

# **Bodies that Speak. Traumatic Corporeal Spatiality in Doris Lessing's *novella* "The Eye of God in Paradise"**

*Cuerpos que hablan. La espacialidad corporal traumática en la novela de Doris Lessing "El ojo de Dios en el paraíso"*

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## **Abstract**

The present article examines the treatment of spatial corporeality in Doris Lessing's *novella* "The Eye of God in Paradise" (1957) set in Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. Even though Lessing's works have been studied from different perspectives—as the abundant critical studies show—, spatial corporeality has not been analysed before. This paper argues that the characters' bodies, insofar as physical spaces of flesh and blood that are lived and where power is exerted, represent the trauma encountered by countless anonymous people who suffered due to the horrors of the war and who have only been made visible by the author's skilled pen. By highlighting the corporeal spatiality in its physical, psychological, and sociohistorical division, Lessing has brought to the fore the intense suffering of unknown people, to give them identity as well as visibility and transform them into a locus of contesting power relations.

**Keywords:** space, literature, body, war, trauma.

## **Resumen**

El presente artículo examina el tratamiento de la espacialidad corporal en la novela corta de Doris Lessing "El ojo de Dios en el paraíso" (1957),

ambientada en la Alemania posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Aunque las obras de Lessing han sido estudiadas desde diferentes perspectivas—como demuestran los abundantes estudios críticos—, la espacialidad corporal no ha sido analizada antes. En este trabajo se argumenta que los cuerpos de los personajes, en cuanto espacios físicos de carne y hueso que se viven y donde se ejerce el poder, representan el trauma sufrido por innumerables personas anónimas que padecieron los horrores de la guerra y que sólo han sido visibilizados por la hábil pluma de la autora. Al resaltar la espacialidad corpórea en su división física, psicológica y sociohistórica, Lessing ha puesto en primer plano el intenso sufrimiento de personas desconocidas, para darles identidad y visibilidad y transformarlas en un locus de impugnación de las relaciones de poder.

**Palabras clave:** espacio, literatura, cuerpo, guerra, trauma.

*[T]he body becomes the testing ground of human endurance.*  
(Laurie Vickroy 168)

*Modernity has come to be understood under the sign of the wound: the modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma.*  
(M. Seltzer 18)

## 1. Introduction

“Our skin is a big blank page; the body, a book,”<sup>1</sup> Irene Vallejo (79) states, a space in which life ordeals are inscribed. Therefore, literature has the potential to unveil the way ordinary people live and endure particular historical events and, sometimes, challenge their hegemonic versions. To write involves an attempt to come to terms with hidden old wounds and traumas, hence, to work them through, the writer constructs different worlds, spaces, and characters that will enable him/her to speak about what has been hurting for a long time as well as to give visibility to political and social wrongdoings. Space, as a living and active entity created by the people who inhabit a particular place, is produced within the geographical boundaries and in the atmosphere created by the participants, in the bodies of its people, “the outer covering[s] of the sel[ves]” (Sprague 99) and in the texts that narrate the events. In so doing, the literary text becomes the memory site that bears witness to the individual and communal suffering which has been a “permanent dialectics

in [Doris]Lessing's works" (Sprague 8). Therefore, the characters' bodies in the *novella* "The Eyes of God in Paradise"— first published in *The Habit of Loving* (1957)—, insofar as physical spaces of flesh and blood that are lived and where power is exerted (Lefebvre, Soja), represent the trauma encountered by countless anonymous people who suffered due to the horrors of the war and who have only been made visible by the author's skilled pen. From this perspective, my objective is to foreground those people excluded from the official history, the ordinary men and women who populate Europe carrying the war wounds on their bodies. This *novella* has been analysed from a different point of view by Mona Knapp and Margaret Drabble gives an account of its plot in the Introduction to Lessing's *Stories* (2008), therefore, my approach is innovative within Lessing's critical studies.

