

IDENTITY, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE IN BESSIE HEAD'S TRILOGY

by

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IDENTITY, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE IN BESSIE HEAD'S TRILOGY**SUMMARY**

This dissertation seeks to explore the perceived intricate relationship that exists between constructed identity, discrimination and violence as portrayed in Bessie Head's trilogy from varying perspectives, including aspects of postcoloniality, materialist feminism and liminality.

Starting with a background to some of the origins of racial hybridity in Southern Africa, it looks at how racial identity has subsequently influenced the course of Southern African history and thereafter explores historical and biographical information deemed relevant to an understanding of the dissertation.

Critical explorations of each text in the trilogy follow, in which the apparent affinities that exist between identity, discrimination and violence are analysed and displayed. In conclusion the trilogy is discussed from a largely sociological perspective of hope in a utopian society.

Key terms: identity; discrimination; construction and representation of identity; utopian; self; gender; hybridity; feminism; emotional torment; postcoloniality

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The existence of racism and racialism into the latter decades of the last millennium saw, one could argue, a marked increase in the world's awareness of the representation of varying identities and their construction. It was this that continued to fuel investigations into those processes that construct identities and that, at times, lead to prejudice and violence. They were investigations that included, among others, the questions: what is identity and what constitutes it?

Some anthropologists (see Eze 1997; Grunshaw 1986; Lestun 1993) writing near the end of the millennium, observed that physical geography in conjunction with anthropology may provide a full range of knowledge on the subject of humankind. According to them, physical geography, which studies colour, height and facial characteristics, is seen as having given rise to different human races and racial classifications, among them categories such as white (European/Caucasian) and black (Africans/Negroids). The use of the terms 'black' and 'white' in this dissertation does not, however, unproblematically endorse the constructed identities that have for so long divided humankind. They are used, rather, as complex signifiers of features within the construction and representation of identity which bear scrutiny. In speaking of identity, I begin from the assumption that it is that which denotes a specified person, belonging to a specified people, place, sex and sexual preference. Discrimination I understand as the unfavourable treatment of a specified person based on prejudice, especially as regards race, tribe, place of origin, sex and sexual preference. Lastly, violence is assumed to mean the use of physical, emotional and mental intimidation and/or torture, employed in order to cause emotional, physical and mental harm (through, for instance, discrimination).

Given this background therefore, in as much as literature is a reflection of lived life and to write is usually an attempt to express the particularity of oneself or one's situation, this dissertation seeks to explore the perceived intricate relationship that exists between identity, discrimination

and violence as portrayed in Bessie Head's trilogy of *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1974). While I will critically explore each text individually as regards the concepts of identity, discrimination and violence, however, given the dissertation's assumption that the three are significantly imbricated, due to the catalytic, dialectic and interactive effect of identity, I will, throughout, seek to explore this intricacy and place the texts in conjunction with one another.

The reasons for exploring Head's trilogy within this framework are indeed as numerous as they are various. I would argue that Head consistently scrutinizes the question of racial categories, by exposing some of the dynamics of identity construction in both colonial and post-colonial societies, and by refusing the compulsion to choose any one fabricated racial identity. In addition, Bessie Head, as a so-called 'half-caste' or 'coloured' and, moreover, as a woman who experienced life both in racist South Africa and tribalistic Botswana, can give, in her writing, an intimate testimony as regards questions and experiences of identity, discrimination and violence from both sides of the so-called 'colour-bar'. Indeed, one could even argue that Head epitomizes the condition of women of colour towards the end of the second millennium. This is apparent in the discrimination on the grounds of both her hybridity and her femaleness which Head herself evidently experienced. Yet it was ironically a discrimination which, whilst it practically drove her to madness and violence, at the same time enabled her creative power. Thus according to Head herself, '(It) was almost as though the books wrote themselves, propelled into existence by the need to create a reverence for human life in an environment and historical circumstance that seems... a howling inferno' (Ogwude 1998: 70-81).

One therefore feels that Head in telling her stories exposes an array of variously tormented thoughts and feelings which, until she wrote them down, were kept hidden, perhaps even festering in her heart and mind, but battling to find voice. Lastly but most importantly, it is my belief that Head's intricately entwined and highly autobiographical trilogy can effectively demonstrate the inter-relatedness of identity, discrimination and violence, especially since she does not write only as a primary witness but also as a victim, 'intent on bringing marginalized experiences out from total occlusion in the shadows of an undifferentiated otherness with its embodiments, its opacities, its anonymities' (Smith S. 1991: 191). The trilogy should therefore

be seen as Head's coming into her own, as it were, intent to act as a spokesperson for all those that have thus far suffered. As Head herself put it, 'all three novels are continuous autobiographical records' (quoted in Sarvan 1987:82-88).

Each individual story becomes, therefore, the occasion of what Hartsock (in Smith S. 1991:172) calls, 'standpoint epistemologies, analyses of specific confluences of social psychological, economic and political forces of oppression'. Alert to such confluence and conscious of the trilogy's largely autobiographical character, this dissertation is primarily the product of library research, in which I have sought to read through a variety of theoretical positions or standpoints. Primary amongst these are postcolonialism and materialist feminism. Of secondary and less extensive (but nonetheless compelling) value are understandings gleaned from theorizations of the biographical and the liminal.

The term postcoloniality, in the context of this dissertation, is used as defined by Walder (1998: x-2), namely as that which '(i) happened after the end of formal colonization (ii) has to do with large scale phenomena involving power relations between people within particular territories (iii) demands an awareness of colonial inheritance as it continues to operate within a specific culture, community or country (iv) places a text, event or attitude within a category of things under discussion and thus permits one to ask a whole series of questions (v) is anti-colonial and so may look back as far as the first moment of colonization by the West and (vi) focuses upon matters of history, language, race, gender, identity and migration.' A postcolonial perspective is similarly attractive and apt, in the context of this study, since various critics (including, significantly, Homi Bhabha:1994) emphasize the importance of hybridity in the work of postcolonial writers. Given Head's own preoccupation with hybridity in her trilogy (and, one could argue, her own hybrid identity) the concept of hybridity offers important insight into the matter of identity.

According to Ben Beya (2001:1), 'hybridity has become one of the most recurrent conceptual leitmotifs in postcolonial cultural criticism [as], it is meant to foreclose the diverse forms of purity encompassed within essentialist theories.' Literally, hybridity exists in the meld of genes and phenotypes. However, in the domain of literary study, it is a signifier for the mix of

meanings, cultures, values, and ideas that accrue to and are consequent upon a condition of being that derives from exchange and interchange. Bakhtin (in Ben Beya 2001:1) perceives hybridization as, ‘a mixture of two social languages ... an encounter, within the area of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor.’ This is a definition which bears usefully on language and its constructs within the experience of the racial hybrid. Significant too is Bhabha’s observation that hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures (1994: 25). The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the entry of the formerly excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse.

However, like any other theory, postcolonial theorization has its potential limits. Thus, Eze (1997:14) points out that it has sometimes involved a romantic idealization of the other, whilst Eagleton (1996: 204) has argued that the presence of this discourse has led to a politics in which issues of race, language and identity obscure the vital material conditions which different ethnic groups have in common. Eagleton’s observation is important yet I would argue that the analysis of race and language in relation to identity remains equally significant.

Myriad forms of violence against women, continuing widespread devaluation of femininity in global contexts, and intensified controls over women’s sexuality and reproductive capacities, especially in Africa, are constant reminders of the need for a strong and persistent feminist movement, perhaps now more than ever. The challenge is, however, to anchor feminist analysis in a recognition of the continued brutal force exerted by such totalities as patriarchy, tribalism and racism. Eagleton’s observation, that ‘like feminism, postcolonial theory is directly rooted in historical developments with their veritable revolution in the notions of space, power, language and identity’(1996:204) points to the fruitful possibilities within the twin perspectives of feminism and postcolonialism. Together these theoretical trajectories underpin this dissertation’s attempt to tackle and explore issues of discrimination and violence.

In Head’s trilogy, sensitive and adept depictions of life from a woman’s perspective evince specific feminist elements. I therefore argue for materialist feminism as a way of reading;

especially as it takes as its particular focus the elimination of power. According to Hennesy, ‘the materialist feminism that has been circulating since the nineties in the work of Teresa deLauretis, Donna Haraway, Toril Moi and Mary Poovey has grown out of and been shaped by the need for feminism to question the adequacy of generic woman and a gender-centred feminist enquiry. Increasingly therefore, materialist feminism analyses have ‘problematized ‘woman’ as a homogenous empirical entity in order to explore how ‘woman’ as a discursive category is historically constructed and transversed by more than one differential axis’ (Hennessey1993:introduction). Materialist feminism thus insists on one of the strongest features of feminism’s legacy namely, its critique of patriarchy. ‘It recognizes that the continued success of patriarchy depends upon its systematic operation - the hierarchical social relations it maintains and the other material forces that it marshals and is shaped by’ (Hennesy *ibid*). It is moreover a mode of analysis in line with feminism’s commitment to the elimination of exploitation and oppression as, ‘the assumptions on which it rests have been forged...principally [from the discourses of] postmodernism, anticolonialism and antiracism’ (Hennesy *ibid*).

In addition to the theoretical positions outlined above, this dissertation is the product of research into the various critical works on Bessie Head of, primarily, Grace Achufusi, Isabella Balseiro, Gillian Eilersen, Craig Mackenzie, Virginia Ola and Maria Olaussen. It is grounded in their critiques that I have read Head. What has led my reading most cogently are the insights (1) on how Head’s tortured existence formed her literary output; (2) that in writing from a position of postcoloniality there are conflicting roles in human lives and society; (3) that Head stretched the functionality of literature to its ultimate by making it subtly didactic, overtly feministic and visionary; (4) that national, racial and gender identity are constructed; and (5) that Head is vitally concerned with aspects of the politics of domination.

However, in this study I seek to focus attentively and rigorously on *Maru*, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power* in order to explore that which seems to give the trilogy its continuity and contiguity: identity, discrimination and violence. I seek to show how the exploration of identity offers a compelling display of the somewhat tortuous emergence of a critical and resistant self-consciousness, which begins to question that which is fixed and given. I argue that self-definition and indeed self-realization become a process of growth, playing

through, at times, the hybrid and the liminal towards a sense of a possibly more contented subjectivity. With the attainment of an at least provisionally re-constituted and chosen selfhood, myriad forms of violence previously experienced as a result of constructed otherness begin to dissipate. In reading through the positions of postcoloniality and materialist feminism, this study invokes polemical positions that reflect and offer ideas and insights relevant to Bessie Head's vision and her trilogy. These positions take as fields of investigation facets of what has become most problematic in our ever-transitional state: how to understand and reconstitute the self, gender, social relations and culture.

Structurally, in view of the centrality of both social and personal histories to the approaches cited, Chapter One proceeds from an introduction to the argument as a whole to endeavour to supply such historical and biographical background as seems relevant for the understanding of the dissertation. Chapter Two constitutes what I consider the centre (or 'motherload') of the dissertation as it attempts to critically explore the intricacies of identity, discrimination and violence as presented in the trilogy. Chapter Three seeks to show how, despite the various crises resulting from identity, discrimination and violence, there is hope of a non-racial, non-discriminatory and non-violent, indeed quasi-utopian society in the future. This concluding chapter thus takes a largely sociological perspective of the trilogy and that of its creator as a speculative writer.

THE ORIGINS OF RACIAL HYBRIDITY, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

According to Smith L. (1999:61), Head's fiction depicts 'a world struggling against and sometimes rendered almost unsalvageable by various social evils – colonialism and racism being amongst the most devastating.' The result of this is that, as argued by Mackenzie (1989:19), a pattern emerges of ' [t]he interior torments of the characters set in a concrete, historically specific context'. History therefore, in as much as it has bearing on subjectivity, becomes invaluable to our understanding of the interior and exterior torments of the trilogy's protagonists. Such torments depend integrally on identity: it is on the basis of their various identities that Head's protagonists suffer discrimination and violence. It is also from such a historical perspective that we are able to speculate on how Head can at times simultaneously embrace and critique even the

most malignant elements of colonial culture, being herself both a product as well as a victim of history.

On the African continent in general and specifically in Southern Africa, it has been argued that a racial consciousness did not come into being until the advent of colonialism. Otherwise, the black inhabitants had perhaps till then only been conscious of their various tribal identities based on their different places of origin and caste systems. Racial identity as we know it today, as derived from different shades of skin pigmentation, would therefore seem to have descended on our southern shores when van Riebeeck and his crew of seventy, planted not only their crops but, through sexual encounters, initiated the complex histories of so-called mixed race genealogies and racial hybridity. Thus by the time a colony was officially established at the Cape, three races were recognizable: White, Coloured and Black (see Elphick and Giliomee 1979:241-275). It was with the emotional and social meanings of cultural and racial hybridities such as these, which run so deep within the seams of Southern African histories, that Bessie Head, herself the daughter of a white woman and a black man, was (I would argue) in a particularly good position to sympathize.

THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Indeed, although the origins of racism in South Africa are a great deal more complex and varied – located as they are in the history of Dutch imperialism as much as British policies, ideologies and discourses – I stress the history of Dutch imperialism, given its seminal position in the history of colonial settlement at the Cape and the unleashing of identity-based discrimination and violence.

A highly devout people, these early God-fearing Dutch settlers now commonly known as Boers, apparently believing themselves the descendants of Shem soon developed the idea of non-whites as a servant class. It is a racial discrimination which we see in *A Question of Power's* Camilla and which spirit was based on an interpretation of the Old Testament story which had cursed Canaan the son of Ham to a perpetual servitude to his brethren's children, the descendants of Shem, the White race. Thus emerged a racist prejudice, which in latter day South Africa was to

be used to justify many extremely racist policies towards Black people of the infamous system of 'apartheid' that discriminated against people on the basis of racial categorizations.

According to Moyana and Sibanda (1984:89), 'It was the Afrikaner Broederbond (Brotherhood) which in 1948 came up with the policy of 'apartheid/Separateness to ensure the purity and dominance of the Afrikaner in South Africa.' Consequently South Africa introduced a great many laws, which dehumanized and discriminated against perceived groups on the basis of colour. Thus, with its dominant principles those of separation and segregation, white racial supremacy and black racial victimhood, apartheid's Act number 30 of 1950 – the Population Registration Act, people classified as 'Coloured' or 'Native', were to be further classified into the ethnic groups of Griqua, Malay, Xhosa, Zulu and many others. It was a scenario in which in some cases some members of the same family would be classified as Coloured, while others White or Black resulting at times in the splitting of families along racial lines. Moreover, it was a classification/categorization, a human grading as it were, that Bessie Head later suffered when as an unwanted baby, she was parceled off to a white foster family, who returned her a week later, allegedly because she appeared too black. Thereafter, she had been handed over to Coloured foster parents who had kept her until she was thirteen years old. It is with some of the mental and emotional stresses that such 'parcelling' had on her that Head, as we shall see, grapples in her trilogy.

Still based on racial identity, Act number 41 of 1950 – the Group Areas Act - discriminated a step further by creating separate areas where each racial group could live and own property. The result was that over three million Blacks, Indians and Coloureds were forcibly and at times violently removed from their original hometowns. Consequently, as noted by Smith L (1999:69) Bessie Head's hybridity suggests that, '[her]doubleness, her sense of herself as split and incapable of belonging, is endemic to her existence as part of a colonized people.' As she too was shuffled from one foster home to another and like the other marginalized people of South Africa, from place to place, it is no wonder Head felt no sense of belonging and sought it all her life, as do so many of her characters. Her state conforms, in a significant sense, to Samuel's (in King 2001:9) definition of a liminal position of being, 'situated in a place "betwixt and between"...a state of limbo where he/she is no longer ...a member of a culturally-defined social

position or class. Liminalities have slipped between the threads of social fabric altogether and are no longer thought of as members of a distinct class or society....’

The racist apartheid laws did not however stop at setting aside different racial residential areas. In the education arena, not only were schools segregated too, along racial lines, but in 1953 the Bantu Education Act, and another Act in 1959, established different school curricula and separate universities for different ethnic groups in the country. As Leslie Witz (in Nuttall and Michael 2001:324-5) demonstrates, education thus also became a significant ideological instrument of a specific political project, particularly that of Afrikaner nationalism. It was designed so as ‘to establish a local European identity while the local inhabitants were not even accorded the status of human beings’. Eilersen (1995:84) reports how Bessie Head, having received an inferior education meant for Coloureds in South Africa, eventually ‘...was not actually qualified for a higher education course ... her teacher’s Diploma [being] inferior, she could not get a teaching post in England ...’. For Head, this was perhaps yet another reminder of the discriminatory refinements of the apartheid education system. She does not however dwell much on these aspects of the South African education system in her trilogy. Her focus lies more fully with portraying the sexual discrimination and, to some extent, the complexities of the Botswana education system that both she and her son Howard suffered first hand.

However of particular interest to this dissertation in as much as it dealt with sexual relationships across the colour-bar, is the infamous Immorality Act, which made mixed marriages and sexual intercourse amongst different races illegal. The taboo against interracial sex, officially expressed in the Immorality Act of 1927 and its amendment in 1950, aroused the fictional imagination of a range of South African writers including, it would seem, Bessie Head. Indeed, she was living testimony of its transgression since, ten years after its passing, she had been born. Thus in both her fiction and the autobiographic accounts within her letters and novels, Head often returns to an indeterminate narrative about the illicit union between her socially superior white mother and subordinate black father. It is an indeterminateness that is interesting in itself as it displays the fragmentary, fractured and uprooted nature of Head’s identity, class and so-called racial status. Like Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, as proof, perhaps of how much the origins of her

existence troubled her and formed a tragic site of confusion, complications and pain, Bessie Head was later to confess that:

I was born on the 6th of July 1937 in the Pietermaritzburg Mental hospital in South Africa. The reason for my peculiar birthplace was that my mother was white and she had *acquired me* [my emphasis] from a black man. She was *judged*[my emphasis] insane and committed to the mental hospital while pregnant, [as a Coloured child was considered the product of an immoral alliance between black and white] (in Mackenzie 1989:1).

