Political Oppression, Social Injustice and Socio-Economic Dilemmas in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

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Abstract:
This study examines the overwhelming difficulties of political oppression, social injustice and systemic socio-economic dilemmas in Bessie Head's ***A Question of Power***. Among the objectives of this investigation is to probe into the crushing impacts of multifaceted inequalities on the marginalised female characters in apartheid-era Southern African sub-region. Most past studies on the novel often isolate the protagonist's (Elizabeth's) psychological breakdown viewing it as a mere private or clinical mental collapse. They ignored how state-established socio-economic predicaments, clandestine political brutality and post-colonial social inequality structurally engender, reflect and exacerbate her mental illness. These critiques centre on racial concerns and gender intolerance, de-emphasising the spate of local economic deprivation and poverty, and community-level economic dependency in Botswana. One justification for this reading is the need to bridge the gap between systemic socio-political analysis and mental interiority. It re-examines the systemic ordeals and gendered problems they persist even outside formal apartheid borders, demonstrating that autonomy from South Africa is not synonymous with freedom from entrenched systemic social inequality. Conducted through a Postcolonial Feminist Framework enhanced by Trauma and Psychoanalytic Theory, it exposes how external socio-economic realities and oppressive power champion internal crisis resulting into psychological breakdown and human psychosis. The study concludes that the protagonist's gradual crash into "madness" expressly reflects the systemic pains of inhumanity which apartheid represents. Elizabeth is the symbol of millions of traumatised individuals who witnessed the complicated gender subjugation, social injustice, economic displacement and other lethal crises associated with the racial incubus of apartheid and patriarchal domination in southern Africa. The novel is a poignant representation of how racism, gender and exile dovetail into social antagonism, alienation and the ultimate quest for self-determination, directed against colonial establishment and patriarchal repression. It contributes immensely to scholarship on Head's *A Question of Power*, by exposing the vicious cycle of inhumanity and systemic social bigotry against oppressed females along with renewed hope narrative of the return to nature, land and agricultural proficiency in post-colonial African world.
Keywords: Apartheid, political oppression, socio-economic dilemmas, *gender,* social justice

Introduction

The prose work, *A Question of Power*, is another significant and profound literary output of Bessie Head. It relates her deep concern with the harrowing realities of exile, displacement and the turbulent socio-political atmosphere of the southern African sub-region. The artist exploits the emotional torments suffered by Elizabeth, its protagonist, as the narrative blueprint for the exploration of this thematic pre-occupation. A semi-autobiographical novel by Bessie Head, it presents a profound and sensitive critique on the barbaric racial doctrine and its systemic political oppression, racial segregation as well as the socio-economic and patriarchal traumas recorded during the apartheid-era South Africa and postcolonial Botswana. *A Question of Power* remains fundamental to contemporary Postcolonial scholarship, as a vivid exposition of socio-political domination, systemic racialist and gendered bigotry, psychosomatic colonisation and identity crisis. Many of the previous studies on the novel frequently viewed the psychological breakdown experienced by Elizabeth, the protagonist, as personal, clinical psychological incident. These appraisals which centre on racial concerns and gender intolerance often de-emphasise the wave of state-entrenched political violence, socio-economic deprivation and poverty, community-level economic dependency in Botswana and other post-colonial disparities that mirror, reproduce and intensify such mental infirmity. The central focus of this research is an examination of how state-level socio-political forces and agents like colonialism, racism and patriarchy, infringe on the oppressed and marginalised person's consciousness in form of individual or micro-level wreckage.

Consequently, the general aim of the paper is to critically examine how the novel explores socio-economic displacement, emotional and structural degradations provoked by political oppression and the struggle for social justice. It demonstrates the place of the protagonist's hallucinatory "madness" as survivalist machinery in the face of imperialist ordeals. In other words, this underscores the life-and-death battle involving her inner reality in the face of the ruthless, poverty-stricken physical world, showing that social justice and autonomy are attainable despite mental siege by the architects of oppression. The study is guided by the following specific objectives: i) identify the socio-economic predicaments in the post-colonial Botswana world; ii) scrutinise racial and political repression in South Africa as sources of enduring ordeals for exiled subjects; iii) examine the protagonist's crash into madness as survivalist machinery in the face of patriarchal and imperialist ordeals and iv) analyse how the natural environment can be used as a machinery in overcoming state-entrenched nightmares.

