

**Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and
the Alliance of two Contradictory Social Realities: Suffering and Forgiveness**

SILUE Lèfara
Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny

Abstract: In Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, suffering is regarded as a punishment nature befalls on Man. In the text, suffering is revealed through Makhaya Maseko's exile, the ecological cataclysm of Golema Mmidi and the death of Paulina's child. Bessie Head uses mechanisms such as government institution of justice, tribal law and popular revolt as a means for solving social antagonisms. Each trial ends by forgiveness and reconciliation, which are the very ingredients of lasting peace. In so doing, Bessie Head promotes justice, brotherhood, solidarity and reconciliation in her text.

Key-words: anguish, pain, forgiveness, reconciliation, suffering, trauma.

Résumé: Dans le roman de Bessie Head, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, la souffrance est perçue comme une punition que la nature impose à l'homme. Dans le texte, la souffrance se manifeste à travers l'exil de Makaya Maseko, le cataclysme écologique de Golema Mmidi et la mort de l'enfant de Paulina. Bessie Head se sert des mécanismes comme de l'institution judiciaire étatique (la police), le droit tribal et la révolte populaire pour régler les antagonismes sociaux. Chaque procès se termine par le pardon et la réconciliation qui sont les véritables ingrédients de la paix durable. Se faisant, Bessie Head prône la justice, la fraternité, la solidarité et la réconciliation dans son texte.

Mots-clés: angoisse, douleur, pardon, réconciliation, souffrance, traumatisme.

Introduction

In Bessie Head's first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), suffering and forgiveness are two contradictory social realities. These two entities are dialectical because they oppose and complete each other to give a true significance to "social action" (Rocher, 1968, p.68). As such, suffering and pain are interrelated. In Blanchot's (1980) view "suffering suffers from being innocent [...] It wants to be blamed to alleviate itself. But its inner passivity hides it from any fault" (70, translation mine). Furthermore, social life demands the forgetfulness of the mistakes and the crimes committed by the members of a social group. In this sense, the victims must accept the forgiveness of their wrongdoers for the maintenance of peace. As such, he who confesses his crimes and apologizes to the victims deserves to be apologized. For this reason, Paul Emile Littré in *Dictionnaire de la langue français* defines forgiveness as a "remission of a fault or an offense." (2007, 4847, translation mine). This clearly shows that justice and forgiveness are the prerequisites for a genuine reconciliation.

A man who suffers yearns for happiness or better living conditions. In this respect, happiness can be regarded as the satisfaction of man's desires. Happiness is also seen as a complete absence of physical and moral suffering for the body and the soul. In other words, human life is like a pendulum which oscillates from right to left, from suffering to plenitude, from pain to happiness. How does Bessie Head succeed in combining contradictory entities in her text? What is the ideology which underpins this combination of contradictory and complementary values? To answer these questions, our paper will be structured around three

basic points: The manifestations of suffering, the mechanism of conflicts settlement and the ideology of writing reconciliation and forgiveness. To reach our goal, we will lean on socio-criticism. According to Roger Fayolle, “every text carries the marks of the socio-historical conditions which presided over its production and its readings. Socio-criticism seeks to decipher these marks and also read in literary texts the ideological conflicts at different moments of the class struggle. (1979, 215, translation mine)

I- The Manifestations of Suffering

In Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*, suffering has many forms and is revealed in different ways. At this stage, our analysis will be based on some significant symbols whose decoding reveals suffering through exile, drought and death.

1-1-Exile as a Predicament

Here, exile is defined as a form of exclusion from society. It is also unsuitability with a system or social practice. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, exile is implicit in Makhaya’s journey. As such, the novel can be perceived as a representation of Bessie Head’s private life. According to Major (1984), “Writing is nothing but a project of self-consciousness or rather a consciousness which must deny itself in order to know itself” (244). Bessie Head uses Makhaya to account for her own life story. Makhaya is then the carrier of her anguish, sorrow and aspiration. Bessie Head chooses interior exile after being humiliated, tortured and deprived of her cultural identity by the Apartheid system. The interior exile is a voluntary exclusion from the community. Makhaya adopts this attitude in order to know himself and to better understand the world. In this way, Writing is a medium through which Makhaya exchanges with his community. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator depicts the psychological and the physical suffering of a fugitive, a South-African political activist known under the name of Makhaya Maseko who tries to cross the boundary to seek asylum in neighboring Botswana.

