IDENTITY CRISIS AND SPLIT PERSONALITY IN *A QUESTION OF POWER*

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Résumé:

À partir de l'hypothèse de Michel Foucault selon laquelle toute folie est liée à une civilisation et son malaise, cet article examine l'impact de l'apartheid sud-africain sur les minorités noires telle qu'encodée dans *A Question of Power* de Bessie Head. En fait, ce texte décrit la manipulation d'Elizabeth, l'héroïne, par Sello et du Dan qui incarnent le système ségrégationniste et patriarcal de son pays. Elle subit donc un traumatisme psychologique qui provoque en elle une crise identitaire qui mène à un dédoublement de sa personnalité.

Mots-clés : Identité, crise, dédoublement de la personnalité, apartheid, folie, ségrégation, patriarcat, traumatisme psychologique

Abstract:

From Michel Foucault's assumption that any madness is linked to a civilization and its malaise, this article examines the impact of South African Apartheid on Black minorities as it is interwoven in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*. In fact, this text pictures the manipulation of Elizabeth, the heroine, by Sello and Dan who embody the segregationist and patriarchal system of her country. She therefore undergoes a psychological trauma that provokes an identity crisis in her and leads to a split of her personality.

Keywords: Identity, crisis, split personality, apartheid, madness, segregation, patriarchy, psychological trauma

South Africa's confinement of many of its citizens through its system of Apartheid has long been a subject of political or literary interpretation. In Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, this reality is explored through the mental trauma of Elizabeth, the heroine. After her school principal's revelation of her origin, Elizabeth's life definitely changes. In fact, her white mother was thought to be insane for having committed the "crime" of conceiving her with a black native. As a consequence, she was sent in an asylum. Later, for fear she might

end up like her mother, Elizabeth left her home country for a village in Botswana with her child. Meanwhile, the information about her origin has provoked such a terrible trauma in her that she undergoes an identity crisis which leads her to a mental breakdown. In her hallucination, two men, Dan and Sello who are in fact, personification of white oppressive and segregationist South Africa and its patriarchal ideology, show up. They interact to destroy her. Elizabeth, therefore, develops a split personality: an alienated personality which evolves as a result of the tension between white oppressive world and black dominated world. By choosing the identity crisis and the split personality as the core of this paper, I want to show how a system can be so cruel as to totally destroy the personality of the subject. I will examine the process of Elizabeth's mental hallucination. My reading of Bessie Head's text will focus on Foucault's assumption that any madness is generated by a civilization and its subsequent malaise. An indirect hint at Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, this assumption will serve to show how South African apartheid locks up Elizabeth on racial ground and creates in her a sort of amnesia that finally reveals itself as a manifestation of the repulsive ideology of the dominant culture. As a mixed-blood and a member of a minority group, she is regarded as an "other" who threatens the white racial purity and consequently must be expelled.

In many ways, the novel deals with philosophical and central issues as human condition and the existence of God through the tragedy of the heroine. From a radical postcolonial worldview, Elizabeth's drama articulates around her incapability to interiorize and confront the political system of her country that has already destroyed her mother. She therefore undergoes mental alienation because she cannot reconcile her personal desire with that of her gender, her race and the realities of her community. However, from a moderate position of post colonialism, the question remains how it could be otherwise when she is torn by the permanent struggle against the race and gender paradigms that supplant all social order to identify as the sole and unique controlling force within her community. This dualistic position seems too simplistic and even reductionist because we cannot understand and efficiently explain the causes of her mental disorder and her identity crisis if we do not link them to the very history of her society. For this purpose, Foucauldian perspective seems more appropriate. In fact, analyzing madness in his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Foucault stipulates that madness, a generic mental disorder or dysfunction only exists within a society and with regard to it: it is related to a civilization. According to the philosopher, the age of reason saw in the diverse forms of madness, the most extreme defaults. The mad was isolated with homosexuals and prostitutes because s/he was thought to have a perverse will. His/her

confinement was more moral than medical because his/her sickness was a social scandal. During the Renaissance, madness was still present in society and was linked to common sense but sensitiveness to it was related to imaginary transcendences. In the eighteenth century, common sense and madness mutually excluded each other and the choice of the former to the latter was based on morality. From the above observations, we follow in Foucault's steps that to any given epoch in humankind's life, a dominant ideology may justify a particular situation. Racial segregation in America, for instance, was based on the ideology that Whites were superior to Blacks. In a similar way, ideological assumption serves as a ground to typify Elizabeth's mental breakdown.