The study goes beyond the usual concerns about suffering or hostility, to embrace the examination of certain hitherto overlooked intersectional dynamics that uncover new awareness on the import of the novel. These dynamics include how psychological infirmity overlaps explicitly with gendered manual jobs and economic deprivation in the text. There is also a mingling of Head's lesser-known essays and biographical letters in re-reading the political repression. The originality of this study hinges on its shift from existing scholarship and the shortfalls of its critical perspectives. Exposing some implicit gaps to be filled like contentions about domination, the reading posits that a shift to specific character analysis is vital to unearth the value of human interactions in depicting socio-economic symbols in the narrative. Hence, it argues that the definitive Botswana setting of the text is fundamental in showing new perceptions especially about land, labour and natural environment as means of healing, restoration of identity and human dignity in the face of state-sponsored dilemmas which are crucial to the appraisal of the novel.

Among other things, one justification for this study is the necessity to bridge the gap between mental interiority and systemic socio-economic-cum-political analysis. This reading re-evaluates the

protagonist's madness beyond the thesis of a private collapse, turning it into a wider socio-political denunciation. It is a dissection of the nightmares of complex post-colonial asylum in Botswana, represented by the inhuman experiences of the protagonist. It portrays both gendered disparity and socio-economic problems as they persist outside strict apartheid frontiers, showing that freedom from South Africa is not exactly the same with freedom from entrenched systemic societal disparity. The reading hinges on the premise that Elizabeth is emblematic of millions of traumatised individuals. These individuals witnessed the complex gender repression, socio-economic displacement injustice and other deadly calamities which define the racial incubus of apartheid and patriarchal domination in South Africa. However, the projected renewed hope outlook of the study is anchored on the narrative incorporation of land, agriculture and nature as counter-strategies in combating the narratives of colonialism, patriarchy and other dilemmas of Post-colonial Africa.

Theoretical Framework:

The study employs feminist research frame along with psychological theory. The purpose is to deconstruct the dialectic relationship involving systemic repression and private fight for self-autonomy. The enquiry relies on a Postcolonial Feminist Framework enhanced by Trauma and Psychoanalytic Theory. In aligning these theories into a logical framework for analysing the novel, the study places postcolonial feminism as a socio-political foundation exposing external oppression. It acts as the logical root probing how racialist and gendered bigotry and other national tools of repression interconnect under apartheid and post-independence locations and circumstances. It hence locates Elizabeth's torments in actual historical and communal episodes of abuse. Next, the trauma principle is used as the structural bridge in capturing emotional consequence of degradation. It is applied in depicting the anguish of continuous dislodgment and deprivation. It demonstrates the fracturing of the mind and its inescapable psychological pain through external socio-economic bigotry. The psychoanalytic theory is employed as the profound interior method to portray broken identity. Here, the wrecked psyche is exposed through notions such as the ego, the shadow and interior figures of power. The theory also clarifies how exterior tormenters transform into interior monsters in the mind of the protagonist, creating unimaginable terror. In the long run, the theories overlap in accounting for the analysis of the novel, enabling the reading to use them as intertwining conceptual devices. They aid in deducing how macro-level political repression and socio-economic dislodgment in apartheid South Africa and autonomous Botswana push into the psychological micro-cosmos of the female protagonist. Hence, external political brutality and social disparity possess the protagonist's psyche as subterranean psychological nightmare, fragmenting her identity through a dual burden of racialist and gendered bigotry.

For analytical effectiveness, Postcolonial Feminism, especially the "Double Colonization" model propagated by Petersen and Rutherford (1986, page 9), is combined with Crenshaw's concept of "Intersectionality" (1989, page 140). This framework will support the analysis of the protagonist's (Elizabeth) agony and deprivation, in three ways. First, the notion of "Double Colonization" covers political repression, by which Elizabeth suffers from both imperialist/apartheid power arrangement inherent in the political atmosphere of South Africa/Botswana and the indigenous patriarchy. The trauma of being subjugated as colonised subject and as a woman resulted in her psychological collapse. Second, considering social justice, the framework uses the notion of the Subaltern voice (Spivak's 1988, pages 283-308) framework and queries whether oppressed, "Third World Women" can actually have their voices attended to in the face of Western or patriarchal systems. This frame would aid in

evaluating the protagonist's efforts at reclaiming her reality in the face of overwhelming, repressive male ideologies, inflecting a quest for subjective agency and collective fairness.

Third, the frame supports the examination of Intersectional Oppression in the text. Projected by Crenshaw (1989, page 140), Intersectionality is a notion that addresses the interface of gender, race and class, in generating exclusive forms of bigotry. It is not surprising that the standing of the protagonist as an outcast/mixed-race woman, her state of destitution and her socio-economic penury in the village of Motabeng worsen her mental breakdown. The Trauma and Psychoanalytic Theory attributed to Frantz Fanon will also enhance the enquiry. The theorist clarifies in *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004, pages 181–250)) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008, pages 89–119) that political subjugation and systemic racial discrimination result into psychosis and overwhelming emotional injury to the dominated subjects. The frame associates colonial oppression, systemic racism and socio-economic displacement to harsh psychic breakdown. It will aid a logic account of Elizabeth's psychological collapse and revival, as her trudge of schizophrenia and startling hallucinations seen as symptoms of historical ordeal. Thus, these are exposed in Fanon's notions the internalisation of the brutality, horror, racial hierarchy and socio-economic degradation consequent upon the inhuman system of apartheid.

