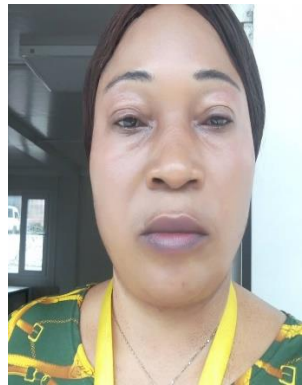


ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENCE: A STUDY OF BESSIE HEAD'S  
*MARU* AND ZAKES MDA'S *THE MADONNA OF EXCELSIOR*



*Beri Mary Shey,*  
Cameroonian,  
Department of English,  
Specialty : Commonwealth Literature,  
Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences,  
Republic of Cameroon,  
University of Yaounde I (Cameroon)  
Cameroon

**ABSTRACT**

This article set out to examine *Maru* and *The Madonna of Excelsior* of Bessie Head and Zakes Mda respectively, in view of their approaches to the question of accommodation of difference in the context of the South African society. Although their respective texts are set in the South African context, their aspirations go beyond their immediate context to include the broader context of the African society. Accommodating difference means accepting and recognising other people irrespective of their backgrounds-whether social or cultural. This article handles the attempts to bring about harmony despite our racial, ethnic, historical, cultural, communal and social specificities as evident in the works of Head and Mda. It also examines the move towards forgiveness and acceptance as presented by the authors with special regard to their attempt at contributing to an authentic postcolonial society.

The article argues that insisting on our differences can only lead to a fractured society, but accommodating our differences would create an authentic society with opportunities for all. Coxed by the values of the Ubuntu philosophy, Head and Mda bring about a socio-cultural consciousness that underscores the significance of considering the aspirations and needs of others irrespective of our specific socio-cultural and political orientations. Love for one another and respect for other cultures and people are quintessential in the building of a better tomorrow. The theory applied in the analysis in this article is the postcolonial theory given that the question of difference is a crucial issue that preoccupies postcolonial critics and writers in the postcolonial society.

**KEY WORDS**

race, ethnicity, difference, harmony,  
accommodation



## Introduction

An important characteristic of our society which also poses a challenge is its multicultural nature inherent in the differences between various racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural entities, not leaving out individual tastes. Accommodating difference means accepting and recognising other people irrespective of their backgrounds-whether social or cultural. The differences that exist among people account for their specific identity. Over time, many extremists have used differences as gateways to foster their malicious agenda through the creation of opposing images and stereotypes. In some cases, mainstream socio-political networks have worked to assimilate minority groups for easy administration. However, any attempts at undermining a people because of their peculiarities have brought nothing but conflicts with severe human and material casualties. In this respect, this article seeks to prove that accommodating difference is a sure means to eradicate prejudice caused by human unwillingness to accept others and respect their specific identities. The article also aims at showing that Bessie Head and Zakes Mda opt for an alternative life far from conflicts caused by prejudice resulting from differences, by encouraging peaceful coexistence across race, ethnicity, communality and families. The preoccupations of Head and Mda regarding the present and future life of the population of their society in particular and Africa in general are in dialogue with the preoccupations of postcolonial critics and theoreticians. We have colonial experiences and effects which include; subjugation, slavery, dispossession, conflicts, oppression, human casualties, displacement just to name a few. The pressing issue of otherness becomes eminent. After freedom, post liberation crisis compounded by neo-colonialism has become the preoccupation of postcolonial critics and writers. Due to insecurity and subjugation in terms of politics, culture, and socio-economic, the postcolonial critic and writer are faced with more challenges.

Therefore, this article further argues that as a postcolonial reality, diversity can be used positively to enhance the well-being of humanity, bringing to light, Head's and Mda's attempts to promote social bonding that would undermine socio-cultural differences and privilege solidarity. One of the preoccupations of postcolonial writers and critics is to ensure a smooth society, where differences would not be seen as a barrier to harmony but as an opportunity for progress and development. Both authors understudy, join their voices with those of other postcolonial writers to ensure serenity between different cultural groups and to maintain harmony between them. Henry Schwarz in "Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial Studies in the US Academy" in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* enunciates:

*[...] postcolonial studies question the violence that has often accompanied cultural interaction and attempts to frame explanations of it as well as to provide alternative models of accommodation or getting along. It also proposes practical models of ending or channelling conflict, often by rethinking the nature of identity in situations where groups come together and interact (5).*

Postcolonial study is a vast field that is preoccupied with alternative ways of conflict resolutions in the postcolonial society. It engages in bringing the society to work together for mutual benefit, taking into consideration the fact that postcolonial population longs for a



society free from fear, deprivation, insecurity and violence. This can only be achieved if everyone is made to see the need to live with others happily despite our differences.