Fiona Becket argues that Doris Lessing has always had "an interest in what might be called selective cultural amnesia" (134) so, by being a transgressor, as Alice Ridout and Susan Watkins have called her, she has affirmed her strong commitment to the individual and the collective in her entire *oeuvre*. Moreover, Elizabeth Maslen claims that Lessing "has always been drawn, from her earliest writings to commitment literature, witness literature, whether in her fiction or her non-fiction" (152), even though the topics she addresses are controversial, "always aware of those whose voices go unheard, always urging her readers to question" (153). Her childhood recollections of the First World War with the gruesome images of maimed war veterans in Rhodesia and her experiences of the Second and its aftermath made her include literature and history into a symbiotic relationship which allowed her to acquire a different way of seeing the world. The wars are omnipresent in her works, oscillating between an open presence or a hidden existence, but always focused on the way victims and their traumas influence the society where they live or return to, as in the case of the veteran soldiers. Therefore, the social context, the collective, and in sum, the space, suffer from a two-fold situation: the influence the victims exert on the societal fabric and the considerable impact that affects the perception of events and their possibility of recovery.

The present article focuses on Lessing's full exposure to common people's bodies and the way they recount their sorrows and narrate their position in the world after the horrors endured in the Second World War. The study is based on the works of academics such as Henri Lefebvre (1991), Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Ali Madanipour (2003) as well as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), Cathy Caruth (1995), Ruth Leys (2000) and Roger Luckhurst (2008), to mention just a few, who have devoted their studies to

space, the former, and trauma, the latter. Literary critics like Susan Watkins (2006), Roberta Rubenstein (1979), Clare Sprague (1987), and Elizabeth Maslen (2018), among others, also improve this paper with their findings on Lessing's use of bodies to get her message across.

Among Lessing's works, there are quite a few in which spatial corporeality is given prominence; examples of these, among others, are "The Nuisance" (1953), in which the body of the old black wife found in the whites' well acquires visibility and 'speaks' of years of humiliation and harassment, and "Our Friend Judith" (1960) where Lessing addresses the duality of the feminine body which, at the same time, hides and reveals according to the spatial circumstances. In the same vein, "England vs England" (1963) presents the protagonist's body that narrates the collapse suffered after years of dealing with the power exerted on him by the University of Oxford's environment. By the same token, her novels, *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) and *The Grass is Singing* (1950) are examples of her use of corporeality since they depict bodies that have been made invisible by age and illness, the former, "a subject which has until recently received little serious treatment in fiction" (Watkins 76) and by the appalling hardships of an African farm that have exacted a toll on the protagonist's anatomy, the latter.

## **2. Corporeal Spaces in the *Novella***

### **2.1. Historical and Geographical Background**

The story takes place in February 1951,<sup>2</sup> six years after the end of the Second World War, during the American occupation of the southern part of Germany, according to the arrangements agreed at the Potsdam Conference in July/August 1945. The protagonists, the British doctors Hamish Anderson and Mary Parrish, are on holiday in Germany because it is the cheapest site they can afford to visit given the fact that they only rely on their travel allowances. The physical place is a small skiing village in the Bavarian Alps where the couple intends to spend almost a month skiing and relaxing. Lessing does not provide the name of the town, only the first letter of its name "O," but using the different markers left purposefully by the author, the reader can discover that the city's name might be Oberstdorf, where the couple will go through an epiphanic and unforgettable experience that would change their lives. Bearing in mind Paul Virilio's statement that people live in a constant state of total war and that the so-called 'normality' and re-establishment of order is almost an impossible task (18), Lessing, with her literary expertise,

has managed to devise very well-defined spaces in the story in which this assertion can be confirmed and, among them, the corporeal space I will study in this article.

## 2.2. War Survivors

Doris Lessing has based the *novella* on opposite pairs, some of them overtly noticeable while others represent spatial manifestations hidden within the text. Among them, body spaces stand out as a binary opposition between war survivors who do not manifest any physical or visible disorder and disabled or maimed war veterans and hospital inmates. However, a closer analysis invites a reconsideration based on trauma studies which will reveal that, within the boundaries of the physical places, a broad range of human life spatiality is developed. Moreover, Henri Lefebvre's arguments that "[b]odies themselves generate spaces which are produced by and for their gestures" (216) and that "the total body constitutes, and produces, the space in which messages, codes, the coded and the decoded [...] will subsequently emerge" (200) open the scope for exploration within the realm of corporeality and the signs exhibited by the survivors to vividly convey the experiences of war.

Ali Madanipour explains the relationship between body and mind,<sup>3</sup> being the former the boundary that separates the "inner space of consciousness" from the "outer space of the world" and the latter the set of faculties that not only "understands the world through bodily senses" but also "communicates with others through gestures, patterns of behaviour and language" (6, 19); that is to say, through the physical body. He also states that the body does not finish in its physicality, but includes its surrounding space, its personal space which is defined by Edward T. Hall as that "small but invisible protective sphere or bubble that individuals maintain around them" (119). It acts as an extension of the body itself and is also charged with emotions that control the person's spatial relationships with other human beings.