Perspectives on Previous Studies

Numerous works of criticism have been done on Head's novel, *A Question of Power*. Grouping these past studies in this review by their main ideas may be profitable to logical critical engagement with the scholars. A few groups identifiable based on critical perceptions include those who focus on psychopathological, psychological, and madness-centered critical concerns; works on psychological trauma, madness and power dynamics; those on psychological trauma, madness, and the internal/external struggle against oppression and power dynamics; and feminist, womanist, and gender-centered literary theories. The first group are scholars whose works concentrate on themes involving psychological breakdown of the protagonist Elizabeth. They examine the novel ordeal from both psychoanalytic and postcolonial theoretical frames. The delusions and schizophrenia suffered by the protagonist are often considered as deep extrasensory reaction to the repressions and brutalities of apartheid and exile.

Scholars within this group include Pearse (1983, pages 81–93); Veit-Wild (2006, page 131) and Tucker (2012, pages 40-51). Generally, these scholars dwell on the protagonist's mental disintegration, nightmares and awful emotional damage. They examine the duality inherent in man's life. This manifests in distorted lines involving certainty versus uncertainty, sanity versus madness, body versus mind, appearance versus reality. The researchers often scrutinise the novel using somatic trauma methodologies, psychoanalytic theory and political study codes. They also make attempts at expositing the circumstances leading to the mental collapse and toughness of the protagonist, hence decoding inner delusions of characters as reflections of systemic cruelty. They often dwell on how socio-political domination and extreme racial mechanisms like apartheid engender psychological misery and create horrible figures and demon-emblems as characters. Their main contributions include showing how the novel is a major critique on universal and brutal subjugation of humanity. They condemn apartheid legacy, thereby, provoking more gendered power struggles that leads to restoration of identity and dignity in figures like Elizabeth.

Despite their critical gains, the critical approaches of the group showed some distinct limits that involve some dangers of oversimplifying Head's intricate prose narrative. For instance, while Pearse's (1983,

pages 81-93) technique regards Elizabeth's hallucinations and mental crash as a textbook case of clinical madness, Veit-Wild (2006, page 131) speculates that the imaginary protagonist, Elizabeth, is an express portrait of Head herself, reducing the novel's range as a creative work of art. The biographical and clinical interpretation of the novel undermines the novelist's theoretical and political concerns about power. On the other hand, Tucker's (2012, pages 40-51) relative perspective on mythological and spiritual symbolic reading detaches from the narrative its unrefined, local and brutal political certainties of apartheid era along with post-colonial dislodgment which the novel depicts. The foregoing thesis, demonstrates that the works of these scholars missed some focal class and societal spotlights. The insights regarding material rank codes and systemic socio-economic hierarchies are lost to readings based purely on psychoanalytical, biographical and trauma-rooted frameworks. Such analyses are prone to viewing the psyche as an alternative for society, while ignoring collective economics.

Another cluster of researchers dwell on gender and patriarchal questions. Also categorised under the critical group focusing on African feminism, Womanism and gender-rooted literary theories, these critics include Ogunyemi (1985, pages 63-80) and Ibrahim (1996, page 172). Generally, these scholars dwell on how Black and African women writers perceive female identity, freedom and survival. The group also rejects Eurocentric feminist codes that do not take into account African women's unique historical, cultural or racial realities. The critics avow that Head stresses how patriarchal and societal standards confine female agency. One other contribution is their re-definition of Black Womanism, boosting the dynamics of contemporary Black female fiction and using the African female self-knowledge or skills as unique literary devices. Thus, they encouraged the exposition of domineering attitudes of characters that are emblems of male control or allegories for patriarchal supremacy. Moreover, they stressed patriarchal conversation, examining cultural taboos as means of control over female sexuality in African cultural setting. They read see political schemes of control in personal cruelty, while recognising the role of systemic control inspiring women's fight to reclaim identity and freedom. However, part of the limitations in the arguments of these scholars often manifested in the use of inflexible socio-political analytical standards. Such frameworks as womanism or postcolonial feminist theory were too daring and over-determine ideological expectations from an extremely interior text like Head's novel. The methods, thus, show dangers reducing the crude veracity of medical pain and obsession or assuming deliberate political resistance. In framing power dynamics mainly around psychological taboos and sexual category collaboration, this group of critics overlook vital materialist positions of systemic social class and state-powered violence that shape character hostility.