First and foremost, the quest for the accommodation of difference is triggered by one's experience, awareness and recognition of difference. This is confirmed by the postcolonial critic and theoretician, Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* when he says: "It is only by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity" (170). Bhabha makes us understand that the experience of difference should help us to appreciate solidarity rather than reinforcing it. This is evident from the fact that the benefit of coming and operating together overrides the alternative of insisting on our differences. There is need for the reconstruction of a new society in which an individual's attainment of education, admission to any public or private institution, opening for employment and proprietorship are neither denied nor restricted for reasons of race, religion, class, gender and ethnic origins. To achieve unity and equality, human beings need to learn how to diversify power because partial consideration of power "privileges diversity, discontinuity, and differences while it silences unity, continuity and similarity" (Zillah Eisenstein, 1988: 18). It is important to note that matters regarding the human future should be envisaged in relation to diversity. In this respect, everyone would feel involved and responsible for the development and progress of their respective societies. That explains why the authors under study aspire for inter-ethnic and inter-racial tolerance, especially in broad-based contexts, where variety has failed to produce social harmony.

Head's contribution to solidarity is hinted by Bomarito and Hunter when they say: "She [Head] worked for substantial change in customs, envisioning equality for citizens in Africa" (*Feminism in Literature* 32). Mda is also concerned with the accommodation of difference which he depicts as a major concern in both apartheid and postapartheid South Africa. South Africa has been characterised by decades of human suffering and the demise of apartheid in the 1990s ushers in the spirit of self-assertion and national unity which are expressed mostly through literature. Nana Wilson Tagoe puts this better when he says in "New Locations and Changing Paradigms" in *The Changing Face of African Literature* that: "Within the pedagogy of nationalism and liberation, literature functions as an instrument for creating a national consciousness and a national community" (22). Literature helps to create awareness in the population regarding the happenings in the society. It has always been the function of literature to make people see what they could not see and do what they could not do especially for the wellbeing of the society. While Zakes Mda emphasises racial tolerance in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Head lays emphasis on ethnic tolerance in *Maru*.

At the racial level, conflicts have brought severe consequences especially on the black community in South Africa both during and after apartheid. Apartheid was a system of government based on racial segregation and the disadvantaged group was made up of black South Africans. The black population suffered discrimination, brutality, humiliation, exploitation and deprivation both economically and politically. With the advent of democracy, South African writers, in response to the 'Rainbow Nation', envisaged by Desmond Tutu insist on the accommodation of racial difference as an undisputable means of building a new South Africa. During apartheid, it was a daunting and practically impossible task to make the whites see the need to accept equality among different races. Their belief of racial superiority which has not waned even with the attainment of democracy and freedom in South Africa is a conundrum yet to be completely dealt with in contemporary society. The watch words in this



context are “acceptance” and “recognition” of group difference. Head and Mda like Desmond Tutu are guided by the principles of Ubuntu ( you are because we are) to aspire for a space that would accommodate one another. Our readiness to accept and take cognisance of the differences that exist between us and others in terms of status, race, tribe, gender can go a long way to build and secure our future in our respective societies.

Unlike Head, Mda deals with the period from transition to democracy, where a lot happens in terms of negotiation and reconciliation. We realise that there is hope of reconciliation between both races that live in South Africa where racial difference would no longer define interactions neither in business nor politics. This is evident in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, where Mda uses flashback to bring to light the evolution of political changes on the eve of South African democracy. We realise that Popi, one of the most admirable characters in the text is against Niki’s decision to trade with the VOLKASKAS, which is an Afrikaner bank and Viliki tells her that the black South Africans and the Afrikaner have decided to come to terms and build one nation as he declares: “Next year we shall be liberated and we shall be one with the Afrikaners. That’s what the movement stands for. One South African nation” (153). Viliki’s enthusiasm at seeing a united South Africa shows that he is out for unity and not division. This aspiration of seeing a united South Africa is also echoed by Lily in Pamela Jooste’s *Dance with A Poor Man’s Daughter* when she says: “[...] next year there’ll be no valley left and we’ll all be on the flats” (191). Like Viliki, Lily is also hoping that the strongholds of racial bigotry will be dismantled and everyone will operate on the same level irrespective of racial background. This is an indication that the racial conflicts that have characterised South African politics is melting and it is also a sign of reconciliation between both races that have long been in conflicts. Viliki and his sister represent dynamic characters who have greatly evolved in terms of their thinking and contribution to change. The idea of reconciliation reflects the maturity of these characters and their determination to be vanguards of solidarity.