The heroine's mental insanity, in fact, results from a system that confines minorities in her native country and she has to live it as a cultural heritage. Early at the beginning of the novel, she is told that her mother was 'mad' because she was having a child with a black man and as a consequence, she was to be isolated in an asylum (16). The madness her mother was accused of and for which she was put in an asylum, as it was done in Foucault's rendering of the Renaissance period, is linked to the ideology of racial segregation prevailing in South African society at the period of apartheid. It was a period, as Dubow observes, when "segregation was regarded as an acceptable and humane means by which to encourage the development of different 'cultures' along the lines of their 'natural advance'' (1989, 8; Guitard 1986). This ideology was strengthened by article nine of the Constitution of the country stipulating that South Africa "could never accept equality between colored and white inhabitants be it in the church or in the state." (Sevy, 1989, 86) It therefore justified all the political strategies or measures set up to keep Blacks and other minorities outside their society. Among these, there was the "pass," a document only requested from Blacks and containing all the details about the bearer and which should be presented at any check-point. Its absence automatically caused penalty or prison to the person in question. It was meant to control the flux of people (Alvarez, 2004, 33-36). Many minorities, like Elizabeth, then resorted to it as a way of escaping oppression and segregation: "She was forced to take an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the 'never to return' clause. She did not care." (Head, 19) The clause demonstrates the segregationist environment Blacks live in. Getting it was therefore synonymous with "freedom." Also, the fact that they did not care for the clause expresses their being so fed of oppression that they wanted to leave the country at any price, even denying their citizenship, provided they live a peaceful life in the end. As Sophia Obiajulu Ogwude comments, "Elizabeth moved to Botswana in hope of finding a new home to which she could belong." (Durosimi Jones & Jones 2002, 114) By moving to Motabeng,

Elizabeth wants to revive this identity within her that, like many South Africans, cannot blossom in her native country. In a letter to Lee Nicholas, the author gives some indications of her project in writing her novel:

> The novel works at two levels – an interior narrative and the everyday life of a village in Botswana. The everyday life was deliberately juxtaposed against the interior narrative for contrast and a choice between two worlds: one of death and destruction and the other which promotes life… It is not basically a book about insanity. (Idem, 114)

Motabeng thus stands for a place of fulfillment, self-realization and wholeness that the author probably has never had the opportunity to enjoy. Here, she projects her inner dream onto her character to express this world of belonging, togetherness and elevation of man so greatly missing in her home country. For some moment, the heroine fairly attains this objective when she notices that in her village of exile, "there [is] a flow of feeling from people to people, [that people are] all relatives" (21) and "are kings and queens to each other." (72) Unfortunately, though far from the daily anguish she was used to in her country, Elizabeth cannot get rid of her past. Her life still pictures the evil of the oppressive South African system of death and destruction against which the writer juxtaposes the life promoting one of Motabeng village. She cannot turn the page on the traumatic and repressing system in which whole part of her life has been molded. This ongoing process of her suffering highlights the existentialist assumption that "frustration, insecurity, and painful striving are the inescapable lot of humankind, and the only life worth living is one in which this fact is squarely faced." (Olson, 1962, 14) In moving to Motabeng in search of a better life, Elizabeth forgets that there can be an impossibility of attaining happiness. This is why she receives what happens to her as a crushing blow and nearly fails to definitely lose all her mental faculties. Her intensive use of toxic stimulants as cigarette, alcohol and sleeping tablets outstandingly indicates the fatal result of self destruction South African world creates in its citizens.