On another level however, this ‘transgression’ between a Black labourer and an upper-class white woman, foretold the eventual demise of apartheid as in their forbidden sexual alliance the two possibly mirrored the spirit of defiance that the draconian apartheid laws could enkindle. It was a spirit of defiance that seems to have spread all over the country, as borne out by the political and social turbulence of 1960s South Africa. It was a spirit that Head was to portray in the relationship between Makhaya and Balfour in her first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

DEFIANCE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

As has already been noted, before the arrival of the white colonizer, blacks had been divided by complex traditional identities based on language and custom. The arrival of the Dutch settlers and thereafter miscegenation, inter-marriage and apartheid, had further divided them along racial lines. However, it was the introduction of apartheid policies aimed at further division that antithetically brought about their unity and strength of purpose as a people and not various constructed and at times imposed identities. In 1910, the Union of South Africa’s Constitution banned black political participation in the country, however, as Moyana and Sibanda (1984:91) chronicle, on the 8th of January 1912 black people in defiance had gathered in Bloemfontein and formed the South African Native National Congress whose mandate was to end racialism, tribal conflict and to fight for black representation. In Head’s *Maru*, we see this same unity of purpose to end tribal conflict and racialism when Moleka dines with his Masarwa slaves and Maru symbolically unites with Margaret (of the despised Masarwa tribe) in marriage. It is such

harmonious utopian unity and co-existence that Head reaches towards in her trilogy, envisaging its possibility after resistance to discrimination and violence.

Bessie Head's vision of a utopian future that transcends race, discrimination and violence, as portrayed in her trilogy, perhaps has an historical parallel. By this I mean that, following the suppression of the Defiance Campaign, the African National Congress met with the South African Indian Congress, a white organization called the Congress of Democrats, the Coloured People's Congress and the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Together, these multi-racial and multi-sectoral organizations drew up the Freedom Charter, a programme for a non-racial democratic South Africa and, one might well say, utopian in character. It is this Charter that concludes 'These freedoms we shall fight for side by side throughout our lives until we have won our liberty' and inspired, at least to some extent, a liberation struggle strikingly marked by a non-racial ethos involving all races, tribes and creeds. Nuttall and Michael (2001:303) however observe how 'The Charter nonetheless assumes the existence of 'racial' identities as given since in it, the individual is subsumed within group identity, or [more explicitly] race identity'. Ironically therefore, it would appear that the future is promised on the racial categorizations which discrimination, racism and apartheid had worked so ruthlessly to establish.

As both *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* endeavour to show, discrimination is neither a white nor a black phenomenon. It is instead to be seen as a human phenomenon. Thus when the Freedom Charter was drawn up, some members of the black members of the A.N.C objected to the participation of whites in the democratic process of a new South Africa as well as to the multiracial nature of the Charter. So, in as much as Maru the titular hero breaks away from his bigoted society so too did a black delegation also break away from the A.N.C and form the Pan-Africanist Congress (P.A.C.) in 1959. Both political parties were however banned the following year in 1960.

In defiance of the banning of both the A.N.C. and P.A.C, 1960 saw the formation of underground military organizations by both parties. Thus some members of the P.A.C. formed 'Poqo' while the A.N.C. formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (or Spear of the Nation) which, from 1961 onwards, sabotaged many economic installations and symbols of apartheid, as does Makhaya in *When*

Rain Clouds Gather. This is an activity that in the novel leads to Makhaya fleeing from South Africa and, like Bessie Head, into refugeeism in Botswana.

Head's life story therefore reads, as noted by Mackenzie (1989:4), '...like a miniature history of South Africa's troubled past'. It is a troubled past that was to be the seedbed of her trilogy. through which she sought to tackle the questions of identity, discrimination and violence as they existed both in her country of birth as well as in Botswana.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY EXPLORED

Sidonie Smith (1991:186) notes that ‘All ‘I’s are not equal. Nor are they conceptualized similarly.’ Smith here touches on two issues fundamental to this dissertation: the conceptualization of identity and the existence and implications of inequality and discrimination directed towards individual or group identity.

Starting therefore with *When Rain Clouds Gather*, then moving to *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, this chapter seeks to explore the question of identity as presented in these texts. This done, my next aim will be to try and establish how and in what ways the many facets of identity have entwined affinities with discrimination and violence. For as Ola (1994:23) explains, ‘[I]t is easy to encapsulate the central issues of all Head’s novels into the vital issues of power and identity’. Thus as with this dissertation, it seems it is also Ola’s understanding that it is on the basis of one’s identity that one is either empowered or disempowered. A concise understanding of this is that more often than not, an empowered identity, the Self, is able to discriminate against while the ‘Other’, the subaltern, is discriminated against. In postcolonial terms, ‘everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern’ (Kilburn 1996:2). The use of the term here is as has been appropriated by marginalized groups to mean the oppressed, the Other.

When Rain Clouds Gather

According to Ashcroft *et al* (1989) a major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, locating the problematics of an identifying relationship between self and place. In

When Rain Clouds Gather Head tells the tale of Makhaya Maseko, a South African political activist and former prisoner, who flees to Botswana to escape a banning order. At the South

African-Botswana border, Makhaya befriends an old man, Dinorego, from the village of Golema Mmidi on the Botswana side. It is from Dinorego, that Makhaya learns of a British white agriculturalist named Gilbert Balfour who is attempting to introduce co-operative farming methods to Golema Mmidi. Eventually, Makhaya joins Balfour in his noble enterprise but as fate would have it, their efforts are opposed by a tribalistic and exploitative reactionary sub-chief called Matenge and his semi-literate Pan-Africanist henchman, Joas Tsepe. Already notable at this stage of the novel are its explicit concepts of tribal and racial identities and power, as evident in its characters' backgrounds, roles and functions. Matenge and Tsepe's opposition is eventually defeated when Gilbert, Makhaya and the fiercely assertive Paulina Sebeso combine with the other villagers against Matenge, driving him to suicide. Tentatively, co-operative farming is established and both Gilbert and Makhaya commit themselves to both the land and its people by marrying Maria and Paulina respectively.

Even an initial reading of *When Rain Clouds Gather* leads one to observe how identity figures prominently in this apparently romantic and even pastoralistic novel. The issue of power and identity, for instance, soon takes centre stage when one realizes that Makhaya's exile has been caused by the iniquities of the South African political system of apartheid, with its basis in the construction and entrenchment of racial and tribal identities. The novel thus becomes a record of a discriminated Black South African's determination to find refuge (as many others before him) in a foreign land whose people would, possibly, not judge or persecute him on the basis of the colour of his skin. Or as Mackenzie (1989:22) puts it, 'Makhaya Maseko's quest is to 'find inner [and outer] peace of mind by a constructive engagement with the social world and in the world of Golema Mmidi, [all] these desires are offered fulfillment.' In Golema Mmidi therefore, Makhaya's lately oppressed, disempowered and subaltern state is uplifted somewhat, in comparison with its previously downtrodden condition.

Largely perhaps due to the intense loneliness and mental anguish she experienced throughout the larger part of her life, over issues of her identity as a refugee and a prohibited immigrant, Head's fiction often focuses on internal battles. Hence we learn that the conscience-driven Gilbert Balfour had himself come to Golema Mmidi in search of a personal identity divorced from his white and emotionally barren (for him, compromised) British middle-class background. Such is

his state that the arid soils of Golema Mmidi to some extent come to symbolize the barrenness he sees in himself. Thus starting with these two men, one soon realizes the novel's concern with the issue of identity from different perspectives as both black and white search for stable and possibly empowered identities and 'roots' they can claim as their own. However, it is a search for an identity that is more than just racial or skin deep but indeed internal and even spiritual. Such a search for identity is not the individual's sole responsibility but, as we see in the novel, is an individual as well as a communal effort.

Throughout the larger part of the novel, Makhaya is more keenly aware of his racial identity as '...a [discriminated] Black dog for the amusement of white people' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 128) than of his tribal identity of which, it seems, he feels ashamed. Thus when asked his origins by Dinorego, cynically Makhaya replies, 'It's Zulu ... I am a Zulu. And he laughed sarcastically at the thought of calling himself a Zulu' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:9). How Makhaya feels at this point about his tribal identity can be better understood if one perhaps compares it with Margaret's more serene and determined, 'I am Masarwa' (*Maru*:5) later on in *Maru*. The reason is perhaps because as Balseiro (1992:44) explains, Makhaya considers tribalism a form of oppression, an assigned ethnic identity whilst for Margaret, it is what she really believes and has accepted that she is. On the other hand, it could just be that Makhaya at this point is still smarting from the torment that both his racial and tribal identities have put him through back in South Africa. They are to him seen as limiting his development as an individual, especially now that he has escaped the claws of apartheid and is seeking a fresh start and progress in life, things his tribal identity has thus far militated against. If Margaret is, on the other hand, seemingly enthusiastic about her tribal identity, this is because she has not had it too cruelly manipulated against her. She thus makes the declaration from a position of near innocence in comparison to Makhaya. Moreover, Ranger (1982:121) highlights that there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the ideas of tribe must be seen as direct results of colonialism or a way of perpetuating divisions created through the changes brought by colonialism in order to hinder the advancement and unification of Black people. Seen in this light, Makhaya's sarcastic view of his tribal identity becomes understandable. Considered from a post-colonial angle therefore, Makhaya's 'prison without walls' is his identity as expressed by his name. It rather ironically means 'the one who stays at home' but he finds himself crossing

the border of his homeland in search of refuge. It is all these versions of identity that he feels he must leave behind if he is to find a new identity, a new self. In doing this he becomes indeed something of a liminary, crossing the boundaries and borders of self and context. Finding himself between identities, as it were, he disavows his ethnic identity and disassociates himself from his tribal ancestors. In this, he enters a liminal area, faced with confronting what is of value and meaning in his life, and beginning to take passage towards a new sense of self.

However, whilst Makhaya at times reacts vehemently towards anything tribal, paradoxically at other times he accepts his tribal identity as a source of ancient values and pride, albeit cynically. In the liminal moment (on the threshold of differing contexts, varying identities) he thus reviews the meanings which invest his previous 'self'. Thus we learn that 'Makhaya was well-versed in the ancient African customs where the man maintained his dignity and control in front of women' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 137-8). But when questioned about his fluent Setswana, he cynically replies, 'Since the days of Shaka, we've *assumed* [my emphasis] that the whole world belongs to us; that's why we trouble to learn any man's language' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:11). One thus concludes that Makhaya, like most young men of his age, is at that confusing stage of his life when he would like to identify with only the positive attributes of his tradition, those that empower him. He thus discards tradition when its demands do not suit him, as he does when his once powerful tribe, the amaZulu, disillusion him. As Maxwell (2002:4) explains, '...a vivid and active sense of self may have been destroyed by cultural denigration and the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by supposedly superior cultural models'. Balseiro (1992:44) however argues that Makhaya is not really scornful of his tribal identity but that his sarcasm is directed against the bid by white people 'to primitivize, decivilize and classify black South Africans neatly into divided ethnic categories.'

Whatever might be the reason for Makhaya's dilemma as regards his tribal identity, the Batswana on the other hand not having undergone any 'active sense of self [erosion] by dislocation [synonymous with migration]' (Maxwell 2002:4), are secure enough in their customs and identity not to want to abandon them. Makhaya on the other hand seems to undergo what Maxwell (2002:4) again also terms: 'an eroded sense of validity and active self due to

dislocation by migration'. I would argue, though (at least in part from personal experience), that with migration the migrant actually overemphasizes his/her tribal identity and guards it jealously. This as it may be, it is in view of such differences as regards perceptions about tribal identity between Makhaya (now renamed 'Mack') and the Batswana, that occasionally there is friction between him and them. Thus for instance on the occasion of Paulina's son's death:

The whole village knew by now that Paulina's child
had died and they were all in her yard, not talking
but just sitting in heavy silent groups.... Makhaya
suddenly could not bear this most exacting of
of African customs, not just then.... (*When Rain Clouds Gather* :167)

Confused and tormented by his tribal and racial identities, Makhaya displays mental and emotional dissatisfaction with the customs and practices of his African identity.

In contrast, the villagers of Golema Mmidi cannot understand Gilbert's revolutionary western agricultural practice of paddocking, as to them, the fence would only lead to changes in their traditional patterns of pastoralism. They are anxious to retain their tribal practices as well as identity. Olausson (1997:115) thus concludes that, '[a]lthough Gilbert and Makhaya are welcome to stay in Golema Mmidi and though people accept some of the changes they bring with them, there is a [profound] difference between their outlook on life and that of the people of Golema Mmidi.' As can be expected, like water and oil, the stable identities of the Batswana, cannot quite relate to the less stable ones of the newcomers.

Eventually, Makhaya's seeming 'pride' in his traditional identity returns when he finally seems to realize that in Golema Mmidi it is custom which takes care of people and supports family structures. Cultural identity thus becomes perceived as an integral part of the individual. This is especially evident with the onset of maturity and exposure to the values of community. This is seen when Makhaya, towards the end of the novel, realizes that 'the poverty and tribalism of Africa [are] a blessing if people [can] develop, sharing everything with each other.'*(When Rain Clouds Gather*:156). In such sentiments, Nixon (1996:248) sees 'a huge allure for Head of the idea of a society that secures its identity through flexible continuities of custom and territory

rather than through the imposition of ethnic criteria.’ Head thus seems to advocate a move away from tribal identities that can only perpetuate disunity and poverty among the numerous tribal groupings of Africa.

An exhibition of documents at the University of Witwatersrand during 1994 powerfully demonstrated the extent to which space in South Africa was linked not only to race but to language as well (Darian-Smith 1996:13). Indeed, according to Nancy Budwig (2002:5), recent discussions have placed increased focus on the role of language in the construction of the self, while many social constructivists (Morgan 1994; Gergen 1999) share the view that language is central to understanding identity. Makhaya’s fluency in Setswana thus enables him to pass for a Motswana, while Gilbert on the other hand, being unable to learn Setswana, remains virtually an outsider. Language thus becomes a confirmed construct of one’s identity, as it creates and influences identity while at the same time being influenced by identity. Thus for instance amongst the Batswana, language results in a connectedness and cohesion: ‘...the Tswana language [like] the bush, [belongs] to all Batswana people’(*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 160). This image of linguistic and territorial ownership however suggests bitterness in view of Head’s own language predicament in Botswana. For, despite having been officially granted Botswanan citizenship Head like Balfour, remained an outsider until death. As she put it in one of her letters to Vigne (1991:9) ‘Apart from that I’m not exactly loved by the Batswana here [but] I shouldn’t really care -- there’s only a kind of rat-race...anyway’. Unable either to speak or to understand Setswana, Head was not able to savour the fruits of her Botswanan citizenship and identity. This was largely because without sharing a common language with those with whom she was attempting to identify, Head could not fully comprehend them nor they her. Thus she could never become a coherent and cohesive part of the group: ‘After all, I am such a goddam outsider trying to be an African of Africa. Believe me - its painful and just guesswork - but such desperate guesswork’(in Vigne 1991:24).

Similarly, Gilbert has left behind a life of privilege in England but when he too feels excluded by the villagers, takes refuge in his memories and thinks back to the snowdrops of England where, in his depression, he feels he belongs. He grows increasingly alienated and silent with each failure to understand Batswana culture and be understood by the Batswana. Neither fully an

‘insider’ nor fully an ‘outsider’, Balfour is caught ‘betwixt and between’ communities. For Makhaya on the other hand, the fact that he speaks Setswana fluently, makes his ‘outsider’ status less obvious and thus less painful. This is further compounded by the fact that he also happens to be black whilst Gilbert is white. What these two then show is that on the basis of colour and language, one can either be taken in by a community or be rejected as different – the ‘Other’. Gilbert’s inarticulateness thus stands at the centre of his personal and cultural isolation. He must therefore first learn the language of the Batswana, before he can play an integral role in Golema Mmidi society.

Intimately linked to language and identity is one’s place of origin, one’s birth cradle. Makhaya’s arrival from South Africa, as well as his name, identify him as a stranger. As Olaussen (1997:41) observes, ‘The exploration of identity formulation in Head’s fiction is closely linked to the struggle for a place of one’s own.’ One’s place of origin and a desire for place thus become important to identity. This is made painfully evident in Gilbert’s memories of snowdrops in England when the Batswana still will not accept him in spite of all his vain attempts to be one of them. What he seems oblivious of is that despite craving to be one of the Motswana, at heart he remains an Englishman. This is something that Entrikin (1991:25) has termed: ‘The sense of place as a component of human identity.’ It is a phenomenon that Head illustrates in *When Rain Clouds Gather* through the majority of her women characters who, coming from different places, have at one time or another been strangers in the village but managed eventually to be absorbed one way or another. The arrival of Makhaya in the village consequently reminds the ‘old newcomers’ of their own once precarious belonging and the caprice of their identities attained gradually over time. The stranger thus having come, from wherever, depends on the village for a new identity, though he/she cannot totally discard the old one.