Accordingly, in his *Awakening to Equality*, Kark Lutze, though not a fictional character thinks like Viliki and Popi, where he explains how coloured people were also surprised to find a white person serving them at a Christian gathering. They expressed their surprise thus: “You do? White people by law are not allowed to be together with colored in any public gathering” (19). Lutze makes us understand that he actually felt bad when the coloured said this to him: “I blush to recall how utterly naïve I was about the state of race relations in the South. I hadn’t even known prior to my arrival in Muskogee that Oklahoma was categorised as a Southern state. Racial segregation was not only practised but also legally enforced” (19). As a true Christian, his belief in equality made him mingle with the coloured without any sense of superiority. This shows that Christianity is not a bad religion as many whites make some Africans believe. Rather, some of its advocates demonstrate hypocritical attitudes because of selfishness, which helps to tarnish the image of Christianity. Lutze, who happens to be a pastor, is calling for his white counterparts to depart from their hypocritical practices and embrace all races of the world.

Still at the racial level, we notice that some whites are making efforts to bring about reconciliation in South Africa. Adam de Vries tries to convince his white counterparts to negotiate with the blacks. We are told that:



*He often told Viliki about a conference he had once attended in 1982 in Marquard, another eastern Free State town thirty-four kilometres north of Clocolan. He had been one of the 260 delegates of the National Party. He could see the waves of the right wing, he said. He had bravely stood up and told the congress that the government had no option but to negotiate with the movement and unban it (The Madonna of Excelsior 218-219).*

The negotiation mentioned above in Mda's text is a fictionalised version of the 1990 negotiation moves, initiated by both races represented by the white government and the ANC. History holds that in May 1990, a meeting, intended to clear the way for constitutional negotiations was held. (*Nelson Mandela: A Biography* 105). A year later, the opening session of the formal negotiations of the convention of a democratic South Africa was held in Johannesburg. In Mda's work, we notice that Adam de Vries wants to see the blacks and the whites come together. That explains why there exists a political rift between Adam de Vries and Johannes Smith. Smith is a racial bigot and for that reason decides to leave the National Party and join another party because Adam de Vries and the National Party are relaxing some of the stringent policies of apartheid (*The Madonna of Excelsior* 220).

Also, Lyzette de Vries bypasses all racial notions to cooperate with Popi in order to promote democracy. These women who belong to different racial backgrounds leave behind every racial disparity and concentrate on nation building. Popi is also another individual who engages in political changes not only in the white government but in the black oriented government. When Viliki loses the position of Mayor to Lyzette de Vries, Popi continues to work with her and usually advises her on development programmes. For instance, the idea of a festival is brought up by Popi. She raises an interesting argument by mentioning other states that have festivals that have gained national and international recognition. This shows that Popi is out to promote multiculturalism as she encourages the organisation of a cultural festival that will bring together all cultures in the country multiculturalism brings about a more tolerant society, which respects cultural differences and encourages open-mindedness and participation in national development. The importance of multiculturalism is also highlighted by Randal Pinkett and Jeffrey Robinson in *Black Faces in White Places* when they say:

*[...] "multiculturalism" movement gained prominence as a way to recognize the history, perspective and contribution of all cultures to the development of [South Africa....] Multiculturalism led to the proactive measures such as accepting different types of clothing in educational and professional environments; organizing cultural celebrations and festival" (22).*

Festivals do not only help to promote culture, they also bring people from different backgrounds together. In the course of taking a tour to other festivals in order to gain experience in building their own Excelsior Festival, Popi and Lycette find themselves in Clocolan, where the farm festival is organised. This festival which happens to bring together people from all over Southern Africa is regarded as one of the most glaring show of the year for the Eastern Free State farming community. Smith happens to be there as the proud Afrikaner farmer that he has always been. He is even noted to have said on one occasion that: "I am a farmer! I feed South Africa! The very Mandelas and Mbekis cannot survive without me!" (225). Smith is a proud white farmer who has been promoting racial disparity by mistreating and exploiting



black girls. Although he brags about his agricultural expertise, his statement has racial and political undertones, especially looking at his racial attitude regarding the changes that are ongoing in the country.