There are other critics of the novel concentrate on what they perceive as the universal questions of the struggle between good and evil. Among their main ideas is the analysis of how personal delusions, mental disintegration and inner psychic torments of the protagonist mirror exterior socio-political anxieties. There is also a conscious connection apartheid and isolation, characters are emblematic as forces of good and evil where dominant personalities like Dan and Sello are seen as internal expression of political and patriarchal supremacy. Thus, they consider the socio-economic and political horrifying encounters of apartheid as a general, cosmological battle involving good and evil. Such critics include Ravenscroft (1976, pages 174-186); and Opara (2017, pages 529-538). This group considers the novel as an internal, cosmic arena where the cruel machinery of South African apartheid progresses as a psychological and spiritual war connecting unlimited good and evil. Using contextual, biographical and thematic methods, these scholars review external socio-political horror of apartheid in South Africa as persistently following the protagonist through her subconscious mind. They scrutinise historical realities, societal pressures and psychological fragmentation that define post-colonial narratives. Here,

madness is redefined as trauma being extended from personal experience to depict a global code of racism, domination and ideological oppression. Their techniques mirror the novel's expression of the personal struggles of the novelist and the wider domineering systems of apartheid. The critics proffer some basic insights on how the narrative bridges the horrors of apartheid, emotional ordeals and the spiritual search for human wholeness.

The scholars contributed immensely towards Head's scholarship. Among other things, Ravenscroft (1976, pages 174–186) was one of the first critics to identify *A Question of Power* as an intensely private, ambiguous text based on the "vast caverns of interior personal experience". On her own, Opara (2017, pages 529-538) scrutinizes the use of of myth and psychological archetypes as a components of form in battling inflexible racial, ethical and gender disparities. However, the limits in the arguments of these scholars could be seen in their reliance on biographical, psychoanalytic or socio-political study frames that diminish the novel's ontological and religious ambiguities. They concur with the thesis that the protagonist's crash into insanity replicates the larger socio-political cruelty, engendering a new corridor to both personal recovery and spiritual self-assurance. They disregard the codes of imaginative madness, changing psychosomatic forcefulness of the narrative. The over-emphasis on spiritual and autobiographical apprehension of the internal consciousness, along with obsession with female identity, dignity and patriarchal structures are seen as the missing links with the society.

Another cluster of scholars dwells on concerns about healing influence of labour and nature questions in the novel. These scholars investigate Elizabeth's hallucinations and descent into mental infirmity, relating this private inner anguish expressly to the exterior brutalities of apartheid and separation. They used psychoanalytic and trauma-based criticism in divulging inner psychic torments and disintegration, revealing the internalisation of outer societal cruelty. They also employed post-colonial-cum-ideological critical methods and phenomenological or reader-response techniques in the evaluation of the novel. They made some contributions to the critical analysis of the novel, probing the interface of post-colonial politics of identity, author's biography suffering and survival tactics. These scholars include Atkinson (1998, page 84), Fielding (2003, page 18) and Goodhead (2017, page 114). Part of their contributions lie in their contention that physical labour and union with the land is Elizabeth's crucial security and remedial machinery against mental collapse. The rejection of elitist hegemony and attachment to nature remain vital in the analysis of these scholars. Hence, Atkinson examines the novels of Head as survival strategies in which physical labour and nature serve decisive remedy to colonial ordeals as well as political isolation. In the novel, she focuses on the restoration of the protagonist's mental well-being through her daily manual. On the other hand Fielding investigates the interface of lethal trauma and the healing power of space. She centres her reading on the protagonist's self-restoration from a fractured psyche engendered by the hostile socio-political realities apartheid through a union with collective rural agricultural setting.

Again, Goodhead considers the narrative rural settings as a symbolic of "complex pastoralism" that signifies the natural flora and fauna generating a soothing support for fostering personal socio-economic and spiritual autonomy. The bond between human and material components in the universe is unprecedented healing the traumatised and marginalised characters, underscoring the impact of land and nature in restoring self-sufficiency and psychological soundness. The limitations of their investigations lie in the use of narrow theoretical methods like clinical methods, mainstream post-colonial paradigms or inflexible Western feminism, in analyzing the madness of Elizabeth. These stylistic approaches often diminish the textual depth of its existential, religious and disjointed essence.