Today in many African countries, especially Zimbabwe, the land question has become topical largely because of the perceived close connection that exists between a people’s space and their identity. However, as Carter *et al* (1993:xii) argue, ‘[I]t is not spaces which ground identifications but places.’ As they explain, ‘space becomes place by being named, as the flows of power and negotiation of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture’. In the trilogy, this does not however seem to be the case as the outsider remains just that, the

outsider in spite of naming his new space and literally begging it to claim him. There is however a close connection between this identification with the land, the practical growth of crops and the literal growth of self. Thus seemingly conscious of this, Gilbert, Makhaya and Paulina being strangers to Golema Mmidi, involve themselves in co-operative agricultural work as, '[t]hey cannot exist unless they can live in the village in such a way that the changes that they bring about are necessary ... in determining who they are' (1997:281). Together, they therefore fight to turn the desert village into an oasis of prosperity. Their preoccupation with the agricultural development of the village thus takes on the added dimension of incorporating them into the village and bestowing on them its identity. As aptly observed by Smith L. (1999:70), Head's letters would seem to suggest that 'Africanness is not a natural state of existence, [but that] it must be performed.' In the case of both Head and her characters moreover, pathos is further added by reasons behind their departures from their original homelands, to which they can never return. Instead they must desperately find new identities for themselves in the village through performance which might go unrecognized. It however still becomes essential that they identify with their adopted land and, through service, have the land identify them. Achieving this feat is uncertain and lacks guarantees of success. Thus in the case of both Gilbert and Head, largely due to reasons relating to their racial identities, neither is readily embraced by their respective societies. In spite of his service to Golema Mmidi as well as marriage to a local girl, Balfour on the whole remains an outsider '[without] roots as such but rather putting on layer after layer of patchy clothing.' (Head in Lauren Smith 1999:70). It is a metaphor that Olausen (1997:284) suggests is something less permanent 'and an easily discarded identity'.

Maru

The development of identity in *Maru*, though similar to that in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is also different. *Maru* (1971) tells the story of Margaret Cadmore, a Masarwa girl who has been brought up like an English girl by her foster mother and namesake. When her foster mother retires and goes back to England, Margaret finds work as a primary school teacher in the Botswana village of Dilepe. Everyone who meets her assumes that because of her complexion, she is Coloured, not realizing that she is in fact one of the despised Masarwa they have condemned to perpetual servitude and whom they consider the lowest of the low. Yet it is against this background, that Margaret firmly declares her tribal identity 'I am a Masarwa' (*Maru*: 5). It

is a declaration that sends tremors whose ripple effects double-back and largely affect the focus of Margaret herself and of course those around her. They are however shock waves which the quiet but resolute Margaret withstands with the aid of her friend Dikeledi and would-be love interests, Maru and Moleka.

Maru is similar to *When Rain Clouds Gather* in as far as the theme is still that of a stranger coming to a small village in order to find a new beginning. It is however different from the other two texts in as far as Margaret starts from a positive position of personal identity. Ola argues that Margaret is ‘a woman without identity’(1994:15). One wonders how this can be so, especially as Margaret vehemently affirms one and shuts off all possibilities of appropriating the Coloured identity offered her. It is after all because of Margaret’s identity as Masarwa that she becomes an outcast in this Masarwa–hostile society.

Ola’s argument does however have some validity when one considers that everything that Margaret is, has been derived from her British foster mother, the ‘original’ Margaret Cadmore. After all, she is the woman who had instilled a positive self-image in Margaret in order to enable her to survive ‘both heaven and hell’ (*Maru*: 21). If Margaret is therefore a Masarwa, it is only her biological composition and nothing else. Otherwise, Margaret’s identity is not indeed her own but a composite legacy derived from her natural mother and from that which is created for her by her foster mother. Margaret’s is thus a fluidity and hybridity of identities. As Balseiro (1992:79) puts it, ‘...the younger Margaret absorbs much of her adopted mother’s personality, her resourcefulness resilience, education and artistic skills are all an inheritance from Margaret Cadmore senior’. We further read that:

There seemed to be *a big hole* in the child’s mind between the time that she slowly became conscious off her life in the home of the missionaries and conscious of herself as a person. *A big hole* was there because unlike other children, she was never able to say, ‘I am this or that’ (*Maru*:15)[my emphasis]

The reiteration of ‘a big hole’ implies incompleteness, an incompleteness and felt absence of identity. Furthermore, although she acquires a strong sense of self-worth from her adoptive mother, ‘...the only part of her life that could be [called] hers, [was] her mind and her soul.’

(*Maru*: 15) Thus according to Smith L (1999:66), Margaret Cadmore senior has been criticized for treating the child Margaret like ‘a real, living object for her experiment,’ (*Maru*: 15) meant to prove the capacity of an educated Motswana. However left all alone after the departure of her guardian, the younger Margaret sets out to exonerate herself from her ‘experiment’ label.

On arrival at Dilepe, Margaret’s firm and confident answer to Dikeledi’s inquiry whether she is Coloured, marks her coming into her own, her sense of self-identity. As Eko (1986:143) notes, ‘[with] her one sentence identification, Margaret confronts her self, her past upbringing, her future and her society.... bursts out from the walls of her white foster mother’s protection and stands aloof and vulnerable.’ Like Makhaya, her cultural pride not only gives a renewed identity to her despised people’s identity, but also challenges the myths of racial and tribal superiority. She thus learns to take control of the ‘only part of her life that is hers, her mind and soul.’ (*Maru*:16). Indeed she sees that ‘nothing can unbushman her’ (*Maru*:18). Unlike her fellow Masarwa who have been made to see only inferiority in their identity, Margaret proudly claims her own. The reason for this is perhaps because she had grown up sheltered from the full blast of the tribal prejudice often suffered by her fellow Masarwa. Indeed if anything, Margaret’s virtually public-school-English-girl-upbringing leaves her with only a constructed notion of her Masarwa identity to the extent that if anything, very little of her Masarwa ethnicity is evident in the

near perfect English accent and manners which did not fit her looks.
In fact, not one thing about her fitted another and she look[ed] like
half a Chinese and half like an African and half like God knows
what (*Maru*:23).

Moreover, if in spite of her near perfect English (like Makhaya’s Setswana), Margaret still retains her Masarwa identity, then it is implied that racial characteristics and not language primarily determine identity. This is especially so taking into consideration the fact that Margaret speaks not a word of the San language. On the basis of racial characteristics alone and inherited identity therefore, should Margaret be identified and identify herself with the San? For most, Margaret remains a somewhat unstable identity and a symbol of negative identity. Unfortunately however, by this identification, she is thus robbed of whatever identity she had laid claim to and is reduced to a symbol.

In the end, it is the western education she received at the hands of her benefactor, which becomes the basis of some individualized/personalized identity. She thus attains the simple status of 'female teacher', another claim to identity. Paradoxically, it is the same education that Elizabeth leans on for 'identity', which while depriving her of her linguistic identity with the San, at the same time bestows on both her and the Basarwa, more than only a tribal identity. The academically and artistically gifted Margaret moves from her objectified identity as subaltern Masarwa to a dignified (yet one feels patronized) young female teacher whom Pete the principal had given the teaching position by 'only [looking] at [her] qualifications' (*Maru*: 41). Margaret's qualifications thus prove that education and not social or racial background can and should without prejudice give one an identity that serves as an indicator of personal potential.

In the same vein, Margaret's great untapped talent as an artist and her identity as a professional Masarwa within a profession provides the oppressed Masarwa with a symbol of dignity in the face of prejudice and disdain. Thus, whereas the San had been stereotyped and discriminated against, Margaret's art which draws extensively from her San heritage and asserts her own and the San's unique personality and identity. Margaret's role is therefore, that of an outcast who achieves an individual identity and a will of her own for the greater good: that of changing the attitudes of the Batswana towards the San. Eko (1986:149) reiterates this in the observation that 'Margaret's resourcefulness and personal achievements help destroy the myth of Masarwa inferiority.' So positive is Margaret's impact on Moleka, that he dines at the same table as his Masarwa slaves and falls in love with Margaret.

Despite all this apparent progress, one however still feels that some uncertainty of self remains in Margaret. Thus when Dikeledi searches for the source of Margaret's apparently peaceful demeanor, we learn that while, '[a]ny other woman would have said, I am peaceful because Moleka loves me...she was not any other woman. She was a Masarwa' (*Maru*: 118). Apparently insecure with (or perhaps even ashamed of) her Masarwa identity, she keeps her feelings for Moleka a secret, believing as she does that he could not possibly love her, a Masarwa. Despite her apparent earlier assertiveness therefore, the assertion proves fragile with the passage of time and now Margaret vacillates between discomfort and genuine pride.

According to Nuttall and Michael (2001:306), the dictum ‘a person is a person through other people,’ is persistently cited in autobiography as being a mark of African identity. Thus in as much as the Masarwa come to be symbolized by Margaret, of interest is the phenomenon cited above, whereby one’s personal identity reflects, diminishes or augments another’s. Consequently we see how Margaret’s personal identity as an apparently assertive and proud Masarwa, makes Dikeledi feel a sense of lack. Thus wistfully Dikeledi declares: ‘I wish I was like you Margaret...You look as if you could live like this forever.... I feel so restless’ (*Maru*: 113). Dikeledi’s sense of self is thus seen as arising from her comparison with Margaret’s seemingly stable identity. Aware of her ‘lack.’, she establishes a relationship with Margaret in order to complement her own ‘unstable’ identity with Margaret’s seemingly more ‘stable’ one.

Ola (1994:65) sees a similar phenomenon as regards Maru’s relationship with Moleka. She notes how in character, both possess contradictory traits, ‘both positive and negative, each crystallizing in description and action the totality of the personality of the other friend’. Thus the ‘new’ Moleka who falls in love with Margaret has more of Maru than the old Moleka who had previously been arrogant and brutal. Equally, the Maru who finally ‘wins’ Margaret is more like Moleka in being brazen, scheming and insensitive. Maru too is conscious of this complementarity of identity, with all its inherent differences: ‘it was only Maru who saw their relationship in its true light. They were kings of opposing kingdoms’ (*Maru*:34). Later on, we also read that, ‘Moleka looked up. At first Maru blinked, thinking he saw almost *a replica of himself* before him. The savage, arrogant Moleka was no longer there, but some other person *like himself*....’ (*Maru*: 57) [Italics my emphasis.] It is a derivation of individual identities from each other, that Ravenscoft (1976: 174) terms the, ‘...symbolic extensions of contending character-traits within the same man’. It is a split-identity, a state of ‘betwixt and between’ which for Robinson (in Abrahams 1990:75), manifests itself in the character of Maru who though he knows how to use arrogance and force, deep within is also a kind and humble man (as he later shows in his marriage with Margaret). In addition, Mackenzie (1989:26) notes how in Head’s view, the realm of the soul is accessible only to Maru, Moleka and Margaret. The novel thus becomes ‘a three-sided struggle in the realm of the soul’, with each of these characters in possession of dual identities; one applying to the so-called ‘real’ world and the other, ‘a soul identity’. Moreover,

Homi Bhabha's (1994:40-65) re-reading of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask*, reveals not only how identity is formed in relation to others but also 'how the identities of both colonizer and colonized are caught up in an especially insidious ambivalence, a Freudian knot of identification and repudiation'. This would then perhaps help explain the age-old notion that opposites attract, more so in view of the fact that both Maru and Moleka understand who they are in relation to the other. Similarly, the colonizer/colonized dyad is mirrored in Moleka's feelings of both respect and revulsion towards Maru. It is again perhaps this derivation of individual identities from each other that leads to their clash over the same love interest –Margaret.

The same could similarly be said of Moleka and Margaret's relationship. As with Dikeledi, Moleka's encounter with Margaret also enables him to be as Olausson (1997:263) puts it, 'true to himself, to be true to his real self.' Thus the encounter's effect is described as being '...like finding inside himself a gold mine he'd not known was there before.' (Maru:32) Margaret thus becomes his better half as all along, he had been '...only half a statement of his kingdom. Someone else makes up the whole. It is the person he now loves'(Maru: 58) Margaret becomes something of a medium, able to 'crystallize the feelings of others and bring them out in their true form'(Olausson 1997:264). However, while she is able to crystallize the feelings and identities of others, it is only fair to say that others equally crystallize her own, as Moleka has an equally invigorating effect on Margaret and seems to stabilize her. This is evident in that until their meeting,

There had been no backbone to her a short while ago,
now something had stabilized her. He seemed to have
said silently, 'You see you don't have to be afraid anymore.

First there was one of you .Now there are two of you (Maru: 30-31).

One can thus safely conclude that in *Maru*, the characters' personalities tend to strengthen and stabilize each other's identities. This could usefully be thought of as a form of identity by association, as the various characters struggle to resolve the question as to who they are.

A Question of Power

The self-same issue and struggle for identity continues in Head's third novel: *A Question of Power*. This is a novel which for many, including Head herself, is explicitly autobiographical and chronicles amongst other things, Head's identity crises, first in racist apartheid South Africa and then later in her refugeism in Botswana. The result is that like her first two novels, this third novel too, deals with enigmatic and unstable identities of various forms.

Unlike in her two earlier novels, Head in *A Question of Power*, systematically traces the origins of her various identity crises. Thus by first representing her origins in South Africa, one sees the roots of these identity crises as having sprung from the apartheid state's rigid racial classifications. It had therefore been in South Africa, that Elizabeth had first been made aware of herself as it were, through her classification as 'Coloured' being as she was, the unlawful offspring of a white woman and a black man. Consequently, she felt that she had been branded as a racially unstable hybrid specimen of humanity unfit to be classified as either Black or White.

In *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth thus registers Head's anguish at being 'fixed' by apartheid to the non-specific term 'Coloured', which she must have experienced as limiting, depersonalizing and dreadfully opaque. Elizabeth thus grows up thinking, ' [t] here was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn't any escape like that for anyone in South Africa' (*A Question of Power*: 44). The mere idea that the term by which she is identified is her oppressor's creation, thus dismisses it as an identity and is just cause for discontent and sadness. Elizabeth by leaving South Africa therefore seeks to escape the loathed rigid classification of herself as 'Coloured', as it was a classification by which, '[s] he was not genuinely African, [but] was a half-breed,' (*A Question of Power*: 104). Given such a scenario, Elizabeth deems it best that she be banished from her homeland by being declared a prohibited immigrant, rather than be a citizen and yet feel herself regarded as no better than a species of dog, cat or horse. According to Eilersen (1995:106), later in Botswana, when the United Nations could not find Head permanent residence, one option was to return to South Africa. However, 'memories of the of the Boers, their attitude, *cruel words* [my emphasis] and actions, [had] prevailed against temptation'. When Elizabeth thus leaves South Africa, she is virtually identity-less and stateless in as far as she has rejected the Boers' identification of her and they have given

her an Exit Visa. She hence sets forth into the ‘wilderness’ as it were in search of a place that can claim her and where she can achieve/earn an identity that she can call her own.

‘Stateless and identity-less,’ Elizabeth finds herself in Motabeng where she soon falls into a false sense of security that she has found an enabling environment in which she can achieve her goals. Unfortunately for her this notion is short-lived as it is soon clear that as far as Batswana society is concerned, she remains an out-and-out outsider, never to be included as part of their community. As Head herself confirms of Batswana society:

Little by little, I became aware of the most terrible brutality
in this quiet –seeming.... Apart from that, I am not exactly
loved by the Batswana here. (Vigne 1991:9)

It is a situation which as Kamanga-Uledi (1987:26) rightly explains, ‘exacerbates [Elizabeth’s] initial sense of being a racial oddity,’ causing her both an emotional and psychological suffering that culminates in her mental breakdown. In the hallucinations that follow, Dan as with the racist apartheid state back in South Africa, constantly belabours the idea that Elizabeth is not an African and thus does not belong there. To her already severe sense of being ‘lost’, is therefore added this cruel psychological torment and violence. It is a psychological torment that takes even greater personal dimensions when in addition to Elizabeth’s already ‘identity-less and stateless’ position, her sexual identity is also put to task, when Dan tells her she is sexually inadequate because she is Coloured. As Smith S (1991:190) comments, ‘[this constitutes yet another] ‘lack’ whose humanity is ‘opaque’ and whose membership in the human community is negated by relegation to ...a chaotic, disorganized and anonymous collectivity’, as Elizabeth is contrasted to the ‘real’ African woman whom Dan chauvinistically and stereotypically defines in terms of her sexual potency. Medusa is therefore described as having a flat-chest, narrow waist with broad hips. Similarly, Miss Sewing Machine ‘can go with a man the whole night and [still] feel no ill-effects.’ (*A Question of Power*: 126-127). While the other ‘Nice-time Girls,’ are reduced to mere erotic parts of the body, Elizabeth on the other hand is charged with having ‘no vagina’. It is a situation that Head described as being like:

[a] fever and a hell here-everybody’s sex organs.

Apart from my I-can-stick-alone-attitude, I also would
 like to keep my sex organs to myself. [Thank you]
 (Vigne 1991:10)

However, from what Head says, it is possibly because she personally did not like engaging in any promiscuous activities that Elizabeth too, is accused of not therefore having a vagina like the other 'Nice Time Girls', who virtually fling theirs in Dan's face. On another level however, Balserio (1992:149) explains that '...not having a vagina implies that one is not a woman'. In Dan's accusation implied therefore is that Elizabeth lacks that very element that would normally identify her with her gender; that without which, she is reduced to a non-woman. She thus becomes an unidentifiable sexless being, who is at best emasculated, at worst neutered, non-organic and sexually inadequate. Achufusi (1991:310) adds that Dan conventionally despises Elizabeth as a 'hybrid being' and therefore as if she were a mule, sees her as metaphorically sexless, especially when compared to the sexually rapacious and 'trouser-wearing' (*A Question of Power*: 43) Medusa.

Unfortunately for Elizabeth, the effect of Dan's attacks is psychologically devastating as she begins to fear and be disgusted by her own sexual identity and entertains doubts of herself as part of humanity. The reason is as Robinson (in Abraham 1990:76) explains, constantly resting at the back of Elizabeth's mind is the fact that her skin is less black than supposedly real 'Africans' and therefore, she assumes that she is less interesting sexually. Indeed in view of all these pressures directed at her sexuality, it is a wonder how Elizabeth does not turn to prostitution in order to prove her sexuality. Elizabeth thus having been rejected since birth on the basis of colour, is now rejected on grounds of lacking a satisfactory racial and sexual identity.