The little Barolong village swept right up to the border fence. One of the huts was built so close that a part of its circular wall touched the barbed-wire fencing. In this hut a man had been sitting since the early hours of dawn. He was waiting until dark when he would try to spring across the half-mile gap of no-man’s -land to the Botswana border fence and then on to whatever illusion of freedom lay ahead. [...] Every half hour the patrol van of the South African border police sped past with sirens wailing, and this caused an unpleasant sensation in his stomach. I’ll soon have a stomach-ache if I go on like this, he thought. His nerves weren’t so good, too easily jangled by the irritations of living. In fact, the inner part of him was a jumble of chaotic discord, very much belied by his outer air of calm, lonely self-containment. The only way you could sense this inner discord was through a trick he had of slightly averting his face as though no man was his brother or worth of trust. [...] There was the chatter of women’s voices, and the man in the hut was briefly surprised that a whole village could live in the wail of those sirens that had tied his stomach in such tight knots. (1-2)

In this excerpt, the small village of Barolong is regarded as a forwarding agency for South-African fugitives who want to illegally enter in Botswana to save their life. However, we notice that the route of the fugitive Makhaya is full of hindrances. Makhaya has to hide himself in a symbolic hut of Barolong to avoid the police and the spies of the Apartheid

regime. The description of this hut is significant because the fictional space of a literary text is the appropriate place where a certain ideology is revealed. This hut has a dialectical function because it is both a source of protection and suffering. The repeating noise of the fire alarm of the boundary police vehicle creates a serious pain of ulcer in Makhaya's stomach. Consequently, the hut is in a way a jail for Makhaya. In this view, the owner of the hut locks the fugitive Makhaya in this symbolic hut with no water and no food. The lack of space in the hut is also another source of pain and suffering for the hero. He remains jammed in the hut all day long as if an invisible hand has tied him on the ground. All this pain and suffering partake in his psychological and physical unbalance. The suffering Makhaya overcomes in Barolong is a forerunner sign of his future predicament in Golema Mmidi where Matenge considers him as a criminal.

Matenge swung around furiously on his brother. 'Either I go or the refugee goes', he said. 'How can people feel safe with a criminal and murderer in their midst? That is what the story says; he is a criminal and murderer who walks around with bombs in his pocket. Why should Gilbert take in such a man unless it is his intention to murder me? There is no other reason why Gilbert should associate with a murderer. He is doing nothing at the farm' (54).

This paragraph shows Chief Matenge as the embodiment of the evil forces which fight against Gilbert's farming revolution. Chief Matenge aims at waging war against Gilbert and his allies. Chief Matenge plainly knows that the new reform of agriculture is going to uproot the Establishment of Golema Mmidi. Therefore, he looks down Makhaya and he even treats him as the worst enemy of the village. Chief Matenge's attitude is meant to spoil the reputation of the reformists fictionalized by Gilbert and Makhaya. Implicitly, the verbal violence of Chief Matenge against Makhaya reveals that the British agricultural engineer (Gilbert) collaborates with a criminal or a saboteur. Makhaya's presence seriously frightens the social peace and the social security of Golema Mmidi. However, he succeeds in integrating the community of Golema Mmidi after overcoming several hindrances. Makhaya suffers in his inner part because he experiences again the same causes of tribalism, xenophobia and suspicion which compel him to flee from South-Africa.

His reasons for leaving [South-Africa] were simple: he could not marry and have children in a country where black men were called 'boy' and 'dog' and 'Kaffir'. The continent of Africa was vast without end and he simply felt like moving out of a part of it that was mentally and spiritually dead through the constant perpetuation of false beliefs. [...] He simply wanted a country to love and chose the first thing at hand. But whatever it was, he simply and silently decided that all this (11)

Makhaya is traumatized by tribalism and ill-treatment he endured in South-Africa. Consequently, he is in quest of an asylum where the ruling class treats the oppressed with dignity and respect. Beyond the behavior of Chief Matenge, Makhaya sees the shadow of an advocator of tribalism. Makhaya believes that South-African leaders and Botswana ones join together in a totalitarian system meant to keep the poor in squalor. Furthermore, Makhaya is spied and followed in all his different movements by the intelligent officers of the apartheid system. In this sense, Botswana's police know everything about Makhaya. When he turns to the police to announce his coming to the authorities of Botswana, he is astonished to see the police agent friendly calling him by his full name:

‘In fact, I was just about to come and pick you up. Sit down, Mr Makhaya Maseko’ ‘How do you know my name?’ Makhaya asked, startled. ‘I know everything’ he said coolly. ‘I also want to impress you, so that you don’t start any of your funny tricks around here. You may think this country is a backwater, but we have the most efficient intelligence service in Southern Africa. We also read the newspapers.’ He bent down and picked up a newspaper that had been carelessly flung on the floor. Makhaya’s picture was on the front page under a headline: DANGEROUS SABOTEUR FLEES BANNING ORDER. I’m not dangerous and I’m not a saboteur’, he said, annoyed. ‘I know,’ the officer said. ‘You just dream about it. You just walk about with little pieces of paper describing how you’re going to blow everything up’. (14)

