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## **SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS IN BESSIE HEAD'S *WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER***

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### **Résumé**

Cet article se propose d'analyser le symbolisme dans le roman *When Rain Clouds Gather* de Bessie Head. Dans ce sens, le travail se focalise sur l'étude des symboles et leurs significations. La narratologie et la sémiotique sont utilisées comme outils de l'analyse. Les résultats de l'étude permettent de démontrer qu'un symbole est un objet concret ou familier utilisé pour se référer à une idée abstraite, un objet ou événement peu ordinaire. La principale image symbolique dans le texte de Head est le célèbre thème de « Rain Clouds », « les nuages ». Ici, les nuages représentent symboliquement le progrès et changement social. La pluie ramène à la vie, la nature morte et la terre infertile. Pour idéaliser la société de son rêve, Head décrit les femmes leaders comme des symboles de la femme moderne émancipée qui s'affirme et s'impose à la société. Dans la narration, les femmes sont éduquées et elles participent à la prise de conscience de la société. Makhaya est le personnage principal du roman *When Rain Cloud Gather* de Bessie Head. Le narrateur le décrit comme un réfugié sud-africain qui vit au Botswana après sa libération de prison pour des activités de sabotage. Le Botswana est aussi représenté comme un catalyseur du changement sociale. C'est un symbole de l'hospitalité, de l'entente et de la fraternité. Le village de Golema Mmidi est également un personnage important dans le récit. Makhaya est bien reçu dans ce village par Dinorego avant d'être présenté à Gilbert.

**Mot clés** : allégorie, amélioration, catalyseur, image, symbole, symbolisme.

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### **Abstract**

This paper intends to analyze symbolism in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*. In this sense, the work focuses on symbols and their meanings. The theories of narratology and semiotics are used as tools to decode the text. The findings permit to show that a symbol is a concrete or familiar object that is used in reference to an abstract idea, or a less familiar object or event. The main symbolic image in Head's text is the best-known theme of "Rain Clouds". It refers to the progression and social change. Rain brings death nature and unfertile soil back to life. To idealize her society, Head depicts female characters as the representatives of the new self-assertive women. In the narrative, women are educated and they partake in the society conscious awareness. Makhaya is the main protagonist of Bessie Head's *When Rain Cloud Gather*. The narrator describes him as a political refugee from South Africa who lives in Botswana after being released from prison for sabotage. Botswana is also depicted as a catalyst for social change. It is a symbol of hospitality, togetherness and brotherhood. The village of Golema Mmidi is also an important character in the plot. Makhaya is welcomed in this village by Dinorego who introduces him to Gilbert.

**Keywords**: allegory, improvement, catalyst, image, symbol, symbolism.

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## Introduction

**B**essie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* is about the plight of Makhaya who leaves his homeland South Africa and settles down in Botswana. Symbolism is one of the major themes of the novel under consideration. In this perspective, this work intends to decipher symbols in order to produce meaning because the revelation of the hidden truth will help the reader to better understand the quintessence of Head's text. Symbolism is prevalent in oral literature and written literature. As such, a symbol is a concrete or familiar object that is used in reference to, or as an explanation of an abstract idea, or a less familiar object or event. It is a particularly useful means of conveying certain important truths or lessons about human life and the problems of existence (Kofi Agyekum, 2013, p.82). Symbols are widely employed in various forms of African oral literature to get insight into deep philosophical, moral and spiritual matters. Indeed, in many folktales in Africa, the characters and events are fundamental symbols that illustrate various morals and philosophical issues relating to people.

In many cases, a conclusive message is given which confirms that the various elements operating in the tale have simply been used as symbols to illustrate the message, and to play didactic rules. In some stories, the audience is expected to derive meaning from the events narrated since most of these tales are set in the fantasy world of animals and spirits. The meaning can only be got if we treat them as symbols illustrating certain aspects of the problems and issues, surrounding life in the real world of human beings. How symbols are perceived in Head's text? What is the ideology behind the use of symbols in her text? To what extent the decoding and encoding of symbols can contribute to production of meaning in

Head's text? This paper focuses on three main points: The metaphor hope, characters' actions and meanings and the ideology of Bessie Head's writing. In this work, the theories of narratology and semiotics are used to decode the essence of our topic.