In *A Question of Power*, the stereotyping of woman's identity is not however confined to Elizabeth alone. In the same vein, Coloured men back in South Africa, are portrayed as homosexuals and stereotyped as sexually abase. We learn that Elizabeth's former husband had been bisexual and a womanizer of sorts. It is stereotyping signified by the Coloured men's falsetto voices and transvestitism, a manifestation of an indeterminate or playful sexuality and performance of gender roles, as '...the Coloured men were homosexual and openly paraded

along the street dressed in dresses' (*A Question of Power*: 45). Dan on the other hand, being a black man and thus supposedly 'the man', manifests both his black identity and what is supposedly his masculine heterosexuality and hegemony through his '...sexual profligacy with his seventy-one nice-time girls' (Newell 1995:67-69) and 'true' to his male blackness, 'He thrusts black hands in front of her, black legs and a huge towering black penis' (*A Question of Power*:127-128).

The constructedness of identity is further evidenced in its affinities with language. Thus in *A Question of Power*, Medusa torments Elizabeth over her inability to speak 'any African languages' (*A Question of Power*: 44) as a result of which Medusa assures Elizabeth '...[she will] only drown', (*A Question of Power*: 44) as she is not a 'true' African. Due to Elizabeth's lack of proficiency in an African language she therefore remains '...not linked up to the people' a condition which as observed by Uledi-Kamanga (1987:26), 'makes her feel more estranged from the indigenous African villagers around her' and one she thus prophetically fulfils by isolating herself from the other villagers. It is a situation which further accentuates Elizabeth's helpless sense of personal inadequacy and disappointment as to her own humanity. Thus unable to socialize with the Black inhabitants of Serowe, Head too had felt: '...shut out from the everyday affairs of this world' (Vigne 1991:11). One cannot help but discern a suicidal note here given that this is her fifth rejection stemming from her hybridity; the first having been that by her grandparents, the second her foster parents and the third her country. Now further rejected for not being a woman, Elizabeth is here rejected for being unable to speak an African language and thus supposedly lacking an African identity. Understandably in low spirits, Bessie Head wrote:

I am just writing to you [Vigne] because there is a dim chance
that I'll not be alive or see this year to an end here.
Such tremendous pressure has built up against me
in this little village (Vigne 1991:9).

It is most probably because there was virtually no-one that Head could communicate with fully and satisfyingly in Serowe, given the language barrier, that she resorted to so much letter writing

‘having long reconciled herself to being permanently unwanted by society in general’ (*Maru*: 94) Like both Balfour and Head, Elizabeth’s inarticulateness in any of the African languages suggests a liminal position that prevents integration into the normal status of community life.

STORM BREWING: IDENTITY-BASED DISCRIMINATION

This section of the chapter aims to show how the complexities and the contestations around identity, once established, may lead to discrimination and ultimately violence, hence the phrase ‘storm brewing’ in anticipation of the coming violence discussed later on in the chapter. Again beginning with an investigation of *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the chapter will then closely explore the linkages that identity has with discrimination in the rest of the trilogy.

In African protest literature, in which discrimination is frequently explored and depicted, it is evident that discrimination is often based on racial identity. Thus for instance, when Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* flees South Africa, it is by and large because of the racial discrimination he had experienced as a result of the apartheid regime’s racist policies. Fittingly, the first place where we initially meet Makhaya reflects his discriminated position. As Brown (1979:45) points out, ‘... the barbed wire fence through which Makhaya crosses over into Botswana, is a graphic symbol of racial separation and the international distrust [and bigotry] from which both Head and Makhaya flee.’ Rather like Bessie Head herself, Makhaya thus flees to Botswana in order to escape both the intense discrimination and persecution as well as the incarceration he has experienced as a result of his black pigmentation and anti-apartheid activities. However, once in Golema Mmidi, he too (like Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*), soon discovers that even though ‘birds of a feather do flock together’, they cannot always co-exist. Thus the Batswana in spite of being black like himself, do not readily accept him as in addition to his blackness, Makhaya has other identities provide possibilities for the enactment of discrimination against him.

The racially motivated suffering and bitter experiences during his years in South Africa cause Makhaya to cross the border into Botswana. However, in crossing the border (the symbol of his isolation and outsider status), Makhaya carries with him an excess baggage of bitter racial discrimination and hatred for anyone white. Thus so blinded by racial hatred is the young

Makhaya that he does not discriminate or differentiate as to who his enemy is. Instead, as far as he is concerned, anybody white is the enemy. The result is that Makhaya no longer just fights against the apartheid system but rather all white people that he encounters (including those who are trying to help him) as well as anything associated with them. As Smith L (1999:63) observes, Makhaya thus critiques Christianity as a white man's religion and its harbingers as 'mincing, squeamish little missionaries, who use their religion as a way of escaping responsibility for their actions...people could do without religions [for, they] left men without any feeling of self-responsibility for the crimes they committed.' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:133) This for Makhaya is the greatest irony of Christianity and one that intensifies his revulsion against whiteness, as it means that, 'a white man could forever go on slaughtering black men simply because Jesus Christ would save him from his sins.' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 134) Even the widely respected and objective Mma-Millipede concedes that the white missionaries who came to Africa, 'had tainted the Bible by not making the words they preached out of it match their deeds' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 132). Individuals' actions rather than issues of identity are here seen as the primary incentive towards discrimination against the racial group, a reaction akin to stereotyping.

The relationship between Makhaya and Gilbert therefore becomes important in as much as it affords one an opportunity to explore Makhaya's racial prejudice and intense hatred for white people whom, '[He] hate[s] in a strange way' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 133). The reason for this hatred one learns is not only because of racial prejudice, nor just the deeds of White people against Blacks but also added to this, because of '...a powerful accumulation of years and years and centuries and centuries of silence' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 133). It is therefore because generations upon generations of black people have gone for years with their unexpressed burdens of hatred for the white man, that the burdens have now festered and become one big ugly wound. Ironically however, it is this same self-defence mechanism of not engaging the white man in any kind of human relationship for fear of becoming his 'Black dog' due to his power over other racial identities, which is seen as denying men like Makhaya an inclusive human identity as opposed to the racial one he bears somewhat bitterly and which makes him feel sorry for himself. Consequently, for men like Makhaya, '...in all [their] silence, [such] black men [have] not lived nor allowed themselves any expression of feeling. But [instead], they [have] watched their lives

overrun and everything taken away' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 133). And, until such men can cast away their anger, suspicions, burdens of anger and sense of racial inferiority (as Makhaya eventually does), they will not regain their humanity but will live forever a '...torture and torment ...a howling inferno' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 128). The black man is thus seen as in danger of not only internalizing a destructive sense of the black-white dyad (of 'us' and 'them') if he continues judging on the basis of racial identity, but also of losing his humanity in the process.

Therefore, when Gilbert Balfour, a white agricultural expert, tries to help the community of Golema Mmidi develop a self-sufficient agricultural economy, the people of Golema Mmidi cannot rise above tradition and racial prejudice and integrate both him and his methods into their society. Instead, so blinded are they by racial bigotry that they cannot see that he is genuinely trying to help them. They instead side with Chief Matenge as he is of the same skin colour and tribe and as he speaks the same language as themselves, even if it is merely to misinform them in that language.

Anxious therefore to fit in, in what can perhaps be seen as a bid to become one of them and so gain their trust, Balfour marries Maria the daughter of Dinorego, but his status remains to an important extent that of an outsider rather than what he had perhaps hoped, that of a son-in-law, due to his racial identity. What is perhaps puzzling are the lengths to which Balfour is willing to go in order to be integrated into the Golema Mmidi community. Indeed one is left asking the question asked elsewhere by Ashcroft *et al* (1989:212) 'Why should the free settler formerly unconstrained, and theoretically free, to continue in the possession and practice of Englishness also show clear signs of alienation and manifest a tendency to seek an alternative differentiated identity?'

Ashcroft *et al* (1989:202-212) attribute this alienation and need to identify with the new setting and its inhabitants to what they have termed 'the construction of place, the gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it.' In particular, such an alienation sets in once the non-native feels his/her vocabulary inadequate or inappropriate to describe the fauna and flora of the new land. This would perhaps explain why after his futile

attempts at integration into Golema Mmidi society, Gilbert becomes homesick for England's physical and geographical conditions, such as its coldness and snow. Gilbert Balfour is thus seen undergoing a crisis in self-image and identity.

Furthermore, Head creates in *When Rain Clouds Gather* a world in which the basic goodness of people is stifled and tormented by what can largely be termed tribalism, given the numerous distinguishable tribes that inhabit Africa. Thus back in South Africa, Makhaya had been categorically discriminated against on the basis of his racial and tribal identities: as a black man and then as a Zulu, in that order. Consequently, having already expressed his fears of being turned into a 'Black dog' on the basis of his black identity, he also protests against his Zulu name, which he feels betrays his tribal identity and might lead to further discrimination by the Batswana if Dinorego's earlier warnings about their tribalistic tendencies are anything to go by. Thus Makhaya feels

That [his] tribal name is the wrong one for me
It is for one who stays at home, yet they gave it
to me and [because of it] I have not known a day's peace
and contentment in my life. (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 10)

Sadly therefore, having fled from South Africa's discriminatory environment, Makhaya instead of finding refuge in Botswana, ironically finds a discrimination of a similarly categorical kind in the form of tribalism. So, in spite of giving up his tribal name and adopting 'Mack' as its shorter version, the unsavoury and tribalistic Chief Matenge recognizes him as Zulu and will not let him forget his 'position' of inferiority back in South Africa and now in Golema Mmidi. He spitefully and cynically asks Makhaya:

You know what a South African swine is?
He is a man like you. He always needs to run after
his master the white man (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 57) .

Discrimination is thus not, as may often be popularly believed, prevalent only among the ‘stragglers’ of society, the so-called lower classes. In *When Rain Clouds Gather* it is also orchestrated by community leaders in a bid to break an individual’s spirit or, as in the case of Chief Matenge, for personal aggrandizement. It is as old Dinorego had warned Makhaya,

You are running away from tribalism.
 But ahead of you is the worst tribal country in the world
 We Baralongs are neighbours of the Batswana but we cannot
 get along with them.... Tribalism is meat and drink with them.
 (*When Rain Clouds Gather*: 10)

In Botswana as in South Africa, tribalism marches in step with racism. As such, Gilbert has to fight against Matenge’s political conspiracies in which the latter exploits tribal organizations and indigenous class structures to increase his own power and fight Balfour’s proposed reforms. As in the past, when with the coming of the white man, tribal enmities and divisions had been cast aside in order to fight a common enemy, similarly, tribal ranks are now closed against the ‘interference’ of Balfour. Ethnocentrism therefore reasserts itself through, for instance, the placing of a taboo on the eating of millet on the basis that a tribe considered *inferior* [my emphasis] has it as its staple food. However, the truth of the matter is that Matenge’s opposition to millet stems not from tribal pride but rather mere personal greed, selfishness and dislike for *the white man* [my emphasis] Balfour. It is as Smith L (1999:64) notes about the created worlds of Bessie Head: ‘...the basic goodness of the people [therein], has been so stifled by greed and the sediment of tradition that she cannot imagine a way out except through natural disaster and violent death as kinds of cleansing.’ In this particular novel, the way out of the tribalism and stifling greed is drought and Matenge’s rather unrealistic suicide.

Identity-based discrimination does not however stop at the tribal level, but is seen to affect society at the intra-tribal levels of community existence. This is because the development from communalism to other forms of societal existence resulted in stratified societies and hence new forms of discrimination based on social class as dictated by birth and monetary status within communities. It is this form of discrimination that is also evident in *When Rain Clouds Gather* in the inequalities that exist between royalty and commoners. Thus Chief Matenge, given the authority and power of his position, shows his contempt for those under him through his use of abusive language to them and his manipulation and exploitation of them. Back in England Balfour too, had found himself alienated from his own upper middle class society due to perceptions of their bourgeois vanity and shallowness. Depending on one’s social status in society therefore, be it white or black, there exists the likelihood of what can best be described as class discrimination.

Patriarchal ideology ensures the socialization of individuals according to already given and thus stereotyped sex categories that work continually to misrepresent women and their lives. Given such a state of affairs within patriarchal societies as exist in the trilogy, 'Autobiographical practices [as earlier noted], often become occasions for the staging [not only] of identity [but also], occasions for the staging of agency as well' (Smith S 1991:189). From a materialist feminist perspective therefore, social structures, especially those concerned with gender relations, can best be examined in the trilogy through an exploration of relationships and experiences in the everyday life of black African patriarchal society as presented by Head. Such an exploration shows that Head strives to show the relegated and vulnerable position of women in African society as largely due to their identity as female. Indeed, given the well known and yet little publicized condition and relegation of black womenfolk to secondary positions of childlike dependence and sexual playthings for men, it is as Head herself so aptly put it, '[It's] pretty terrible I tell you for a woman alone in Africa. Men treat women as the cheapest commodity.' (Vigne:10) In her letter, she then relates how a principal at her school, had allegedly tried to rape her '...in front of the kids....I had to bite his hand to let him go' (Vigne:10). The same patriarchal sexist hegemony is portrayed in Chief Matenge's sexual escapades, as well as Makhaya's with prostitutes. Smugly, Makhaya declares that, 'prostitutes ...are the best type of women you'd find among black women, unless a man wanted to be trapped for life by a dead thing' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:125) An entrenched disrespect within patriarchy for black femaleness is thus mirrored in such black men's discriminatory contempt as Makhaya and Matenge and later Maru, Moleka, Sello and Dan. It is a discriminatory contempt which is seen as leading to black women's dehumanization and objectification.

In as much as Head exposes the habits and prejudices stemming from discrimination towards femaleness, so too does she show the affinities that exist between sexual discrimination and oppression. By so doing, Head further adds to the trilogy's feminist impetus stressing women's response to oppression. The women of Golema Mmidi constitute the epitome of the condition of women of colour by being portrayed as home-keepers, mothers, sexual tools and near slaves for men. And it is they who suffer:

No men ever worked harder than Batswana women...
they often ...took over the tasks of the men and also
ploughed the land with oxen (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:104)

For Ola (1994:19-31), 'Head in exploring her women's day to day activities, does not fail to point out that quite often, these women perpetuate their own problems through mental conditioning and their acceptance of social norms and taboos.' Thus if anything, women's oppression is '...self-inflicted through their docile acceptance of their socialization and its perpetuation, by being willing conduits for the maintenance of the status quo.' Given such a scenario therefore, Head's novels should perhaps be seen as a bid to re-educate women by invariably thrusting her women characters into a hostile landscape from whence they must grow and realize their identity. What however both Ola and Head seem to forget is the brutal hegemony of black

patriarchy which little tolerates any revolution in gender roles that would displace male privilege. Though ironically of course the men of Golema Mmidi seem to be only too happy to lighten all their load on to their womenfolk. Otherwise in Africa, such a revolution in gender roles (in favour of women) is perhaps only possible in the urban areas where the mindset of black patriarchy is reasonably malleable to such modern ideas. However in less developed areas of the continent, such revolutionary ideas are only likely to lead to violence against women. There is then need perhaps to take into account the issues of identity and hegemony, which after all are the primary causes of women's discrimination and oppression, before making such indiscriminate statements as: 'women perpetuate their own problems'.

Before the advent of colonialism, it seems, age in African societies was greatly revered. Since the advent of colonialism, many would argue that the reverence of age has slowly been eroded and been overtaken by education amongst others factors. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head seems to look back nostalgically to a time when youth still respected age. Consequently, the first time old man Dinorego meets Makhaya, he stereotypically concludes that because of Makhaya's youth and formal education, he is alienated from the values and customs of his traditional society. On the basis of his experience of young people and his wizened years, Dinorego thus makes assumptions about the youthful Makhaya. On the other hand, Mma-Millipede has the influence that she has over both Paulina and Makhaya because of her age and status as a mother figure. As for Gilbert, his youth, age, language and modern agriculture combine to alienate him from the majority of the traditionalist villagers. It is only after he enlists the help of the motherly Mma-Millipede and fatherly Dinorego, and lifts the traditionalist influence of Matenge, that Gilbert (aided by Paulina and Makhaya) is able to make any headway.

According to Mackenzie (1989:26), Head's avowed purpose in writing *Maru* was to produce '...an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice.' *Maru* cannot however I feel, be described as being in any simple sense about about racial prejudice. It could perhaps be described as such only as far as a 'tribe' is one racial group living as a community under one or more chiefs. Otherwise, in *Maru*, Head more specifically tackles the hideous issue of tribalism. The only reference to racial discrimination, I feel pertains to the missionaries who never '...really liked to be involved with mankind', and 'did not often like you to walk into their yard, [preferring] to talk to you outside the fence' (*Maru*:12). In addition to this is the fact that Margaret Cadmore senior considers little Margaret as something of a pet project to experiment on. For the British Cadmore, raising the little Masarwa child is an experiment to prove her theory of 'Environment everything; heredity nothing.' (*Maru*:15) Racial bigotry is therefore seen not as just a heathen's practice, but as so strong that it inhabits even purportedly 'Christian hearts'.