In the above paragraph, Makhaya is portrayed as a reformist or rather an activist of the fight against Apartheid. By implication, Botswana leaders take him for a consciousness raiser. As such, Makhaya is not allowed to lead any political activity in Botswana. His involvement in the politics of the country can bring about his repatriation and the confiscation of his residence permit. Makhaya is turned into the laughing stock of a ruling system deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of South-Africa and Botswana. Also, drought has a negative impact on Golema Mmidi as a whole. In this perspective, as a misfortune of shepherds, it will be scrutinized in the second section of our paper.

1-2-Drought as Misfortune for Shepherds

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, farming is the core of social life. The social stratification of labor enables Motswana society to work in a proper way. According to Motswana tradition, farming is dedicated to women: “The women were the traditional tillers of the earth, not the men” (31). On the contrary, stock breeding is strictly reserved to men. In this respect, the Motswana man without cattle is compared to a dead man among the living: “A Motswana without any cattle at all might as well be dead” (148). As it can be seen, there is interdependence between the shepherd and his cattle. In the narrative, the men of Golema Mmidi live in the bush with their cattle. They move from place to place to graze their animals. The narrator explains:

If there was no food or water for a man, then there was nothing for his cattle either. Both were as close to each other as breathing, and it had never been regarded as strange that a man and his cattle lived the same life. No doubt the cattlemen who lived in the lonely, isolated cattle posts at first stared in disbelief when their cattle began dropping dead before their very eyes. There were always droughts. There had been many in each man’s lifetime, but never in the memory of man had the cattle dropped dead. By the time the men panicked, hundreds and thousands of cattle had died. (154)

Cattle breeding, indeed, creates family crisis in Golema Mmidi. In the plot, the chief of the family who happens to be shepherd is always far away. He leaves his family and stays with his cattle in the bush. As a consequence, he tramples down the family life to the detriment of his cattle. In this case, women do not know the affection and the tenderness of their husbands. The married woman lives like single one. She always manages as she can to satisfy her sexual appetite during the long and regular absence of her husband. Through this adulterated image of the Motswana woman, the reader notes the frailty of women. This frailty of women is clearly explained by the narrator: “It caused no mental breakdown and was free and casual, each woman having six or seven lovers, including a husband as well” (101). As seen in the narrative, the long absence of men is the main source of the sexual instability of

women. In this sense, women's daily life of is made of anguish, pain and sorrow. In the intrigue, women play men and women roles. They take care of the houses and work hard to feed their children. The cattle are in certain way shepherds' best friends. However, a long drought turns the savannah into a desert and kills the majority of the animals. The narrator relates the disaster caused by this situation as followed:

It was just as though everything was about to die. The small brown birds had deserted the bush, and the bush itself no longer supplied the coverage and protection for the secret activities of the scarlet and golden birds. Here and there, faint patches of green clung to the topmost branches of tall thorn trees, but not a green thing survived near the sun-baked earth. The sky had lost that dense blue look of the winter days and spread itself out into a whitish film, through which the sun poured out molten heat in pulsating waves from dawn to dusk. In this desolation the vultures reigned supreme. They gathered on the ground in huge flocks of sixty to a hundred and held important discussions in hoarse, rough voices and flapped their long, sloppy brown feather in imperious indignation. They could afford to be imperious, indignant and important, for they were to be a burial society for over six hundred thousand cattle. (167)

The climatic change brings about a dreadful drought which destroys the cattle of Golema Mmidi. The death of the cattle symbolizes the partial death of the shepherd. In the text, the shepherd and his animals have a common destiny. The disaster is so hard that an atmosphere of mourning hovers over "the fictional representation of the world" (Westphal, 2007, 141) epitomized by Golema Mmidi. The drawbacks of the dryness deeply affect the collective consciousness of Golema Mmidi. Men seem to lose a terrible fight against the hazards of climate. Consequently, all the shepherds return home where family support and comfort await them. Their misfortune is the source of the vultures' happiness. While men cry and mourn their dead cattle, vultures gather to feed themselves on the dead bodies of the animals scatter all over the bush. The crisis of cattle suddenly becomes an economic and social crisis. The drought has changed Golema Mmidi into a fractured universe in quest of its cultural identity. The course of life is totally disturbed because nothing works like before.

