

### 38. Subversion of traditional family structure in *the Fifth Child*

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#### Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to study the novel called the Fifth Child (1988) by Doris Lessing from a cultural materialist perspective in terms of reflecting the subversion of the traditional family pattern, creating alternative family structure instead of it and eliminating gender roles imposed on women and men. According to cultural materialist theory, meaning is created culturally and some stories or some representations are tried to be more plausible than others. In this regard, the Fifth Child will show how Victorian morality and values were understood and subverted in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of Britain. This novel is chosen to be studied from this perspective because there is a wish for returning back to Victorian values in 1980s in the novel represented by the couple of Harriet and David. They get married and have children by sticking their gender roles imposed on them by Victorian morality. That is, David is the money provider and Harriet is looking after children and doing households in a Victorian house. Although hegemonic ideologies of Victorian morality such as emphasis on the gender roles and on the family bond exist in this period they are challenged and subverted with the birth of the fifth child called Ben into the family. As a result, the subversion of family bond with the coming of Ben and the subversion of gender roles with Harriet who brings Ben back against the consent of her husband will be illustrated in the paper.

**Keywords:** The Fifth Child, Doris Lessing, cultural materialism, Victorian period and subversion

#### **Beřinci Çocuk adlı romanda geleneksel aile yapısının alt üst edilmesi**

#### Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, Doris Lessing'in Beřinci Çocuk (1988) adlı romanını, geleneksel aile yapısını alt üst etmesi, alternatif aile yapısı oluřturması ve, kadınlara ve erkeklere dayatılan cinsiyet rollerini ortadan kaldırmasını kültürel materyalist teorisiyle incelemektir. Bu teoriye göre anlam kültürel olarak yaratılır ve bazı hikayeler veya bazı temsiller diđerlerinden daha makul olarak yansıtılmaya çalışılır. Bu bağlamda, Beřinci Çocuk, Margaret Thatcher'ın İngiltere Bařbakanı olduđu 1980'lerde Viktorya ahlakının ve deđerlerinin nasıl anlařıldığını ve alt üst edildiğini gösterecektir. Söz konusu roman, 1980'lerde Viktorya dönemine ve deđerlerine dönme arzusunun Harriet ve David çiftiyle gösterecektir çünkü bu çift Viktorya ahlakının kendilerine dayattığı cinsiyet rollerine bađlı kalarak evlenip çocuk sahibi olurlar. Örneğin, David eve para getirirken Harriet de ev işleriyle ve çocuklarla ilgilenir. Ancak Ben adlı beřinci çocuğun doğumuyla geleneksel aile yapısını korumak gibi Viktorya deđerlerine ve cinsiyet rollerine vurgu yapan hegemonik ideolojilere meydan okunur. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Ben'in doğumuyla kurulmaya çalışılan aile bađının yok edilmesi ve Harriet'in kocasının

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rızası olmamasına rağmen Ben'i kurumdan alıp eve getirmesiyle geleneksel cinsiyet rollerinin alt üst edilmesini gösterecektir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Beşinci Çocuk, Doris Lessing, kültürel materyalizm, Viktorya dönemi ve alt üst etme

## Introduction

*The Fifth Child* was written in 1988 and it reflected Thatcherite England. Margaret Thatcher was the first woman Prime Minister in Britain between 1979 and 1990. Her political ideas were referred as Thatcherism that was considered to be an ideology. In this regard, Evans defines Thatcherism as follows:

Thatcher had no difficulty identifying what she was against: state interference with individual freedom; state initiatives that encourage an ethos of 'dependency'; woolly consensuality; high levels of taxation; the propensity of both organized labour and entrenched professional interests to distort market forces; and a reluctance to be 'pushed around', either personally or as a nation-state. In one sense, being 'against' all of these implies that their obvious antitheses will guide policy; individual rights; private enterprise within a free market; firm, perhaps authoritarian, leadership; low levels of personal taxation; union and vested interest bashing; simple patriotism. (2004, p. 3)

Therefore, Thatcherism arose from a consideration of what Thatcher opposed and the policies and ideals she attempted to promote. In order to promote her policies, her strategy was coming from her adherence to Victorian values and life style. She aimed to convince people that if the Victorian values were revived glorifying day of British Empire would come back. Kate Mitchell claims that Thatcher's commitment to Victorian values is just "a political ploy that enabled her to appear to be protecting stability and tradition when in fact she sought change, transformation and the new" (2010, p. 51). She instilled her ideologies representing these values on the minds of people through social institutions, which made her an influential figure even after her death (Pilcher and Wagg, 1996, p. 3).