It is perhaps in *Maru* that Head largely concentrates on yet another ironic story of discrimination in Southern Africa. This time based on tribes, this tribalism or tribal discrimination is against the so-called 'bushman' or Masarwa or San. In view of the various names by which they are known, it could perhaps be because as proposed by Mackenzie(1989:27), 'Head's contention is that socially ascribed identities are

false, misleading and degrading to the true inner person.’ It could also possibly be that the varied derogatory terms are a reflection of the scope and intensity of the discrimination that the Masarwa have to endure. The irony of the discrimination against the Masarwa like that against blacks in South Africa, is that they are the original inhabitants of the land and yet on the basis of their racial and tribal identities, have been relegated to servile second class citizenry by their respective ‘conquerors’. In *Maru*, the story of the Masarwa’s oppression is told through Margaret Cadmore, a Masarwa woman brought up by white missionaries.

The circumstances of Margaret’s birth in the open desert air are symbolic of the oppressed status of her ancestors, who tend to live on the periphery of society, on the outskirts of villages. Thus from her birth onwards, Margaret becomes literally and practically an outsider amongst other black people not of her own tribe. Ironically though, despite her rejection by people of her own skin colour, Margaret is accepted by the philanthropic white woman Margaret Cadmore. However, whether this is out of true Christian charity or for anthropological reasons, remains indeterminate.

Due to the sheltered, controlled world created by Margaret Cadmore senior that the young Margaret grows up in, it is not until she enters mission school, that she first encounters discrimination and becomes conscious of her difference. Margaret’s experience is very much like Head’s little son Howard, who Eilersen (1995:113) reports was according to Head, ‘...assaulted on the grounds of looking like a Masarwa or Bushman’ when he started school at a school in Serowe . Similarly, whilst at school, the other children had, ‘...spat on [Margaret],they punched [her] they danced a wild jiggle with tin cans rattling: Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!’(*Maru*:10-11). Thus on the basis of her tribal identity, Margaret suffers the rejection of her Batswana schoolmates who in addition to mocking and chiding her, refuse to sit next to her, and harass and spit on her, offering tribal slurs: ‘You are just a Bushman....Since when did a bushy go to school?’ (*Maru*:17) Moreover, she has to put up with the racial discrimination stemming from her being the adopted child of a white woman who also happens to be the school principal. Margaret is therefore doubly discriminated against both on the basis of her tribe and because of her association or identification with Margaret Cadmore senior.

Unfortunately, this double discrimination becomes triple when it leads to a self-effacement as Margaret completely withdraws into herself and turns into an intensely lonely and self-pitying figure who enacts on her own life aspects of the oppression she suffers under. Like Makhaya, she thus internalizes her oppression:

What was a Bushman supposed to do?
 She had no weapons of words or personality,
 only a permanent silence and a face which revealed no emotion,
 except now and then an abrupt tear would splash down out of

one eye.(*Maru*:12)

However the antithetical consequence of this is that as a result of Margaret's social isolation, she becomes a brilliant, studious child, a benefit due 'to [her] communication with her books' (*Maru*:19). Discrimination had thus led to a sound education.

Balseiro (1992:88) observes how in adulthood Margaret '...inherits the stigma of Tswana conventions [that had plagued her natural mother to death] and constantly fluctuates between a sense of self-worth and a deep inferiority complex'. Thus while she confidently declares her Masarwa identity, when however anyone approached her, 'she slowly raised her hand as if to ward off a blow. Sometimes she winced, but the raised hand was always there as though she expected only blows from people' (*Maru*:71). Moreover, the psychological scars of Tswana discrimination are manifest when Margaret, on realizing that both she and Dikeledi have the same love interest in Moleka, readily gives him up. She is convinced that 'Moleka can't possibly love me' (*Maru*:113-4). Pitifully therefore, her inferiority complex tells her, '...[you are]not any other woman.[You are] a Masarwa.' (*Maru*:113) and as such, Moleka 'will never approach [you] because [you are] a Masarwa' (*Maru*:115). What therefore becomes clear is that Margaret is not always discriminated against but that like Makhaya and Elizabeth, she has internalized oppression and will not follow through on her wishes and personal desires. She limits herself to behaviour that others think a Masarwa should display and quietly wastes her life away *because she is Masarwa* [my emphasis]. As concluded by Uledi-Kamanga (1987:23), 'ultimately, her isolated existence and social rejection, reduce her significance in the village to the level of obscurity'. Symbolically, she lives in her isolated little house on a hilltop and fearfully watches the rhythm of village life as an outsider. Thus while she sorrowfully and quietly pines away, 'In the distance a village proceeded with its own life but she knew not what it was....' (*Maru*:93). , Margaret's feelings of abjection and her enactment of subaltern status are in to a significant degree of her own construction. In a situation in which the victim seems to collude in her own oppression, Margaret readily plays the role of the disempowered protagonist in her own tragedy, quietly fulfilling the prophecies of Dilepe about her.

Aside from the masculinist prejudices associated with Margaret's position as a female teacher in a male-dominated school system and community, Margaret particularly has to contend with Pete the principal's tribalism. On discovering that Margaret is Masarwa, Pete is so horrified that he becomes determined to have her dismissed. Here the arbitrariness of tribal discrimination becomes evident in Pete's sudden change in attitude towards Margaret. Thus after her declaration of her Masarwa identity:

The shock [had been] so great that he [had] almost jumped into the air.
The whole day he fretted.... He kept noting out of the corner
of his eye that the Masarwa (she was no longer a human being)....
'There's been some chicanery,' he muttered over and over again (*Maru*:40).

Thereafter, Pete curtly objectifies her by calling her an ‘it’ (*Maru*:40) and impersonally makes reference to her in terms such as ‘I have a Masarwa on my staff’ (*Maru*: 41). By acting oppressively towards Margaret on the basis of cultural prejudice and tribal assumptions, Pete shows tribal discrimination to be based on mere myths, ideologies and structures of thought unbecoming of a supposedly educated principal of a community school. Perhaps this goes to show the indiscriminate nature of tribalism.

What we tell our children in private, must be lived in public. Pete being the undignified, unprofessional, unprincipled principal that he is, takes it upon himself to inform all and sundry of Margaret’s identity and as often happens in small communities, children also get to find out. When Margaret’s pupils find out her tribal identity, being impressionable, their reaction is that of their prejudiced parents: ‘Now they all stared at her with fascination and attention’ (*Maru*:45) until one of them finally gathers enough courage to ask insolently, ‘Since when is a Bushy a teacher?’ (*Maru*:45) One is shocked to hear such hurtful and hateful discrimination coming from the mouths of proverbially innocent and pure babes. However, the vitriol of discrimination that the children proceed to spew has not originated from themselves and Margaret’s Masarwa identity *per se* but rather, has been influenced and moulded by the discrimination and bigotry of their parents and other adults like Pete and even Maru himself.

Maru (very much like Matenge) is not, despite his position as a community leader, to be spared from accusations of tribal discrimination. For instance when he learns of Margaret’s tribal origin, Maru has Moleka repossess the bed that the latter had before Maru’s arrival lent Margaret from the tribal administration. His reason for doing such an obviously cruel thing is, as he claims, that such generosity might incite a revolution: ‘What will they do when they [the Masarwa], hear that a certain Masarwa in my village is treated as an equalWon’t they want beds too...’(*Maru*:59-60). Maru therefore, like Matenge, incites tribalism in order to prevent ‘revolution’ and so as to preserve his own authority and power through the maintenance of the *status quo*. Dikeledi too, in spite of her protestations that, ‘There is no such thing as Masarwa....There are only people’(*Maru*:65) is not immune from identity-based discrimination. Sometime later, when Maru tells her of his intention to marry Margaret, Dikeledi involuntarily thinks to herself, ‘But you can’t marry a Masarwa’ (*Maru*:108). As Balseiro (1992:50) confirms, ‘Dikeledi’s subconscious reaction betrays her in-bred feeling of tribal superiority, which sharply contrasts with her growing awareness and rejection of prejudice.’ Achufusi(1991:325-6) on the other hand attributes Dikeledi’s and Margaret’s pupils’ prejudices to what she terms the ‘pecking order’, whereby children see their parents spit on the ground as a member of a so-called ‘filthy low nation’ passes by and so their children go a little further by spitting on the despised being. This ‘inheritance’ of prejudice thus extends first from Margaret’s mother whose Batswana nurses had disgustedly dumped her on the bare floor, to Margaret herself, who grows up and lives with the selfsame discrimination. Yet Margaret does she not go and live in a Masarwa community. Not once do we read of her in the company of a Masarwa. She seems in a significant sense to

be caught on the threshold, not to be drawn to fully cross the boundaries of group identity. To some extent, then, her position is liminal, that of the ‘betwixt and between’.

At this juncture, in as much as Margaret ‘unites the elements of ethnicity, gender and occupational marginality’ (Brown 1980:49), I shall now turn my attention to look more closely at Margaret as a woman and how this identity affects her relationship with other characters. This is especially so, keeping in mind that Margaret, like many women of colour, suffers the double yoke of a discrimination based on both ethnicity and her engendered sex.

In view of Brown’s reference to ‘occupational marginality’, of note is that despite Margaret qualifying as a primary school teacher at the top of her class, her identities of Masarwa and woman, make her ‘vulnerable’ to an array of discrimination. Upon discovering that Margaret is in actual fact Masarwa and not Coloured as he had thought, Pete in addition to previously objectifying her, further reduces her to ‘that Margaret Cadmore woman’ (*Maru*:41). Yet earlier that morning, he had been looking forward to her teaching at his school. What is perhaps uncertain is whether Pete is infuriated with Margaret more because she is a woman or because of her Masarwa identity. It is certain however why he thinks it will be easy to dismiss her, ‘[After all s]he can be shoved out. It’s easy. She is a woman’ (*Maru*:41). This is in spite of the indisputable fact that, ‘[h]er qualifications are good’ (*Maru*:41). But then, this is Pete the chauvinistic representative of masculinist patriarchy who strongly believes that women, and moreover Masarwa women, cannot single-handedly be academically successful, let alone teach Batswana children. After all, he is certain that Margaret could not have ‘possibly got there on her own brain [without someone pushing her]’ (*Maru*:42). Unknown to this male chauvinist, is that if Margaret had indeed got where she is using someone else’s brains, they would have been those of yet another woman, namely Margaret Cadmore senior.

Seth and Pete are, however, not the only sexists in Dilepe. Both Maru and Moleka, as formed and encouraged by their patriarchal society, positions of power and authority, are sexist womanizers. For the two, women are mere sex objects for their sexual pleasure and gratification, an attitude that leads to their reputations as womanizing philanderers. Achufusi (1991:308) notes how Moleka’s treatment of animals is ‘indistinguishable from his treatment of women, being characterized by domination and subordination.’ Thus in addition to having ‘innumerable girlfriends’ (*Maru*:31), we learn that: ‘There was nothing that Moleka did not know about the female anatomy [after a love affair], Moleka was always the only one to emerge smiling’ (*Maru*:33).

Similarly, despite Maru’s seemingly noble intentions towards Margaret, there is something tyrannical in his automatic assumptions that Margaret will marry him without his having so much as wooed her. It is therefore no wonder that even in their final elopement, Maru’s actions are domineering and verge on the abusive. Margaret’s calm acceptance of his chauvinistic treatment does not help matters either. Is it that she has been swept of her feet, feels she is too weak/inferior to protest, being but a Masarwa woman, simply

awed by the debonair Maru's sense of power and authority or simply afraid for her life? Whatever the reason, as with the tribalistic treatment she receives from her pupils, Pete and Seth, Margaret again calmly accepts what she perhaps considers her due, given her status as an inferior Masarwa woman in a Botswana male-dominated society. It is perhaps an inferiority that arises largely from her consciousness of what it means to be a Masarwa rather than a woman, the two being so closely related for her.

As earlier seen in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the near feudal and patriarchal society of Botswana, does not however only oppress women, but men as well. This discrimination based on differences of power and stature within the same tribe is seen to affect men who lack hegemony within the tribe. Where such emerges in *Maru*, Achufusi(1991:328) has termed it an 'apartness consciousness' within the non-Masarwa ranks and among them, the totem. Thus Moleka being a totem, discriminates against the ordinary people of the tribe whom he terrorizes with his driving:

The man slammed the door shut, turned on the ignition, then there was a cloud of dust....Both people and goats looked outraged.[H]e was *royalty, the son of a chief*. He had grown up making goats and people jump (*Maru*:28) [my emphasis].

However, when Maru eventually makes an appearance, the fact that he is the son of the late paramount chief and thus paramount chief-in-waiting, subdues Moleka's earlier arrogant confidence. For Maru: '...is greater than [he] in power, [and he is]...stunned, taken aback....' (*Maru*:58). Maru then not only proceeds to 'steal' Moleka's love interest, as it were, but moreover forcibly manipulates him into making a 'decent woman' of Dikeledi. Similarly Morafi, Pete and Seth are also terrified of Maru's paramouncy (and supposed black magic powers) despite the respect they command amongst the ordinary Batswana. Earlier, we learn how Morafi and his late father had manipulated their positions of power to obtain cattle from less powerful men:

Like most Totems, Morafi was a cattle thief and he had had a hey-day of thieving while his father was alive, his father being a thief as well....How it was tolerated can only be explained by the terror the chiefs inspired in the hearts of the people (*Maru*:42-43).

Any patriarchal practice of culture manipulates elements of control, coercion and power and the patriarchal hierarchy of Dilepe is no exception. It serves to reinforce and entrench authoritarianism, terror and discrimination. It is a terror and discrimination that becomes a vicious crescent when the non-Totem members of Dilepe decide to lord it over and discriminate against the even more vulnerable members of their society, the Masarwa.

As observed by Ola (1994:19), the social discrimination which Margaret suffers among the Batswana in *Maru* reaches harrowing proportions in Elizabeth's nightmares in *A Question of Power* where one of

Elizabeth's tormentors takes every opportunity to remind her of her Coloured identity. It is this Coloured identity stemming from Elizabeth's immediate ancestry and legacy of a white mother and a black father that is the root cause of the discrimination to which she is subjected. As we see, it is a racial persecution of the heroine that is so devastating that it undermines her sense of self-worth and leads to a mental breakdown.

Bessie Head, writing to Randolph Vigne, confesses that until coming to Serowe, '[p]erhaps I did not realize how much what is known as a mixed breed, is really deeply hated by African people...everything went wrong from the time Howard was assaulted. I never seemed to recover and the nightmare was so persistent and in-ward-turning, in my own mind that nothing seems to wash away the *horror of this racial business*' (in Eilersen 1995:110) [italics my emphasis]. This 'racial business' in Head's and as we shall see, in Elizabeth's case too, was not just about race but the hybridity of identity as caused by cultural encounters. Thus Elizabeth in the thralls of an insanity which had planted itself in apartheid South Africa, is brutally told that Coloured people are not Africans. She is denied her Coloured identity and is instead told that Coloureds are: 'Dog's filth [which] Africans will eat to death.' (*A Question of Power*:104) While the imagery is gustatorially disgusting, one at the same time notices the connotations of savage hegemony that are linked to an African identity. It is a power that Elizabeth, being Coloured, can never enjoy as her identity not only disqualifies her, but also renders her perpetually powerless. According to Balserio (1992: 136), Medusa's views represent the notion that '...the children of an interracial relationship, are genetically inferior and hence socially doomed'. Such a perspective emerges from the portrayal of both Coloured men and women that Head gives in the novel, a representation that suggests aspects of the subaltern.

In mainstream and feminist writing alike, depressions and breakdowns have been identified as problems particularly prevalent among oppressed and discriminated women. Cixous (1980:259), adds that due 'to women's distance from the phallus [and therefore power] they are not as [mentally] anchored as men and so tend to be closer to images and fantasies.' Elizabeth, like Margaret before her, seems to conform to this theory as she also withdraws into herself and is left self-pitying and powerless in the face of the discrimination she suffers, '[there] was nothing she could think of to counter it' (*A Question of Power*:49). Thus discriminated against and depressed, marginality becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy when Elizabeth, like Margaret before her, takes comfort in escapist artistic pursuit. While Margaret retreats to her painting, Elizabeth escapes to her writing. For while she had 'acclimatized' to the racism in South Africa, her unexpected rejection in Botswana produces both depression and mental anguish. As Eilersen (1995:87) explains, 'refugees were not always popular with the local population. The refugees were often sophisticated urban dwellers, some reasonably educated and some in possession of a number of skills. This alone, tended to alienate them from the villagers. They were also generally not related *in terms of tribal groupings* [my emphasis] to the Tswana, so it was more difficult for them to be absorbed into rural communities.' It would therefore appear that Elizabeth, like Head and Margaret, is not only discriminated

against on the basis of racial tribal difference, but also as a reaction towards her education and apparent worldliness. In response, Elizabeth's reaction is a little more disruptive and her imaginings-cum-psychoses relatively outward-directed as they are towards her vexing relationship with the world. This is however different from Margaret's quieter response to the predicament in which she finds herself.

Seemingly secure within 'herself', Elizabeth's dilemma becomes inescapable when the racial discrimination she is subjected to both internally and externally subsides internally while at the same time increasing externally. For it is directed towards her by the patronizing and domineering Danes. Thus Camilla, who never sees '...black people as people but as objects of permanent idiocy', (*A Question of Power*:76) becomes Elizabeth's external Medusa. Similarly, the other Danish families, based on their notions of racial and mental superiority, make no effort to be integrated into the village. In contrast to Balfour, they instead seek only to make a superficial impression on the village, by bringing about changes without really ever reaching out to the villagers as human beings. It is perhaps a strong belief in stereotypes about Africans that leads to a domineering attitude seen for instance when Camilla imposes her own notes on Elizabeth's. It is this arrogant rudeness that in Elizabeth's view becomes tantamount to 'taking over [her] process of learning while totally disregarding her as a student and a human-being' (Olaussen 1997: 135). So racially prejudicial are Camilla's actions, that she comes little short of telling the blacks whom she encounters that they are stupid, and is constantly scolding and upbraiding. It is such people as Camilla who leave Elizabeth wondering, '...why white people ...had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you? They were just born that way, hating people, and a black man and woman were just born to be hated' (*A Question of Power*:19).