## 1-The Metaphor of Hope

Before, tackling the metaphor of hope, we believe that it is important to say some few words about the concept of metaphor. In this view, a metaphor is an image whereby a comparison is made by a direct reference. This technique of imagery is particularly common in praise songs and chants in which the artist is so carried away with admiration of objects or persons that he or she conceives of them in exaggerated terms. Nature and environment, trees, plants, animals, the solar system cosmology are used, and attributes of human beings are referred to these elements. As the paratext reveals "rain clouds" are the first symbols of the renaissance in *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

### 1-1-Rain Clouds

The main symbolic image in Head's text is the best-known theme of "*Rain Clouds*". It refers to the progression and social change. Therefore, the "rain clouds" gathering at first suggests a negative atmosphere in the novel. As a matter of fact, "rain clouds" lead to the blockage of the sun and so it provides a cold and mark mood. However, rain clouds make a transformation from being negative to positive in the book. "Those rain clouds may come to symbolize hope, recovery, the rewards of faith, new growth"(p.i). The rain itself represents happiness, good people and good things. Here, the reader is invited to reconsider his

earlier preconception on “rain clouds” and realizes that rain provides water which is a necessity in the Botswana desert. It is required to grow the crops, vegetation and the cattle’s thirst, which provide the only source of income in the village.

A well-educated man should not be stranded in our country. But you will find that things happen slowly here. They say this is a country where people ought not to live and it is true. Botswana people often go without food and water and so do their cattle. Cattle are grazed where a bit of grass grows, but water may only be found ten miles away. Life is like this: You graze cattle here on day; the next, you take them on long search for water. It is such a hard life that I myself a long time ago gave up the cattle business. In all my years I have known of only one man who thinks he can change. His name is Gilbert. He came to our village three years ago and started the cattle co-operative. Also a farm to try out better ways of crop growing, and it is from this I mostly benefit as I only grow crops (p.20).

Through this passage, the reader can see the importance of rain or water for the villagers. Rain is important for both men and animals. No one can go without water. By implication, rain is a source of life and fertility. Rain brings death nature and unfertile soil back to life. In a way, rain is the fruit of sexual intercourses between sky and earth. In other words, rain is the semen sky introduces in earth which brings about the birth or renaissance of country yard. In this perspective, the eastern part of Golema Mmidi symbolizes fertile woman whereas the western part of Goloma Mmidi stands for barren woman. Gaston Bachelard refers to this paramount significance of water when he writes:

Quand nous aurons compris que toute combinaison des éléments matériels est, pour l’inconscient, un mariage, nous pourrons rendre compte du caractère Presque toujours féminin attribué à l’eau par l’imagination naïve et par l’imagination poétique. Nous

verrons aussi la profonde maternité des eaux. L’eau gonfle les germes et fait jaillir les sources. L’eau est une matière qu’on voit partout naître et croître. La source est une naissance irrésistible, une naissance continue...L’eau est l’objet d’unedes plus grandes valorisations de la pensée humaine: la valorisation de la pureté (1942, p.22).

Golema Mmidi is, for most of the year, a village of women with all the men away at the cattle posts. Dinorego is the only full-time made crop producer in the village. All the rest are women. What Gilbert has in mind is to bring the two, cattle production and crop production, together. If cattle are brought to the crop-producing areas, they could be fed on the crop residues and grain surpluses, and this would raise the grade of the beef. This is a serious reason for finding urgent solutions. “The country was in the grip of a severe drought, which had already lasted five years and was becoming worse with each succeeding year” (p.31). Then, “rain clouds” symbolize the villagers of Golema Mmidi getting together through Makhaya and Gilbert by co-operating. They can achieve much more than they could individually. Here, gathering simply means that the oppressed people have to be united if they want to find a way out of oppression. The coming of Gilbert and his new cultivating system in Golema Mmidi is regarded as a source of hope for the villagers. As the narrator puts it:

Nothing in his life had prepared Makhaya for his first week in his new employment. There was so much that excited the interest of Gilbert about the country, and he was anxious to impart three years of observation all at once to Makhaya to give him a base on which to work. (p.33)

This paragraph shows that Makhaya’s involvement in the farming company of Gilbert is a very important thing. It can contribute to the improvement of Makhaya’s predicament and the village. Rain is the most important thing for the farmers of Golema Mmidi. In this sense,

they see “rain clouds” as a blessing coming from God. Rain water is a promoter of fecundity (Paul Diel, 19). Stephen Gray highlights this significance of “rain clouds” in the introduction of the book when he writes “those rain clouds may come to symbolize: hope, recovery, reward of faith and new growth. Hence the passionate theme of *When Rain Clouds Gather*”(p.i). In Head’s text, rain stands for happiness, good people and all good things.