It is important to note that Smith is one of the Boers who still think that F. W de Klerk has betrayed the white man by letting Mandela out of prison and paving his way to the helm of the Republic. We are informed that:

*He [Smith] had not been socializing much with the likes of Adam de Vries and his wife, given that he believed that they belonged to the group of Afrikaners who had sold the Boers out to the communists. A group that had been misled by one F. W de Klerk, who had capitulated to one Nelson Mandela as soon as the Afrikaners had elected the said de Klerk President of South Africa. Johannes Smith kept his distance from such Afrikaners (215).*

Mda, uses conservative characters like Smith and Cronje to represent the members of the Conservative Party who opposed president de Klerk by walking out when de Klerk declared in his speech that he was advocating the repeal of the several Acts that were punitive to the South African native population. The fact that such declarations prompted the members of the Conservative Party to walk out showed that they were not ready for the changes that de Klerk wanted to introduce in 1991. We see that the family of de Vries constitutes the white faction that has decided to unite with the blacks to build a new nation and those who are still in support of racism like Smith are not ready to associate with people who want democracy. The likes of Smith continue to practise racial discrimination and alienation in the new South Africa.

Evidently, we notice that in the new society, Smith and Cronje continue to drink in separate drinking corners where black South Africans are usually excluded. It is reflected that: *They [Viliki and his friends] watched as Afrikaner men and women walked in and out of the hotel, Viliki and his friends had never been inside that pub. The thought never even entered their heads to drink there. It was the domain of the Afrikaners of Excelsior. And everyone left it at that.... Viliki saw Tjaart Cronje and Johannes Smith climbed out of a four-wheel drive vehicle, singing boisterously. Jacomina followed, reprimanding them for making too much noise. They only laughed at her and sang even louder, dancing clownishly around her as they walked into the pub (223).*

The likes of Smith, frequenting such segregatory areas is indicative of the fact that the postapartheid society is still not free from white racial segregations. But the efforts of de Vries and the Pule siblings [Viliki and Popi] are enough to frustrate these racial bigots. The friendship between both families represented by whites and blacks respectively contributes in building a new society.

However, from a political perspective, Popi has a more cordial relationship with Lizette de Vries than she has had with her brother. It is important to note that when Viliki was the mayor, his relationship with Popi was not cordial as they did not share the same view on political development. Mda is making it clear that a government of only blacks would always be handicapped as well as a government of only white people. He is advocating a mixed race government, where every race would be adequately represented. The uniraical government of



either race has demonstrated high sense of misrepresentation and irregularities characterised by discrimination, greed, human alienation and corruption thus, showing the necessity for the creation of a rainbow nation for the country of South Africa.

Accordingly, Lycette de Vries goes beyond her husband's endeavour to fight racial discrimination by putting her complete trust in Popi. She ignores her white counterparts and gives priority to Popi as we are told that: "It was true that Her Worship, the Mayor of Excelsior seemed to rely very much on Popi's counsel. It was Popi who had suggested that it would do Excelsior a lot of good if the town had a festival of its own" (214). The role of Lyzette de Vries against racial discrimination is reminiscent of the role played by Vera Stark in Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*. As a professional lawyer, the role she plays in liberating black people cannot be overstated. She forms a foundation called Vera's Legal Foundation in which she devotes herself in fighting against the oppression of black people. It is stated that Vera has been active in "campaigns against detention without trial, forced removals of communities, franchises that excluded blacks" (5). Gordimer is out to prove that white people were also involved in the struggle against racial oppression in South Africa. Sibongile, a black woman returning from exile also engages in political activism. However her commitment in tolerating and accepting assistants with poor education also shows her willingness to accommodate and teach the ignorant to become efficient. It is corroborated that:

*Although Sibongile spoke of her job assistants as if they were quite humble. It was the democratic vocabulary hang over from exile with its brave denial of hierarchy. -She was one who could not be reached except through a secretary these days. She had her offices and battery of command-computers, fax, assistants whose poor education and lack of skills she was attempting to tolerate while disciplining and training them (None to Accompany me 74).*

By means of education, Sibongile has become an empowered woman in politics. She tries to show that instead of alienating those that are not of the same standard as we are, we should accommodate and teach them what they need to know.