As noted by Smith S. (1991:186), 'In the postcolonial global environment, the cultural hegemony of the west comes under question. Imperial gazes become déclassé as the old imperial 'I' is revealed for what it has been: a locus of normative and exclusionary stabilizations of subjectivity that silence marginalized peoples, thereby occluding specific temporalities of identities, specific heterogeneous histories.'

Elizabeth like Makhaya, displays a way of thinking perhaps typical of the trauma that she too has experienced at the hands of discrimination. She thus also thinks in binary terms of black and white, binaries not only typical of psychological trauma but also of cultural and racial conflict.

In *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head chooses, I would argue, to focus more extensively on sexism than on racism. This as Umeh (1996:153) claims, '...forces her readers to see the similarities between the two and their common root in the plant of domination.' Thus as in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*, in *A Question of Power* Head once again strives to substantiate her earlier accusation that in Africa, '[M]en treat women as the cheapest commodity' (in Vigne 1991:11). That is, women mean almost nothing. Particularly in *A Question of Power*, it is a nothingness which takes the form of women's objectification for men's sexual pleasure, torment and outright disrespect, as evidenced by Dan and Sello's indiscretions as regards sexual exploits. The two men thus degrade, manipulate and abuse women in Elizabeth's nightmare

because they fail, significantly, to perceive their value. As Head herself put it, '[N]obody values anybody expect for what he/she can give.' (Vigne 1991:9). For a number of male characters in the trilogy, the value of a woman is only seen when it comes to sexual matters.

It is in such a context of sexual discrimination as that portrayed in this text, that Ashcroft *et al* (1989:211-212) elsewhere observe a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity, both of which have become a common feature of postcolonial literatures in English. More importantly, as seen in the trilogy, it is a widespread concern with the myths of identity and authenticity that often leads to discrimination of various forms. Thus for instance, Dan quite crudely and oppressively tells Elizabeth that he has to have sex with other women because she has white blood and is therefore sexually inadequate: '[your] hair is not properly African.... [You haven't] got what African women have' (*A Question of Power*:126-7), whatever that is imagined to be. Similarly, Sello is described as being desperately attached to that 'thing' Medusa has which no other woman has. In a forceful attempt to press home the sexual inferiority of Elizabeth, Dan parades before her girls named after parts of a woman's anatomy or named in ways which are suggestive of some particular way in which that woman has sex. Such serves to emphasize Dan's sense of the worthlessness of women except as sexual playthings.

The mental abuse that Elizabeth undergoes at the hands of both Dan and Sello has the desired effect when, added to Elizabeth's unattractiveness, it leads to her debasement and abjection, an unconscious slide across the boundaries of the self. It is as if there is a partial erasure of the outer edges of the psyche defining the ego. So devastatingly low does Elizabeth's self-esteem fall that, as a sign of her of sexual inferiority, even the attentions of Dan-of-the-permanently-erect-penis, are welcome in spite of the indignity that they cause her. As Head explains, this is because under normal sane circumstances, '[S]he would never have earned a second glance from a man like Dan' (*A Question of Power*:48) especially since it is painfully obvious that, 'She was not his type - Miss Glamour, Miss Beauty Queen, Miss Legs, Miss Buttocks' (*A Question of Power*:49). Indeed, Elizabeth, conscious of her unattractiveness, masochistically consoles herself that she would not mind if anyone told her she is ugly as she already knows it to be true that she looks 'like the backside of a donkey' (*A Question of Power*:48). Thus other than the result of the discrimination and consequent violence that Elizabeth suffers at the hands of Sello, Dan and Medusa, her antic disposition could simply be the result of an attempt to escape her loathsome self.

Ironically, it is Elizabeth's apparent means of escape from self – her madness, her status as a medically certified madwoman - that displays yet another cause of her discrimination. Elizabeth's madness initially caused by the racial discrimination she suffers, leads to her further discrimination and stigmatization by her community. As Eilersen (1995:110) confirms in her biographical analysis of Head's own life, 'Bessie's breakdown brought a change in her life in Serowe. In a most dramatic way she had shown the villagers that she was crazy. The doctor and hospital had confirmed it.' Elizabeth is thus branded mad in the same way that her mother had been for sleeping with and conceiving a child with a black man. The result of this is

Elizabeth's institutionalization and further alienation, where her mother had suffered incarceration. Isolation for both is thus the ultimate penalty.

In as much as a law of physics states that forces never occur singly but always in pairs as a result of the action between bodies, and the Bible advises there be an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, similarly too, hatred breeds hate and discrimination reciprocal discrimination. The racial discrimination perpetrated against Elizabeth thus leads to her own hostility towards black people as it, perhaps, did Head's: 'Gone were all her noble plans to love Botswana and the Batswana even if they hated her. There is not one sane person in this village...my mind is distracted with intense dislike for the people of this country. I am beginning to loathe them'(Eilersen 1995:108). Her hostility and rancour stem from her sense of rejection by a people closer to her own colour and amongst whom she had sought refuge, not expected rejection. Consequently, by seemingly excluding her from solidarity with them, the Batswana contribute to her insanity. Significantly Elizabeth 's first breakdown starts with a verbal curse on the Batswana: 'Oh you bloody bastard Batswana'(A *Question of Power*:50-51), as well as a verbal attack on the symbol of Batswana solidarity, Sello, whom she accuses of incest. Here, what Mackenzie (1989:19) terms 'a pattern of the interior torments of the character as set in a concrete, historically specific context' emerges. By verbally abusing Sello (who is based on Sir Seretse Khama, who had married a white woman), Elizabeth, according to Mackenzie's pattern, does not only express her disappointment in Khama's failure to forge the solidarity amongst Batswana that his political party had promised, she also expresses her bottled up anger towards her natural father and Khama for perpetuating hybridity through their interracial relationships and hence discrimination. Balseiro (1992:136), however proposes that possibly because of the discrimination poised against her from the black community, Elizabeth has internalized the racist notion that black sexuality is primitive and so unbridled as to devour its own offspring. This is in contrast to the attachment and fond memories Head often displays for her mother. The reason for this is perhaps that of her parents, only her mother had made some parental provisions for Elizabeth's upbringing, while her father had remained a 'faceless' being, hence the discrimination from his daughter. If indeed this was her reason, it is as unfair as discriminating against on the basis of skin colour as there could be many extenuating circumstances to explain her father's absence.

This as it may be, according to Eilersen (1995:117), Head once confessed that she regarded her biological mother as a goddess: 'My mother is my private goddess. I alone adore her'. While Lewis (1996:73) also reports that Head claimed her mother as the source of her identity and the provider of resources for her entry into public life and the world of writing. In contrast, Lewis (1996:74) also notes how the father is given little direct reference and as Head herself explained, 'I feel more for her than for my father because she died a terrible death in a loony bin while he is most probably still alive somewhere' (Vigne 1991:65) Lewis (1996:*ibid*) further comments how, '[B]y turning to the mother as the point of origin, Head identifies her own cultural inscription and that of Elizabeth ... locating parallel processes of subjugation in mothers and daughters.' However, while by dismissing the father, Head practices racial and sexual discrimination,

by forging a determined orientation toward a mother figure, she rejects the father as a representative of a racial group and a gender and not only for personal reasons.

Elizabeth continues to identify her own cultural inscription, when she is asked to join the other hospital inmates in cleaning the hospital where she has been admitted. She flatly refuses and bluntly demands special treatment as: '[She] is not a an African' (*A Question of Power*:181). The white psychiatrist in turn having identified the racist in Elizabeth, also confides in her his own racist sentiments. Similarly too, Medusa having seen the racial bigotry embedded in Elizabeth, persistently reminds her of this racial prejudice: 'Yes you think like that because you hate Africans. You don't like the African hair ...the African nose.' (*A Question of Power*:48)

Closer analysis of *Maru* reveals that Head's own perhaps unconscious potential for racial prejudice had started as early as then, in view of the fact that in the novel, the colour black symbolizes as it stereotypically does in most parts of the world, such negative activities as witchcraft. Thus Windscreen-wiper the kid goat says, 'My mother is a witch. Look at how black I am' (*Maru*:62). In *A Question of Power*, the colour's association with evil continues with both Dan the Devil and Medusa being black in complexion and Sello—the Monk being clothed in a white robe. Elizabeth's association of blackness with evil perhaps stems from her social, physical and mental experiences with it as the horrific projections that persecute her are black. This is because as has been propounded, *A Question of Power* coming as it does at the end of the first phase of Bessie Head's writing, constitutes what was possibly for Head an exorcism of personal anxieties and questions or confusions about identity and discrimination. For Cheryl Wilhelm (in Mackenzie 1989:20) this novel, like the other two, must have had a therapeutic effect. Smith L (70) suggests that Bessie Head, might have experienced her 'self' as 'locked in multiple ambivalencies in relation to white, black, Coloured, South African and Botswanan identities.' In other words Head, by looking for African roots, for an African self, makes herself the object of her own inquiry; she is therefore the subject and object of her search. However, in her search, she not only seeks her own identity, but also that which constitutes all identities as well as whatever else is intricately entwined with them: amongst which are discrimination and violence, as this dissertation seeks to show.

FROM DISCRIMINATION TO VIOLENCE

To say however that discrimination's effects end at the social and psychological levels would indeed be to confine the tentacles of identity and discrimination. This section therefore, explores how far these 'tentacles' or interlinkages between identity and discrimination stretch to result in violence.

In the feminist theory of Helene Cixous and Simone de Beauvoir, the personal life of Woman mirrors that of other women. With this in mind therefore, one notes how the gender discrimination earlier seen in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, leads to violence in the lives of the different women characters in the novel. With regards to Mma Millipede, one observes how mainly as a result of her femaleness in a dominantly

patriarchal society, she has experienced gender violence in all its facets. In her youth, she had been subjected to emotional violence by being forced (as many Third World women are) into an unwanted marriage with the violently and drunkenly disposed chief's son Ramogodi, when it was actually Dinorego whom she loved. Unsurprisingly, the arranged marriage had turned into a seemingly endless mental and emotional torture for her. Consequent to this, she had suffered abandonment and later divorce as in her objectified, undignified position, Ramogodi had 'inherited' and married his young brother's wife after the latter had hanged himself. In the meantime, she had suffered both mental and further emotional violence, when her only son had been banished to a distant village due to an inherent, unrestrainable and unnatural urge to kill his father. Mma-Millipede's life thus reads like that of most poor women of colour whose femaleness and backgrounds, make them vulnerable to the vagaries of discrimination and violent existence.

Similarly, violence stemming from Paulina Sebeso's refugee status and femaleness pervades her life's story. The daughter of 'a meek, repressed dull-eyed mother' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:94) Paulina had also married young and suffers the difficulties attendant on black womanhood, wifhood and later widowhood when like Ramogodi's young brother and later Matenge, her husband commits suicide. The impression given here is that in the face of any difficulties, black men do not hasten to commit suicide. In addition, as often happens in black societies when the 'man of the family passes on,' his family members (though in this case it is the employers), take advantage of the widow's femininity and confiscate all 'his property'. Thus in order to recoup money allegedly embezzled by Paulina's late husband, his employers appropriate the family's property. It is this last callous act, which had led to Paulina's mental torment and her family's destitution. Later, she has to accept the catastrophic death of her son Isaac. Mma-Millipede and Paulina, due to their vulnerable positions of femaleness in a patriarchal society, suffer various forms of violence. However, looking at Maria, Dinorego's daughter, she goes against the grain. For although soft-spoken and meditative, she is at the same time full of independent thought and action. In her relationship and later marriage with Gilbert, she retains her domineering personality and single-mindedness. This is perhaps because unlike the first two, her position is not necessarily one of a vulnerable female refugee, but a proud indigenous woman of Golema Mmidi who has the freedom of choice that has largely been denied the other two women.

In Africa, the interaction of different racial groupings, has often been marked by violence of a discriminatory nature. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Makhaya is, as we have already seen, one such victim of racial oppression. It is a racial oppression, which eventually leads to violence. The young black man of Zulu descent flees South Africa to Botswana to escape racial prosecution and persecution, for anti-apartheid activities and his blackness. It is as a result of his experience at the hands of white men back in South Africa, that Makhaya finds it difficult at first to respond to the genuine concern for goodness as expressed by Gilbert Balfour, given that he is white and what for Makhaya has become a symbol of oppression. Makhaya's natural instinct is therefore to '...distrust and dislike ...white people' as he had experienced, 'how a [Black]man walked out of his home...and never returned' (*When Rain Clouds*

Gather:120). Consequently, bitter at the second class citizenry of blacks back in South Africa, Makhaya had belonged to an armed group of freedom fighters seeking to regain power from the white Nationalist government whose ancestors had violently dispossessed black tribal groupings, through the violence of the Gatling gun. Equally, Makhaya had thus formulated plans to blow up government installations. In Botswana, the sight of dynamite makes him wish he could ‘...use this very dynamite against the enemies of human dignity and their hate-making ideologies’ (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:180). Until he befriends Gilbert, violence against the white man is constantly on Makhaya’s mind.

This is however not to say that violence only takes the form of racial violence as instances of black-on-black violence also feature in the trilogy. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the tribalistic traditionalist Matenge, enforces rigid class distinction between traditional royalty and commoners in order to viciously exploit and oppress his servants whom he uses as his personal slaves. Amongst those who suffer Matenge’s violence too are Dinorego, Gilbert and Makhaya. In view of Matenge’s publicized hatred of Makhaya as both a Zulu and a South African refugee, in an angry confrontation with Matenge, Makhaya in all seriousness vows to kill the former. However, this is not to say that all hostilities are tribal based as others, stem from personality clashes and petty vendettas. Thus Matenge despises Dinorego because the latter had refused to sit on Matenge’s advisory council. Gilbert, on the other hand, is violently disliked for attempting to destroy Matenge’s profitable cattle rearing business. In addition, Makhaya apart from being hated as ‘a South African swine...a man [who] always needs to run after his master the white man’ (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:66), is also intensely disliked for his close association with the racially despised Balfour against Matenge.

It is Balseiro’s (1992:52) view that: ‘Golema Mmidi suffers from a conflict between traditional and modern forms of social organization that express themselves as tribal disputes’. It is thus her opinion that when Makhaya and Balfour attempt to establish farming in Golema Mmidi, they provoke the violence of Matenge and his henchman Joas Tsepe who see in Gilbert’s endeavours not only a threat to their commercial venture but also, a challenge to their hereditary claims of tribal autocracy and tyranny. What then ensues is a violent confrontation between modernity and tradition as Gilbert, Makhaya, Paulina and other people of Golema Mmidi push for agricultural reform. The result of these differences in personality and ideology is an explosive adversarial conflict that eventually drives sub-chief Matenge to suicide, the ultimate violence against self. It is a suicide that in many ways also epitomizes the potential violence in inflexible tribalism. In *Maru* on the other hand, it is perhaps because Maru is able to adapt to the times, that he survives and from discriminatory villain, he turns hero. Eilersen (1995:95) too has noted how Head’s theme in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is the way changes in traditional family patterns, at times violently affect the lives of people, especially women and children. With modernity, women’s traditionally oppressed position, has turned increasingly emotionally violent as male familial responsibility continues to diminish due to rural-urban migration and material individualism. Thus in Golema Mmidi we learn that, ‘...a love affair resulting in pregnancy was one sure way of driving a man away and [as a result], it was a

country of fatherless children now' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:104-5). Indeed, one could argue that the moral fabric of modern society in Africa as in other parts of the world has been eroded due to the absence of male father-figures in the home.

Interesting yet quite directly linked to identity and discrimination based violence, is the violence of the environment in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. It has been observed, that 'besides Matenge's and other self traditional rulers' oppressive violence, [the] violent and destructive element of nature is symbolically represented by the harsh wasteland of Botswana, with its riveting images of death and decay to which Head gives cosmic significance. These images in turn, underscore the harsh moral landscape of the novel already created by the brutal power of Matenge.' (Ola 1994:14). Thus like Matenge, at times the cold drought-ridden 'harsh and terrible land' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:83) becomes an environment which having already disastrously decimated cattle and brutally caused the death of young Isaac, reveals itself as dangerous, '...red in tooth and claw,' (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:143) and none can tame its violent fury. However, in as far as it affects all regardless of race, tribe or creed, this violent and brutal environment perhaps also suggests an impartiality in the environment of humankind, offering environmental challenges irrespective of political history.

Head's second novel, *Maru*, pursues the issue of violent discrimination earlier seen in the brutal power of Matenge's tribalism. The difference this time however is that instead of concentrating particularly on the violent tribalism of sub-chiefs, the lens encompasses the general Batswana populace's discriminatory violence against the despised Masarwa. In *Maru*, it is this discriminatory violence against the Masarwa that is given a human face through such characters as Pete, Seth, Maru and the pupils of Dilepe primary school.