### 2.2.1. Survivors without Physical or Visible Disorders

Bodies are spaces that speak; they turn into texts that inform the outside world about them. They are places that tell stories and on which power is exercised. Moreover, Henri Lefebvre highlights the importance body gestures assume in this corporeal dialectic and states that they "constitute a language in which expressiveness (that of the body) and signification (for others - other consciousnesses, other bodies) are not further apart"

(214). Several scholars have also approached the topic of corporeality from different perspectives. On the one hand, Kathleen Lennon argues that “the philosophy of embodiment” is not old since, historically, “the body has been conceptualised as simply one biological object among others.” It was considered “part of a biological nature which our rational faculties set us apart from”. In addition, it was regarded as “an instrument to be directed and a possible source of disruption to be controlled” (n.p.); in sum, the body is a site where acts of extreme violence can be perpetrated. By the same token, Barbara Hooper, echoing Lefebvre, states that “the space of the human body is perhaps the most critical site to watch the production and reproduction of power”. On the other hand, following this train of thought, she claims that the human body “is a concrete physical space of flesh, bone, of chemistries and electricities; it is a highly mediated space, a space transformed by cultural interpretations and representations.” She also emphasises that the human body is “a lived space, a volatile space of conscious and unconscious desires and motivations [. . .] a social space, a complexity involving the workings of power and knowledge” (qtd. in Soja 114), which corresponds with Merleau-Ponty’s propositions of the “experience of the body” and the “spatiality of the body” insofar as they are related to and linked with the space they inhabit (161). Given these assertions and since bodies exist in time and space, hence history is written in them because forces exerted onto bodies turn them into a locus of contesting power relations. Furthermore, Michel Foucault claims that “the materiality of power” can be seen “operating on the very bodies of individuals” since the human body has been, for ages, the site where power has been exercised either to legitimise authority or to administer punishments to set an example to the community (56).

Henri Lefebvre explains that “when [a person] arrives in an unknown country or city [he/she] first experiences it through every part of [his/her] body—through [their] legs and feet” (162). Hamish and Mary first experience the German space through their senses; they see, hear, touch, smell and taste what Germany is offering them. It is through their bodies that they perceive, live, and produce their own space. But it is also with their bodies that they are confronted with the fact that they are also participants, witnesses, and survivors of the past armed conflict despite not having visible marks on their anatomies. During their stay in the village, they encounter many bodies similar to theirs—war survivors—that speak to them. They tell their stories and everything they want to know about the physical place they are visiting through words and gestures, but mostly through their bodies

because, as Laura Di Prete states, the body stands out as "a medium of self-expression and—crucially—textual working through" (vi) in which the survivors, through their corporeality, can make themselves heard and take control of their own lives despite the emotional burden they carry.

Cathy Caruth explores the key theme of survivor and guilt that emerges from the strong feeling of disloyalty traumatised people experience for having been spared from a tragic outcome unlike their comrades (9). Hamish and Mary experience it when they visit a mental hospital and are confronted with the director's, Dr. Kroll, paintings. Immediately, Hamish and Mary recognise the intense suffering caused not only by the disappearance of their partners but also by the horrors they witnessed during the war which have left indelible, but unacknowledged, marks in their psyches. Therefore, they have to face the fact that, for years, they have been numbed with grief due to the protective shields with which their bodies have equipped them but that were destroyed before Dr. Kroll's art which acted as a mirror for them to 'see' and recognise what they had been trying to remove from their minds. The space of their bodies has turned into a space of war where their emotional sensitivity has been intensified by the powerful and disturbing images of the war shown in the paintings. Their awakening starts in that very minute when the space of joy and relaxation they are looking for becomes one of war (Lessing 109). All their memories and hidden traumas are brought back for them to confront, and they are reluctant to do it, they prefer to continue in denial, numbing, and silence because, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub state, they fear that the tragedy lived may reappear if they talk about it or acknowledge the emotional effect produced on their lives (67). They are not ready for a working-through yet, but their ghosts have been awakened and will haunt their corporeal space to such an extent that they cannot get to sleep (Lessing 130). This sleep deprivation is felt in the space of their bodies affecting their emotional states.