Furthermore, Johannes Smith, who has violated Niki through rape, says: "We can't live in the past for ever. Bygones should be allowed to be bygones Niki" (*The Madonna of Excelsior* 261). This shows that Smith regrets what he has done and wants to reconcile with Niki. Smith was one of the great farmers and enterprising whites who used their wealth to exploit black girls. Besides his wealth, he also used his racial power to rape Niki and go unpunished because he is a white man. They are in the new South Africa so, Smith wants Niki to forget what he did during the apartheid era. There is this insistence of forgetting the past which the South Africans, especially the whites think that it is an easy way to live together in peace. This is because they recognise that they have hurt the black community and memories of such a hurtful past could bring retaliation.

Sadly, coloured people continue to face rejection due to their hybrid nature which gives them partial identities. We also learn that while most people, both blacks and whites are against Maria because of her coloured skin, Viliki has no worry being with her since he does not discriminate against coloured people. He falls in love with her and they decide to go about entertaining people with music in a unique way when "she accompanied his accordion with her



flute, which in itself was an innovation, as that combination of instruments was unknown in the kind of Sesotho music that they played (*The Madonna of Excelsior* 203-204).

Contrastingly, Sekatle constantly reminds his niece (Maria) of her lack of identity because she is neither black nor white. Although Sekatle works in the same local council controlled by blacks, he stands in sharp contrast to Viliki due to his unrepentant attitude towards whites and coloured people. Viliki shows his accommodating behaviour by bringing out the potentials in Maria's daughter popularly known as "the seller of songs". She is more confident now that someone could appreciate and encourage her to realise her dream of becoming a popular musician. His uncle Sekatle could not realise these potentials because of his rejection of her for being a coloured. This shows that if we learn to appreciate and accept each other no matter our racial or social backgrounds, we will greatly contribute to development and cause others to have a sense of belonging and feel free to showcase their talents.

Also, Tjaart Cronje (the son of a white business and political tycoon) who has hated Popi all along reconciles with her by telling her that they have the same father. Cronje and Popi share the same biological father. He has never accepted Popi as his half-sister owing to the fact that she is a product of scandal brought to his family by his promiscuous father. In his sick bed, he sends someone to call for Popi in order to reconcile with her. In a discussion with Popi, he tries to make Popi understand that he is a changed person. He begins his discussion by bringing in a flashback about their happy moments in the council leaving aside the ugly moments characterised by insults on Popi's racial background. It is related that:

*There was an uneasy silence for a while. Then Tjaart Cronje made some small talk about their days in the council. He did not talk about their fights. He recalled only some of the funny moments when the joke had been on him. Self-depreciating moments. Soon Popi was laughing. An uneasy kind of laughter. After a while, Tjaart Cronje said he was tired and wanted to sleep. He thanked her for coming. But as she was about to walk out of the door, he called her back. 'I have a little gift for you' (265).*

Tjaart Cronje has changed from his evil ways of harassing Popi on grounds that she is not white. The fact that he calls Popi, and wishes to be friends with her means that he no longer sees her as an object of ridicule but as someone he can interact with. Like the others, the wind of change has finally touched him and he would not want to be the only one left behind in this general march towards democracy and reconciliation. Popi's acceptance of Tjaart's gift also depicts that the differences between them have melted: "I'll take the cream, Tjaart, because in my culture they say it is rude to refuse a present. But I will never use it. I love my body the way it is" (263). This shows that Popi has not only reconciled with Tjaart but has also begun to accept her physical features for which she has been seen as a source of shame.

Consequently, Popi reconciles with herself after having lived an absurd life due to her rejection by the society. She breaks the mirror each time she looks at herself and thinks of how the society feels about coloured people. She has desired to be black so that she could mingle freely among black girls (*The Madonna of Excelsior* 263). Nevertheless, we are told that she has come to accept her identity. She no longer sees her blue eyes and long hair as elements of embarrassment. It is revealed that:





*Lately Popi spent all her morning looking at the mirror, admiring her blue eyes, and brushing long hair golden-brown hair. She wondered why she had been ashamed of it all these years...She did not only admire her hair and her eyes. She loved her yellow-coloured face and her long neck that had the spot where the skin continues to peel off. She loved her body and everything about it. She had taken to wearing the isigqebhezana, the micro-miniskirts of the new millennium, displaying her long yellow legs that bristled with golden yellow hair. She was no barbie doll: she would not shave her hairy legs. Her hairy arms. Even her armpits. She rejoiced in her hair and in her hairiness (266).*

This shows self-acceptance as she is able to accept those body parts and the colour that she has rejected. She has come to self-realisation when she questions why she used to be ashamed of herself. However, the society has also contributed to her self-rejection by rejecting her. It is in this mood of self-acceptance that Popi is able to visualize the possibilities of building a progressive society.