At this stage of our work, the reader is invited to reconsider his earlier preconception on “rain clouds” and realizes that rain provides water which is a necessity in the Botswana desert. It is required to grow the crops, vegetation and the cattle’s thirst which is the only source of income in the village. The narrator uses drought as a symbol to depict the suffering of the black South Africans. This novel is a portrayal of the writer’s personal experiences. With *When Rain Clouds Gather*, there is yearning for freedom and promised future. The gathering of clouds allows the reader to see beyond the present circumstances and associated hostilities. It marks hope and an end of current happenings and experiences. Her departure from her home land South Africa is symbolic in the sense that it also refers to the move away from autocracy to democracy. In the plot, the different characters come from different social classes, a true reflection of South Africa’s rainbow nation, diversified, multiracial and multicultural nation. Their different experiences represent the different social settings and associated events as they were manufactured by Apartheid. In the plot, Tobacco farming is also an important symbol.

### **1-2-Tobacco Farming**

The tobacco farming is regarded a symbol of women emancipation. In this novel, Head believes that African women live in squalor. The collapse of gender barrier as a projection of an ideal world is

also an important aspect dealt in this book. So the traditional view that relegates women to the bottom of the social ladder is more valid. Women are no more considered as objects: “Forget about them. It is not the same thing. Black woman is different from white women” (Chinwuba, 2003, p.80). Therefore, to idealize her society, Head depicts female characters who are the representatives of the new self-assertive women. Here, women are educated and they can bring their society to conscious awareness. The implicit of the text suggests that a woman is not only a housewife or child bearer but she is also a facilitator of social change. In the intrigue, women are emancipated. They know their rights and duties. As such, they regard themselves as the counterparts of men. In this respect, the narrator asserts:

He stopped talking awhile and turned and looked at the women to ask them a few direct questions. The experimental plot would be ready for harvesting in about three months’ time. If the women harvested, cured and dried this first batch together, they would gain the necessary experience and be able that much sooner to cultivate, harvest and process their own tobacco. Therefore, it had been decided by him and Gilbert that the first tobacco curing shed be built in the yard of someone who lived nearest the farm.(p.111)

In the text of Head, Gilbert is the man who turns the sorrow of women into happiness. Through cooperatives, Gilbert is able to end subsistent agriculture, which was of little benefit to the people. He eliminates the land tenure system that stratified the society into the rich and the poor and maintained the poor in a permanently poor position. Head’s fictionalized ideal world can be seen through Gilbert’s vision of society. According to this ideology, everyone and anyone should work cooperatively together and reap the benefits cooperatively. Gilbert and the revolution of farming will be the focal point of the next step of our work.

### 1-3-Gilbert and the Revolution of Agriculture

Gilbert is the advocator of social change. He is the character who suffers most from tribal practices. He is a foreigner who believes in progress and development in a traditional village ( Golema Mmidi) where people are quite pleased with their way of life and are particularly suspicious of everything new. Gilbert, like Makhaya, is also looking for his own peace of mind, and his quest led him to Botswana, where he thinks he can find psychological equilibrium. Gilbert has an optimistic view of life and wants to work hard for the good of mankind. He sees women as counterparts of men. By implication, he believes that women should be on the front line of his fight for peace and better “tomorrows”. In so doing, he gives men social rules to women as revealed in the following paragraph:

He wanted the women of the village, first and foremost, to start producing cash crops which would be marketed co-operatively through the farm. The idea was to get capital in hand which would open up the way for purchasing fertilizers, seed and the equipment necessary to increase food production in Golema Mmidi. Once people had enough to eat, other problems like better housing, water supplies and good education for children could be tackled. (...) If each woman cultivated a small plot of marked co-operatively, the profits could then be spread out to good purpose. (p.102)

In the above passage, we note that Gilbert finds his psychic stability in hard work, humility and helping people. In England, he could not feel free because of the hypocritical mentality of the upper middle class from which he comes (p.102). His quest, like Makhaya's one, is not an easy undertaking. Sekoto and Matenge keep turning his projects down, and because he is a foreigner, the community suspicious of him. His experiences in Golema Mmidi have a

mixture of frustrations and victories. In addition, Mama Millipede is cherished by the whole community. The narrator refers to her when he argues:

But in spite of the advantage they had over men educationally, few of the women developed a new personality. They remained their same old tribal selves, docile and inferior. Perhaps Mma-Millipede was one of those rare individuals with a distinct personality at birth. In any event, she was able to grasp the religion of the missionaries and use its message to adorn and enrich her own originally of thought and expand the natural kindness of her heart. (p.68)