Moreover, Thatcher gave emphasize on the family values. In order to support her idea, she blamed the permissiveness of society in 1960s culture. She suggested returning to the traditional structure of family as a cure for the problems in the society. For instance, Mitchell states that "Thatcher used the term 'Victorian values' as a message against which to identify the social ills of her milieu – a regulated economy, welfare dependency and the decline of the family – and to advocate a return to laissez-faire economics, to a reliance upon individual charity and to strong family discipline" (2010, p. 48). She even refuses the term such as society by suggesting that there are just families composed of men and women. Family means a middle-class Victorian family according to Thatcher. Mitchell approves Thatcher's emphasis on family by writing that "Thatcher's invocation of the Victorian era centered upon her particular re-creation of the Victorian family, with the heterosexual marriage relationship as the permissible locus for sexual activity" (2010, p. 48). Clearly, Thatcher wanted to create binary oppositions such as heterosexual marriage and having children as normal and homosexual or any sort of deviance from the traditional family structure as abnormal. Consequently, those which were different from this traditional family structure were considered as subversion. By the same token, Nick Frost declares that "single parent families are seen as a cause of poor results in school, vandalism, football hooliganism, to name just a few social problems, and pose a threat to the 'health of society'" (2005, p. 325). Once more, it is seen that alternative family structures are denied by Thatcher and her government.

Moreover, Thatcher encouraged people to have the patriarchal nuclear family where the mother was expected to look after children and do housework while the father was expected to provide money for

the family. In this regard, Beers writes that “it’s important to emphasize the extent to which Thatcher perceived the family in distinctively gendered terms: as the primary sphere in which women’s lives achieved value and purpose” (2012, p. 119). Clearly, there is a return to the concept of ‘angel in the house’ as in Victorian era. In addition to women, children were expected to be quite submissive. They could not take decisions about their lives. Instead, their parents were responsible for them. In this sense, Oppenheim and Lister write that “the Social Security Act rejigged priorities, but did nothing more than churn the incomes of the poorest. The Child Support Act was not about tackling child poverty among lone parents, but about reinforcing parental responsibility and clawing back money for the Treasury” (1995, p. 130). As seen, Thatcher government did not help the children but tried to reinforce traditional family structures and made the parents responsible for their children.

Although Thatcher’s policies imposed the traditional family structures in society the rate of divorces, cohabitations and single-parent families rose in the 1980s. It may be interpreted that Thatcherite hegemony became a failure with the existence of subversive family structures. Besides, there emerged another opposition to Thatcherite hegemony through attempts of women who challenged the patriarchal system. For instance, Berry and Foyster assert that “far from being passive subordinates, some women developed strategies to modify or resist patriarchal authority, including marshalling support through friends, neighbors and kin to circumvent their putative subordination to their husbands” (2010, p. 3). This kind of subversive family structure is exemplified in *the Fifth Child* as well. That is, Harriet’s bringing Ben back to home against the consent of her husband may be considered as an opposition to David who represents the patriarchy in the novel. The novel makes use of English setting and portrays the 1980s’ outlook of Victorian times in the sense that Harriet and David buy a Victorian style house in a suburb of London. In addition, family as an institution is reflected as a powerful social institution but it is challenged and subverted in the novel, which shows the fact that the social institutions can be challenged and changed by people even if people are influenced and shaped by them. As a result, the novel is shown both to have hegemonic ideologies about reinforcing the traditional family pattern as a social institution and also have the subversions of them.

### Theoretical background

Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield developed cultural materialism as a literary theory in Britain with their book *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. This theory is interested in refusing the objectivity of historical knowledge and relies on the relationship between text and history by emphasizing the power of dissident or subversive elements in culture as well as literary texts. In addition, because the theory is interested in present, cultural materialists analyze past works by relying on the contemporary power relations. Apart from this, other important features of the theory are “the focus on the possibilities of subversion, the bifocal perspective on both the past and the present, the belief that both the objects of their studies and the methods by which they study are forms of dissidence, the view that all forms of representation are engaged in political struggle” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 109). As a result, cultural materialists give a chance to speak to the silenced marginal voices of the past in the present by highlighting the reasons for their marginalization as well as highlighting their tremendous opposition attitude.