Concurrently, Popi is a character whose mixed racial background has greatly affected her behaviour and self-examination. Even after apartheid has been toppled, Popi still suffers from such legacies as partial identity crises making it difficult for her to recognise and accept herself as a normal human being. It is only through her acknowledgement of herself as a human being that she begins to function normally in the society. Popi's self-realisation is important in the accommodation of difference just like family and intra-communal harmony because if one does not recognise and accept the people around, it would be difficult to appreciate and accept the people who are a little away. As it is more or less articulated – charity begins at home. The consequences of the apartheid system pushed many to long for a space characterised by unity and solidarity. The advent of democracy granted an opportunity for such dreams to be realised. The desire to live together, despite differences in backgrounds, is also extended to the ethnic context as seen in the next section.

Furthermore, Leon de Kock in “South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction” in *Contemporary Literature* also preoccupies himself with the idea of racial solidarity in the context of South Africa. He Posits that:

*In the most influential stream of antiapartheid resistance, that of the Charterists or alliance partners now consolidated in South African National Congress government, nonracialism became a key policy. During the years of resistance to apartheid, an alternative revolutionary South Africa was represented – for we are here still enclosed in the seam, in the crisis of self-representation – as a place of non-difference, a place of equality for all, despite race, class, or gender, and a place where difference is vigorously disavowed in favor of the one, seamlessly open society (455).*

During the apartheid era, black South Africans were ready to create a society without difference and discrimination in order to achieve racial harmony. Although this spirit continues in postapartheid South Africa, some people still think that the whites should be paid in their own coins now that power is in the hands of black people. It is this spirit of vengeance that Mda seeks to discourage in his postapartheid literary adventure as he makes us understand that



vengeance can never solve but create more problems because we can sometimes get entrapped in our attempt to exact vengeance.

Hence, Mda writes from a backdrop of socio-historical realities with the aim of revolutionizing the mind-sets of his people, especially political leaders who have the destiny of his people in their hands. As a literary explorer investigating the past, Mda appreciates memory and also underscores the pedagogic implication of history. He explains his reasons for venturing to the past in the following words:

[...] we who are now the new rulers of South Africa, should not do to others what was done to us. In other words, we should not be the new oppressors. Only history can teach us that, only memory, providing of course we are capable of learning from history. In many instances we tend to forget those lessons that history gives us and we repeat the same mistakes over and over again. But it is our hope that by remembering what happened, we will not be the new perpetrators, which is very possible [...] (interview with Zakes Mda by B Kachuba).

Mda contemplates that by going back to the past we are taking a step forward in ameliorating human condition, especially if we learn our lessons and make efforts to erase mistakes and avoid repeating them. There is every indication that Mda opts for interracial harmony in the new society with eagerness to create a rainbow nation.

In the ethnic context, Head is more concerned given that her novel, *Maru*, is set in a typically ethnic community, where ethnic prejudice is a daily experience of the indigenes. In Head's *Maru*, we notice that the presence of Margaret brings tremendous changes in the lives of the people. The village of Dilepe is noted for its long history of ethnic discrimination. Head tries to refute the feeling that identity and relationship should be based on shared cultural characteristics. Bhikhu Parekh comments on this view in *Rethinking Multiculturalism* when he says: "Sense of belonging cannot be ethnic or based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics, for a multicultural society is too diverse for that, but political in nature and based on a shared commitment to the political community"(341). What Parekh suggests here is absent in Head's fictive world in *Maru*. Margaret comes to introduce the spirit of sharing, commitment and above all love, yet many people are ignorant of what those principles are all about. Although she meets many obstacles enough to cause her to give up her struggle, she does not stop fighting and her determination is what helps her to triumph in the end. The cultural identification of the Masarwa people has never been considered by the Botswana people. They have never understood what Lovemore Mbigi expects in "The African Dream in Management" when she spells out the principles of Ubuntu featuring: "survival, spirit of solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity" (33).