When Gilbert arrives for the first time in Golema Mmidi, he has two challenges: getting the villagers on his side so that they can put into practice his ideas of development and overcoming Matenge's opposition to his projects. Matenge is the symbol of anti-progress. He is afraid to lose his powerful position and its advantages. Therefore, he must by all means keep the people in poverty and ignorance. According to Dinorego words: “People have long been ready to try out new ideas, but everything was delayed because of the fight that was going on between chief Matenge and Gilbert”(p.21). However everything is not that simple to Gilbert, who knows that centuries of habits, beliefs and superstitions are hard to change:

Three years of uphill battling had already made clear to him own limitations in putting his ideas across to people, and he had also learned that change, if it was to take place at all, would in some way have to follow the natural course of people's lives rather than impose itself in a sudden and dramatic way from the top. He hadn't the kind of personality that could handle people, because everything in him was submerged to the work he was doing. He lacked sympathy, patience and understanding. (p.26)

Here, we notes that Gilbert met his first difficulty when he

misunderstands the complexity of the land tenure system. Chief Sekoto allowed him to fence the land, but Matenge and the villagers took it as an offence. He had to fight racial and class prejudices evident in people's eating habits:

Certain minority tribes, traditionally considered inferior, had long had a liking for millet and had always grown it as part of the season's crops. Therefore, other tribes who considered themselves superior would not grow it nor eat it. (p.41).

Gilbert also denounces the cattle-post tradition, in which men as well as young boys live in isolated lonely conditions, when agriculture could have provided them better living conditions. Although he undergoes several ordeals, Gilbert never forsakes and his tenacity brings him small victories which finally lead him to the end of his journey. Gilbert stays in Golema Mmidi three years before he begins to appreciate the results of experimental farming. He has a hard time trying to adjust himself and his ideas to the people, but he turns some traditional habits to his advantage. He realizes that agricultural revolution "would depend in the long run on the women of the country" (p.43). Women are the backbone of agriculture and are on the land every day of the year, while men "shuttle to and fro with the cattle" (p.43).

Consequently, it is necessary for Gilbert to instruct women with the assistance of "someone with the necessary mental and emotional alienation from tribalism" like Makhaya (p.30). As our analysis shows Gilbert's quest starts and ends in Golema Mmidi. The name of the village is the concrete sign of his agricultural success. Usually villages are named after important chiefs or events. Golema Mmidi means "to grow crops". In this specific case, the name of the village is judicious and symbolic. It yearns for social change. Agriculture means important modifications such as: the replacement of tribal migration with permanent settlements, which will result in

family life changes, and provide more than the bare necessities. Furthermore, it forecasts a change in women's social standing, for it promises to offer them more power through economic independence. By the end of the novel, by showing concrete result to the returning husbands, Gilbert manages to change some aspects of traditionalist mentality. His inner peace is no more threatened by the fear of a failure. Characters are also important symbols which need be deciphered to understand the quintessence of Head's text.

## 2- Characters' Actions and Meanings

In this study, a symbolic character is a significant one. It is full of different meanings. The symbolic personage acts and behavior also carry symbolic functions. These symbolic functions grant important meanings to the characters in the plot.

### 2-1-Makhaya as a Symbol of Peace

Makhaya is the main protagonist of Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*. The narrator describes him as a political refugee from South Africa. After being released from prison for sabotage, Makhaya fled to Botswana. The reader who knows more about Head can see a close relationship between her and Makhaya. Makhaya is perceived as the voice and the eyes of Head in the novel. Head conveys her idea of change through the actions of Makhaya.. Makhaya has to overcome several kinds of power in the book. He yearns for a community with a balance of power. In this new community, Africans and the Europeans should be full citizens or equal citizens. Africans must not be treated like Bushmen (Head, *Maru*, 1971, p.11). The dialectic of the master and the slave, the oppressor and the oppressed must be vanished. In the new South African community built upon the basis of the positive values of European and African cultures, the people should not be judged by the color of their skin. The narrator refers to

this world of freedom in the following paragraph:

The small group of women, including Paulina, at first felt a little inhibited. They were unaccustomed to a man speaking to them as an equal. They stood back awhile, with uneasy expressions, but once it struck them that he paid no attention to them as women, they also forgot he was a man and became absorbed in following his explanations. And this was really part of the magic of Makhaya's personality. He could make people feel at ease. He could change a whole attitude of mind merely in the way he raised his hand or smiled. But he never exerted himself, seeming to leave it to the other party with whom he was communicating to do all the exerting and changing. (p.110)

In the above passage, Makhaya is a good person who fights for the freedom and survival of his people. The narrator refers to his kindness when he says:

Makhaya remained where he was some minutes longer. If there was anything he likes on earth, it was human generosity. It makes life seem whole and sane to him. It kept the world from shattering into tiny fragments(p.61).