Disaster had indeed struck down swiftly on their small world, and each man sat in a mountain of aloof reserves to prevent his fellow from starting the sorrowful tale: 'My friend, I had two hundred cattle just yesterday. Out of this, one hundred and twenty have died. I have just counted the beats. I now have eighty'. They had seen the bush strewn with dead cattle on their way home. (155)

This passage is a lament of the hopeless shepherds. The drought has transformed their dreams of a "better tomorrow" into a nightmare. The situation is alarming because the shepherds are bound to start anew cattle breeding. But this new departure without the support of government got worsened the situation. Furthermore, the traditional method of cattle breeding is in jeopardy since the arrival of Gilbert and his reform project of the agricultural sector of the village. The example of the well-known shepherd who possessed two hundreds beats before the drought and who only owns eighty-four beats after the disaster shows the extent to which the drought is merciless in the rural zone. The fury of the dryness does not save the shepherds themselves. And the discovery of the dead body of a small shepherd called Isaac in the bush reveals that the social disaster is at its peak. In this « season of anomy » (Soyinka, 1994), the scale of values and norms rapidly change and become indefinable (Zima, 2000, 20, translation mine). As a result, the sacred is trampled down and immorality becomes

a social norm or a way of living. This explains why the corpse of Isaac is abandoned in the bush for vultures as food.

He pushed open the door and looked in. There were only a heap of clean, white bones lying on the floor. They lay in a curled, cramped position with the bones of the hands curved inward. The white ants and maggots had vied with each other to clear all the flesh off the little boy. And Makhaya stood there so silent and still, absorbing this terrible sight, confused and angry that there was only this dead, unanswering silence in his heart, as though he had only expected to see such sights. [...] All these rotten customs are killing us. (170)

The environmental disaster influences the fictional space of Golema Mmidi as a whole. Shepherds and farmers are all victims of the ecological cataclysm. The death of Paulina's child is a form of expression of women's suffering. Paulina deeply suffers because she has lost her sole child. She then has to cope with the loss of her child and the disappearance of her cattle. The theme of suffering is predominant in Bessie Head's text. From this perspective, the analysis of the mechanisms of conflicts' settlement will be the focal point of the next step of our paper.

II-Mechanisms of Conflicts' Settlement

Bessie Head's narrator uses several means to solve social crisis. Therefore, the analysis of government institution of justice, Sekoto's court of justice and popular resistance will be the central points of this part.

2-1- Government Institution of Justice

The drought has turned the forest into a vast desert. A very small number of Cattle overcome this terrible cataclysm. As a result, all the shepherds return home empty-handed. However, Paulina realizes that her son is the only shepherd who remains in the bush. She thinks that the cooperative of shepherds hides something from her about her son. Paulina sets out in quest of truth. She meets the oldest shepherd of Golema Mmidi to better understand the situation.

Please spare a moment, Rra Rankoane, she said. 'I want to ask you something'. Rankoane detached himself from the group and walked towards her with his angry-looking expression. Rankoane was always rude and offhand to women. What is it? he asked impatiently. 'Your cattle post i near mine' Paulina said. 'Why didn't you persuade my son to come home with you? What's the good of him staying in the bush when there is no water and the cattle are dying?' A queer, guarded look crept into Rankoane's eyes. "So your son has not come home, Paulina Sebeso?" he asked quietly. 'I don't understand you, Rankoane,' he said, widely. 'What are you saying? The man shrugged. He had more than enough troubles to bear. His whole livelihood had almost vanished before his very eyes. 'I told your son to go home two weeks ago,' he said. 'I expected him to be here, that's why I did not stop at your cattle post today.' (157-158)

In his discourse, Rankoane feels guilty and asserts that he asked Isaac, Paulina's child, to return home two weeks ago. The dean Rankoane is betrayed by his own words. As the reader can notice, he knew the ailment of the young Isacc. But he did not find it necessary to inform the family of the lad. From then on, the responsibility of Rankoane is engaged in the

sudden death of Isaac. The implicit of his words reveals that Paulina's child died of tuberculosis.