Margaret's arrival in Dilepe accompanied by her bold declaration: 'I am a Masarwa' opens a whole Pandora's box of not only discrimination but its attendant violence as well. It is a declaration that serves, 'as such a slap in the face...so great that [Pete] almost jumps into the air' (*Maru*:44). Pete's response to Margaret's declaration, is what Ebele-Eko (1986:143) calls, '...a vicious counter-offensive' of violent evil. It is a violence that whilst not directly perpetrated by both Pete and Seth, is however orchestrated by Pete who severely poisons innocent minds with hate. This is as of before, when Margaret's classmates had, '...spat on [her]...punched [her]...danced a wild jingle with tin cans rattling: 'Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!'" (*Maru*:10-11) Now through the evil influence of Pete, the 'young innocent children' in Margaret's class taunt and goad her for being Masarwa. Thus hurtfully and hatefully they chant: 'You are a Bushman! You are a Bushman!' (*Maru*:45) Indeed, of all nature of violence, there is perhaps none more shocking than that perpetrated by children. That someone in such a position of authority and responsibility as Pete can encourage and condone such from the children under his care, is in itself violently distressing. But then, one needs to understand that this is because the things that amuse those who have influenced this violent act and by so doing, done violence to once innocent minds and souls, '[are also]the kind of things that cause suffering to others' (*Maru*:42) The tragedy of this is as Maru later points out,

Three quarters of the people on this continent are like
Morafi, Seth and Pete...greedy, grasping, backstabbing ,
a betrayal of all the good in mankind (*Maru*:68)

The pupil's prejudicial verbal violence in turn almost drives Margaret to physical violence, as later she tells Dikeledi, 'I thought I had a stick in my hands and was breaking their necks' (*Maru*:74). The effects of discrimination play out in the mental spaces of the mind of the victim, in her imaginings, as seen here in Margaret. Similarly Dikeledi by way of rebuke threatens the children with violence: albeit a violence stemming rather from violent anger and the children's display of discrimination. Violently, she shouts, 'Stop it! Stop it! I'll smash you all to pieces!' (*Maru*:46). Meanwhile, the few senior class teachers present, sadistically enjoy the violent scene and smile to themselves, instead of extending their sympathy and support to Margaret. By not doing so, they indirectly endorse discriminatory violence.

In a novel that largely confines violence to the realm of violence directed against women, the prejudiced violence of Pete, Seth and Morafi does not stop with them. Instead, it extends to Maru as well. Thus Maru on learning of Margaret's ethnicity, is cold and ruthless towards her even before he has set eyes on her and instructs that Moleka retrieve a bed the latter had earlier lent Margaret just so she can sleep on the ground like all other Masarwa. This blatant lack of magnanimity on prejudicial grounds, is in itself a form of mental and emotional cruelty, as even Margaret herself cannot understand the reason 'Why so suddenly? she asked, struggling to regain her shattered equilibrium.' (*Maru*:61). Moleka too, when told to retrieve the bed has a violent thought, 'I'll get the bed returned,...but the undertone was so violent it meant: I am going to murder you' (*Maru*:60).

This violence by Maru is not however directed against Masarwa women like Margaret alone. We learn how Maru directs discriminatory violence towards all the women in his life, including his sister. We are thus told by the omniscient narrator, how of the women that had come into Maru's life, but proved only interested in the socio-economic gains that would accrue to them from the liaison, Maru had, '...killed them all because of their greed...' (*Maru*:69). His is a violence that mirrors that of hegemonic patriarchy, that contemptuously discards women after manipulating and abusing them.

In addition, when Maru becomes romantically interested in Margaret, upon realizing that he might lose her, he thinks to himself: "What will I do if she does not love me as much as I love her?" A terrible reply came from his heart 'Kill her' (*Maru*:110-111) Antithetically therefore, given the size of Maru's ego, violence is here seen as stemming from self-pride disguised as love and not necessarily discrimination, though perhaps because Margaret is a Masarwa woman, he thinks he can just murder her without any legal repercussions. The issue thus becomes that of one's power and identity; especially so since Maru is a man of some tribal stature as paramount chief. Consequently, added to Maru's personality, he 'loves' violently

and once in love, becomes so obsessed with such a murderous jealousy that he thinks to himself that ‘...one day [he] would be forced to kill Moleka, one way or another’ (*Maru*:8) Short of doing this, Maru violently breaks the unspoken sentiment of love between Moleka and Margaret by forcing the former into a marriage with Dikeledi and abducting Margaret to marry in a distant land, away from any possible violent recriminations by his subjects.

For Ola (1994:24), the victimization of women can be further demonstrated in the haste and ruthlessness with which Maru arranges the marriage of Moleka and Dikeledi. Thus, although Dikeledi is royalty and a professional, at the end of it all, she is a woman who also proves incapable of fighting the sexual abuse and patriarchal arrogance of both Moleka and Maru.

It is however not women alone who suffer violence. Men too do suffer violence primarily and ironically because of their own discriminatory conservatism. Thus as observed by Achufusi (1991:253), Maru uses his mystical powers to terrorize Pete, Seth and Morafi -‘the three bastions of conservatism’-out of Dilepe. Through what can be concluded to have been frightful and violent black magic, ‘[Maru] terrorize[s] them into the grave. Three bombs went off in Dilepe village, one after the other’ (*Maru*:92). Thus Maru, having identified the three as conservative sexists, violently and mystically drives them away. By so doing, Maru symbolically gets rid of discriminatory violence.

Bessie Head(1979:20-26) in ‘Social and Political Pressures that Shape Literature in Southern Africa’, associates Southern African history with many horrors and death. It is through the trilogy generally and in *A Question of Power* in particular, that one feels Head sought to portray southern Africa’s violent horrors to their fullest extent. It is again a violence that is seen as stemming from an identity-based discrimination and directed against the mind and emotional well being of Elizabeth

Elizabeth, much like Makhaya, flees to Botswana after a racially dominated life of violence that since birth has dogged her. It is a life in which: ‘Usually small girls got raped but the men were known’ (*A Question of Power*:70) and from which she seeks reprieve. Unfortunately for her however, the full force of the violence she seeks to leave behind follows her across the border into Botswana where she is exposed to its full blast and intensity.

In Botswana, as in South Africa, the violence stems from racial discrimination and manifests itself primarily in the form of violent mental torture as perpetually Elizabeth is made conscious of her despised racial identity as a ‘half-breed’ (*A Question of Power*:104), a ‘mixed breed’ (*A Question of Power*:147) and ‘not a tribal African’ (*A Question of Power*:145). Thus due to Elizabeth’s lack of ‘enough blackness’ -her hybridity- the discrimination that follows ushers her into the violent realm of the mind, where the savage demons of racial and sexual discrimination, Medusa, Dan and Sello, torment and torture her. The result is an unwarranted violence and untold suffering which threatens to drive Elizabeth to a violent death by

suicide. However, the fact that in the face of all the adversity she encounters she does not commit suicide, as do some men in the trilogy, is an illustration of her mental resilience.

Of particular interest about Elizabeth's situation however, is the paradoxical nature of her discrimination and consequent experiences of violence. It would appear, they stem both from her Coloured identity and her perceived lack of distinct identity (being neither Black nor White). Elizabeth thus comes to personify the dilemma of an 'identity-less person', indeed to some extent she is a liminal figure, in a society where the individual is expected to be black or white for 'easy classification'. It is this inability to classify both herself in terms of race and sexuality as demanded by Dan and Medusa that leads to Elizabeth's violent mental breakdown since she cannot claim a racially determined position and yet so desperately desires to do so. According to Hogan (1994:95-112), a Lacanian reading of the novel, thus illustrates a disturbed process of self-constitution. Such leads to depression and mental suffering.

Beginning with Sello who violently invades and colonizes Elizabeth's mind by determining her whole thought processes, the arrival of Dan violently reduces her to the position of '...a person driven out of her own house while demons rampage within, turning everything upside down' (*A Question of Power*:49) Elizabeth is thus reduced to a suffering victim who finds herself assaulted by discriminatory statements as well as pornographic images of sexual violence. This is especially so with the introduction of the 'monstrous woman', Medusa, who ferociously attacks Elizabeth on the grounds of her inability to conform to her notion of what constitutes African womanhood and identity. At night, she haunts Elizabeth with pictures of Coloured men dying and goads Elizabeth 'That's your people not African people' (*A Question of Power*:71). As highlighted by Olausen (1997:194), the descriptions of Elizabeth's confrontations with Medusa become frightening when suddenly, Elizabeth finds herself with the blood of Medusa on her hands (*A Question of Power*:33). Thus the violent relationship between Elizabeth and Medusa, depicts gender violence as not confined to male against female but, as in this case, enacted by women against other women. The possible reason for this is explained by Olausen (1994:195) as that, 'Medusa epitomizes female power outside of male control and the threat of monstrous femininity used against women.' Apart from being a symbol of emasculated feminine violence, Medusa it would appear is also Head's disapproval of radical feminism which, in itself, is unpalatable in its resemblance to male hegemony. As Achufusi (1991:361) explains, '[Head] having suffered the degradation of being non-white, distrusts all ideologies of apartness and belligerence and would put radical feminism in those categories.'

In the characters of Sello and Dan, Head again returns to the issue of patriarchal heterosexuality and its stereotyped, virtually conditioned idea of the female body as a site for sexual pleasure and violence. Thus the two sadistically degrade, manipulate and abuse the women they introduce into Elizabeth's nightmares. It is a pattern that begins vigorously with Dan's assault of Elizabeth's mind with pornographic images of his sexual exploits with his 'Nice-time girls'. For, in order to prove Elizabeth's sexual inadequacy as a Coloured woman, he morbidly insists on having sex with the other women in Elizabeth's presence. It is a

complete indiscretion, which brings with it mental violence due to the nature of its perversion. This is more so, when Dan takes to killing his women for sexual pleasure:

Miss Wiggly-Bottom was stone dead.
He had overestimated her stamina...
Pelican-Beak was too pushy....He broke
her legs (*A Question of Power*:167-8).

As Elizabeth's '...mind and body become the site where sexuality, madness and power converge in a battle of wills' (Balseiro 1992:132), the result of this torturous experience leads to Elizabeth's second and more violent breakdown.

The impact Elizabeth's mind undergoes as a result of her mental torture, in turn breeds its own brand of discrimination and violence within her, as Elizabeth begins to discriminate against black people-the perceived source of her torment. It is a racial discrimination that manifests itself in the form of violence and hatred, as Elizabeth accuses Sello of violent crimes of ritual cannibalism and incest. On one occasion, while out shopping, she loses control and violently abuses a Motswana postal clerk. In the meantime, we learn that:

[an]insistent hiss ,hiss of horror, swamped her mind...
'You don't really like Africans .You see his face?
Its vacant and stupid...You never really liked Africans...'
She sprang to her feet and shouted,...`Oh you bloody
bastard Batswana (*A Question of Power*:50-1).

Thus in the same way that Elizabeth arouses Medusa and Dan's racist violence by being Coloured, the clerk's identity as a black Motswana, kindles Elizabeth's racial discrimination which in turn gives rise to her violent verbal abuse and attack. However, if Elizabeth has become verbally violent, it is both Dan and Sello who are its originators as it is:

Both men [who had] flung unpleasant details at her
in sustained ferocity [so much so that],
she had no time to examine her own hell
(*A Question of Power*:12).

Verbal abuse thus becomes what Corindouriotis (1996:29) has termed: 'the powerful adjunct of sexual molestation and violence when Dan opens Elizabeth's skull and talks into it in a harsh grating voice.' Consequently, at times, 'her head explodes into a thousand fragments of fiery darkness' (*A Question of Power*:141)only to wake up hours later, "her mind a total blank (*A Question of Power*:143). These are

black periods during which Dan assaults Elizabeth's head, attacking 'her head the way he had attacked the vaginas of the nice time girls' (*A Question of Power*:188).

Elizabeth thus having experienced the violence of both Dan and racist South Africa, like Makhaya, retaliates against white society when she violently strikes an elderly white missionary woman whom she imagines to be another of Dan's seventy-one nice time girls. This incident, apart from its discriminatory violence, also suggests the performance of violence against individuals as a response to a deep sense of the wrongs committed by varying racial groups. The elderly white missionary woman and the black postal clerk thus become scapegoats for their respective races' past discrimination and violence.

Racially motivated violence however takes a different twist when, due to her ostracization by Batswana society and the pervasive influence of Dan, Elizabeth considers killing her son and then taking her own life. It is a violence reminiscent of her mother whom society's perverse discrimination had also driven to violence against herself. As with Matenge, violence against self thus emerges as a result of societal discrimination leading to self-hatred and self-pity. These are states of being which at times act as catalysts to abjection, abasement and eventually violence. For Head (1979:21), this particular brand of violent discrimination in the Other, is a result of the experience of being the victim of oppression since: 'Every oppressed woman has this suppressed violence, as though silently waiting the time to set right the wrongs that afflict[her].' Suicide is however, not one way of setting right these wrongs as Elizabeth herself realizes. She does not therefore kill herself and decides to take revenge for her anguish upon her tormentors. Consequently, Head's protagonists are filled with the same violent hatred their creator harboured for both Blacks and Whites due to the injustices that the two races had inflicted on her.

An exploration of Head's trilogy thus affirms the intricate linkages or affinities existing between identity, discrimination and violence. The violence takes the intertwined forms of verbal, physical, sexual, emotional and mental violence. However, violence in the trilogy, also proves to be independent of identity and discrimination, when nature, unlike Man, is seen as unprejudiced in her violence as she affects all no matter what race, sex or creed. Lastly, the trilogy's exploration proves correct the old adage that: 'violence begets violence', when the victim initially violently abused, on the basis of identity, retaliates against the discriminatory victimizer.

It is this about the trilogy that makes it largely retaliatory, angry and clamorous with cries of pain and victimhood.

CHAPTER THREE

‘There is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophet.’
(*A Question of Power*:206)

AN END TO IDENTITY CRISES

Again looking systematically at *When Rain Clouds Gather*, then *Maru* and finally *A Question of Power*, I shall explore how a sense of individual identity or selfhood is finally arrived at and if this necessarily leads to the resolution of discrimination and violence. The last section of Chapter Two sought to show how one’s constructed identity and how one is perceived by others often leads to discrimination and violence. In this chapter, I seek to show how one’s perception of self, (an identification of and by self as opposed to one that is imposed), seemingly leads to an end to such violence and the birth of a hopefully more stable self and a humane, unprejudiced world. Central then, is the struggle the protagonists undergo in order to finally resolve their identity crises and effectively engage with an outer world thus far hostile. The assumption is that with one’s attainment of a more solid self, the imposed identities experienced under the burden of discrimination and violence become less pressingly significant, and instead take a back seat to the establishment of a ‘new society’, based on a common humanity. This is in distinction to the processes (similar to a chain reaction) of stereotyping, discrimination and prejudicial misperception which catalyze various forms of violence and lay the individual open to suffering the varied effects of discrimination.

Looking at Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, a sense of self and of pride in self emerge as a result of a pride in his cultural identity, which he has previously despised. In Golema Mmidi, Makhaya slowly comes to realize that it is customs that take care of people and support family structures and therefore should not be shunned. It is an awareness which with Makhaya’s reconciliation with his culture, leads to his acceptance of his tribal identity and also of himself as a member of the human race rather than a ‘Black dog’. Once at peace with himself and the world, and convinced that ‘...the poverty and tribalism of Africa were a blessing if people could develop sharing everything with each other’(*When Rain Clouds Gather*:156), Makhaya becomes a true child of the universe due to this realization as well as his fluency in Zulu, Setswana and English. It is such self-realization and multi-lingualism that finally help with his integration into Golema Mmidi society. This is in combination with the healthy intimacy he is able to establish with Dinorego, Mma Millipede and especially Paulina., as by marrying her, he cements his position in his new community as well as his new perception of himself and the world.

Gilbert, on the other hand, seems to end his identity crisis not necessarily through his own self-realization but more through various media. The first of these is human relationships, as Gilbert sees the importance of

association with others rather than individual isolation if he is to become an integral part of Golema Mmidi. He thus manoeuvres Makhaya away from Maria, whom he is interested in romantically, and eventually marries. It is by marrying Maria, that Gilbert thus takes his first step towards attaining some semblance of permanence, identity and social stability in Golema Mmidi. Indeed in most cultures, functions such as nurturance, protection and integration are conventionally attached to women. Thus sensitive to the torment of the stranger, the women of Golema Mmidi, specifically Mma Millipede, Paulina and Maria, play a pivotal role in the integration of both Gilbert and Makhaya through their maternal, filial and spousal roles. As noted by de Laurentis (1984:139), ‘...the main function of the village women in the lives of the strangers is to facilitate their subsequent integration by marking out the place to which the male hero will cross’

Furthermore and I think most importantly, it is through Gilbert’s identification with the land that he has helped tame and shape, that he is able to consolidate his sense of self. Enraptured by the vibrant beauty of the land, he quite unreservedly exclaims: ‘I like it here’ (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:116) and with this declaration, having identified himself with the land, the land reciprocates by allowing itself to be worked in the manner that Gilbert desires so that the glory and recognition can be bestowed on Gilbert. Balseiro (1992:42), highlights how in the novel dispossession is first and foremost from the land, hence Makhaya and Gilbert’s dedication to the agricultural co-operative in Golema Mmidi is a reaction to their previous alienations from the land of their forefathers. It is through productive interaction with it, that the land thus facilitates the process through which both Gilbert and Makhaya become rooted in Golema Mmidi society.

In *Maru*, though Margaret starts off from a position of seemingly positive personal identity, it is however arguable whether she has positively accepted herself for who she is or not. This is particularly debatable since she has had to come to the conclusion that she has, ‘...to live with her appearance for the rest of her life[and that] there is nothing [she]can do to change it’ (*Maru*:15). In view of such rational negativity, identity for Margaret, as for other characters like Dikeledi, is conventionally based on the physiological, as it is primarily through her body that she is defined. It is the femaleness of the body that prompts some of this resignation and the sense of pessimism in response to being female in a patriarchal hegemony. Thus, quite consciously, she shuts off all possibilities of passing for Coloured available to her and quite calmly and solemnly accepts her identity as Masarwa. Unfortunately, while it is this self-image that Margaret has of herself that is the catalyst for discrimination and violence against her, it is finally the love interest shown in her by both Maru and Moleka that positively impacts on her and other Masarwa. For Margaret, having proudly identified herself as Masarwa and now loved by two Totems, genuinely and proudly accepts her identity as opposed to her earlier superficial acceptance, and proceeds to vindicate the respect and dignity of her people through her own assertion of her intelligence, resilience, artistry and self-contentment. As noted by Eko (1986), she defies all assumptions, confronts her past, her future and her society for nothing can ‘un-bushman her’ (*Maru*:18) So great is her impact on Dilepe that apart from an individual identity, she also helps change Batswana attitudes and myths of Masarwa inferiority. The

utopian result is that Moleka, to show his newfound respect for the Masarwa, dines with his Masarwa slaves. While Maru, for his part, not only chases away Dilepe's biggest bigots, Pete, Seth and his brother Morafi, he also opts to marry Margaret rather than ascend to the paramount chieftainship of his tribe.