Cultural materialism is a term coined by Raymond Williams who associated culture with materialism and defined culture as “a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (2001, p. 57). Clearly, everything in life apart from art is related to culture. It is interesting to observe that although there is always a dominant

culture in a society it is inclined to change and produce new and even contradicting thoughts and culture in time. Williams explains this culture as residual or emergent one. For instance, he writes about residual culture by referring to “some practices, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation” (2005, p. 40). He also explains what he means by emergent culture by referring to ideas, attitudes, or behaviors that have recently emerged.

Through his definitions of culture as dominant, residual and emergent, cultural materialists have the opportunity to develop the concept of subversiveness that composes the core of the criticism. For instance, Alan Sinfield illustrates William’s contribution to the cultural materialism with his definitions of culture by writing that

Williams argued the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance. Cultural materialism seeks to discern the scope for dissident politics of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation, both within texts and in their roles in cultures. (1992, p. 9-10)

Subversion is defined as a term including both glorifying and degrading elements at the same time related to the authority in a literary text. Therefore, Jonathan Dollimore, states that “resistance ... may be there from the outset or itself produced by authority for its own purposes, once installed it can be used against authority as well as used by it” (1994, p. 12). Likewise, Alan Sinfield claims that the presence of subversion can be taken as a challenge to authority because the potential for dissident stems from “conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within it, even as it attempts to sustain itself. Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, striving to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances” (1992, p. 41). Consequently, subversion has an inevitable influence of authority. In addition, in this quotation, it is implied that subversion comes from dissidence. Although dissidence should be thought as an absolute opposition of the dominant ideology, “it is instead close in resemblance to the structures of power and is in fact produced by the internal contradictions of these structures. It does... imply a deviation from some aspect or tenet of the dominant ideology or culture” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 111). Clearly, dissidence causes the emergence of subversion which develops through time and becomes powerful enough to oppose the authority. Dollimore also accepts this idea by explaining that “non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes coexisting with, or being absorbed or even destroyed by them, but also challenging, modifying or even displacing them” (1994, p. 6). Besides, because dissidence exerts a persistent pressure on the authority it does not have to be subversion as it includes subversive elements in it.

By the same token, Dollimore claims that culture is not a single and coherent thing, but rather a collection of disparate forms existing in varying proportions at the same time. He maintains that “non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes coexisting with, or being absorbed or even destroyed by them, but also challenging, modifying or even displacing them” (1994, p. 6). He also opposes the idea of a unified literary work since it invariably includes both dominant and non-dominant agents. As a result, oppression may trigger resistance. This resistance cannot be visible at the time the work is created, but it can reappear afterwards. The author may not even place the dissidence; instead, the reader may interpret it himself/herself.

Furthermore, cultural materialists believe that it is impossible to produce a work which includes absolutism as “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to exclude” (Sinfield, 1992, p. 47). Namely, what is appropriate in a work written in past may be evaluated as unacceptable in a work written in future because of the fact that the prevailing culture does not constitute a coherent totality and dissident elements may become a part of it in the future. In other words, subversive elements have an important role in determining the circumstances of credibility because of the fact that ideologies cannot be steady and consistent. Therefore, some particular standards of plausibility tend to change so that different features that have not been indicated before can be discovered and, thus, marginalized people or features in the text can be given credence.

### **Subversion of traditional family pattern in *the Fifth Child***

*The Fifth Child* clearly opposes the moral constraints of traditional family in Thatcherite England. In this family model, there is a hegemonic support for the traditional nuclear family model and Victorian morality. The novel also offers such a family example but it is subverted with the coming of the fifth child named Ben, which is resulted in questioning of this family model and Victorian morality. In the novel, the only happy marriage is the one of Harriet and David. For instance, after Harriet’s father died her mother does not think about marriage again as a result of being attached to her husband even after his death. Harriet took her parent’s marriage as an ideal for herself and even though she became unhappy in her marriage with the coming of Ben she did not think about getting a divorce. On the other hand, David’s family got divorced and he grew up in two different houses. While David chose to get married his sister took a different way. As seen, except from David and Harriet, there are divorces, family relationships are not strong and the couples prefer to live separately instead of getting married. That is why, the marriage of the Lovatts couple is an example for all their relatives and, that is why, during the holidays, people visit them and share the happy atmosphere of this family union till the coming of Ben.