'I don't know what's wrong with me, Uncle, the boy had said. I am coughing up blood every day.' But Rankoane knew at one glance what was wrong. Tuberculosis was the major killer in the country, and the small boy with his red feverish eyes was seriously ill with it. Also, the diet they were eating now, plain porridge with salt and water and no milk, must have brought the boy's ailment to a serious stage. [...] 'We are all coughing 'he said. The reason why? There is too much dust and no rain to settle it. Dust in the lungs causes one to cough up blood. The one way to cure it is by drinking beer, but since you are young and cannot drink the beer you must go home tomorrow with the cattle and your mother will take you to hospital. (158)

In the text, tuberculosis is one of the drawbacks of the severe drought. The fictional universe of Golema Mmidi is threatened by an epidemic of tuberculosis. This epidemic greatly increases the rate of the infant mortality. "The hospitals were full of children who died in the posture of the little boy in the hut, their knees cramped up to their chains, their bony fingers curled into their plans like steel claws" (175). The audition of Rankoane is followed by a police inquiry. The intervention of the police explains that Botswana is a country moving towards democracy. The police office stands for government institution of justice. Contrary to South-Africa, Makhaya realizes that Golema Mmidi is a peaceful place where black people live as brothers. As such, Paulina cannot avenge herself. The people of Golema Mmidi refer to the national police to solve their social conflicts:

We don't know what has caused the death of the child, my friend', he said. 'So, we will have to call the police. Could you please take my wife home and notify the police at the same time? I will remain behind.' These few simple words put new life into Gilbert. He nodded briefly and turned the car round, and he and Paulina drove back in the direction of Golema Mmidi. Makhaya was left alone with the vultures. Surrounded by tragedy and seat in the shade of ramshackle mud hut in the Botswana bush, he began to see himself. (171)

In this passage, the reader realizes that Gilbert comes back to the cattle post with a police officer George Appleby-Smith and a doctor in the afternoon. The post mortem examination reveals that the young shepherd died of malnutrition and not tuberculosis as Rankoane mentioned it before. "I'd say the poor little fellow died of malnutrition. [...] The hospitals were full of children who died in the posture of the little boy in the hut" (175). After the revelation of the truth, Makhaya burns the remaining of the bones of Isaac's corpse. Then, he keeps the ash of the bones in a bottle. As soon as they officially announce the death of Isaac, all the inhabitants of Golema Mmidi meet together in Paulina's compound to comfort her. Sekoto's court of justice is the second instrument used in the text to settle down conflicts.

2-2- Sekoto's Court of Justice

Sekoto's court of justice is a symbolic traditional institution of justice which plays a significant role in the narrative. The reference to this traditional court shows that Golema Mmidi is different from South-Africa. Golema Mmidi properly works thanks to the respect of its tribal law. Sekoto's court of justice implicitly and dramatically expresses different crises and contradictions which are linked to the behavior of the protagonists. In other words, this court of justice is the privileged place of the dramatization and the settlement of social

antagonisms. Chief Sekoto presides over the Supreme Court. No villager is beyond the traditional law. Furthermore, any transgression or violation of the traditional law is severely punished. The trial of Bodibeng's woman known under the name of Mma-Baloi is a good illustration:

The case had been brought in from one of the outlying villages, call Bodibeng, and the cause of its rowdiness was that the whole village of Bodibeng had turned up to witness the trial. A certain old woman of the village, named Mma-Baloi, was charged with allegedly practicing witchcraft, and so certain were the villagers of her guilt that they frequently forgot themselves and burst out into loud chatter and had to be brought to order by the president of the court with threats of fines. (49)

A testimony reveals that the defendant Mma-Baloi is a mysterious and discreet woman who lives outside the community of Bodibeng. As such, she is not involved in the gossip of the village women. Mma Baloi is also regarded as a kind woman who largely opens the door of her hut to strangers from neighboring villagers. She is a good symbol of hospitality and solidarity. Despite her kindness, she is seen in the village as a sorceress. She is regarded as the main cause of the rampant infant mortality. The villagers bring proceedings against Mma Baloi because they want justice to be done. A second testimony accuses her of killing of a foreign woman in the village the previous week. Moreover, Mma Baloi escapes from popular condemnation thanks to a quick intervention of the police. She pleads not guilty:

'Sir, I am no witch', said the quavering old voice. 'Even though I am called the mother of the witches, I am no witch. Long ago I was taught by the people who live in the bush how to cure ailments with herbs and that is my business.' She pointed a shaking finger at a bag placed near her. 'I would like to see the contents of the bag'. Chief Sekoto said with a great show of interest. The bag was brought to him and its contents tipped out on the ground. (50)

Chief Sekoto thoroughly examines the content of Mma Baloi's bag. This deliberate attitude creates confusion in the mind of her opponents. Mma Baloi rejects all the different accusations against her:

About the deaths of the children of which I am accused, I know nothing, sir', She said. 'About the young woman who died in my home last Saturday, I am also innocent. The young woman came to me on recommendation, being grievously ill. We were discussing the ailment when she fell dead at my feet. Never has such a thing occurred before, and this caused me to lose my mind and run out of the house' (51)

