

**THE AFRICAN WRITER AS A SOCIAL CRUSADER AGAINST SOCIAL ALIENATION IN A TRAUMATISED AFRICAN SOCIETY: INSIGHT INTO BESSIE HEAD'S *A QUESTION OF POWER AND MARU***

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**ABSTRACT**

The fact that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would simply have meant an improvement on the general human conditions that have in the past haunted and hunted the human species. However, the dehumanising practices are still seen rearing the Neo-Colonialists' ugly heads in the African continent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. African writers have taken to pen and paper, to refute these dehumanising practices through their literary works. One of such writers is Bessie Head. Using the trauma theory, this paper examines two of Bessie Head's novels: *A Question of Power* and *Maru* as a traumatic critique to analyse in detail, the issues of discrimination, alienation and the dehumanised condition of the majority of Africans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper adopts primary and secondary sources in analysing the two chosen novels. The analysis shows that Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and *Maru* are powerful expositions of the forlorn living, and the type of mental disorder that befall the people of Africa, who in their bid to live, are meant to undergo all forms of social alienation that come with much despondence and depression. The paper concludes that the author using her literary texts, makes a case for the people of Africa in particular and the world in general as she has expressly shown that Africa and the entire world would have been a better place to live and stay if not for the degrading and insensitive posture of the powers that be towards the development and growth of humans.

**Keywords:** African writer, social crusader, social alienation, traumatised society.

**INTRODUCTION**

Human predicaments have been in existence from time immemorial, and writers in the bid to x-ray such predicaments, or the general oddities of humans in the African society have embarked on the herculean task of presenting and representing the society in their literary works, in a manner that the social realities of their time and space are carefully depicted.

It is in the light of the above premise that, Bessie Head writes and directs her literary energy towards a creation of an awareness of the sort of inhuman and dehumanised social conditions that have over the years thwarted the smooth growth of the society, especially as these conditions affect negatively, the continent of Africa and its people. Since writers are known as social crusaders of their various societies, Head without mincing words, writes tenaciously to chronicle the insensitive posture of those who find themselves on the corridors of power and who use such power, to suppress, oppress and subjugate the down trodden of the society, thus, arrogating to themselves in the long run, unquestionable rights and opportunities, to the detriment of the masses.

In view of the above, therefore, Richard Abcarian and Marvin Klotz (1996) write of this sort of situation below:

... social beings –men and women – sometimes submit to these forces, it is always an uneasy submission, for the purpose of these forces is to curb and control people. Individuals may recognise that they must be controlled for some larger good; yet, they are aware that established social power is often abusive. The tendency of power, at its best, is to act as a conserving force that brakes the disruptive to abandon and destroy, without cause, old ways and ideas. At its worst, power is self-serving. The individual must constantly judge which tendency power is enhancing. (209)

### **The Perspective from which Bessie Head Writes**

Bessie Head as a social crusader of her society writes her literary works that are under study, from a traumatic standpoint. Thus, the trauma theory is adopted as the basis for this analysis. The field of trauma studies in literary criticism according to Azmi gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. A theoretical trend was introduced by scholars like Caruth, who pioneered a psychoanalytic post structural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language. This Lacanian approach crafts a concept of trauma as a recurring sense of absence that sunders knowledge of the extreme experience, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression. The evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society (Azmi 2018: 58). Trauma theory denotes a vibrant, interdisciplinary area of Western scholarship developed since the 1980s through cross-fertilisation between psychology and the humanities.

For Caruth's deconstructive criticism in particular, the model allows a special emphasis on linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality, and aporia. The unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining trauma's function in literature. This classic model of trauma appealed to a range of critics working outside of post-structuralism as well due to the notion of trauma's irreversible damage to the psyche. The assumed inherent neurobiological features of trauma that refuse representation and cause dissociation were significant to arguments that sought to emphasise the extent of profound suffering from an external source, whether that source is an individual perpetrator or collective social practice. While the model is useful to forward claims regarding language's inability to locate the truth of the past, it was quickly accompanied by alternative models and methodologies that revised this foundational claim to suggest determinate value exists in traumatic experience.

The evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society. The allure of the classic model exists in the pairing of neurobiological theories regarding the processes of the mind and memory together with semiotic theories regarding the processes of language, associations, and symbolisation. Yet if the psychological basis of trauma is reexamined, then the classic model fails to fit the laws of structural and post-structural linguistics (Azmi 2018). This is to suggest that the traditional Lacanian approach only works if the psychological definition of trauma conforms to a particular theoretical recipe that draws from Freud to portray traumatic experience as a pre-linguistic event that universally causes dissociation. In many ways, the thrill of the classic model is the apparent marriage of psychological laws that govern trauma's function to the semiotic laws that govern language's meaning.

The history of the concept of trauma is filled with contradictory theories and contentious debates, leaving both psychologists and literary scholars the ability to work with varying definitions of trauma and its effects. Some alternative approaches start with a definition of trauma that allows for a range of representational possibilities. Alternative models challenge the classic model's governing principle that defines trauma in terms of universal characteristics and effects. Critics such as Leys (2000) who establishes a psychological framework apart from the classic model thus produce different conclusions regarding trauma's influence upon language, perception, and society. Beginning from a different psychological starting point for defining trauma than that established in the traditional approach thus allows critics a renewed focus on trauma's specificity and the processes of remembering. Understanding trauma, for example, by situating it within a larger conceptual framework of social psychology theories in addition to neurobiological theories will produce

a particular psychologically informed concept of trauma that acknowledges the range of contextual factors that specify the value of the experience. This stance might therefore consider dubious the assertion of trauma's intrinsic dissociation.

Taking into consideration the variety of approaches to studying trauma in literature, Basse Head's collections (*A Question of Power* and *Maru*) broaden the parameters of literary trauma theory by suggesting that extreme experience cultivates multiple responses and values. Trauma causes a disruption and reorientation of consciousness, but the values attached to this experience are influenced by a variety of individual and cultural factors that change over time. The idea that knowledge of the past, not just any past but a particular type of past experience, can be taken care of by the traumatic theory is undoubted as this is contained in the two literary texts under study. The pluralistic model of trauma suggests that criticism may explore trauma as a subject that invites the study of the relationship between language, the psyche, and behaviour without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism. The collections thus demonstrate the methodological diversity within literary trauma theory that moves the field beyond a restrictive analysis by demonstrating trauma's varying representations. Criticism within this framework may function to acknowledge the impact of suffering on individuals and communities, to consider the role of literature in a violent world, or to analyse the ways language conveys extreme experiences.

Commenting on the sort of social commitment that Head demonstrates as an African writer and the main issue with which she concerns herself about, Ogungbesan (2004: 127) further submits:

Miss Head, perhaps, more than any other African writer, has dwelt on the poverty of rural Africa. She is no romantic, celebrating the superiority of rural life over the urban. Instead, she examines at length the reality of life in the remotest village in Botswana, paying the minutest attention to the poverty and the grim struggle for survival faced by the most lowly villagers.

The scenario above has clearly shown that there is a traumatic scenario in Africa that we as Africans cannot in a hurry, sweep under the carpet. This certainty of course, has to do with the fact that the socio-economic and political conditions in Africa generally, have created a kind of social ineptitude with an anathema standpoint, thus, making life in Africa to be a phenomenon that is highly miserable and unbearable, hence, the setting in of confusion in the bid to hold unto endless hope, as one strives to live with and within the barest necessities of life.

In concrete terms, Africa's predicaments have reached the height of great trauma as the conditions in Africa are a confirmation of the sort of governance that she has been encountered

with. In a discourse that dwells on the sort of inglorious posture and stance of the various governments in Africa, Solofo Randrianja (1994:41) writes that:

The problem facing Africa is not so much having to choose between a collective conception of democracy and a representative conception based on individual choice, but rather, how to harness democracy to economic development. In any event, one of the functions of democracy is to instal a framework within which sociability may be negotiated without recourse to violence.