The protagonist Harriet and her husband David meet in an office party. They are described as unusual in their generation. For instance, Harriet is virgin although there is sexual freedom in 1960s. Her friends define her as a “poor thing” (Lessing, 2001, p. 10). David is also old fashioned and conservative and although David and Harriet are described as conservative or old-fashioned by their friends they contended “a stubbornly held view of themselves, which was that they were ordinary and in the right of it” (Lessing, 2001, p. 7). That is why, when they have met for the first time they think that they should get married. Both of them are seen as misfit for their times because of their adherence to the sanctity of Victorian morality and Victorian values. These two people can be seen as the embodiment of Thatcher’s ideologies since, by developing a discourse based on dualities of normalcy, Thatcherite ideology determined family and gender roles. That is, it supported traditional gender roles, heterosexual nuclear family and prohibited sexual activity before marriage. Accordingly, nontraditional family structures, homosexual relationships, premarital sexual practices, and divorces were all seen as potential threats to hegemony (Mitchell, 2010, p. 48). Thatcher aimed to bring Victorian morality back and to wipe any sort of alternative family structures or relationships out. It is explained as follows: “In her eyes, the key to the revival of Britain was moral recovery and regeneration: the hedonism of the 1960s and the dependency culture of the welfare state must both be renounced and the more vigorous and admirable qualities ... must be re-discovered, proclaimed and espoused” (Cannadine, 2007, p. 278).

Harriet is a traditional woman who is dependent on her husband economically. She quits working after getting married to David and she has four children during six years of her marriage. She is a typical housewife and a mother who takes care of the family and does housework, all of which exemplify

Thatcherite discourse about women and family. Neither her individual existence and intellectual capacity nor her inner desires or fears are portrayed in the novel. This is the case in Victorian society in which women were seen as just ornaments and they could not act against the consent of their husbands. This is true for Harriet as well. For instance, David wants to have a big house with lots of children in it. Then, they get married quickly and buy a house in a small town away from London. They have four children in six years despite the fact that their parents do not like it.

At the beginning of their marriage, the relatives and friends of David and Harriet fill the house on Christmas and Easters because they find happiness and comfort in it. Even a cousin of David named Bridget comes to these family parties because “she had an unhappy, or at least complicated, family background, and she had taken to spending her holidays here, her parents pleased she was having a taste of real family life” (Lessing, 2001, p. 36). To her, David and Harriet symbolize marital happiness and she expresses that “when I get married, this is what I am going to do. I’m going to be like Harriet and David, and have a big house and a lot of children” (Lessing, 2001, p. 37). Even though there are brutal incidents and crimes in outer world the Lovatts couple represents the idyllic family until Harriet becomes pregnant for their fifth child accidentally. With the fifth child their idyllic and happy family start to decline starting from the very beginning of her pregnancy.

Like Harriet, David is also stick to traditional gender roles. Thus, the life of the Lovatts is reined by a patriarchal system. Patriarchy can be defined as “male domination and the power relationships by which men dominate women...Eisenstein defines patriarchy as sexual hierarchy which is manifested in the woman's role as mother, domestic labourer and consumer within the family” (Beechey, 1979, p. 66-67). The domination of women by men is exercised in the constitution of family in which the women are responsible for procreating and take care of children and house. David supports his family financially. He has a patriarchal view towards marriage and family. For instance, when he decides to get married to Harriet it is written, “he knew what he wanted, and the kind of woman he needed. If Harriet had seen her future in the old way, that a man would hand her the keys of her kingdom, and there she would find everything her nature demanded . . . refusing all muddles and dramas, then he saw his future as something he must aim for and protect . . . what he was working for was a home” (Lessing, 2001, p. 13). The reason why they get married so quickly is because of the fact that although there is freedom for both women and men both in sexual terms in 1960s, marriage and, thus, heterosexuality is suggested for the happiness of the women. Under the seemingly freedom for women, patriarchy still prevails, which can be observed in the situations of the women characters in the novel. For instance, when Molly does not like his son’s idea of having lots of children David replies “you are not maternal. It is not your nature. But Harriet is” (Lessing, 2001, p. 19). David accuses of his mother not being maternal. As it is seen, the patriarchy which is represented by David here demands maternity from the women. David’s parents get divorced and they get married with different people. David’s sister Deborah also is a divorcee. In contrast to these divorced characters, David believes that her kingdom will protect her family from the dangers in the society of 1960s. However, he realizes that he can no longer control it with the threat of Ben and he becomes angry, sarcastic and has inclination of violence from time to time. That is, he shows masculine tendencies.