The existence of God and the suffering of humankind are other key existentialist elements interwoven in the narrative. After recovering her mental stability, Elizabeth raises this question during a conversation with her American friend Tom (190-191). For her, if God does really exist and has created all humankind at His image, why then does He let some of them oppress and exploit others? If He really loves them all, why does it happen that some are rich and others poor, some in good health and others sick? For all this, she concludes that He is good and evil combined. Yet, it is the ambivalent and ambiguous characteristic of God and

mainly the complexity of human life that she is made to experience through the characters of Sello and Dan: life is never linear and it never goes as one expects it to go. Sometimes, it is characterized by happiness. Other times, things go wrong. Faced with this, man must be careful since this perpetual zigzagging can weaken his soul and greatly impact on his life as Elizabeth confesses to Tom:

> Things I'd never have thought of get to dominate my mind and create neurotic fears. I'd never have thought twice of what Jesus said. He said the soul was really open territory easily invaded by devils. They just move in, carry on, mess around, and when a man has just cleaned up his house, ten thousand more move in. if I had to take up residence in somebody's house I'd be polite and enquire after their health. Devils don't do that. They just walk in and smash everything up and then they grin. (192)

As I said earlier, my argumentation focuses on the crisis in Elizabeth's identity, which leads to a split of her personality. But it was essential to discuss first these existentialist questions to better understand the psychological (my main goal) aspect of her tragedy. Indeed, Elizabeth's "madness" is nurtured by the interaction of Sello and Dan on her. They are the expression of the confrontation between her inner power and her outer vision. This conflict even justifies the title of the novel. Indeed, throughout the narrative, both characters always appear to her separately, justifying their impossibility to cohabit in her. On rare occasions when they do so, their interaction is one of conflict; each of them wanting to get total control of her (143-144). Another good instance of their impossible cohabitation is offered to us just after Elizabeth comes from hospital following one of her crises and decides to have a fresh beer: "It took a few days to realize what was happening. The drama was speeding to a close. The two men were conducting, in different ways, a fierce struggle over her nearly dead body." (186-187) Yet, "they are interchangeable souls" (30) and have the same and common ambition of destroying her psychologically and emotionally.

If to Foucault madmen lead an easy wandering existence, despite some divergences among the translations of the original version of his text (Velody and Still, 1992, 86-87), Elizabeth's madness is not an "easy wandering." The madman in her society and in her civilization is not such a character who goes around or who is a social scandal. He or she is rather, in Ralph Ellison's words, an 'invisible' character living in an extreme ostracism as the other of those who are thought to be in full possession of all their mental faculties. In Elizabeth's society and civilization, the madman is conscious of his existence but his illness is due to his failure to grasp the reality of the social and political pressure that has left its marks

on him and that his memory cannot erase despite his mental exile. Elizabeth well illustrates this in a shop when she is asked to have a radio she wants to buy registered. She automatically becomes delirious:

> The insistent hiss, hiss of horror swamped her mind: 'You see,' it said. 'You don't really like Africans. You see his face? It's vacant and stupid. He's show-moving. It takes him ages to figure out the brand name of the radio. You never really like Africans. You only pretended to. You have no place here. Why don't you go away... She was shocking the air. The clerk had told her to sit down opposite him. A loud wail of counter-protest was arising in her. The insistent hissing was mean, stifling, vicious. Whom could she accuse, to end it? She sprang to her feet, slamming the chair against the wall, and shouted: 'Oh, you bloody bastard Batswana!! Oh, you bloody Batswana!!' Then she simply opened her mouth in one long, high piercing scream. People came running from all directions and were blocked in crowd at the entry to the office. (51)

Elizabeth, in fact, fails to understand that as a human being, "one of the most complete statements for the future [she] could ever make [is to] be ordinary. Any assumption of greatness leads to a dog-eat-dog fight and incurs massive suffering." (39)