This simply means that the most important desire of Makhaya is generosity. The narrator depicts Makhaya as the rain that allows plants to grow and bear fruits. Makhaya represents African unity and solidarity.

Makhaya embodies all the people fleeing from the tortures of the Apartheid system. These refugees are in search for peaceful shelter in the neighboring countries. Well-educated men often come to the crossroads of life, he said "One road might lead to fame and importance, and another might lead to peace of mind. It's the road of peace of mind that I'm seeking"(p.15). As it appears Makhaya is looking for both physical and moral freedom. The protagonist is in quest of

shelter that can set him from the bondage of apartheid regime. Although, Makhaya does not completely escape from his internal strife, he is committed to forgive the deeds of his oppressors. As Aidoo asserts: "She couldn't understand it so she told herself she was dreaming. May be there was a simple explanation. Perhaps a new god had been born" (Aidoo, 2013, p.4). In so doing, Makhaya is seen as a sensitive soul. He denounces the evil sides of African politics. He is the advocator of African positive values such as generosity, courtesy, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and mutual respect for the Black and the White.

Botswana is also depicted as the catalyst for social change. It is a neighboring country which offers asylum to the refugees fleeing from torture and oppression of Apartheid. Botswana is the symbol of hospitality, togetherness and brotherhood. Through the representation of Botswana, one can see the kindness of the people living there. This is the reason why its borders are open to refugees in quest of shelter.

My first novel is important to me in a personal way. It is my only truly South Africa work, reflecting a black South African viewpoint. The central character in the novel, a black South African refugee, is almost insipid, a guileless, simple-hearted simpleton. But that is a true reflection of the black South African personality. We are an oppressed people who have been stripped bare every human right. We do not know what it is like to have our ambitions aroused, nor do we really see liberation on an immediate horizon.(p. iv)

Makhaya's decision to flee is not only a political strategy but rather a strong desire to appease his internal conflict. In this view, he can live peacefully and find a way out of his inner strife. In this study, gathering simply means that the oppressed people have to be united if they want to be free from oppression. The text is in a way a portrayal of the writer's personal experiences. Head's departure from South Africa is symbolic in

the sense that it also refers to an escape from autocracy to democracy. In the plot, characters come from different social classes. This is a true reflection of South Africa's rainbow nation, diversified, multiracial and multicultural nation. Their different experiences represent the different social settings and associated events as they were manufactured by Apartheid.

To find his peace of mind, Makhaya must leave aside his feelings of hate and regain his innocence and natural goodness. The narrator states that Dinorego "felt in Makhaya's attitude and utterances a horror of life, and it was thought he was trying to flee his horror and replace it with innocence, trust, and respect" (p.97). Makhaya needs time and the right environment to be able to feel and express love, and, being in Golema Mmidi is exactly what he needs. On his arrival in Botswana, Makhaya is hateful and eager to take up any battle in order to expel the negative energy trapped inside him. In Golema Mmidi life is very peaceful but Makhaya discovers a new kind of fight, agriculture, which will help him attain peace of mind. According to the narrator, "Makhaya turned to agriculture for his salvation" (p.81). Agriculture gives him a fair battle to fight, not only against tribalism but also against the harshness of the land.

(...) It was harsh and terrible country to live in. The great stretches of arid land completely stunned the mind, and every little green shoot that you put down into the barren earth just stood there single, frail, shuddering, and not even a knowledge of soils or germination ability of seeds or modern machinery could help you defeat this expansive ocean of desert" (p.115)

Gilbert farming cooperative also makes Makhaya realize, for example, how ironic it is to use dynamite to kill people while it could be used to save hundreds of them. In Golema Mmidi, he uses dynamite to make dams that will bring water to the

village while "not so very long ago, he had come out of jail for wanting to use this very dynamite against the enemies of human dignity" (p.137). Makhaya's politics are a kind of anti-politics. He represents himself as disinterested in the ideological tensions of his country. He appears to be interested only in freedom and common sense.

## **2-2-Golema Mmidi as a Place of Shelter and Generosity**

The village of Golema Mmidi is an important character of *When Rain Clouds Gather*. It is located in the heart of the rural area of Botswana. Makhaya is welcomed in this village by Dinorego who introduces him to Gilbert, an English agricultural expert who has stayed there for three years in order to upgrade the village's traditional farming methods to modern ones. Dinorego is the old man who invites Makhaya to stay in the village: "A poor person like me can still be hospitable", (...). Besides, a lot things are happening in my village and a well-educated man like you can bring a little light" (p.16). The narrator considers Makhaya as someone who can help people in the development of the village.