Interestingly enough, other women characters also help the patriarchal system reign whether it is consciously or unconsciously especially by adopting the masculine features. For instance, although David’s mother Molly is an intellectual woman and marries Frederick who is also an intellectual at Oxford she is indifferent to the problems of the women around her. For instance, Dorothy, Harriet’s mother, works as a governess without being paid money and Molly does not mention anything related

to this situation. She seems to be a product of “greedy and selfish sixties” (Lessing, 2001, p. 28) as she acts as an oppressor of the patriarchal system. Her daughter Deborah does not confirm a traditional English lifestyle, rather, leads a materialistic life. For instance, she gets married and, then, gets divorced. She does whatever she wants to do. She lives with the support of her father in financial terms. In this sense, she resembles Jessica who is her step-mother because Jessica is defined as “a noisy, kind competent woman, with the cynical good humor of the rich” (Lessing, 2001, p. 12). Both Jessica and Deborah take up the popular life style but this does not mean that they are free in a true sense as they are dependent to their fathers or husbands in financial terms. Just like Molly, neither Deborah nor Jessica is interested in the problems of women around themselves.

Dr. Gilly can be seen as another example of a woman who also represents the principles of her society behaves in a very rational and insensitive way without showing any empathy to Harriet. The specialist in London is like Dr. Gilly. Both of them look like insensitive and do not care of Harriet’s psychological problems. They behave mechanically and unemotionally. For instance, when Gilly talks to Harriet about Ben she says “the problem is not with Ben but with you” (Lessing, 2001, p. 124). She does not mind hurting Harriet. When Harriet insists her to examine Ben Dr. Gilly does not show any sympathy towards her. Harriet feels “Dr. Gilly’s pose was wary, offended, she was calculating the time left to the end of the interview. She did not answer” (Lessing, 2001, p. 126). Mrs. Graves behaves just like Dr. Gilly and when Harriet asks what she thinks about Ben she does not say what Harriet wants to hear. Harriet reflects that “she was frowning, as if some annoying thought were poking at her, wanting attention, but she did not feel inclined to give it any” (Lessing, 2001, p. 120). They are important figures because they are professionals. While Harriet is victimized here these two women are oppressors. Therefore, the patriarchy represented in the novel is sustained not only by men but also these women who have adopted masculine qualities.

The only female character who helps Harriet is her mother Dorothy who is from working class and has a very strong sense of responsibility for her daughters. For instance, she takes care of the daughters of Harriet without getting money until Ben is born. Then, she looks after a relative’s baby named Amy with Down syndrome. She is a typical selfless Victorian woman. For instance, when Harriet and David have difficulties both because of financial terms and because of the pregnancy of Harriet other women do not come to the house of the Lovatts except for Dorothy. Thus, neither Molly nor Deborah who belong to upper class visits the house of David anymore. Dorothy says that “I do the work of a servant in this house” (Lessing, 2001, p. 42). In this sense, she can be seen as the victimizer under the patriarchy in which the men are the breadwinner and the upper class women indulge in their business being indifferent to the working class women.

Dorothy stops coming to the Lovatts with the birth of Ben. Because Dorothy does not come to help anymore Harriet becomes desperate in looking after five children and doing housework. David cannot afford the needs of the house by himself. Nobody in the family helps them anymore. Therefore, both David and Harriet are unhappy although they dreamed differently about their marriage in past. That is, after they get married Harriet and David know that they will be happy being in their suburbia with their Victorian style house. They give so much importance on family life that they even regard their family as a defense to the moral corruption. They are described as “happiness. A happy family. The Lovatts were a happy family. It was what they had chosen and what they deserved” (Lessing, 2001, p. 28). Mark Donnelly expresses the spirit of the sixties as follows “the sixties were the age when people were preoccupied with the self - self-fulfillment, the autonomous self, the contemplative self, integrity of the

self, self-adulation” (Donnelly, 2005, p. 29). Hence, instead of focusing on family union people prefer to live individually.