Likewise, Hamish and Mary consider that the personal space that surrounds and protects their bodies has also been violated; their privacy disturbed. Ali Madanipour provides a definition of privacy: "an interpersonal boundary-control process which paces and regulates interaction with others" (qtd. in Madanipour 20), hence people can manage their interplay in social situations so as not to feel subjugated by unwanted strangers. Moreover, he claims that the significance attached to personal space "lies mainly in how it marks out a personal territory" which allows the person "to develop a sense of identity and engage in the rituals of communication and recognition"

(30). Therefore, given the fact that Hamish and Mary's personal spaces have been invaded when Dr. Schröder approaches them to share their table at the restaurant, they have not only been deprived of performing those rituals but also regulating their social interactions. However, to maintain a degree of civility, they accept his company and relegate their intrinsic rights. This invasion of their personal space might have led them to react defensively and negatively but, as their bodies are also conditioned by the physical place as well as by the atmosphere created within its boundaries, they choose not to confront the intruder.

Another character who does not manifest visible disorders in her body is Frau Stohr, Hamish, and Mary's first landlady, since her anatomy, appearance, and behaviour not only epitomise everything correct within a world that has been turned upside down by the war, but her corporeality has also become into a text in which the old Germany is inscribed. She is described as a "thin and elderly lady, her white hair drawn back into a tight knot [...] stuck through with utilitarian pins" who wore "a long woollen skirt [...] [a] long sleeved striped blouse fastened high at the throat with a gold brooch" (131, 132). By contrast, Frau Länge, their second landlady, even though her anatomy does not signal any physical disorder, expresses her emotional vulnerability through her body. She has been badly hurt by the war and her body language sends the message that she is eager to please—as if by smiling constantly and adopting a sympathetic attitude, she would erase her sorrows—, with the hidden intention of not being left alone once more. Edward T. Hall speaks of "the silent language" which stands for "an entire universe of behavior" that "functions outside conscious awareness *in juxtaposition to words*" (xi, italics in the original); hence, without even noticing what her body is doing, she is communicating to her lodgers what she cannot utter. Her choice of clothes is another subtle hint she drops to reclaim her womanhood, "a tight scarlet sweater and a tight, bright blue skirt" (134). Michael Argyle states that "most people, some of the time, use their appearance to send information to others" (233); therefore, by donning this type of garments, she is affirming her femininity and her desire to be seen.

Regarding the trauma experienced by both ladies, it must have produced analogous reactions concerning the severe deprivations they suffered during the war, as well as the fear they felt but, at the same time, dissimilar concerning family losses. The narrator does not expand on Frau Stohr's husband's death but she does about Frau Länge's loss of sons and husband. Her family life was destroyed by the armed conflict and feelings of emptiness



and an unimaginable void may have arisen producing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with which she has to subsist and manage to go on living for the sake of her teenage daughter. Cathy Caruth states that "the problem of trauma is not simply a problem of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (24), i.e., how to rebuild one's life after having faced such a terrible catastrophe. Both landladies seem to have come to terms with the trauma produced by the trail of devastation left by the war in their lives and struggled for their survival, nevertheless, reading between the lines, it appears that they keep their sorrows to themselves and try to move on to comply with the defining spirit of the period, the "conspiracy of silence" (Bessel and Schumann 10) but that exacts a toll on their corporeality.

Within the range of war survivors, there also appears a family in the restaurant whose bodies, apart from showing remarkable beauty, act with such naturalness that the message they convey is that for them the world and their lives are the same as one or two decades before as if the last war had not taken place at all. Their corporeality not only corresponds exactly with the Aryan supremacy established by the Nazi ideology, not showing any visible reminders of their struggle against the horrors of the war, but they also act as if they consider themselves superior to most of the other diners. Their corporeality exudes the confidence acquired through the economic success achieved during and after the years of the armed conflict. Nevertheless, their bodies must be hiding the trauma that the war left on them and the way they have found for denying it is to put on an act as if they were in the theatre showing the world not only all their beauty and best qualities but also that they are not beaten. They make their grand entrance once all the diners are seated as if the curtain has been lifted for them to make their appearance on stage (Lessing 112). Notwithstanding, their bodies, the boundaries that separate their inner selves and the outer world, are also shouting and crying on the inside. They are showing to society that they have moved on with their lives but, in their interior, they must be feeling the intense humiliation of having lost the war and with it everything they believed in (Lessing 127). Ali Madanipour draws on the notion of "masks" human beings depend on to face society and that "are made of socially mediated suppression of impulses to stage a stable, relatively consistent performance." He pinpoints the precise form they adopt: "normal routines" that change according to the places human beings are in as well as their encounter with individuals, but all of them involve a degree of corporeality from "shaving or putting make up, to changing vocabulary, accent, and forms of expression" or "adopting