Golema Mmidi was in the eastern part of the country in a watershed area that received an average annual of rainfall of eighteen inches while vast stretches of the western region were almost desert and received an average annual of rainfall of nine inches. Thus, the eastern watershed was also the most heavily overstocked and overgrazed and overpopulated part of the country. (p.33)

As one notes, many factors have combined to make the village of Golema Mmidi a unique place. It is composed of large tribal or family groupings. Golema Mmidi consists of individuals who have fled there to escape the tragedies of life. Its name too marks it out from the other villages, which are named after important chiefs or important events. Golema Mmidi acquires its name from the occupation the village



followed, which was crop growing. It is one of the very few areas in the country where people were permanently settled on the land. As the narrator asserts:

Normally, in other parts of the country, whole families would migrate in November to their lands on the outskirts of the villages to help with the ploughing and planting, returning to their villages in late January and leaving the June harvest to the women and children. Although people on the whole had to live off crops, they paid little attention to the land. The pivot of their lives was the village. Not so with the people of Golema Mmidi. (p.17)

The analysis of the text reveals that over a period of fourteen years Golema Mmidi had acquired a population of four hundred people, and their permanent settlement there gave rise to small administrative problems. Due to this, a paramount chief named Sekoto had recognized it as a ward of territory and for administrator had appointed his troublesome and unpopular younger brother, Matenge, as subchief of the village. This appointment of Matenge engenders division in the village. In Golema Mmidi, violence and hatred become unnecessary because it is believed that evil destroys itself.

Makhaya finds in Golema Mmidi a perfect community which suits his needs. He accepts life in this locality because it is not an ordinary one: "There were too many independent-minded people there, and tragedies of life had liberated them from the environmental control of tribe" (p.145). Throughout the book, the small village is depicted as if it were a promised land and symbolizes the end of Makhaya's journey. For Makhaya, Golema Mmidi is "a whole new, astonishing world" (p.35). It "seem(s) a dream he had evoked out of his consciousness to help him live, to help make life tolerable" (p.137). Golema Mmidi has the advantage of being a community where people are respectful of one another, strangers are well integrated and progress is

acceptable when it is for the good of the people.

A cordinal trait of Golema Mmidi's community is its sharing, both material and spiritual. To belong to the community Makhaya must accept to open himself to the people and sacrifice some of his freedom in order to gain happiness and peace of mind.

### **2-3-Allegoriy of Bostwana's Desert**

In this work, we can reconsider an allegory as any story which hides under the surface of poetic, historic or symbolic image as an important truth that, when discovered, it leaves no other hidden thing. According to Goethe, allegory is transitive, for the signifying face is crossed in order to understand the signified. For Todorov (1975), allegory has a precise and "univoque" target. In other terms, allegory is a mode of expression through the use of stories which comprise ill-matched images. The meaning of an allegory is the same everywhere. And Platon's allegory of the cave is a concrete illustration. This allegory which is a quest for knowledge is known as such everywhere. Whether we read it in Africa or London, the allegory of the cave stands for a quest for knowledge. But with allegory, images do not appear at the same time. For this reason, we can say that they are ill-matched images. This succession of inter-related images is revealed through the quest for knowledge in the allegory of the cave. In fact, in the first image of this allegory we have a man who lives in darkness. This darkness is a mere representation of ignorance or a lack of communication with the outside world. In the second image, man tries to break up the wall that creates the darkness in which he lives. With the third image, man has his first contact with the outside world. He is then astonished when he sees the day light. All these processes show the steps that followed in the quest for knowledge.

Regarding the above mentioned , the desert in *When Rain Clouds Gathers* should be perceived as the contrary of “rain clouds”. These “Rain clouds” symbolize life and resurrection whereas Bostwana’s desert stands for death and suffering of Batswana people. Therefore the desert has negative connotation. As it can be seen, the desert is not a place of happiness and joy. In this sense, the narrator asserts:

They say this is a country where people ought not to live and it is true. Batswana people often go without food and water and so do their cattle. Cattle are grazed where a bit of grass grows, but water may be found ten miles away ( p.20).

This passage shows the importance of rain or water for Batswana people and their cattle. Batswana people lives and rain are interrelated. They sometimes starve because of the lack of rain. This situation has a negative impact on the farmers and the village of Golema Mmidi as a whole. People have to travel from miles to miles to get water as revealed in the text:

Golema Mmidi was in the eastern part of the country, in a watershed area that received an average annual rainfall of eighteen inches, while vast stretches of the western regions were almost desert and received an average annual rainfall of nine inches. (p.33)

Here, the western area of Golema Mmidi represents the desert zone. It is also described as a place where it rarely rains. By implication, people leave the savannah or desert regions and the forest zones incarnated by Golema Mmidi in the plot.