That is why, when Harriet and David want to get married and have lots of children their parents protest their idea. However, they do not listen to their parents because they believe that the corruption outside will not affect them. For instance, it is said, “the young Lovatts made themselves read the papers, and watch the News on television, though their instinct was to do neither. At least they ought to know what went on outside their fortress, their kingdom, in which three precious children were nurtured, and where so many people came to immerse themselves in safety, comfort, kindness” (Lessing, 2001, p. 30). In fact, this idea as an ideology is instilled on the minds of people by Thatcher who has a feeling of nostalgia for Empire in eighties and claims that if people adhere to Victorian values they may return to the glory days of Empire; however, it has been observed that “from the sixties to the seventies, when the traditional values of culture – propriety, gender, life style, and so on – were being called into question, Britain lost its confidence as an Empire because of its declining economy and the successive loss of its former colonies” (Honbun 209).

This is the case of Harriet and David as they end up being unhappy in their marriage. For instance, although nobody in the family wants to keep Ben at home Harriet goes to the institution and takes him to the home. However, she confesses that his bringing him back is not because of love but because of her feeling guilty: “It was not with love or even affection, that she thought of him. It was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights” (Lessing, 201, p. 94). The important point is not the reason why she brings Ben back but is the fact that she does this against the consent of her husband. Although she exemplifies a typical Victorian woman who is subordinated by hegemonic masculinity she seems to subvert this hegemonic masculinity represented by David. With the coming of Ben, other children leave the home, that is, some of them leave for boarding school and some of them move to the houses of their relatives. Therefore, the idea of extended family is subverted with the decision of Harriet. In addition, Harriet’s decision makes David feel impotent despite of his masculinity and wealth because David has wanted to establish an extended and happy family from the beginning of their marriage. For instance, he says that

“It’s either him or us,” said David to Harriet. He added, his voice full of cold dislike for Ben, “He’s probably just dropped in from Mars. He’s going back to report on what he’s found down here.” He laughed—cruelly, it seemed to Harriet, who was silently taking in the fact—which of course she had half known already—that Ben was not expected to live long in this institution, whatever it was.

“He’s a little child,” she said. “He’s our child.”

“No he’s not,” said David, finally. “Well, he certainly isn’t mine.” (Lessing, 2001, p. 74)

No matter how much David tries to stop Harriet from bringing Ben back from the institution David becomes ineffectual, which indicates the subversion of the power of masculinity and patriarchy.

Consequently, the happy marriage of Harriet does not last for long and she is unhappy and desperate. She cannot establish a new life for herself. She feels that she cannot survive without David and she does not get a divorce. Clearly, the novel presents the only conventional family example as a failure. Their strong family ties weaken with the coming of Ben. Harriet cannot form strong family connections neither with her husband nor with her other children. For instance, Harriet reveals that

But the last thing before they slept, the other children locked their doors quietly from inside. This meant Harriet could not go to them to see how they were before she went to bed, or if they were sick. She did not like to ask them not to lock their doors, nor make a big thing of it by calling in a locksmith



and having special locks fitted, openable from the outside by an adult with a key. The business of the children locking themselves in made her feel excluded, forever shut out and repudiated by them. Sometimes she went softly to one of their doors and whispered to be let in, and she was admitted, and there was a little festival of kisses and hugs—but they were thinking of Ben, who might come in...and several times he did arrive silently in the door way and stare in at the scene, which he could not understand. (Lessing, 2001, p. 87)

After the four children leave home, the story is mostly told through the lens of Harriet and the narration focuses on the relationship between Ben and Harriet but from the perspective of Harriet. We do not know how and what Ben thinks about the things happening around him, for instance. Harriet wants people around her to think that Ben is abnormal or alien. For instance, when she goes to doctor or a specialist in London she tries to make them say that he is abnormal. For instance, she talks to Dr. Gilly as follows:

“You think Ben is a throwback?” enquired Dr. Gilly gravely. She sounded as if quite prepared to entertain the idea.

“It seems to me obvious,” said Harriet.

Another silence, and Dr. Gilly examined her well-kept hands. She sighed. Then she looked up and met Harriet’s eyes with “If that is so, then what do you expect me to do about it?”