In her tragedy, she develops, as I have already mentioned, two types of identities. The first one is expressed by her personal vision of the world as she hopes and the second one is nurtured by the coactions of Sello and Dan. Obviously, it is the conflict between these two kinds of identities that provokes her hallucination. Throughout the novel, both identities alternate. Sometimes, Elizabeth is in control of all her mental powers. Other times, she totally loses these powers, finds herself in a complete depression and at the mercy of Sello and Dan who respectively embody racial and patriarchal South African society as they are projected in her mind. Each of them acts on a particular aspect of her personality: Sello acts on her psyche and Dan on her sexuality. But the two actions combined serve to destroy her soul. The narration describes Sello as a monk-like character, "the originator of the caste system" (32) and as he says of himself, "the root cause of human suffering." (36) Under such characterization, he symbolizes the division of the South African community into antagonistic groups while account for the complex relations among these groups. He also adds that he has killed several women but he remains inexplicit about these killings, creating confusion in the mind of the protagonist (28). Thus the recurring "Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death...," that sounds like a litany in her head, breaks her completely and precipitates her into the abyss: "She could not help but identify with the weak, homosexual Coloured men who

were dying before her eyes. One day of it set her nervous system screaming. A week of it reduced her to a total wreck. She lay on the bed trapped in misery." (47)

In his destruction of Elizabeth, Sello manipulates the words of Medusa, a figure of the Greek mythology, said to have a face one cannot look in (Garber and Vickers, 2003, 47-48). Throughout the narrative, we discover that the image of the Medusa well applies to Elizabeth as she cannot face the reality of life incarnated by Sello and Dan; she has not measured the consequences of her vision of the world and its possible outcome. On the other hand, the Medusa image as it is performed through the manipulations of Elizabeth in the hands of both Sello and Dan exemplifies what Roger Caillois (1960) terms "disguise," in the mimesis and the reflects of Medusa. Sello, most of the time, disguises and mimics the Greek goddess. Good instances are given to us when he appears in "a brown suit" (39, 62) or in "a monk's robe sitting on a chair nearby." (39) He also appears to the heroine with Dan, both wearing dark glasses (104). As far as Dan is concerned, during a quarrel with Sello for the control of Elizabeth's mind, he "covered his whole form with a white sheet" (143). In their disguise, they intimidate and torture Elizabeth up to her soul, demonstrating that human suffering manifests in different ways.

It would be erroneous to read Elizabeth's amnesia as a crisis that leads the individual to totally loose his/her memory, so much so that s/he cannot remember who s/he is, recognize his/her friends and relatives. Though sometimes Elizabeth "attains" this status, she generally remains the same person. She has a personality as she demonstrates it on many occasions in Motabeng village. Unfortunately, this personality is overwhelmed by the unbearably and inexpressibly hypocritical environment of her past she wants to forget but that Sello and Dan invigorate. They maneuver Medusa to take from her all that is emotionally and psychologically human: "each time they hit her [she] would topple over, collapse and remain in bed for two days on end." (62) The metaphor of the goddess then serves as a way of teaching us that life is not that easy when we refuse to face the reality we cannot escape. Sometimes, as part of our human condition, a tougher experience can be lived after fleeing a first situation. This is evidenced by the principal of the Mobateng Secondary School, a refugee like Elizabeth: "I suffer, too, because I haven't a country and know what it's like. A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns." (52) Though the declaration of the principal is intended to console Elizabeth in her drama and show solidarity, the one thing that is true in it is that it traces the misfortune of the people who are in the same situation as her while warning her about her future life in her new village; thence, an indirect invitation to be strong-minded.

The Machiavellianism of Sello and Dan through the metaphor of the Medusa is so crucial and destructing for Elizabeth that at times, she seems definitely hypnotized. For instance, the first encounter between her and Sello is very revealing of her future trauma. The narrator describes that Sello

> was sitting sideways. He had an almighty air of calm and assurance about him. He wore the soft, white, flowing robes of a monk, but in a peculiar fashion, with his shoulders slightly hunched forward, as though it were a prison garment. He stared straight at Elizabeth in a friendly way and said, in a voice of quiet affection: 'My friend.' She stared back, not replying. Then he said: 'Will you stay here for some time?' (22)

From this onward, we understand that Elizabeth is caught is a prison-like environment. Like a prison guard, Sello plans to keep an eye on her and control all her movements. His sitting, clothing and mainly his self-assurance, demonstrate that he has the situation under control. As the epitome of South African political system that confines Blacks and minorities and destroys them psychologically, his self-assurance and garment traduce the continuation of this oppression. In addition, his friendly tone while addressing the heroine is all a mockery. It expresses the dead-end in which he plans to drag her: "Will you stay here for a long time?" Surely, this question does not require Elizabeth's immediate answer. The answer is already contained in the system of which he is a symbol. For, how can she have a choice, how can she give her viewpoint in a plan that is already set to control her? Whatever her answer may be, Elizabeth is definitely caught in the trap. All of Sello's manners are the manifestations of a repressive system that refuses to admit that it is doing wrong to some of its citizens. It rather considers its acts as a way of preserving its social and internal cohesion. Throughout the novel, Sello's happiness anytime Elizabeth undergoes a mental crisis well illustrates this situation.