Consequently, the eastern part is also “the most heavy overstocked and overgrazed and overpopulated part of the country” ( p.33). The desert regions symbolize the sociopolitical crisis that undermines postcolonial African society. The movement of people from the savannah to the forest zones is in a way, the departure of South Africans fleeing Apartheid for Botswana, a sole place of their freedom. In

the story, the absence of rain expresses the lack of democracy and justice. The dry soil of the desert stands for the white ruling class of South-Africa. They are seen as monsters with stony hearts. In Head’s book, death is another symbol of desert, social crisis and division. This study of the symbolism of hope and peace enable the reader to see the implicit meaning of each symbol in Head’s novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Every code, sign and symbol in the text carries a hidden message. Beyond the encoding of signs, the reader can see easily Head’s ideology.

### **3- The Ideology of Bessie Head’s Writing**

To discover the ideology of Bessie Head in her novel amount to revealing her ideas, her feelings, her intentions and her ways of thinking. In the text under study, we notice that her intentions are most of the time unconscious. she denounces or praises specific social facts. In this perspective, the analysis of Head’s ideology is meant to highlight her hidden thoughts. By implication, this ideology has a considerable influence on the mind of the reader and compels him to take a specific position or direction of reading of the text. The analysis of Head’s ideology will revolve around the study of the explicit and the implicit ideologies of Bessie Head.

#### **3-1-The Explicit Ideology of Head**

The explicit ideology of Head is a set of ideas that the reader can discover after a first reading of the book. It enables the reader to know more about the South African female writer, her behavior, her intentions and her vision of life. This implicit ideology also permits to understand the motivations, the direct and visible ideas of the novelist. Head’s text is an answer to the white evil men of South Africa who have turned black people into animals. Referring to this dehumanization of Africans, the narrator states:

I was born in South Africa and that is synonymous with saying that one is born in a very brutal world-if one is black. Everything had been worked out by my time and the social and political life of the country was becoming harsher and harsher. (...)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 or exploitation. In a creative sense, I found myself left with questions. (p.iii)

Head writes to answer back to the white oppressors of South Africa. She is seen as a social arbiter of her community. Her work is meant to tell the rulers of apartheid system that black people are also human beings. She wants the oppressors to treat black people as their counterparts. In so doing, Head fights against the ill-treatment of the Black under the yoke of apartheid regime. Therefore, her novel appears as the fruit of an ideological action vis à vis the white oppressors as depicted in her third novel *Maru* (1971):

When young people ask me: 'How do I become a writer? I always reply that a career in writing first begins with love of reading and a love of books, a feeling for all the magic and wonder that can be communicated through books. I have struggled with the young at workshops in Botswana about this reading tradition. But sometimes a book just burns its way into on's mind and is never forgotten...(p.viii).

This passage reveals that Head is a committed writer who dedicates her life to the service of her community and her compatriots. She writes in order to show her people the way out of the evils of Apartheid system. In this respect, the examination of Head's implicit ideology will be our concern in the next step our paper.

### **1-2-2-The Implicit Ideology of Head**

This work allows the reader understands the opinion of Head about the role of a writer in a fragile society. For Head, the isolated man is very often an artist. In her

trilogy: *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971) and *A question of power*(1973), she gives a significant place to the quest of peace of mind and the re-consideration of women social position. Talking about the role of the artist, Achebe states in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) that "A novelist must listen to his characters who after all are created to wear the shoe and point the writer where it pinches" (1987, p.131). In the notes she put together for publication in the April 1979 issue of *World Literature Written in English*, under the title 'Social and Political Pressures that shape Literature in Southern Africa', Head revealed clearly her intentions:

With all my South African experience I longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice. But I also wanted the book to be so beautiful and so magical that I, as the writer, would long to read and re-read it. (...) I knew the language of racial hatred, but it was evil exclusively practiced by white people. I therefore listened in amazement as Botswana people talked of the Basarwa whom they oppressed: 'They don't think', they said they don't know anything' (Maru, p.iv).

In a way, Head's novels reveal much more than a study of the traumatic effects of Apartheid system on a subject people even though this is a serious part of their intentions. Head recognizes her obligation to her society and has said of herself that she must participate in the task of 're-education and re-generation' which must be done. This situation puts her in quite different relationship to her society than writers in Europe and America. She lives in her society and expresses its aspirations. Modern African writers speak primarily for and to the people of their countries. These writers express their hope and fears, sum up their experiences and establish ( or re-establish) the uniqueness and dignity of their communities. Modern African writing, like all literature, has a special commitment to formulating the basic values of the society and is both a reflection and a criticism of

those values. It creates a sensation of the life of the society.