Another group of studies are classified readings emphasising madness and trauma as approaches of female agency and resistance in the novel. It is also known as feminist and post-colonial/exile-focused psychological critiques. For them, it is a disorderly space and a means to talk back and destabilise communal mythologies of gender, race and imperialist silence. They engage in the deconstruction racial classification, whereby Elizabeth's "coloured" identity in apartheid-era South Africa positions her in an unfeasible in-between status. Among other things, she neither belongs in the white supremacist system nor in limiting black nationalist standard. Within such studies, the inner phantasms (of figures like Sello and Dan) and spiritual/psychological wars are seen as allegorical indicators of outer socio-political power structures in southern Africa. Thus, these scholars who concentrate their reading of the novel on hybridity and racial alienation include Chetin (1991, pages 116–134), Nixon (1994, pages 1-15) and Jussawalla (1990, pages 89–103). The impact of such studies lies in the recognition of the protagonist's psychological disintegration as unusual and being beyond the personal or medical crash. Moreover, significant are the mixing of the personal and the public, resilience and spiritual restoration, dismantle hierarchies of authority. Decolonisation of the psyche and autobiography as a means of survival strategies are their other contributions.

These critiques have shown the risk of overlooking the novel's intensely encoded materialist, structural group realities as well as the larger socio-political economic world beneath the protagonist's inner, spiritual, and psychological infirmity. Literature reviewed so far exposes various gaps in Head's scholarship. This study seeks to categorise the socio-economic predicaments in the post-colonial Botswana world; analyse racial and political repression in South Africa as sources of enduring ordeals for exiled subjects; and evaluate the protagonist's crash into madness as survivalist machinery in the face of patriarchal and imperialist ordeals.

Political Oppression, Social Injustice and Socio-Economic Dilemmas in the Text

In Head's *A Question of Power*, the protagonist, Elizabeth, suffers severe psychological breakdown. This is seen as a direct mirror of the harsh, oppressive and absurd socio-economic realities in Southern Africa, during the apartheid dispensation. The narrative explores the intersection of racial hierarchy, poverty and totalitarian politics, using madness as a ploy for the survival of colonial trauma. These realities are demonstrated in the novel through various incidents. There is the danger of a post-colonial brutality with the new black elite repeating the cruelties of former white masters: "There was a fear in me that monsters would merely change roles, that black faces would simply replace white faces of cruelty, hate and greed". Here, the artist exposes the deep socio-political dread concerning the post-colonial prospect of Africa, underscoring that political liberty from colonial masters may not automatically guarantee freedom as the new Black leaders may take to similar manipulative and fraudulent systems established by previous white oppressors. Hence, the narrative mirrors the certainty of poverty as a regularised trend of life among the Black African populace. The trend continued even with political independence, being normalised by the new African leaders, as revealed in her posthumously published *Tales of tenderness and Power*:

> Poverty has a home in Africa — like a quiet second skin. It may be the only place on earth where it is worn with an unconscious dignity. People do not look down at your shoes which are caked with years of mud and split so that the toes stick out. They look straight and deeply into your eyes to see if you are friend or foe (Head, 1989, page 41).

Despite the ubiquitous and tragic nature of poverty in the land, the narrator observes that the oppressed

often demonstrate their enormous resilience and poise to endure, even while systemic agencies give them no hope of upward mobility. The massive oppression of the people comes in different ways. Ordinary people are the true facilitators of natural goodness: "Ordinary people never mucked up the universe", (page 10-15). Hence, Elizabeth observes that calamitous anguish and political adversities do not emanate from common, working-class individuals. The narrator opines that societal wreckage derives from the principal, messianic individuals and power-drunk leaders who exploit common citizens for their own advantage

Again, the novel looks at how weak but controlling characters brutally abuse and cheat people of modest and kind manners. This predatory disposition of the powerful members of the society is echoed as follows: "It was harder to disclose the subtle balances of powers between people - how easy it was for people with soft shuffling, loosely knot personalities to be preyed upon by dominant, powerful persons" (page 10). The entire system is corrupt. This oppression involves all, including top government officials along with leading elites who endlessly prey upon the submissive masses. The novel demonstrates a permanent legacy of imperial and class victimhood:

> Maybe he concentrated on his immediate situation. It was African. It was horrible. But wherever mankind had gathered itself into a social order, the same things were happening. There was a mass of people with no humanity to whom another mass referred... (page 84).

This denotes the persistent human degradation found in stratified societies, where the populace is stripped of crucial human pride by powerful ruling elites. This trend of degradation shows that tyranny and its oppressive tendencies are not isolated but common. It means that every society creates its own "underdogs", "oppressed" or "marginalised" group, who must be stripped of essential humanity by the dominant elites using some justifiable systemic codes.