Despite the alienation that has befallen the African people, the new song on the lips of most, if not all Africans, is the song of democracy. But democracy, instead of bringing about the much desired wellbeing of the people has become an insidious saint that is meant to undermine the struggles that the people of Africa are being faced with on a daily basis, in the bid to survive in a draconian society. With this sort of trauma that stares Africa in the face, one begins to wonder whether indeed, Africa is ripe for democracy truly. It is in the light of the aforementioned African socio-economic and political quagmire that Kole Omotoso (2009:70) writes:

Most governments had been unstable owing to ethnic competitions for political power and economic advantages. Laws had been outlawed because of corruption and there was no learning to be held in the educational institutions whose infrastructure had decayed. The failure of the nation-state to be responsible for all its citizens led individuals to seek protection under the still surviving ethnic structures of their particular nationalities.

### **Synopsis of *A Question of Power***

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* is a literary work that can be understood on two levels. One of these is the literal level which is the story of the protagonist of the text, Elizabeth who is in Botswana on exile from South Africa. She first teaches in a school and later becomes involved in a cooperative farming venture that is designed to boost the economy of the village of Motabeng and to instil some pride in especially the women of Botswana. On this level therefore, the story has little and few emotional hills and valleys. On the other level, however, the novel is a record of Elizabeth's breakdown and of her wavering in and out of the terrifying world of insanity. The daytime world of her mundane chores and her routine work at the school and later in the gardens, contrasts sharply with the night time world that eventually takes over and leads to her total mental collapse.

Reared in South Africa by a foster mother, Elizabeth is shocked on being sent to a mission school, to learn that her real mother is white and that she is living in a nearby mental hospital. Her teachers are warned to be on guard against any sign that the child is afflicted with the

mother's ailment. It is only when she leaves South Africa in response to an advertisement for teachers in Botswana, walking out on a cheating husband and taking with her, her little son, does she start to show signs of insanity. Within three months of her arrival in Botswana, the normal and the abnormal start to blur for her. She then starts to hallucinate, and in the fantasy world, created by her disturbed mind, she is obsessed with questions about the soul and the nature of good and evil.

### **Polemic Analysis of the Text**

In her *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head spreads her literary tentacles to certain thematic preoccupations that have become a clog in the wheel of progress in the continent of Africa. These range from life in exile, childhood trauma, the ordinary against the extraordinary to psychosis.

### **Life in Exile**

Elizabeth finds herself in a foreign land, particularly, in Motabeng in Botswana where she expects to be emancipated from the claws of alienation that she experiences in South Africa. But to her surprise, she finds out that that which she runs away from in South Africa, is present in her new environment with a difference in manifestation. This, to a large extent, is in contrast to what she is used to in South Africa where the streets are well lit and "at first, she found the pitch-dark darkness of the Motabeng night terrifying" (Head 1973: 21). After some time, she starts living with the stark traumatic experience of life.

Another point where Elizabeth finds greater despondence in her stay in her new abode, is at the level of self-esteem and personal ambition. In South Africa for instance, Apartheid is experienced while in Botswana, it automatically becomes an offence for a non-white to aspire to become important. This, once it happens, is considered to be an aberration. Head (1973:26) hammers on this sort of situation that "people there had an unwritten law. They hated any black person among them who was 'important'". So, when Elizabeth is asked if she wants to be important in Botswana, her new place, she responds in negation to this question in order to avoid any unpleasant situation that might arise if she responded positively.

With this sort of thing in place, her being in Botswana reaches a point of dissonance and disenchantment. It is in view of all these experiences that are more nasty in nature than pleasurable that Head expresses in her *A Question of Power*. In collaborating with the direction or perspective from which Head writes in terms of her promptings and compassion for commoners, Ogungbesan (2004:132) submits that:

Through the personal sufferings of a coloured woman among the Botswana villagers, Miss Head re-enacts, in *A Question of Power*, the sufferings of all the rejected and oppressed of human history. Her concern is with the ordinary people, who seem only interested in the business of living, which she considers higher than politics, nation, race or colour.

As part of her experiences in Botswana, Elizabeth more or less, becomes the odd one out among the locals as she cannot discuss freely with them because she does not share with them that which binds them together as Botswana people. She is thus, denied of her humanity the same manner that she experiences it in South Africa. Her language, way of life on a daily basis are quite different and fall short of the expectations of the people of Botswana. Elizabeth can therefore, be said to be experiencing racial discrimination, social degradation and alienation of the highest order. To this, Head opines that “definitely, as far as Botswana society was concerned, she was an out-and-out outsider and would never be in on their things” (Head 1973: 26).