Head refers to the educative role of the writer when she regards herself as “the sensitive point in the community” (G. D. Killam, 1971, 98). As the work reveals, the artist is mainly equipped to know in a sensitive way what is prominent in the minds, what are the most pressing concerns of the people for whom he or she writes. Head has the responsibility of synthesizing these values and interpreting them. The educative role of the writer which Head accepts involves her in the formulation of the social and cultural philosophy and values of society which she casts in the most effective and convincing form that she can command. A part of Head’s concern has been with reconciling the individual with his cultural heritage on the one hand, and his culture in a time racial segregation on the other. In the same range of thought Achebe argues:

I believe that the writer should be concerned with the question of human values. One of the most distressing ills which afflict new nations is a confusion of values. We sometimes make the mistake of talking about values as though they were fixed and eternal...Of course values are relative and in a constant state of flux. (1964, p.159)

In our analysis of allegories and symbols, which are indirect ways to express ideas, we noticed that some attitudes which are related to democracy. Among these attitudes, we have some ones which favor the improvement of this process whereas some others hinder its fulfillment. As the narrator puts it:

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 Africa border police sped past with sirens wailing, and this caused an unpleasant sensation in his stomach. (p.1)

In this paragraph, the patrol van and its sirens represent some of the tools used by apartheid system to oppress the black people. This situation reveals the social classification of South-African society. The black people flee apartheid because of the evil deeds of the white minority. The refusal of the ruling class to protect the poor can be assimilated to African inoperative institutions.

This passivity is perceived through the attitude of a policeman who just stays away in front of an impolite driver. As we can see, this passage is a good illustration of indiscipline in front of institutions incarnated by this passive policeman. This scene is not the only case that illustrates defects in the domain of the respect of institutions. For example the black people do not have the same rights with the white men. And worse, the black boys do not attend the same schools with the white ones. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, this social stratification is seen through the agricultural reform. The narrator highlights this issue of social classification when he asserts:

(Gilbert) He wanted the women of the village, first and foremost, to start producing cash crops which would be marketed co-operatively through the farm. The idea was to get capital in hand which would open up the way for purchasing fertilizers, seed and the equipment necessary to increase food production in Golema Mmidi. (p.102)

This above paragraph shows that the writer, Head gives men power to women in her book. Everything important in text revolves around women. In so doing, women in Head’s work are the “alpha” and the “omega”. “No men ever worked harder than Botswana women” (p.108). As such, men are perceived as “second zone citizens”.

They are behind women who play significant part in the economy of the country. As the unvoiced comment of the novelist suggests, the future success of the country rests on women. This can be explained by their active involvement in the revolution of agriculture.

Head's remains hopeful despite the different ordeals she underwent in her quest for freedom. As a committed writer, she uses her pen as a weapon to castigate the predicament of her people. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, she sheds light on the weakness of modern African political institutions. Head assumes that whatever the situation is or may be, we must remain hopeful. If one is hopeful he can achieve positive and greater things. Head then believes that democracy will somehow occur in Africa. The advent of agricultural revolution and the new social position of women reveal that there is hope for a better tomorrow. As Abadi states "We are in a democracy and everyone has a right to express any opinion" (Okara, p.45).

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, we note that Bessie Head uses symbolism in *When Rain Clouds Gather* to share her life experience with the reader. She uses many symbols to express the transition from the predicament of

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tribalism, to the development of today and the effect it has on the society. In a way, Head uses symbols and nature to denounce the evil side of the apartheid system. The evil deeds of Apartheid compel many South Africans to leave their homeland for neighboring countries.

We also find many aspects of Head's personal experiences as a racially mixed person in her writing. She uses writing as a pretext to shed light on the issue of discrimination, refugees, racism, African history and interpersonal relationships. The main point is always on the hardship and struggles of people's life in postcolonial African society. Even though she claimed to be non-political in her actions, her writings dwell on injustice and oppression in South Africa's political arena. Head wants to set free all the oppressive and hostile social structures that marginalized and disadvantaged the Africans in South-Africa. Head uses Makhaya to embody the suffering of all the oppressed people in their homeland. She wrote her first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* to awaken the consciousness of her people. Head also uses her pen to promote love, brotherhood and togetherness. "Love isn't like that. Love is two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other, like a ghoul" (Head, 1974, pp.12-13).

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