The natural environment is used as an anchor from socio-economic, political and emotional destruction. In the novel, soil and agricultural work on it serve as remedy to toxic political power. The physical engagement of Elizabeth with the earth in terms of gardening and co-operative agricultural work becomes the direct opposite of the rude and brutal hierarchical "power-politics" personified by the phantom figures of Sello and Dan. An aspect of the natural environment is the bare earth or soil and its agricultural labor. This village is seen as a place of refuge. It is a place of the rain-wind, and represents a common, dry, agrarian Botswanan village that provides Elizabeth with physical shelter from the brutal racial subjugation of South Africa. Her physical commitment to labour on the earth and her communion with the natural environment of Botswana generate a formidable protection from the overwhelming mental, racial and political ordeal she bore as she fled apartheid repression in South Africa.

The foregoing assertion agrees with Atkinson's (1998, page 84) notions of applying physical labour and nature as survival strategies; a situation where physical labour and nature serve decisive remedy to colonial ordeals as well as political isolation. Head focuses on the restoration of the protagonist's mental well-being through her daily manual. Thus, manual labour along with communion with the soil in the village of Motabeng, anchors her broken psyche in the face of exigent structures of supremacy. For her, there is awakening wonder in the soil: "She felt just living in a mud hut in Motabeng made her close to nature and incites 'a great wonder about the soil and the food it produced" (page 60). Here, Elizabeth removes her mind from the crushing, perplexing, brutal spiritual hierarchies imposed by the phantom figures Sello and Dan to the stark, quiet, modest certainties of her mud dwelling and its

surrounding earth. The simple effect of this natural and quiet environment of Motabeng is that obliteration of the artificial, man-made social and racialist stratifications of South Africa. This union with earth and nature in Motabeng contrasts with the Apartheid enclave and its obnoxious colonial power mechanisms depend entirely on abusing and displacing people, isolating and reducing them to degraded labour. In this new environment, therefore, Elizabeth regains her foundational human identity and dignity that domineering political and racialist regimes tried to obliterate. This is the result of the substitution of abstract political brutality with a natural, serene, fundamental absorption with what the earth gives.

Generally, the soil is seen as a equalizer. A physical contact with it signifies healing. In Motabeng, earth and nature represent healing and wholesome life:

> Elizabeth said: 'My name is Elizabeth... I should also like to do some practical work. You've heard about the local-industries project Eugene is starting in the village... Isn't that love, not only for people but vegetables too?' Her soul-death was really over in that instant... (page 90)

The local cooperative gardening project gives Elizabeth the opportunity to join other village workers in planting and nurturing life. She channels her entire physical energy into tending vegetables and through breaks the cycle of psychological isolation ("soul-death was really over") and hierarchical exploitation. This synchronises with Fielding (2003, page 18) on the interface between lethal trauma and the healing power of space. Accordingly, through a union with collective rural agricultural setting, the protagonist attains her self-restoration from a fractured psyche engendered by the hostile socio-political realities apartheid. Apart from being instrumental for spiritual restoration, the communal garden is the novelist's means of critiquing exploitative socio-economic structures and capitalist/nationalist greediness (embodied by such oppressive figures as Dan). The garden functions as collective physical effort, a cooperative aid and continuous local production centre. It proffers a supportive financial alternative to the entrenched poverty and deprivation afflicting post-colonial masses.

In the text, racial and political subjugation are not merely peripheral historical realities. They are also seen as internalised mental torments and spiritual calamities. The exiled protagonist, Elizabeth, is emblematic of the mass of people who suffer from this trauma emanating from South Africa's apartheid regime. The trauma represents a deep mental breakage. It also involves enduring ordeals of alienation in addition to a battle for sanity. The narrator states that "...the fifth negative effect of power in powerless society is the alienation and escape from the contempt identity..." (page 19). This signifies the combat to escape a race-induced inferiority complex. The novelist exposes how those living in a helpless condition regularly experience severe emotional separation as a survival mechanism against continuous deprivation. Thus, the mental breakdown or madness among people in exile, like Elizabeth, is seen as a frantic, unconscious tactic of the intellect to rebuff and escape the forced individuality of a "contemptible" person. The narrative also openly condemned the vicious nature of the Immorality Act of apartheid regime. The disclosure of protagonist's parentage highlights this infamous law that makes unlawful inter-racial relationships. The narrator observes: "Your mother was a white woman. They had locked her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native" (page 9). The obnoxious law imposes a lasting nightmare of inherited torment. This leaves the exile struggling with the stigma of her own birth as a forbidden, multiracial subject. This extends to the absurdity of race and class hierarchies. Through this novel, the novelist denounces the intricate, tumbling ladder of racism created by colonial masters, in which even the oppressed groups suppress those that are more susceptible than themselves. Thus, racial subjugation comes in diverse categories, showing that a society could be

fractured into various levels of oppressions: "And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile - at least, they were not Bushmen" (page 32). This is one of the permanent nightmares of the colonised mind.