As Chief Sekoto wants justice to be done, he uses all the means to reveal truth. He sends his messenger and his car driver to Bodibeng to collect the result of the mortem examination. At noon, the car driver and his messenger come back with the doctor of Bodibeng's hospital. The result of the mortem examination is so clear. According to the pathologist, Mma-Baloi has nothing to do with the misfortune which befalls on Bodibeng. The narrator talks about the increase of death in Bodibeng as followed:

There had been a surprising number of child deaths in the village off Bodibeng, and death in each case had been due to pneumonia; and yes, he said, he had performed a postmortem on the body of a young woman last Saturday afternoon. The young woman had died of a septic womb due to having procured an abortion with a hooked

and unsterilized instrument. He would say that the septic condition of the womb had been of three months' duration. (52)

This extract shows the victory of Mma Baloi over her opponents. The conspiracy of the community against the individual is discovered before the law. Thus, Chief Sekoto revolts against the malice of the inhabitants of Bodibeng. He even regards them as the fools who willingly arrange the murder of a poor woman. The verdict is very fair in the sense that it saves Mma Baloi from death penalty. As revealed in the narrative, the villagers are responsible for the rampant epidemic of the village. Chief Sekoto fines all the inhabitants of Bodibeng. Each villager is bound to bring a she-goat to the royal compound. In this logic, the narrator utters the punishment of the people of Bodibeng in the following way: "The fault is all with you, and because of this I fine each household of Bodibeng one beast. From the money that arises out of the sale of these beasts, each household is to purchase warm clothing for the children [...] (52)." After punishing Bodibeng, Chief Sekoto moves towards the old Mma Baloi. His face lets appear kindness and compassion for the poor woman. He recognizes the victory of Mma Baloi over her oppressors. He then uses this opportunity to reconcile the two parties. He yearns for a lasting peace in Bodibeng. Consequently, he offers political asylum to Mma Baloi in the royal palace to save her from hatred and malice:

'As for you, mother,' he said, 'I cannot allow you to go and live once more among the people of Bodibeng. It is only hatred that the people of Bodibeng feel for you, and this has driven them out of their minds. As hatred never dies, who knows what evil they will not plot against you? I have a large house, and you are welcome to the protection it offers. Besides, I suffer from an ailment for which I am always given penicillin injections at the hospital. Now I am tired of the penicillin injections and perhaps your good herbs may serve to cure me of my troubles'. (52-53).

Chief Sekoto offers shelter to Mma-Baloi because he wants her to be far from the zone of tension which Bodibeng epitomizes in the text. Mma-Baloi's confinement in the royal palace enables the village to live in harmony and unity. Through his generosity, Chief Sekoto wants to befriend with Mma-Baloi. In this sense, he recruits Mma-Baloi in his cabinet as his personal traditional healer. The social crisis of Bodibeng creates a close relationship between Chief Sekoto and Mma-Baloi. Beyond this rapprochement of the two characters lies the reconciliation of two contradictory social classes: the bourgeoisie incarnated by Chief Sekoto and the proletariat embodied by Mma-Baloi. The text highlights the interdependence between the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed. Through the meeting of these characters, the narrator's goal is to reconcile tradition and modernity: "Now I am tired of the penicillin injections and perhaps your goods herbs may serve to cure me of my troubles" (53). These words of Chief Sekoto largely open the door to dialogue between African culture and western one in the plot. In Bessie Head's novel, the narrator also uses the people as a tool to settle down social conflicts.

2-3-The Revolt of the People as a Route of Suicide

Bessie Head often refers to the people to solve social antagonisms. Chief Matenge sues Paulina because of an alleged offence against the Establishment of Golema Mmidi. In effect, he is angry because Paulina personally does not inform him about the death of her child Isaac. He then regards Paulina's attitude as a questioning of his authority. Chief Matenge wants Paulina to know that he is the one who presides over the destiny of Golema Mmidi. For this reason, he launches an arrest warrant against her in order to punish her:

Paulina rushed about flustered and breathless for five minutes until the two men walked out of the yard. Then she bent down, poured the remainder of the bath into a basin, picked it up, and was about to enter the hut to wash when, to her amazement, she saw a silent figure crouched down near the entrance of the yard. It was one of Matenge's servants. 'Good-day, friend,' she said apprehensively. 'What do you need? The servant looked up a sly grin on her servile face. 'I am sent to bring you to court. The case has a case.' 'I?' Paulina said, stupefied. 'But what have I done? [...] But when she came out the servant was still there, crouched down, and she began to be afraid, wondering what she had done to offend Matenge. And all she could think of was that she had forgotten to report the death of her son to the chief. It was a custom but surely a court case could not be made out of forgetfulness? (182-183)