Sello maneuvers all Medusa's acts and words. Thus, when the Gorgon works out "things at a different level," (39) it is the character who is behind this torture even if he pretends to be sorry to see Elizabeth being so badly hurt, that he cannot do anything to stop her. For him, it belongs to Elizabeth to face this situation. At this moment, the brutal and oppressive Sello shifts into a sympathizing character, an advisor. As the victim who knows what she is experiencing, she must be the appropriate person to take on resistance as a process of recovery, of release. For this purpose,

> he produced a brief reconstruction of the story of Osiris and Isis. He had been the Osiris who had been shattered into a thousand fragments by the thunderbolt of the Medusa. She has been the Isis who had put the pieces together again. The details did not unfold. What unfolded fully was the picture of the reconstructed man, with the still, sad, fire-washed face of death. It was then that she was able to link up that particular expression with thousands and thousands of other people who had died terrible and violent deaths. (39)

Through the metaphor of Osiris and Isis contained in this quotation, the text unfolds the Egyptian mythology. In fact, Sello reveals that he has succumbed to the power of Medusa. This is why he cannot resist her as he is under her control and embodies her personality. Thus bewitched, he appears as a dead person: Medusa has 'killed' him as Osiris has been by Seth in the Egyptian mythology. But through Elizabeth, he finds a way of using his powers. The protagonist then serves as a means for him to reconstruct his fragmented identity. As such, she symbolizes the image of Isis in her reconstitution of Osiris's fragmented body after being killed by Seth. In the same way Isis has reconstructed Osiris and given him a kind of new life, by being a field of exercising his power after being under the control of Medusa, Elizabeth allows him to regain a new life. Nevertheless, by advising her to fight for her recovery, Sello adopts a postcolonial posture and seems to regret in some way his deeds. If he seems to mock the heroine during their first encounter and generally oppresses her throughout the text, in this particular case, he appears as a regretful character. This reveals that in all oppressive system, there are instances when some of the members are repentant for their acts, feel pity for the victims and ally with them in their fight for freedom. It can be deduced, therefore, that despite his will to destroy Elizabeth, Sello's particular action here intends to help her.

The other component that associates with Sello to destroy Elizabeth and provoke what I qualify as a split of her personality is offered by Dan. After Sello impacts on her psyche, Dan must complete the process of her destruction by acting on her sexuality. Thus, he tortures her through sexuality. While Sello is portrayed as the root cause of human suffering, Dan represents patriarchy and incarnates all what is immoral in the African world view. For instance, he is described as "a homosexual [and] he also sleeps with cows and anything on earth," (148) a sexual orientation regarded as obscene and vile in most African societies. Like Sello, Dan carefully plans to kill her soul: "He had everything arranged in advance. He knew exactly what he wanted. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew exactly who was going to die." (103) Also, like Sello, he embodies Medusa in his destruction of Elizabeth: "Dan was simply the extension of Medusa, and the torrent of hatred he felt for Elizabeth was hitting her daily such terrible blows, she was alive. It was done under cover of the parade of

the nice-time girls." (168-169) The character, in fact, is described as a sexual horror; he stands in front of Elizabeth, pulls his pants down, flays his penis in the air and says: "Look, I'm going to show you how I sleep with B… She has a womb I can't forget. When I go with a woman, I go for one hour. You can't do that. You haven't got a vagina…" (13) Then he adds to this a long list of his women, naming them according to the peculiar sexual relationship he has with them (148). Really, his sexual activities with these women exemplifies a kind of slavery as he exploits them sexually but does not truly love them all (128). His display of his sexual activities aims to make Elizabeth's suffering more disastrous and painful: "After all, he was only there to kill her. It was taking so long, the road was so devious, his activities so tremendous. The weaker she became, the more intensely excited did he become, something like the way animals scent blood or death in the air." (163) To intensify his process of destruction on Elizabeth, he tells her that he goes with these women because she is inferior (147). This is why he parades with them, showing her that they control him and encouraging them to use her personal possessions to clean up: "He was abnormally obsessed with dirt on his women. They washed and washed in her bathroom; they put on Elizabeth's dresses and underwear and made use of her perfumes." (128) His more crucial obscenity is that he sometimes topples these women into bed beside Elizabeth.