However, Elizabeth discovers the permanent scar of state-provoked abhorrence of black humanity: "They were just born that way. Hating people, and a black man or woman was just born to be hated" (page 19). The narrative exposes the central mental hostility of apartheid which hinges on the organised devaluation of the black race. In other words, the exiled victim is weighed down through the internalisation of this ubiquitous phantom of hatred, with an enduring state of being seen as a target for contempt. This state is complicated by the victim's alienation. This is because, by design, the political mechanisms of apartheid South Africa only allows an identity of servitude for the colonised and degraded blacks: "We, as black people, could make no appraisal of our own worth; we did not know who or what we were, apart from objects of abuse and exploitation" (page 16). This highlights identity crisis coupled with inferiority syndrome as a major nightmare confronting the exiles. There is also the innately boundless, soul-ravaging quality of the autocratic government. This is evident in soul-rending physical and mental torments, linking the death of the soul to totalitarianism: "The torturers become more hideous day by day. There are no limits to the excesses of evil they indulge in. There's no end to the darkness and death of the soul" (page 84). This underlines the overwhelming emotional toll exacted on exiles, who must recover from communities where systematised cruelty has entirely obliterated the essential morality of the leaders.

In contrast to the above exposition of the show of power and supremacy, the novel also exploited natural environment as a reflective allegory for egalitarianism. The Motabeng, village garden project is a crucial metaphor for inclusive, classless reality. Working the soil becomes an express remedy for political tyranny, racism bigotry and social hierarchy. Hence, connecting with the collective agricultural system enables characters discard their shells of inferiority and flourish in an inclusive community: "In an area where people had no names, Elizabeth felt herself accepted. They were all together creating something new, and it was a world where people could live without fear or the threat of being crushed" (page 158). The environment of the garden is simple, ordinary and natural. Unlike political organisations rooted in tribal affiliation, gender supremacy or socio-political categorisation, the earth does not discriminate. It is like the grave and simply requires common, shared labour, while frowning at undue veneration of "great" or oppressive figures. The above extract reveals the emotional and psychological transformation of Elizabeth as she joins the communal vegetable garden.

Notably, the shedding of racial identity, social status, tribal tags, and political labels in the garden community is captured by the expression "people had no names", indicating the egalitarian nature of the said community. It also shows that working the earth eradicates fake human ranking or classifications. This garden community looks like a utopian creation. The soil is symbolic of an equaliser-field where natives, foreigners, locals, refugees and international volunteers labour side-by-side. The phrase equally signifies that individual workers are appreciated exclusively for their labour and common humanity. Moreover, the land symbolises a shelter where oppressed people are no more "crushed" by the brutal societal structures. The expression "something new" created by this near-perfect people may refer to a micro-society, a system built on shared respect instead of fear and supremacy. Hence, she confidently avows that "She had a weapon in her hands, a garden fork. It was a weapon against the breakdown of her mind... She was a part of a great pioneering effort" (page 158). This is because socio-political domination flourishes through undue classification and the degradation

of minorities. Again, injustice is engendered by the isolation of the "other" within the community. "Vegetable-growing was a completely new world to Elizabeth. It was a world of magic, of things coming up from the ground... It was a world of peace, where people did not hurt one another" (page 153). Thus, the inclusive nature of working the earth offers a realistic format for social justice, showing that harmony is attained by means of communal, right labour. By giving room for freedom from state-sponsored anxiety, the garden directly subverts classification and its concomitant domination.

This is the inner rhythm and idiom of peace which the novel projects: "The work had its own internal rhythm and peace... The language of the garden was universal; it belonged to anyone who wanted to learn it, and it broke down all the barriers of race and background" (page 142). From what the artist proposes this "universal" language of agriculture favours equality, love and collaboration. It is unlike the political structures of apartheid South Africa or the over-bearing tribal discrimination in Botswana. The garden responds evenly to everyone who cultivates it. The garden is a metaphor just like the soil. It stands for peace and harmony. Consequently, the "internal rhythm" of farming subverts the disjointed, chaotic, vicious mental agony exacted on Elizabeth by figures of supremacy like Dan and Sello. It does not encourage violence or discrimination on the basis of gender, race, or nationality. Poverty, economic displacement and political degradation are major concerns in the novel. Agriculture signifies a realistic reaction to poverty as delineated early in the narrative. By learning to grow food in poor soil, the community bypasses capitalistic and post-colonial dependencies

> She liked the garden completely... It was an intensely practical micro-world where people dealt with real, tangible problems of soil, seed, and water, contrasting sharply with the wild, unstructured heights of absolute power that threatened to destroy her sanity (page 153).