The perusal of the above passage describes the inhumanity character of Chief who does not give a damn to the suffering of his people. He returns himself into the village destroyer instead of protecting it. This is why he wants to arrest Paulina. Moreover, the six elders who preside over Golema Mmidi's court of justice do not understand Chief Matenge's behavior. The contempt of Chief Matenge vis-à-vis the villagers will cause the downfall of his dictatorial regime. As such, all the inhabitants of Golema Mmidi set out to back up Paulina in her fight against the dictator chief.

The news travelled swiftly from hut to hut, and men and women immediately set down their chores for the day and made their way to the village centre. They were even excited in a silent way as though they had known this day would arrive when they would all face their persecutor of many years. They had been straining together in one direction for years, and Matenge had been straining in the opposite direction, always pulling them down. Because of this they had politely avoided him, but today they wanted to see his face when their cattle were dying while his cattle were safe. [...] They wanted him to know they were not after his Chevrolet or big house. [...] They would even be able to tolerate ten thousand Matenges, but the disagreement between him and them was that he said no, no, no, to everything they wanted to do. [...] Very well then, the whole village, as one man, would go and die in the bush if that was all a tyrant wanted of them. If you said no, no, no, and kept your claws in a people's heart, what else did you want but that they should all die? You are so unreasonable. (184-185)

The arrest warrant that Chief Matenge launches against Paulina becomes an arrest warrant against the community of Golema Mmidi. In this way, Paulina's persecution is turned into a collective one. Golema Mmidi is ready to go and sojourn with Paulina in the cells of Chief Matenge's prison. The unusual demonstration of Golema Mmidi's people is an expression of a yearning for a political change. The case of Paulina breaks into pieces the regime of Chief Matenge. Chief Matenge wants to punish his people, but he is finally punished by the same people. As revealed in the text, his palace is taken hostage by the demonstrators of Golema Mmidi. His housewives feel the end of his reign and leave him alone fleeing from the behind door to join the demonstrators as illustrated in this passage:

Was he crying now because, for the first time in his life, he was feeling what it must be like to face a tomorrow without any future? That was what those upturned faces meant. He would have to go away. They weren't going to tolerate a man like him any longer because he would not give way nor understand that they needed co-operation from the man at the top to whom everyone had to go for permission to progress. [...]

The end of it was that Matenge had to barricade himself up, not because the villagers were about to rise up and tear him to shreds, but because he was an evil pervert and knew it. Only you could not understand why a man like that stood there crying like a forlorn and lonely child. (186)

The environment of Goloma Mmidi also participates in the demonstrations against Chief Matenge. The symbolic participation of the universe is seen through the gathering of vultures which happily hover above Golema Mmidi. Through this sign, one sees the revolt of nature against Chief Matenge. Furthermore, the three strangers: Gilbert, Makhaya and the permit man realize the general revolt against Chief Matenge: "Then they walked along the footpaths, passed the deserted huts with rising alarm. No Paulina. No Maria. And even the farm workers had left off their duties" (187). Makhaya realizes that the prevailing atmosphere is different from the village's usual ambiance. In this respect, Gilbert asks a question to better to understand the situation: "What's happening here, people?" (187). Dinorego gives him a straightforward answer, saying "we want Chief Matenge to come out of his hiding place" (187). Makhaya tries to save Chief Matenge. He breaks into the palace and finds the dead body of Chief Matenge balancing in the air like a death leaf. Chief Matenge does not want to face the new social order of Goloma Mmidi so he takes his own life. Chief Matenge's suicide epitomizes of the downfall of an individual against his community.

A moment later they heard a tremendous crash as Makhaya broke down the door. Then a long silence. The villagers all rose and climbed the steep stairway. These in the forefront stood looking silently for a while into the big dining room, not at the luxurious couches, carpets and high-backed kingly chair, but at the dead, still body hanging from a rafter. [...] 'There's been some trouble here today', he continued on the phone. 'I don't know the details, but the whole village is here'. 'Okay, cut down the body. I'll be there in about ten minutes', and Makhaya heard the man at the other end slam down the phone. (187-188)

The end of Matenge's ruling system is tragic because he kills himself. He could accept his political failure and negotiate with the leaders of the revolution. He dies in humiliation like Okonkwo, the main protagonist of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). These two problematic characters commit suicide to avoid new political order. Chief Sekoto considers the fatal death of his brother as his own funeral. Chief Matenge's political failure is also Chief Sekoto's one. In this sense, Chief Sekoto mystifies the death of Matenge, creating confusion in the mind of the inhabitants: "Matenge had died of a heart attack" (189). Chief Matenge's sudden death symbolizes the beginning of a new era. It reinforces freedom, brotherhood and solidarity in the village. This situation enables every villager to be in harmony with himself and his environment. In this view, the ideology of writing reconciliation and forgiveness will be examined in the last part of our study.