a more polite, careful manner” to confront everyday situations. Moreover, he maintains that this way of “manipulation in response to the social world” is a form of “theatrical performance” human beings put on with their corporeality to struggle for survival (103-106). This family, despite their wealth and beauty, is fighting for their lives like all the people in the village and in post-war Europe. As well as all their compatriots, they “[had]plunged [...] into the edge-of-disaster hunger-bitten condition” (Lessing 114), and are now struggling to rebuild their lives, apparently, more successfully than others.

Hamish and Mary also encounter people who, to the naked eye, seem to have moved on with their lives since they go out, work, and perform ordinary everyday activities. Nevertheless, inside their bodies the intense agony produced by years of suffering still goes through, their cries of pain are audible as they silently walk the streets. At the station, the past war can be seen not only in its remnants but also in the people who are waiting for the bus and the workmen who “[look] like black and energetic insects” reconstructing the village. The gloomy space created is increased by the “silence [that] locked the air” (145, 146) which, at the same time and in an oxymoronic way, is shouting that its soil not only bears traces of the blood spilt by the bodies of soldiers and civilians alike in the past war but also that there exist vestiges of its infamous past as well as the invisible presence of the unforgettable dead.

Rose Chambers defines the aftermath society, like the one depicted in the story, as a community filled with melancholy and who are prevented from mourning their dead because of the trauma that affects them. She also emphasises the fact that even though some years have passed since the traumatic events took place, the trauma is “never over” and, in so doing, the dividing line between individual and collective trauma fades (qtd. in Luckhurst 125-126). Lessing describes the ordinary people of the town: “[they wait ... wait] eternally, huddled up, silent, patient [...] listening to the silence, under which seem[s] to throb from the depths of the earth the memory of the sound of marching feet, of heavy black-booted, marching feet” (162). Therefore, beneath the surface of the village, the blood spilt from the bodies of thousands of people who gave their lives in the war will stay forever. The trauma experienced by soldiers and survivors is present in the shadowy eyes of the workers who have to go on with their lives carrying with them the pains and sorrows experienced during the years of terror. The deadly silence that falls over the place brings about the everlasting and deafening sounds of black-booted marching soldiers.

### 2.2.2. Disabled and Maimed by the War

Likewise, Hamish and Mary find other bodies; maimed, disfigured, and crippled that narrate their own stories of suffering, pain, disillusion, and marginality. Firstly, at the restaurant when they first meet Dr. Schröder, they tolerate his presence out of politeness because he has been injured in the war: "the surface of his face was a skin-graft; [...] the whole highly-coloured, shiny, patchy surface, while an extraordinarily skilful reconstruction of a face, was nothing but a mask, and what the face had been before must be guessed at" (116). They feel pity for the man, but they cannot avoid the thought that the past war was everywhere; it was not only on the streets but also in a bourgeois restaurant. The space of the village is filled with war, but the response from the people to these bodies, telling their truths, making them visible lest they forget, was different. On the one hand, Hamish and Mary decide to leave the country so as not to have to look at them (109); on the other hand, Dr. Schröder, a wounded soldier himself, refers to the men on the street with aggressive remarks, "[i]t's a disgrace that these people should be allowed to behave like this. It makes a bad impression on our visitors" (121). This character, who stands out as a liminal persona in the story, an in-between in this society of survivors, shows a cynical disregard for his comrades in arms who have been less fortunate than him who could have his face reconstructed. Not for a moment does he think what his reality would have been if he had not been lucky enough to get the expert medical assistance that "moulded" a new face "for him [...] covered with skin taken from his thighs" (135). Regarding Dr. Schröder's behaviour towards his less favoured comrades in arms, I contend that, as Yi-Fu Tuan argues, he must have acted with such carelessness due to what he experienced in the war concerning his body and the relationships with other people (34). He must have organised his space in such a way that it adapts to his corporeal necessities and the social connections he is willing to establish. His demeanour suggests that he is transferring to the wounded soldiers his fears of what his present reality might have been. He is conscious that his body, in particular his face, speaks, it is a "locus of remembering and suffering," as Corinne Bigot states (123). Thus, to counteract the feeling, he displays a sense of superiority that acts as a cover under which he hides the trauma he has not dared to acknowledge yet. Like Hamish and Mary, he is in the phase of denial and numbing in which silence is the holy place of comfort.