This means that physical labour in the natural environment naturally destroys the man-made obstacles of racial affiliations and socio-political conditions. Here, Elizabeth's change from inactive anguish to active engagement with the soil is her extraordinary triumph over poverty and other social torments. It also comes with spiritual transformation tallying with Goodhead's notion of "complex pastoralism" (2017, page 114). This notion signifies the soothing support of natural flora and fauna towards ensuring healing and spiritual autonomy among traumatised and marginalised characters; it also entails how connections with land and nature guarantee restorations of self-sufficiency, psychological soundness and personal socio-economic buoyancy.

The surroundings transform from being the harsh, dust-blown desert into a new well-organised, life-affirming, shared vegetable co-operative. The narrative uses tangible vocabulary: "soil, seed, and water", in depicting her new situation, contrasting it expressly with her elusive, hallucinatory nightmares of the past. This shows that the soil demands for no extraordinary credentials other than one's readiness to learn and work, hence it is essentially democratic. Moreover, the "micro-world" of the garden contrasts with the opposed "unstructured heights of absolute power" where people like Elizabeth battle against the terrorising weights of socio-political and psychological domination. By substituting biased communal principles with the impartial systems of nature, these characters circumvent the unjustified political codes of their times. Hence, the earth stands as both literal and emblematic bases for a fresh, democratic socio-economic reality marked by the scaling down of human focus to small, daily agricultural actions. Various inhuman attributes of society are resolved through continuous, collective earth-working, that guarantees both economic security and human dignity. Consequently, Head implies that socio-political and economic predicaments are not insurmountable. Accordingly, the narrative position is that the cure to entrenched socio-political cruelty and injustice is

not pushing for counter-political ascendancy. It lies, rather, in pushing for a democratic correlation with the soil and the people. By and large, the narrative position is that the local environment proceeds from a place of economic adversity into a remedial room suited for its healing. Therefore salvaging the land by means of co-operative labour presents the lucid corridor for genuine post-colonial survival and autonomy.

Conclusion

This study examines Head's *A Question of Power* illustrating how political repression, social injustice and socio-economic predicaments brutalise the human psyche in oppressive and separatist environments. Anchored on the mental disintegration of its protagonist, the novel reveals that ethnic bigotry along with state-sponsored violence permeate the internal consciousness of the individual instead of acting as marginal political forces. Terror, hopelessness and hostilities are intensely provoked and promoted by ruthless structures of economic dispossession, racial and cultural hegemony along with political supremacy. Exploiting the crushing impact of systemic failure on the protagonist's psychological consciousness, the narrative depicts the overwhelming, deadly toll that both social inequality and political despotism exact on man's mental survival and self-respect. This study, therefore, concludes that freedom involves a drastic and total destruction of these ruthless power structures. It is not a mere swapping of one privileged class with another. The study demonstrates that the protagonist's plunge into insanity is not simply a natural pathological experience, but a sensitive indicator and a defiant reaction to irrationality and brutalities of the apartheid regime and its prohibitory systems. It is simply a descent into "madness" acts as devices for both suffering and subversion. The narrative draws attention to numerous socio-economic predicaments that depict the harsh realities of postcolonial life. This is also portrayed in the fight for agency in discriminated, agrarian locations in Botswana. It is clear that both material and economic inequalities that keep the powerless dependent on the powerful must be tackled in order to apprehend real social fairness in human society. This is the basic argument of the novelist. Where this is impossible, the artist imbues her characters, especially the protagonist, with the courage to resist depressive impact of racial bigotry, patriarchy and colonialism. Hence, the characters shine with far-reaching light of liberation rooted in daily, solid acts of resilience such as cultivating the earth, teaching children and creating real human relations. The protagonist characteristically rids her mind of the harsh patriarchal and immoral colonial ideas by means of hallucination and resilience. Hence, with this new mental perception and spiritual precision, she is able to regain her sense of personal identity, autonomy and integration.

While denouncing the degrading quality of absolute authority inherent in political hegemony, the novelist advocates for a natural survival that is linked to a mutual, supportive agricultural labour that entails socio-economic stability. Moreover, freedom and well-being are seen to be attached to land and natural environment, conscious of the quiet endurance of an organic advancement of communal dignity. The ultimate input of this study is in taking *A Question of Power* as a political philosophy rather than being a simple narrative on psychological disintegration. The novelist proffers a vision that surpasses rising above the restrictions of post-colonial disenchantment. She sees an emancipated society as one that not only demolishes domestic intolerance and exterior cruelty, but equally builds an enduring common future where love replaces hatred, and where natural, radical compassion and shared human equality is valued above artificial authority. This is Head's preferred formulae for social well-being and the right step into reclaiming socio-cultural security, human dignity and mental healing.

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