Dan appears as a pervert character as he has all sorts of women. Also, his sexual activities shed light onto the perversity of life as it goes on in South Africa and the immorality of this society as Elizabeth comes to notice: "The sum total of it was a world where no one loved anyone. They were just barking savagely all the time; they were not human, or anything but permanently growling, hideous, savage beasts. She had no way of breaking the storm of evil." (168) But if Dan's love affair with his nice-time girls makes Elizabeth think about the immorality of her home country, on a broader level, it accounts for the lack of love (moral and spiritual) among people. Here, the writer extends her criticism of her home country to point out the fact that the notion of love has lost its true meaning and value. For her, people nowadays, have no consideration for love as what pushes one to sacrifice oneself for another human being. On the sexual level, love as a total involvement between two individuals who have decided to offer themselves to each other has no meaning. People just have sex to satisfy their libidinal lust regardless of the pain they can cause to their partners or to themselves, physically, psychologically or emotionally. All the same, their immorality is so evident that incest that is severely blamed in African societies passes for a normal practice. As an instance, the narrator describes Sello "as a filthy pervert who sleeps with his daughter." (175) All this makes life a perversity.

Both Sello and Dan use homosexuality to make Elizabeth feel excluded. Dan tells her that it is a "universal phenomenon." (139) He makes Sello appear before her with his boyfriend (148), saying that they used to do it (139). When we consider the display of homosexuality and heterosexuality, we understand that they are meant to degrade Elizabeth. She is all the more horrified and mad as her world condemns both sexual practices. To her, a man to man relation is unconceivable in the same way as it is abominable for a man to go with so many women. But, like in her manipulation by Sello, her drama takes a more dramatic impetus because she fails to grasp the environment of destruction in which Dan drives her. As a consequence, she cannot seriously prepare to escape any of his plans. And the fact that she "jumped to her feet and burst into tears" (143) as Dan and Sello quarrel to control her, illustrates all her incapability to apprehend this reality and resist their assault. However, it is through the horrors of her contact with Dan in her hallucinations that she learns the most:

> The suffering she had endured had sealed her Archille's heel; that of the brutal murderer for love […] He had deepened and intensified all her qualities. He was one of the greatest teachers she'd worked with, but he taught by default – he taught iron and steel self-control through sheer, wild, abandoned debauchery; he taught the extreme of love and tenderness through the extremes of hate; he taught an alertness for falsehoods within, because he had used any means at his disposal to destroy Sello. And from the degradation and destruction of her life had arisen a still, lofty serenity of soul nothing could shake. (202)

Obviously, in her contact with Dan, the sexual mania and the sexist character, Elizabeth learns that love that permits the elevation of humankind is attainable. By acting from the opposite side of her vision of life, though in a torturous and destructive way, Dan involuntarily but surely helps her discover and understand the true meaning of life. Through her madness, there is a possibility of being healed and being sane by individual and/or communal enterprise.

In the novel, Elizabeth generally evolves in a world of nightmares that is totally out of her control because of the constant assault and pressure from Sello and Dan. She asserts: "It's midnight all the time. I'd not taken note of it. I'd not taken note of real living people because so many fantastic images surround me, and they talk and move all the time, and when they address me I just burst out with the right lines on cue as though I am living with a strange 'other self' I don't know well." (58) The identity that the two characters impose onto Elizabeth clashes with her true one. This confrontation is illustrative of the tensions that arise as a protest against a system that seeks to confine the individual and prevent him/her from

possessing his/her self. And when in the end there is no compromise, the individual usually undergoes an identity crisis since s/he is divided between these two antagonistic worlds, each of which yearning to supplant the opposite. As Vincent de Gaulejac (1987) asserts,