In her desperation resulting from alienation, Elizabeth concludes that “I like the general atmosphere because I don’t care whether people like me or not. I am used to isolation” (Head 1973:56). Her isolation and alienation are due not only because of geographical difference but also the sort of behaviour she exhibits that sometimes is considered to be against the moral and social conventions of the Botswana society. For this behaviour, she is dealt with by this same society as a strange kind of person who in social configurations deserves no place and rights, an outcast.

### **Childhood Trauma**

Being that *A Question of Power* is an autobiographical text, through Elizabeth’s persona, Head’s traumatic childhood experiences are brought to the fore. In presenting Elizabeth before the reader, she presents her life as one fraught with problems. These problems seem mainly from personal and social relationships. Right from childhood, Elizabeth is shown to have familial problems. She grows up with the impression that her foster parents are her real parents. She comes to terms with a sad realisation that, that which she has been thinking all along is the reverse of the real situation. This of course, is a reality that is hard to swallow, as she is shocked to her marrow when in a school where she is being sent, the principal of the school calls on her and then tells her, “we have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you are not careful, you’ll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native” (Head 1973:16).

With the above expression from the principal, she gets a sort of introduction to who her real mother is. Elizabeth keeps this intriguing information on her mind for seven years before she finds it necessary to confront her foster mother about her real mother's being and where about. In response, her foster mother agrees with what she heard from the principal and then goes further to give her more revelations as she recounts:

My husband worked on the child welfare committee, and your case came up again and again. First, they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nursing home. A day later, you were returned because you did not look white. They sent you to a Boer family. A week later, you were returned. The women on the committee said: what can we do with this child? Its mother is white. My husband came home that night and asked me to take you. I agreed. (Head, 1973:17)

From the quotation above, it becomes quite glaring that apart from the fact that Elizabeth has a problem that is traced to her family, the government too, simply aggravates her situation instead of creating that enabling environment for her to thrive on, despite her sorrows. Her case is, therefore, one out of a million in Africa. She represents millions of Africans who have all along, been living a life that is characterised by paranoid and despondent existence. Living, to them, is managing whatever situation that comes their way, since they don't expect to have help from any quarters, as everyone turns a deaf ear to their plight. This is a clear case of no one wanting to associate with those who have perpetually been hunted and tormented by poverty in their respective homes, even in the face of the so-called democratic dispensation in Africa.

Elizabeth, stands out as one of the most unfortunate children in Africa due largely to her being rejected by institutions, groups and individuals across the society until it becomes difficult to reject her any further. She hears as a teenager that the mother she thinks is hers, adopts her because no one else would. She is told that as a baby, no one nor institution accepted her as a child to be loved. If the manner of Elizabeth's adoption is important, equally seminal are the child's experiences with the woman and family she takes to be her own. We are told pretty little about life in this family but the little we are told needs to be examined or scrutinised. In her foster family, the situation hardly facilitates bringing a child up with love and care. The husband of her foster mother dies and the mother turns the house to a bar. This trade leads to a deterioration of law and order in the home. It gets so bad that it attracts the comment that "she was secretly relieved to be taken away from the beer-house and sent to a mission school, as hours and hours of her childhood had been spent sitting under a lamp-post near her house, crying because everyone was drunk and there was no food, no one to think about children" (Head, 1973: 15-16). Thus, the only companion she has in her foster home are pangs of hunger and tears of



misery. The little food she gets on a daily basis, is only meant to put the stomach into temporary silence from hunger. It is not the type that can quench it.

### **The Ordinary Against the Extraordinary**

Contrasts of light and darkness, symbols of life and death form the narrative structure of Head's novel, and it is Elizabeth herself that reflects and consciously realises the struggles going on between her inside and the outside world. She seems to associate with the ordinary, a sense of relative temporal continuity and a possible sense of belonging. Inversely, when the extraordinary world unfolds on her mind, she has a feeling of her house being suddenly besieged, invaded and turned upside down: "she was like a person driven out of her own house while demons rampaged within, turning everything upside down" (Head, 1973: 49).

