormal baby can happen to any mother. Harriet has nothing to do with carrying an abnormal child. It is just a matter of misfortune but not a crime. On her part, Harriet is aware of this reality but she has to suffer. Her sufferings become greater because of the cruelty of the society in which she is living. What intensifies Harriet's suffering is that she is condemned by the very people who are directly connected to the same child including his father and his siblings. She is victimized by all those around her, yet, she is able to stand up for her own benefit and conviction.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, Harriet's sufferings from the different social and psychological pressures as a result of first,

deviating from the dominant social conventions regarding family construction and maternal life and, second, of giving birth to an abnormal child expose her a scapegoat from an implicit feminist point of view. She is blamed for making choices that are not in line with what society believes in. At another level, Harriet finds herself in a situation where she has to choose either to be a dedicated mother through caring for her abnormal child in the same way she has been caring for her four children or to act as a perfect wife through neglecting the abnormal child and caring for the husband and the family's well-being. She is split between her duties as a perfect wife and her requirements as a dedicated mother. In a word, Harriet's different experiences as a dedicated mother and a perfect wife in light of the different circumstances that have characterized her life have exposed her as an implicit feminist figure.

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