> the split [is] a reaction of the Ego that tries to coexist with contradictory identifications, ideals and habitus. For lack of being able to choose between the ones and the others, it needs to interiorize the ones and the others. When these different elements are antagonistic, the Ego, that cannot find a mediation to support the division traversing it, operates a split, as if both of the two foreign identities constituted it. (244, my translation)

Yet, Elizabeth sometimes demonstrates that she has a personality, an identity that opposes the fragmented one. In fact, her temporary recovery of her mental sanity evidences that a system cannot be so cruel as to completely destroy an individual. The most significant illustration of her opposition to the oppressing world and of her reconstruction of her identity is given by her involvement in the activities of Motabeng people. Though not direct, her act, as a whole, can be read as one of contestation and of resistance. She becomes an icon in her village of exile and most of her undertaking emulates the villagers. She teaches them how to plant, demonstrating the qualities that she has but that unfortunately, she could not use in her native country because of the hostile environment. Her implication in the village activities and her know-how, are so important that when she is absent, these activities seem to come to a halt as Birgette tells her: "You must never leave the garden… I cannot work without you." (142) Thus when she is hospitalized during a crisis, her absence is heavily felt. Kenosi testifies to it: "You left the garden. I don't know how to do. We became poor. When you were here we used to make R4.00 every week from vegetables; R4.00 from gooseberry jam. No one could do jam. The vegetables came down to R2.00." (203) In fact, Elizabeth views her tragedy as a purgatory journey during which she learns her true self and the meaning of human life:

> I've lost my sense of goodness completely; just the ordinary kind people use from day to day. I've seen a form of greed and grabbing and an arrogance monstrously out of proportion to normal human feelings. The first thing I've always done is to act on wild impulse. My temperament was unequal to what I've lived through for three years or more. I seem to have taken a strange journey into hell and darkness. I could not grasp the darkness because at the same time I saw light. That captured and riveted my attention. (190)

She reconciles with her-self and with the world around her. This tragedy reveals itself as a spiritual journey from destruction and fragmentation to reconstruction and wholeness as the end of the novel well clarifies it: "As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over the land. It was a gesture of belonging." (206) In Motabeng, Elizabeth feels a sort of belonging, a self-fulfillment she has so long looked for. She experiences this humanity that elevates people and permits them to feel the sense of living. On the whole, she understands that all her suffering is cumulated in her hasty and greedy lust for freedom regardless of the surrounding and the complexity of life itself. Her day-to-day contact with the population of Motabeng has helped to reconstruct her identity. The gardening association she helps create and of which she is a leading figure, shows that when "people of totally foreign backgrounds [are] made to work together and understand each other's humanity, [they] establish the brotherhood of man." (158) Thus, contrary to her native country where the white man's hatred of the black man operates as an established and accepted thing through the social and political system (80), Elizabeth attains a plenitude of life in her new community.

The theme of madness, as it is interwoven in Bessie Head's text, unfolds the reality of South African Apartheid that locks up Blacks on the ground of racial segregation. If, in this civilization, the madman does not physically wander around, his mind does so instead. By leaning on the character of the fool and through the manipulation of the heroine by Sello and Dan who populate her mental world, the writer lays criticism on South African system. As such, she invites the reader not to see madness simply as an illness that brings shame in society, but she mainly posits it as a means of introspection: the fool is a mirror through which people must see who they are and judge their acts. Also, through the mental drama of Elizabeth, Bessie Head draws attention on human condition and the importance of love among people. In this work, I have tried to analyze the experience of the heroine to explore some of the key existentialist issues as they are questioned by the writer's work. Thus, I showed that Elizabeth's psychotic depression is linked to the civilization of apartheid that she fails to understand as a human creation. She also fails to comprehend that this civilization must be dismantled from within rather than through escape, which can be harmful. And as the text shows it, in her exile, Elizabeth, like many of her fellows, undergoes an identity crisis that leads to a slip of her personality. In the end, Elizabeth's madness can be read as a journey from victimization and fragmentation to consciousness and wholeness.

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