Enigmatic is the day when Elizabeth is engrossed in watching her son as he plays football from the window and suddenly Dan intrudes, interrupting the scene:

She nearly [committed suicide], except that her small boy had asked her to buy him a football and he came down the road with a gang of eager friends. They set up a football pitch outside the house. Her son was so eager to impress everyone that he kept on kicking the football too high in the air and falling flat on his back. She spent the whole afternoon at the window watching him, he was so comical. So Dan tried another prophecy: he said: "I have the power to take the life of your son. He will be dead in two days". (Head, 1973: 14)

Throughout the text, there are other similar illustrations. This is a crucial aspect since in the aforementioned passage, we see how on the one hand, it is her son that prevents her from committing suicide; without being aware of it he brings her back to life and she can thus, reconnect with the outside world, whereas on the other hand, Dan breaks this connection and destroys it. The implication is that often, the subject is paralysed, torn apart between life and death. This is extremely painful and strenuous. The extraordinary has not only a banning function on the subject's relation to the outside world; these interruptions are part of Dan's larger plan of complicating and contaminating her relationships with the community of which she is a part.

### **Psychosis**

Being that Elizabeth has a childhood that is full of memorable pangs, she is as a matter of reality, subjected to suffer the draconian effects of a two-edged sword, of psychosis and psychosomatic. These two have taken a toll on her personality as a person. She is as a consequence upon these, reduced to a state of permanent abysmal and distorted existence.

Persons experiencing a psychotic episode, may also experience some sort of hallucinations, hold delusional beliefs, demonstrate personality instability and constantly exhibit disorganised thinking and behaviour. It involves the loss of contact with reality or coming to terms with it. Unlike neurosis, psychosis interferes with the person's rational thought or his or her ability to function properly in the scheme of things on a daily basis, thereby, showing some sort of withdrawal syndrome. If the person is born naturally to be an extrovert, they automatically become introvert by circumstance. As a consequence therefore, there is an expectation of catastrophe of enormous dimension, a horrific panic, a fear of disintegration or more violently, an implosion.

Elizabeth, who is the protagonist of this text suffers total social rejection and alienation from the society that she all along thinks to be a place where she belongs. The society which she longs up to as her haven, instead, becomes the brewing pot of all her troubles and sorrows. The culmination of it all is that she suffers an identity crisis, as her mind becomes a battle ground where each of her tormentors fights for possession and domination of her personality. Gradually, her world crumples under her feet.

As a matter of fact, she is considered to be one of the most tormented mentally and frightened characters in African fiction. Margaret E. Tucker describes her conscientiously that "Elizabeth, who moves in and out of madness throughout the book..." (Head, 1973:170). Lewis Nkosi sees her as one who experiences "loss of internal equilibrium" (Head, 1973:102), while Virginia Ola describes her as having undergone "severe mental torture, loneliness, fear and repetitive circles of nervous breakdown" (Head 1973: 45).

### **Synopsis of *Maru***

Set in the rural and unforgiving village of Dilape, *Maru* sets about exploring the ability of people to love others, live together, as one despite their palpable differences. Moving in an ordered sequence, the story begins at the end of the main characters, Maru (who gets the novel its title) and Margaret, his wife. Thereafter, the story moves back in time examining all the past events that led up to this point. Finally, starting at the real 'beginning'; readers are first exposed to harsh prejudices of the Botswana tribe against the Marsawa people. A dead Marsawa woman and her baby are found, yet, no Botswana person wishes to bury her, and so, English missionaries are called upon to carry out this task. In this wise, Margaret Cadmore arrives the scene and is utterly disgusted, flabbergasted and overwhelmed by the discrimination attitudes of the Botswana nurses who have been somehow forced to help prepare the body for burial. Moved by the plight of Marsawa woman, she decides to adopt her baby and names her after herself - Margaret Cadmore. Margaret Cardmore, the English missionary believes that by giving her good education and an upbringing that can help mold her to brace-up-with the challenges that confront her, she as an

adopted child can withstand all such related prejudices that thwart the smooth existence of humans. But by the time Margaret Cadmore, the Marasawa woman graduates from school, just about the same time that her foster mother returns to England, the raw facts of such social and inhuman discrimination still stare her in the face as Maru, one of the characters in the text, becomes an agent of such in all its inglorious ramifications.