Secondly, Hamish and Mary find some maimed and crippled war veterans begging on the streets. They are the 'other'; the outcasts of society.

Janet Wolff states that “[t]he anonymity of the crowd provides an asylum for the person on the margins of society” (145), but it is not the case with the soldiers in the village who are a powerful and constant reminder of the atrocities committed in the last war bringing to the fore years of suffering which pollute the collective space. On their arrival, Hamish and Mary meet two men at the train station, “hacked and amputated by war almost out of humanity, one without arms, his legs cut off at the knee, one whose face was a great scarred eyeless hollow” (109). From the very beginning of their journey, they have to face the space of war represented by the bodies of veteran soldiers who are carrying history on their anatomies and whose eloquent silence acts as a slap in the faces of the British couple. In the wounded veterans, the production and reproduction of power are obvious. It is in the concrete physical space of their bodies that the atrocities committed during the last war have perennial existence; their bodies shout their truth. But these men are not the only ones the protagonists encounter during their holidays. They also find a “queer hopping figure [...] It was a man whose legs had been amputated and who was hopping over the snow like a frog, his body swinging and jerking between his heavy arms like the body of some kind of insect” (109). These people stand for what is out of place in society because they do not conform to what is expected from them as members of a community, they do not count, they are excluded, and they are pushed to the margins. This communal space is the one they have been forced to relinquish due to their situation as outcasts. Emile Durkheim coined the term ‘anomie’ to describe a state of precariousness and vulnerability because of a breakdown of social norms and values in a society (Britannica, n.p) which echoes the political, social, and emotional instability of post-war Europe. This situation produces such a psychological disturbance that many of its members decide to take their own lives, destroying their corporeal space, due to a feeling of an outright rejection by their community. Antonius Robben and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco argue that the “collective violence exerted on [war veterans] cannot be reduced to a single level of analysis because it targets the body, the psyche, as well as the socio-cultural order.” These people have not only been deprived of their privacy but also their safety, they are no longer in control of their bodies, and they are not able to defend themselves against any attack. Furthermore, the scholars add that “we can always do a body count, discern the patterns in the amputation of limbs or explore a torturer’s agenda by the marks he leaves in his victim’s body” which emphasises the textual and palimpsestic quality of the human body where everything it has to endure

stays there for the observer to "read the wounds" (Hartman 537), and decode the message engraved in its corporeality. By foregrounding their suffering and presenting the unsavoury, gruesome images of maimed bodies, Lessing has committed herself to giving visibility to those outcasts of society who have been erased and forgotten for being Germans, "the archetype of evil" for the time (Lessing, qtd. in Maslen 160) showing total indifference towards their fate. Regarding the issue, Elizabeth Maslen asserts that Lessing has always been "aware of those whose voices go unheard" (153) and Roberta Rubenstein reinforces the concept by reminding readers that "the dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy, between the self and the world, inner and outer, becomes the deepest expression of the unconventional consciousness of Lessing's fiction" (40). The barrier that should have protected the wounded soldiers from the outside world has been broken and they find themselves under the scrutiny of unknown people who feel entitled to pass subjective judgements about them and how they would have to solve or escape from the predicament they find themselves in. Hamish and Mary cannot bear the sight of these men, they do not allow themselves to decipher the message these bodies are conveying and their immediate response is to leave the country, to run as far as possible from these spectres, "for God's sake, let's get out of here" (109). The crippled veterans are no more than subjects in space whose empowerment or disempowerment depends on external laws passed by men who claim to be doing what is best for them. To further the understanding of the previous scene, Henri Lefebvre enlightens the topic by saying that gestures and I add attitudes as well, "embody ideology and bind it into practice" and not only do they "connect representations of space with representational spaces"—insofar as the space designed with a purpose and that dominates society, the former, and, the space that is lived by human beings, the latter—, but also "the micro-gestural realm generates its own spaces" (215, 216). The interrelation of these two notions is established through the masks human beings wear on their bodies which act as boundaries between their private space whose centre is the body and the public space as well as about their position of power: perpetrator or victim. In Nazi Germany, under the concept of racial hygiene, many crippled veterans were sent to hospitals where they were killed or had to endure institutional violence. Together with prisoners, as Robert Proctor states, they were injected with "known diseases to test vaccines or possible cures" (25) among other unbelievable atrocities performed on their bodies. Dagmar Herzog expands on the topic:

[a] key aspect of National Socialism was the concept of racial hygiene and it was elevated to the primary philosophy of the German medical community, first by activist physicians within the medical profession, particularly among psychiatrists. That was later codified and institutionalized during and after the Nazi's rise to power in 1933, during the process of *Gleichschaltung* ("coordination" or "unification"), which streamlined the medical and mental hygiene (mental health) profession into a rigid hierarchy with National Socialist-sanctioned leadership at the top. (167)

In a similar vein, Robert Proctor mentions some other experiments that were used to "further the German's war strategy by putting prisoners in vacuum chambers to see what could happen to pilots' bodies if they were ejected at a high altitude or immerse prisoners in ice water" to measure "how long they would survive and what materials could be used to prolong life if worn by German pilots shot down over the English Channel" (25-26). By carrying out these types of tests on prisoners of war, the authorities transformed them into powerless human beings deprived of their human dignity because their bodies would no longer belong to them; they were dehumanised, and their corporal space was violated. What is more, these tests reinforce the idea that some bodies matter more than others. This issue may not have passed unnoticed by Lessing's sharp eye since, as Roberta Rubenstein states, one of her "consistent strengths" lies in "her ability to document the actual current social history of the times." Moreover, she perceives them "through a strong sense of detail, event, psychological insight, dialogue and the felt texture of social experience" (218) as can be observed in the detailed depiction of the mutilated and disfigured corporeality of some characters to compel the reader to face the horrors left by the war in people's physicality.

During their stay in the village, Hamish and Mary visit a mental hospital and become acquainted with Dr. Kroll. His body, at first sight, does not show any anomaly that prevents him from leading a normal life and performing his medical duties. His mental illness is hidden behind his elegance and attractiveness: "a handsome man of late middle-age [...] extremely distinguished [...] an aristocrat" (148) which evinces that the war has taken a huge toll on his mind rather than on his physicality. His trauma must have its roots in the horrors and trail of devastation he not only witnessed but was part of when he worked "under Hitler" (158), hence the way he finds to overcome his sorrow, guilt, and, perhaps, shame is through

painting. Through his art he fulfils the need to communicate with others, to narrate what he has seen, but he is misunderstood by critics, only the hospital inmates grasp the meaning of his artistic production (154). His body is eager to speak, to find a listener who understands the message he wants to convey, but, at the same time, when he is overwhelmed by reality and memories to such an extent that his psyche is compromised, his corporeality tells him that he needs help, that he has also been wounded by the armed conflict so, due to his expertise in the medical realm, he humbly relieves himself from duty and is hospitalised (152). On the other hand, when he can return to his functions as director, his mind seems to have changed and he adheres to the way of thinking his compatriots support, like when he utters "the gentlemen of the Nazi regime had sensible ideas" (159), evincing the manipulation he has suffered disguised in medical treatment.

Regarding his art, Dr. Kroll's paintings embody the true essence of the past war emphasising the bodies of the casualties, their blood spilt everywhere, their skulls denoting the passing of time without being acknowledged, their corpses that must be in an advanced state of decomposition, the bodies of ordinary people who, in their desperation to escape, decide to throw themselves out of the windows rather than to feel their flesh burnt by the flames (152). In sum, a powerful and vivid image of war corporeality. This pictorial process assists him with the unlocking of the "dissociated or repressed traumatic memories" as Bassel Van der Kolk and Mark Greenberg explain (qtd. in Leys 49) because not only has he given prominence to hidden deeds but also awoken the dead of the recent conflict making them visible. He has also prompted a dialogic exchange about the facts recreating a historical context that cannot be forgotten and, in so doing, by signifying the space of war, he has encouraged people's awareness of their past and present situations transforming the paintings into spaces of resistance in which corporeality plays a crucial role since it is in the bodies of the soldiers and ordinary people that the destruction brought by the armed conflict is mostly felt and seen.