Harriet insisted, “I want it said. I want it recognized. I just can’t stand it never being said.” (Lessing, 2001, p. 96)

Her insistence comes from the fact that abnormal children are considered as taboo and the mothers of these children are regarded as outcasts of society in the novel. Patriarchy oppresses women once more. That is why when the narration is focused on Ben we do not see David. He does not take the responsibility of Ben and of the deterioration in the family by refusing Ben. He considers that looking after children is the duty of women. As seen, there are both social and psychological pressures on Harriet since she thinks that establishing and maintain a family is the duty of her as a mother. This is another oppressive feature of Thatcherism imposed on women. In this regard, it may be claimed that “Thatcherism aims to protect and improve ‘the stability and quality of family life’, and to stress the centrality of women’s place in the home. As central as nationalism and union-baiting to the rhetoric of Thatcherism is its appeal to the importance of the family” (qtd. in Honbun 208). In short, Thatcher reminds of all women that the most important thing in life is to establish a family.

However, the reason why the happy family of David and Harriet falls apart is not Ben’s being ‘abnormal’. He is just somebody who does not fit anywhere. Harriet and David like other members of the family cannot accept Ben as he is because he does not fit their conventional family pattern. Instead of accepting Ben with his difference from other children his parents want to change him so that he can fit to the family. However, Ben resists against his being changed according to the rules of this family. He is concerned he is the product of punk generation. It “was a transnational cultural phenomenon in industrialized Western countries, a synthesis of different aspects of British and American youth culture and music. Their appearance was in part a response to rising unemployment as well as to a boring middle-class lifestyle. They expressed their rejection of common social values and aesthetic norms through outrageous clothes, hairstyles, and accessories” (Brauer, 2012, p. 55). The youths show the attitude of angry social alienation. Ben and his friends are not accepted in the society. Rather, they are considered as outcasts. Harriet and David do not like their behaviors and David dismisses them one night when he comes early at home. As in the case of this family, they are dismissed from school and other institutions in the society as well. Thus, Ben can be defined “to represent the inarticulate, ineducable, alienated fifth of Britain’s young, a gang of amoral hooligans born out of the womb of a sick

society suicidally obsessed with happiness without cost” (Thorpe, 1988, p. 657). For instance, his aunt Sarah mentions “Ben gives me the creeps. He’s like a goblin or dwarf or something” (68). He is described as different from other four children of Harriet. Harriet’s fourth child Paul also has some problems but David states “Paul was even more difficult than Ben. But he was a normal ‘disturbed’ child, not an alien” (Lessing, 2001, p. 129). As a result, he is ostracized because of his difference and cannot establish a family bond with her parents and her siblings.

Rather than arguing for nuclear and extended families, Lessing demonstrates the power of the nontraditional family that individuals can create for themselves. Ben builds strong relationships with people outside the family despite his incapacity to connect with his biological family. Firstly, he becomes friend a man named John who is loved by Jonh and his friends. This indicates the fact that Ben, actually, can construct a family bond with people who provide the acceptance and understanding lacking in his biological family. However, after a while, John and his gang leave the city because they find work in another city. At his secondary school, Ben forms a group of friends. Though Harriet initially assumes that the other children’s acceptance of Ben is based on charity, it quickly becomes evident that Ben is the gang’s leader and that the rest of the school shows respect for the group. Ben’s acceptance with this group demonstrates that he is capable of attachment in a group of individuals who resemble him. Harriet does not understand this fact. For instance, at the end of the book, she imagines Ben’s future as if he would look for people like him for the rest of his life. She could not see the fact that Ben has created an alternative family for himself and he is happy with this family. Ben looks for and discovers a non-traditional family that can supply him with love and support because he has been denied those things by his nuclear family. Consequently, the ending of the end of the novel also signifies the subversion of the traditional family model once more.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the novel has illustrated important subversion of the hegemonic ideology that centers on traditional family structures from a Thatcherite view which is quite oppressive one as it imposes some patterns and conventions on society and attempts to marginalize subversive groups by constructing dualities of normalcy. In the novel, Harriet and David, who are conservative and old fashioned according to the fashion of their times, believe that they will be happy if they stick to the Victorian morality and values but their happiness falls apart with the coming of their fifth child Ben. They cannot accept Ben because of his difference while Ben is found as a loveable character by like-minded people. Although nobody at home wants Ben Harriet makes a radical decision and keeps Ben at home especially despite of her husband David. Therefore, *the Fifth Child* subverts traditional family structure and suggests new models such as nontraditional family model that can be established with people outside family through embracing unconventional gender roles.

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