### **Polemic Analysis of the Text**

As a socially committed and critical realist writer, Head's *Maru* chronicles in its entirety, certain thematic concerns that she observes overtime, as factors that have hindered the smooth running of human society, and as a consequence, the society finds itself in a standstill position. These factors are those of discrimination, the place of woman in a dominated male society and tribalism. These three have, from time immemorial, been the bane that has kept human relationship to be built on the foundations of suspicion and mistrust. Thus, the Whiteman suspects the Blackman, and the Blackman in turn, does not see any trust in the person of the Whiteman.

Being that Head is a strong social crusader, she uses *Maru* to create an environment where such issues as mentioned above, would absolutely and permanently be eradicated, and as such, a society where everyone would have a stake and a place, can be put in place. It is on this sort of philosophy that Edward Ako (1999:65) opines that:

Bessie Head depicts or imagines an ideal society, a kind of utopian, a land in which there is magic and wonder, a land of innocence, respect and trust, in short, a gathering of rain clouds. In a similar vein, when people break away from their constrictions, when they forgo their prejudices and are prepared to try something new, when what matters is the depth of one's soul and not the colour of their skin or sex. When together, the people unite...their losses become their gains.

From the above, it becomes glaring that Head breaks away from the belief that has been enshrined in the society which recognises the fact that the society is made up of people of different statuses or rank and file, and as such, sometimes, before one is being born, the society already determines the place of the person, as this follows the person all through. By this, the person struggles endlessly to find a place that can truly define who they are and create names for themselves amongst a committee of unscrupulous mortals, and more often than not, ends up with little or no success in life.

### **Discrimination**

In the text, Head shows a strong commitment towards challenging matters of racial discrimination. To this, *Maru* becomes a masterpiece that depicts this sort of discrimination in its rawest form. Here, Head (1971:6) acknowledges the fact such prejudices may be learnt by children from their parents, as she says, “children learnt it from their parents. Their parents spat on the ground as a member of a filthy, low nation passed by. Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling. Bushman! Low breed! Bastard!”

Of course, such discrimination is thus depicted as cyclic in nature in the sense that it handed down from one generation to another as far as black and white relationship is concerned. As it is, it alludes to the difficulty of rooting it out and eliminating it completely from human existence. Margaret Cadmore’s experiences as a Marsawa person, is one that is riddled with discrimination right from her tender age. This is manifested in the sort of treatment she receives from people when she starts going to mission school, to which she comes to a realisation that something is definitely wrong with the way she relates to the world. She is discriminated for no other reason than the fact that she is a Marsawa person and as such, she is often being pinched under the seat and no one wants sitting close to her.

To this, she undergoes a psychological trauma to the extent that her being a human and her race as a black person are affected. This results to her becoming helpless and hopeless in a society that has no human face and consideration for human dignity. Head (1971:13) writes of her in the following expression:

What was a Bushman supposed to do? She had no weapon of words or personality, only a permanent silence and a face which revealed no emotion, except that now and then and abrupt tear would splash down out of one eye. If a glob of spit dropped onto her arm during play time hour, she quietly wiped it away. If they caught her in some remote part of the school building during play time hour, they would set up the wild giggling dance: since when did a bushy go to school?

The above excerpt sets the tone for Head’s dislike for social and racial discrimination. Difference in colour is seen as a crime, yet, the victim of such circumstance does not have the power to change this and therefore, adinfinitum remains in perpetual and abysmal despondent state of mind. Discrimination, thus becomes, one man made phenomenon that imprisons a victim’s potentials and personality. Just like what Margaret Cadmore experiences, anybody caught in this sort of web, adopts a posture of permanent silence and a face that expresses no emotion.

One important factor that is worthy of note in Head's (1971:11) own portrayal of young Cadmore is the fact that she is intended for experiment as indicated in the white man's motto: "environment everything, heredity nothing". In essence of the above expression, the white missionary who is the foster mother of young Cadmore has a conviction that environment could create a difference in human's behaviour as this will be dependent on nature and level of exposure, hence, her adoption and use of a Marsawa woman's daughter for the purpose.