III- The Ideology of Writing Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Bessie Head's writing is one of self-revelation. She uses the text as a pretext to castigate and denounce the evils of the Apartheid system which turns the hero Makhaya into a stateless character. In other words, Makhaya is a "Child of two Worlds" (Mugo, 1967): South-Africa and Botswana. But he has no citizenship. *When Rain Clouds Gather* is then a writing of sincerity and truth. The narrative is the private life experience of the protagonist. Beyond the revelation of Makhaya's intimate life, one reads Bessie Head's personal life story. Consequently, the narrative becomes a medium which permits Makhaya to talk to his soul and

to understand the world. The novelist also uses the narrative to reconcile man and his alter ego, self and the others, the poor and the rich. In this perspective, the unity of Golema Mmidi's people is perceived as the powerful weapon which destroys Matenge's system:

People were being drawn closer and closer to each other as brothers, and once you looked on the other man as your brother, you could not hear that he should want for anything or live in darkness. Maybe he knew nothing about this because this revolution belonged to young people like Gilbert and Makhaya. (190)

It appears that suffering and humiliation compel Golema Mmidi's people to get united. Unity, mutual respect and brotherhood constitute the source of the success of the proletariat in its fight against the bourgeoisie at the end of the novel. Chief Matenge's suicide is a symbol which the reader needs to decipher in order to understand the quintessence of Bessie Head's writing technique. Chief Matenge's death facilitates the implementation of the new reform of agriculture. As a consequence, women and men are all involved in the creation of farming cooperatives. The increase of which impels Gilbert to dream of a developed and wealthy Golema Mmidi.

He liked the idea that the whole of Golema Mmidi would be full of future millionaires. It blended in with his own dreams about Africa because he could not see it other than as a continent of future millionaires, which would compensate for all the centuries of browbeating, hatred, humiliation, and worldwide derision that had been directed to the person of the African man. And communal systems of development which imposed co-operation and sharing of wealth were much better than the dog-eat-dog policies, take-over bids, and grab-what-you-can of big finance. Therefore, in Makhaya's mind, the poverty and tribalism of Africa were a blessing if people could develop sharing everything with each other. (164)

Through this passage Bessie Head promotes African unity. However, this unity cannot be a reality without a true reconciliation and forgiveness. The text is then an invitation to tolerance, forgiveness, brotherhood and togetherness. Bessie Head also dreams of a democratic and united African society where women and men, Blacks and Whites will have the same rights and duties. Furthermore, the writing of exile must be read as a manifestation of the inward pain of the exile. It is also seen as a kind of therapy which releases the neurotic Makhaya from his psychological trauma. As Miraux (2007) asserts, Bessie Head's writing is meant for "self-examination" and "memory duty" (23). Through the successful social integration of Makhaya in Golema Mmidi, the novelist urges African people to experience the squalor of the exiles. As such, the text is a call for solidarity, sharing and dialogue among cultures. The implicit of the text reveals that cultural cohabitation is the backbone of the development of the new African society. In this view, African people must select the positive elements from African and European cultures to create a new African cultural identity based on love, reciprocity, tenderness and brotherhood.

Conclusion

At the end of this study, we realize that Bessie Head's novel is a satire of South-African Apartheid regime. The writer uses Makhaya's caricature to lay bare the squalor, the suffering and the pain of South-African refugees in their asylum. In the text, African refugee is looked down in his asylum. He is seen as a spoilsport, a political activist or a criminal. Despite humiliation, frustration and hatred Makhaya succeeds in integrating the fictionalized

society of Golema Mmidi. In addition, Makhaya actively works with Gilbert to reform Golema Mmidi's agricultural sector. Makhaya's contribution to the improvement tobacco farming can be regarded as a form of reconciliation between natives and non-natives. Bessie Head turns her novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* into a fair fictionalized court. The settlement of social antagonisms usually ends by the acknowledgement of the committed crimes and forgiveness. Therefore, Bessie Head's writing is viewed as a writing of reconciliation and forgiveness. Her yearning for African unity will become a chimera without love, solidarity, togetherness and brotherhood.

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