The last and devastating blow for Hamish and Mary comes during their visit to the patients' quarters in the hospital. There, not only do they see big groups of inmates—men and women—separated by a wire fence according to their sex, deprived of their humanity and "reduced [...] [to] complete identity with each other" (156), but also little children. The gruesome sight they are faced with shocks them: "[i]n the centre of the room a five-year-old child stood upright against the bars of a cot. His arms were confined by a

straitjacket, [...] he was tied upright against the bars with a cord” (157). This boy is not the only one in the room, “a dozen children aged between a year and six years—armless children, limbless children, children with enormous misshapen heads, children with tiny heads and monstrous bodies” (158) are also there. The explanation the doctor gives the protagonists makes the reader believe that these children’s deformed bodies are the result of new experiments: “[m]odern drugs are a terrible thing. Now these horrors are kept alive. Before, they died of pneumonia” (158) because of the simple fact that they were left to die. The brutal reality the protagonists face in that room evokes horrific memories of Dr. Joseph Mengele’s use of children to try new drugs and tests during the war. The experiments conducted in Auschwitz by the ‘Angel of Death,’ as he was called, “included surgeries without anaesthesia, transfusion of blood from one twin to the other, injections of lethal germs, sex-change operations, removal of organs and limbs, incestuous impregnations and chemical injections in the eyes to change the colour among others” (history.com, n.p.). The horrors committed by this physician on children’s bodies unveil the lack of consideration for their corporeality due to their condition as prisoners of war because of their race or ethnicity, a situation they are neither conscious of nor do they know what it entails.

What is worse in Hamish and Mary’s views is that doctor Kroll seems to agree with these earlier practices when he comments: “there are many people in this hospital who would be no worse for a quick and painless death” (158)—referring to Aktion T4 program by which at Hitler’s orders the mentally-ill patients were executed “by euthanasia under the cover of deaths from strokes and illnesses” (Proctor 17-31)—and that “on certain questions, the gentlemen of the Nazi regime had sensible ideas. [...] one could call them questions of social hygiene” (159, 160) what makes me agree with Robben and Suarez-Orozco’s statement that “social institutions provide the tools, the know-how and the psychological support for the conduction of systematic atrocities” (9). In the story, the space of war, portrayed not only by the bodies with the emerging messages from the little cots but also by the Nazi ideology represented by the physician, surrounds the protagonists.

### 3. Conclusion

The present analysis of the *novella* from the perspective of corporeal spatiality has brought to the fore some interesting findings. Firstly, Doris Lessing, a visionary, a woman who is ahead of her time in countless controversial issues,



constructs her story around bodily opposite pairs—survivors without physical or visible disorders and disabled and maimed by the war—in a time in which the body was considered only in its biological nature. In addition, she has displayed in her narrative actual bodies with visible or hidden marks left by the past war and in so doing show the world the ugliest and most brutal reality of the atrocities committed by the belligerent parties. By paying close attention to the language used to produce the desired effect on the readers, she not only makes the opposite pairs converge in the trauma suffered by both parties but also allows them to speak thus turning them into texts. She achieves her objective of representing trauma through corporeal spatiality and transforms the bodies into a locus of contesting power relations. Secondly, the trauma affecting the characters is represented in the survivor's guilt, their feelings of loneliness, solitude, and absence and its manifestations of denial, numbing and belatedness as well as in the melancholy and silence of the people on the streets and in the body of war veterans that stand as a perennial reminder of the past events. In so doing, she has constructed a broad range of human spatiality in which the bodies assume the position of boundaries between the inner selves of the characters and the outer space of the world and in which corporeal and traumatic spatialities are blended. Finally, Doris Lessing, talking about her historical time, generates a descriptive voice in the literary field that resignifies the historical events through the hidden trauma of her characters. Her commitment to the suffering produced by the war, and evident in the survivor's bodies, is revealed in the *novella*. She becomes the voice of the voiceless whose desperate plight deserves to be heard and recognised; hence she crosses the boundaries between the public and the private spheres to unveil and decode the facts that are written in the bodies of her characters. By exposing their corporeality, she challenges the acceptable level of behaviour of the times, puts the ethical and moral standards upside down, and presents them to the public from a different perspective and, in so doing, creates her Poetics of Corporeal Space.

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## Notes

1. My translation
2. All the subsequent references to the novella in analysis are from Doris Lessing's book *Stories* cited in the bibliography and are quoted parenthetically in the text.
3. See Chapter II: Personal Space of the Body.