The indiscriminate manner that defies restrictions is the author's attempt to create a global identity, whose end result would be hardly African or European but merely built on human relation and principle of togetherness despite difference in colour or race. This, ideally, is Head's utopian solution to racial discrimination and tribal differences as expressed between the Botswana and Marsawa people. This sort of philosophy of course, presents a universal vision of human relations that would be devoid of any affiliations of whatever form. To portray human's inability to change their circumstance, Head (1971:14) through the white missionary, Margaret Cadmore writes; "they are wrong. You will have to live with your appearances for the rest of your life. There is nothing you can do to change it", meant to be a piece of advice to young Margaret Cadmore.

### **The Place of Woman in the Society**

The woman in Head's *Maru* is presented at different levels as seen in the portrayal of the various female characters in the text. The protagonist of the text is presented by the author in such a way that we see nothing other than one who is psychologically traumatised, marginalised and demoralised. She is perfectly seen as the 'other', an outcast in the society by the simple fact that she has a Marsawa blood in her veins that gives her an identity of one that can be likened to a person with leprosy in a committee of white faces, and a strong tribal discrimination in the midst of the Botswana people. As a way of crawling out of her bottled-up-situation, she marries Maru, but this only helps to silence her further or the more, as Maru controls her every move and emotion. Her happiness is thus, dependent on his mood, such that whenever he is in a bad mood, her happiness is arrested as he would use every possible harsh words that remind her of her sad past, coupled with the fact that as a woman and a black person, she has no place in a racially discriminated society and one that at the same time, turns a woman into accepting whatever she is being offered by the dominance of malefolk. As Head (1971:4) observes, quite often than not, Margaret is overwhelmed with happiness and would walk around for a whole day with an ecstatic smile on her face. The reason for this is that "the days of happiness were few and far overbalanced by the days of torrential expressions of love".

The portrayal of Margaret as having caught the attention of both Maru and Moleka, both of whom are royalties however, reveals her as good enough, that is, as deserving of male attention.

Moleka, despite his attraction to Margaret, is unable to openly express his love for her. Interestingly, his new course of action, the acknowledgement of the impression Margaret creates on him, the subsequent rivalry with Maru when he realises that Maru too is interested in the same woman, and even his invitation of his slaves to his table all point at his change of heart. The change that comes over Moleka at the point of his encounter firstly with Margaret is the author's own attempt to ridicule prejudices that men usually level on women in general.

At another level, Head's attempt to destroy stereotypical images of women is depicted in her portrayal of the white woman and missionary, Margaret Cadmore. She is presented by the author as being above petty prejudices, as her good sense of organisation is revealed through her habit of doing things simultaneously so as to speed up the end result. Her personality is contrasted to her husband's who is depicted as naturally dull and stupid. These traits are however, downplayed by the fact that he is a priest and by the virtue of his calling, he mercifully remains silence for hours on end. His appearance as outlined by the author does not get better public of him either. His wife is depicted as having common sense in abundance. This virtue makes her timeless as though she could belong to any age, race, time, space, but always on the progressive side. This positive portrayal does not, however, make her impeccable. On the contrary, it makes her "abusive of mankind" (Head, 1971:8).

The other female character, Dikeledi, is portrayed as being independent. She is the daughter of a paramount chief and the first to put good education to useful purpose in a male dominated society. Unlike the rest of her social class who merely use education to adorn their social statuses, she has a more practical view of the world. This is evident from the fact that she has no need for any employment but unlike others who have made wealth synonymous with illness, wealth has given her the freedom to specialise in what interests her the most. She does not let her Diploma in Early Childhood Education go to waste but takes up a position, a primary school teacher at Leseding School.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and *Maru* are a powerful exposition of her forlorn living and the type of mental disorder that befalls the people of Africa, who in their bid to live, are meant to undergo all forms of social alienation that come with much despondence and depression. The author makes a case for the people of Africa in particular and the world in general in her texts. She feels that Africa and the entire world would have been a better place to live and stay if not for the degrading and insensitive posture of the powers that be towards the development and growth of the human species. We thus, live in a world, where democracy has been the only song that people sing, yet conditions and situations have defiled improvement. People generally, are beginning to learn new arts of living since the little that is being provided by the various

governments for them, is only meant to silence the stomach temporary. This makes living on a daily basis to be herculean tasks for all and sundry, while those who are in control of power, permanently suffer from cupidity.

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