The revolutionary transformations that both Maru and Moleka initiate are a result of the changes they themselves have undergone with their encounter with Margaret. Thus in as much as it has already been noted that the womenfolk in Head's novels play a pivotal role in the establishment of the selfhood of their men folk, Moleka's encounter with Margaret leads to his being 'true to himself', his 'real self'. Head describes it as being '...like finding himself a gold mine he'd not known was there before' (*Maru*:32). For, Moleka had until the arrival of Margaret been, 'half a statement of his kingdom [Margaret] makes up the whole. [She] is the person he now loves' (*Maru*:58). Maru too, we learn, had felt incomplete until his encounter with Margaret. So vital does she become to his life that apart from dreaming the same dreams as her, he feels he cannot live without her and he abdicates his chieftaincy in order to be with her always. Margaret thus becomes what Olausson (...: 43) has termed: 'a medium who is able to crystallize the feelings of others and bring them out in their true form.'

As noted by Smith S (1991:188), there is '...an ontological basis to identity, a potentially emancipatory practice that seeks to uncover the 'true' self and the 'truth' about the self's experience, the sources of oppression and strength, the essential difference in body, psyche and modes of knowing and being in the world.' In *A Question of Power*, therefore, Elizabeth having suffered the discrimination and violence of Dan, Sello and Medusa based on what they perceive to be her identity, retreats deeper into herself in a bid to find a less diffused and fragmented self. She withdraws to find a 'liberating and nurturing space' where she can sift out whether what the nightmarish trio of Sello, Dan and Medusa have said about her is true and decide who she really is. The latter part of the novel is therefore devoted to Elizabeth's quest for self-definition and self-worth. It is the attainment of a more solid self that will hopefully end all discrimination and violence against her.

Symbolically therefore, towards dawn Elizabeth, having suffered from a deathlike state of madness consistent with Turner's observation (in King 2001:4), that liminals are often 'dead to the world', rejects death and reels towards life and identity. This is a process that Head ultimately portrays as a devastatingly painful 'rebirth', which culminates in Elizabeth's refusal to give in to her tormentors' view of her as nothing and ends with her throwing away her packet of tranquilizers. She will no longer be guided as to who she is as her journey across the threshold, through this state akin to liminality, is complete. Thus Elizabeth, having seemingly gone through hell and survived, possess an awakened knowledge of self that helps her discover a personal relationship with both the people and the land, both of which enhance her sense of self and of her own worth. Significantly, Elizabeth underscores her liminal status when she acts individually in her search for self-definition, rather than with the support of the community as does

Makhaya. Both undertake a rite of passage, crossing the boundaries necessary for the discovery of a new sense of selfhood and understanding of self.

According to Turner (*ibid*), liminals often have ‘instructors’ who assist them in a reintegration into the community that often accompanies a rite of passage. It is therefore, through Elizabeth’s encounter and association with Kenosi, Tom, Birgette and Eugene that Elizabeth slowly builds herself as an individual, in the same way that they help build her garden. The garden’s growth and development hence come to symbolize the rebirth and growth of Elizabeth’s self –identity. We as interested observers and sympathizers, eagerly await the fruition of Elizabeth’s growing self-confidence and identity. Indeed, when it eventually does come, it is a self assured identity ‘...that is attainable through the refusal of racial categories, the denial of a certain meaning of the body’ (1997:98), as mirrored in Elizabeth’s multi-racial relationships with the self-assured American Tom, the proud and stern traditionalist Kenosi and the selfless Eugene. However, not only do they help Elizabeth finally climb out of the ‘not white enough not black enough’ trap that Medusa and friends had thrown her into. In addition, it is through them, that Head seems to express the wish for a unified universal identity and humanity through the transcendence of the body. Such might result in a universal human being with not only one identity, but what Bhabha theorizes (1994:231), as ‘...a kaleidoscope of identities’ and Kamanga-Uledi (1991:32) as ‘...the affirmative influence of ordinary human connection’. Such notions reflect also in the image of a rainbow nation as envisaged in the Freedom Charter. It is a feat that is seen as a possibility through self-acceptance, warm human relationships and involvement in communal labour on the land, which gives the opportunity not only to accept other races, but more importantly, Self as well.

Thus Elizabeth’s newly acquired sense of selfhood is also facilitated not only by her human relationships but a relationship with the land too. Indeed as highlighted by Darian-Smith *et al* (1996:2), ‘[t]he notion of space as a multidimensional entity with social and cultural as well as territorial dimensions,’ has become of prime concern in recent scholarship; particularly in post-colonial literatures and thinking. Thus for Elizabeth to finally and totally be comfortable and at peace with who she is as well as proud of her hybrid roots, it becomes significant that she should symbolically plant and grow the exotic Cape Gooseberry. In the same way she has finally planted herself in Motabeng. The act is what has been seen as a symbolic gesture of belonging, hopeful productivity and eventual fruition. This indeed comes true when, with the gooseberries ripening, Elizabeth makes gooseberry jam and sells it to the villagers almost as an expression of her sweet self-fulfillment and satisfaction. Thus like Gilbert, Elizabeth too brings productivity and nourishment to her community. For as Olausen (281) rightly put it, ‘...the stranger’s construction of a stable identity cannot be complete unless he/she lives in the village in such a way that the changes that they bring about are necessary in order to determine who they are.’

Above all however, if Elizabeth by the end of the novel has finally taken root in her adopted country, it must be acknowledged that the other reason for this achievement is her own resilience. For, invariably

thrust into a hostile landscape, Elizabeth accesses her inner strength and drive in order to rise above the brutalizing and agonizing experiences that confront her. It is therefore through her sheer will power, her enhancing relationships with associates and with the land as well as her productive service to the larger community, that Elizabeth manages to relinquish her negative self-perception as a political refugee, half-caste and ‘insane woman of the village’, to become Elizabeth who, as she tells Dan, is God too. In a sense, it is indeed through a focus on spirituality or on the self as spirit, as not primarily embodied, that Head resolves the destructive, disabling and oppressive forces of discrimination. In an environment in which imposed identity facilitates discrimination, oppression and at times ultimately violence (and all of these are so thoroughly inscribed on the body and mind) she resists them by valorizing Self as spirit.

SELF AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UTOPIA

Commenting on what Cixous (1980), called the ‘autobiographical manifesto’, Smith S. (1991:258), writes that ‘the I of what [Cixous] terms the “autobiographical manifesto,” writes under the sign of hope and the very possibility of change.’ Ola (1994:35) argues that ‘Bessie Head’s novels are quest novels as they end in not only self-discovery but also peace and harmony.’ Looking at the pattern of each novel in the trilogy, it is of a confused and buffeted character who is actively positioned ‘...in a potentially liberated future distanced from the constraining and oppressive identifications’ (Ola 1994:35) and finally finds love and peace after a grueling encounter with the forces of social oppression and mental torment. This second part of my final chapter therefore seeks to show the truth of the notion that with self-discovery there does indeed, to some extent, come an end to discrimination and violence which may result in a potentially blissful future .

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Makhaya with his newfound sense of selfhood, emerges from the hatred that had been gradually consuming his being. In place of hate, now grows only love and romance. Thus at the end of the novel, he walks into the warm embrace of his new wife and new life with Paulina. Whereas previously he had harboured suspicions as to Balfour’s intentions in Golema Mmidi, now it is friendship and brotherly understanding that he has for him. Together, they look forward with patriotic zeal to an agriculturally transformed Golema Mmidi oasis.

In addition, Makhaya in his regained traditional pride, with a feministic difference, comes to stand for new African maleness that voluntarily discards patriarchal hegemony and insists on treating women as equal partners in the restructuring of Golema Mmidi. Obviously conscious of the degradation of calling another man ‘baas’ or ‘nkosi’, Makhaya we learn had as early as back in South Africa abolished the custom where an elder brother is referred to as ‘Buti’ and treated with exaggerated respect by subordinate women. Instead, Makhaya had firmly instituted a regime of equality and had countered his mother’s objection to this with the feminist question: ‘Why should men be brought up with a false belief of superiority over women?’ (*When Rain Clouds Gather*:16). Makhaya therefore proves that tribalism need not be responsible for the inferior status of women when it is up to the individual to either implement or disregard its dictates.

In *Maru*, the self-discoveries of both Maru and Moleka clear the once sexist and tribalistic atmosphere of Dilepe, if not totally at least in part. Moleka dissipates the oppressive atmosphere with his benevolent reintegration of his Masarwa bondsmen. He counters sexism to a degree by marrying Dikeledi, even though there is an important sense in which his marriage to her does seem to reinscribe a sense of male munificence and benefaction towards a subordinate female. This is as it may be, but with Moleka's marriage, no longer are women regarded as objects for the release of sexual tension for they are now treated with a sense of respect and dignity. Similarly, Maru's marriage to Margaret, especially in the context of her descent from a tribe of so-called untouchables, hopefully puts an end to discrimination and violence through the exemplary cultivation of tolerance and peace in tribal affairs through intermarriage. In her discussion of *Maru*, Bagley-Miller(1996:263) notes the subversive quality of hybridity as an explicitly political response to a history of racism [tribalism] and colonialism in southern Africa. According to Bagley-Miller, Bessie Head displaces the issue of Black-White miscegenation with that of a Batswana-Masarwa miscegenation which both, 'infuse[s] the concept with new life, while still recognizing its spectral nature in the collective consciousness.' This displacement functions as a way of revealing the arbitrariness of the terms involved, and 'that black and white are not fixed terms in the racist binary' (Bagley-Miller 1996: 268). Of the Masarwa's reaction to the marriage we read:

When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. *The wind of freedom*, which was blowing throughout the world for all people, *turned and flowed into the room*. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air their humanity awakened (*Maru*:126) [italics my emphasis].

It is hoped that with the marriages, there is a reevaluation in the treatment of the Basarwa as the community slowly become aware of the evil involved in keeping alive a system of values that oppresses others and open their eyes to recognize the humanity of the San. Tomaselli (in King 2001:1) identifies the liminal state as enabling the individual to question traditional ways of operating and to recognize new possibilities. This is made even more apparent by Maru's abandonment of stifling power and its signification of an end to the discrimination and violence associated with such a position. Most importantly, instead of ceding power to his brother, Maru makes arrangements for his sister to succeed him. A memorable image of final harmony in the novel is of the abdicated Maru living a settled and contented life of growing yellow daisies, as 'they [are]the only flowers which resemble the face of his wife and the sun of his love' (*Maru*:5). Thus as in *When Rain Clouds Gather* marriage comes to symbolize the harmonious co-existence of the sexes, races and tribes as well as the victory of love over oppressive power, whatever the complexities and potentially questionable aspects of the individual marriages themselves.

In *A Question of Power*, it is when Elizabeth opts to identify with humankind in general rather than any particular ethnic group and, as we have seen, conceives of herself as spirit, that her identity crisis is eased. Her previous sense of the discrimination and the violence she has experienced comes to an end. Initiated by the symbolic destruction of Medusa, and the accompanying stabilization of Elizabeth's identity, with its consequent harmonization by both Black and White, the racial and gender discrimination and violence she had previously encountered in her position of fragmentation or instability is dispelled. Such is now replaced by a vision of an ideal human society in which the darkened clouds of discrimination and violence give way to harmony and equality. As noted by Wenzel (1998:57), at the end of her ordeal with the nightmarish trio of Medusa, Dan and Sello, Elizabeth indicates that she and the latter had '...perfected together the ideal of sharing everything and then perfectly shared with all mankind' (*A Question of Power*:202) Indeed, it is a utopian society of both racial and gender equality that is portrayed in Tom and Elizabeth's relationship. Not only do they operate on an equal footing on the land but they are also able to have deep mutual discussions through which they develop a sense of a common destiny. This is all in incomplete contrast to her previous relations with the hegemonic Dan and Sello.

Nixon (1996:249) detects in Head an anxiety that racial domination may continue to preoccupy black forms of self-definition preventing the setting of more independent imaginative co-ordinates. In the trilogy therefore, Head rejects racial, sexual and tribal identities as social constructions that savagely lead to discrimination and violence. Instead, she thus preaches the ideology of identity based on the intrinsic Self, of the individual, if discrimination and violence are to be eradicated. As Bagley-Miller(1987:66) points out, before meeting Margaret, Maru had been accustomed to short, unsuccessful relationships which ended in sorrow, terror and insanity. Failure of all these liaisons was because of the women's focus on the outer Maru and his mundane, constructed or designated position of future paramount chief of a tribe, instead of the beauty of his soul. However, when the self-determined and self-assured Margaret meets Maru, she looks past the earthly trappings 'from a great height [where she is] more than his equal' (*Maru*:64). Significantly, it is immediately following this that Maru resolves to marry Margaret as she had looked beyond his privileged status and seen him for what he really is, himself.

The marriage that then follows, like all warm humane human relations, becomes the 'cement' that welds similar beings together in the hope that they can start a happy family. This is in keeping with Head's conviction that she had an important role in the spiritual development of the universe. Once she declared: 'Actually, I am not the kind of person that's just born for being born sake. Its very significant that I have been born in Southern Africa' (in Eilersen 1995:85) It is a didactic mission of rebirth that she preaches throughout the trilogy.

CONCLUSION

The writing of literature in Africa is an inescapably political and social act given the unique social and political circumstances pervading the continent, especially perhaps its southern regions. An investigation of the source of the region's unique social and political problems finds it in the various constructed and inherited identities of race, tribe and gender that have beleaguered Africa for centuries. It is a reality that Bessie Head brings out in her trilogy through its portrayal of the interconnectedness of identity, discrimination and ultimately violence.

Herself born into the alienating and brutal world of South Africa, Bessie Head in her trilogy recreates the prejudices she had suffered as a result of her identity as a Coloured woman. Thus primarily through Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* she laments white South Africa's discrimination, abuse and persecution of black people and through *A Question of Power*'s Elizabeth, that of Coloured people. It is however not only racial prejudice that Head portrays and rejects as both tribal and gender biases are also denigrated. Thus in *Maru*, Head attacks Batswana tribal superiority over the Basarwa and generally men's assumption of superiority over women. The consequent verbal, physical, sexual and mental violence of such discrimination is explored too through the multiplicity of relationships in the trilogy.

Moreover, writing as not only for the speaking Self but a collective space is further seen in Head's demonstration of how identity need not be a tool for discrimination and violence nor a barrier to a harmonious human existence. She therefore attempts not only to restore Black people's and women's sense of worth but also a more civil and co-operative relationship amongst all, irrespective of varying identities. Thus for instance in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, George Appleby-Smith the white police commander comes to Makhaya's aid against Matenge's hatred. In *A Question of Power*, racist exploitation is denigrated through the dissolution of a scenario where blacks do the work and whites supervise, through Elizabeth's relationships with both her Black and White friends. When they do eventually succeed, signified is the power not of one identity over the other but rather the power of co-operation and co-existence.

In *Maru*, tribal intermarriage and the democratization of power structures, are seen as possible solutions to tribalism. The marriage between Maru and Margaret that follows the discriminatory violence of Dilepe society based on Margaret's identity, serves to conquer prejudice by functioning as a socially progressive force that advances mankind in the direction of racial and tribal equality, away from identity-based discrimination and violence. In addition, Maru's abdication marks not only the termination of violence in as far as it implies a stop to the brutal discriminatory power wielded over others but also in as much as it portrays that anything socially or biologically inherited, be it identity or title, is at the centre of discrimination and violence. Hence the impetus to 'make a fresh start' evident in Maru himself and throughout the trilogy as a whole.

Head does not however only seem to act as advocate for racial tolerance and equality, as she is evidently a crusader for justice as well. As observed by Cloete (1998:32), 'Head's writing, is a clear attempt to write women into history from whence they have been resolutely and traditionally excluded on the basis of their femaleness.' In the trilogy therefore, through such women characters as Mma Millipede, Paulina Sebeso, Margaret, Dikeledi, Kenosi and Elizabeth, Head thus not only confronts the issue of gender discrimination in patriarchal African society, but also seeks to restore and rehabilitate images of women. Nixon (1996:251) thus observes how, '[Head] herself born from the inconceivable, seems particularly drawn to women who press the limits of what is locally imaginable.' As far as *Self* goes, her women are thus portrayed as strong, decisive, intelligent dignified and rational women quite capable of meeting their male-counterparts on an equal footing, 'perfect[ing] together the ideal of sharing everything' (*A Question of Power*: 202).

In the trilogy, stereotypes regarding identities come under intense imaginative scrutiny as Head's is a vision that seeks to transcend such stereotypes by resisting a world in which people are divided into neat categories. Ultimately therefore, she pursues a utopian vision, '...a waking dream of the possible which might inspire us too see beyond the constraints of the here and now to the idealized vision of a perfect future' (Lionnet 1989:110). In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head advocates a universal vision of humanism in which all forms of diversity should not be seen as offensive and divisive, but rather as enriching our existence as all God's creations.

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**Dedicated to my daughter, Celeste-Esther Nolwazi Mhlahlo,
with whom since conception, I have not really had time to bond. Daddy loves you very much. Sunday
1/12/2002 @ 1450hrs**