However, Margaret's presence brings radical transformation in the consciences of the people, particularly of the ruling class. Moleka, a member of the ruling class, who has been treating his slaves so shabbily, decides to assemble them on the table and dines with them. Like the others, he becomes very disappointed with the maltreatment of the Masarwa people, especially with the school community, championed by the principal and his supervisor (Pete and Seth) respectively. He is the one who loans the community bed to Margaret. When he hears that the whole village has gone insane about the presence of the Masarwa teacher, he decides to stamp out such evil from his society. In this respect, he decides to put the principal and others



to shame by dining with his slaves on the same table. He even goes as far as using his fork to feed his slaves as indicated in the following narratives:

*Moleka, who heard that the principal and the high-ups were planning trouble for the new mistress, could not make allowance for the slow removal of prejudice. He removed it all in one day. He told Seth, the education supervisor, that there was good food in his house on Sunday. When Seth arrived he found all the Masarwas in the yard of Moleka also seated at the table. Moleka took up his fork and placed a mouthful of food in the mouth of a Masarwa, then with the same fork fed his himself ( 53).*

Moleka's behaviour is intended not only to put Seth and his likes to shame but to conscientise them. This action also shows that Moleka has come to self-realisation and now sees the Masarwa people as normal human beings. He has also been overpowered by the strong influence of love, which makes him renounce his former identity as an oppressor.

Also, Maru, the heir apparent to the throne, who has brought untold suffering in the life of Margaret simply because she is from a despised tribe, now becomes an advocate of ethnic solidarity. He has proven that he is no longer living in the past; that things have changed and his people must submit to the new order; that they are in the modern era, where every individual must constitute part of the whole that makes the nation. Kaufmann in *Rethinking Ethnicity* corroborates that: "...the modern principles of democracy, citizenship and popular sovereignty allowed for the inclusion of large sections of the population previously confined to the status of subjects and subordinates" (35). Human relationship characterised by solidarity and consideration is what is expected in a society that seeks to maintain ethnic connections and ensure nation building. In this respect, people need to be given the opportunity to take part in activities that can enhance their capacities. However, Margaret's attitude and her potentials have caused the state of affairs to change in Dilepe village. She has worked on the consciences of Dilepe ruling class and people like Maru and Moleka have become conscious of the evil they have been perpetrating in the society. Maru has been touched by an unimagined spirit overnight to change his attitude towards the Masarwa people. Head also uses Magic realism not only to bring reconciliation as in the case of Maru and Margaret, but also in uprooting the bigots of the society as in the case of Pete and Seth who are terrorised to their graves by unseen spirits. As a postcolonial writer, Head employs magic realism as a way of challenging the western tradition of realism. Using magic realism as a form of challenge to western realism is supported by Ato Quayson who in "Magical Realism and the African Novel" in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* posits that: "Magic realism is then proffered as that mode of representation that challenges the western tradition of realism, positing instead an alternative universe in which fantastical elements are placed side by side with the real in a process of establishing equivalence between them" (160). The adoption of oral genres in narrative techniques with traditional elements of supernatural existence is a way of enhancing the African identity. Maru has not only changed his intolerant behaviour, he has also decided to incorporate the Masarwa community into the ruling class. Maru is able to break a long history of conservative beliefs by getting married to a Masarwa. Like Maru, Waiyaki in Ngugi's *The River Between* attempts to unite the two divided Gikuyu communities [Makuyu and Kameno] by marrying a Makuyu girl called Nyambura. The two communities were historically one but became divided when one [Makuyu] finally converted to Christianity and the other remained attached to their traditions.



Comparatively, Maru's behaviour in Head's novel falls in line with that of Obi Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* who rejects the cultural demands of the Ibos and gets married to Clara, a descendant of the stigmatised Osu caste. Although they have faced racial discrimination in England, their country offers no hope of existing without stigmatisation, especially on the part of Clara. A change of place does not solve their problem as they experience human prejudice in just the same intensity as they have experienced in their former setting. According to the Ibo customs an Osu should not interact with the Ibos. However, Obi thinks that Clara is a human being and needs to be treated in the same way like the others. The baselessness of ethnic prejudice is portrayed by the circumstances that surround the beginning of the love affair between Clara and Obi. Obi has been into many love relationships in England but the woman who seems to have stolen his heart is Clara. At their first meeting at a dance held by the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, Obi proves to be emotionally attached to Clara on this first meeting. On their next meeting in the ship, the *Sasa* as they return to Nigeria, Obi's insistence finally kindles the romantic passion in Clara who responds to his love advances. The influence that Clara has on the emotional life of Obi is overwhelming. We are told that:

*Until Obi met Clara on board the Cargo boat Sasa, he had thought of love as another grossly over-rated European invention. It was not that he was indifferent to women. On the contrary, he had been quite intimate with a few in England – a Nigerian, a West Indian, English girls and so on. But these intimacies which Obi regarded as love were neither deep nor sincere.... With Clara, it was different. It had been from the very first. There was never a superior half at Obi's elbow wearing a patronising smile (63).*

Love knows only human beings and not the social divides that exist between them. Obi has fallen in love with an Osu in whom he sees a human being with talents and beauty worth appreciating. Obi is trying to rise above the ominous grip of ethnic chauvinism. Unlike his father who produces every evidence to justify his actions, he maintains his view that no human being should be alienated or discriminated upon. Maru has also risen above ethnic prejudices by uniting with Margaret.

Hence, Maru takes his conscience to task and this makes tribal identifications insignificant to him. Here, we notice that love also facilitates reconciliation. Maru's irresistible romantic attachment to Margaret causes him to leave behind all tribal prejudices and marry her. The marriage between Margaret and Maru does not only reveal the accommodation of difference but it is also a mark of reconciliation between the two ethnic groups, which have been separated for ages. This marriage also symbolises the accommodation of ethnic, historical, social and cultural specificities. It is important to note that Margaret plays a very important role in this reunion with Maru. It is due to the potentials embedded in her that Maru is enticed to fall in love with her. Due to her determination to save her people through the demonstration of her abilities, Maru is made to understand that the Masarwa people are normal human beings and should be treated with respect. Her arts prick on Maru's intuition and he gets to understand that Margaret is the only one who has the keys to his kingdom. It is commented that: "It was as if Moleka were split into two-he had the energy, but someone else had the equivalent gift of Maru's kingdom. Creative imagination" (38). Margaret's art piece causes Maru to see the entire tribe as a tribe that has people of high potentials. Head writes:



*But the conditions which surrounded him [Maru] at the time forced him to think of her as a symbol of her tribe, and through her he sought to gain understanding of an eventual liberation of an oppressed people. There was this striking vitality and vigor in her work and yet, for who knew how long people like her had lived faceless, voiceless, and almost nameless in the country. That they had a life or soul to protect had never been considered (108).*

This quotation reveals the peak of human consciousness in the history of the Botswana ruling class. They have all along been blinded by ethnic bigotry such that they could not see the positive side of the Marsawa people. However, it is not surprising that such awareness of the existence of evil and its consequences can be created by Margaret.

Besides, the Masarwa community have acquired their liberation and anyone who attempts to undermine them will face the wrath of the people. Maru himself has furiously declared that: “three quarters of the people in this earth are like Morafi, Seth and Pete – greedy, grasping, backstabbing, a betrayal of all the good in mankind. I was not born to rule this mess. If I have a place it is to pull down the old structures and create the new” (68). Those who represent evil are now the black sheep of the kingdom and on the wrong side of Maru. Maru believes that:

*There was a world apart from petty human hatreds and petty human social codes and values where the human soul roamed free in all its splendor and glory. No barriers of race or creed or tribe hindered its activity. He has seen majestic kings of the soul, walking in the ragged clothes of filthy beggars ( Maru 67).*

Such visions greatly characterise Maru’s recent ways of thinking and he begins to shun evil in all its forms. He is just looking forward to “a day when everyone would be free and no one the slave of another” (Maru 69). Those who are not yet aware of the sudden changes only have surprises awaiting them as it is indicated that: “People like the Botswana who did not know that the wind had also reached people of the Masarwa tribe, were in for an unpleasant surprise because it would no longer be possible to treat Masarwa people in an inhuman way without getting killed yourself” (Maru 27). Margaret represents a Christ-like figure who gives in to all situations for the sake of liberating her people. Both Margaret and Maru are able to see beyond the gender and ethnic differentials that are being used as sources of discrimination and alienation. They have not yielded to the oppositional pressures exerted on them by the rest of the society who are implicated in ethnic prejudice. Rather, they want the society to understand that a time has come in the history of their nation when ethnic predilection will no longer take precedence to the socio-political wellbeing of the entire community. Contemporary society needs to reason beyond tribal leanings in order to ensure progress. There are more serious problems that we need to come together and tackle and tribal divides cannot help but exasperate these problems. In this respect, the best brains need to be given the chance to head positions of responsibilities rather than using tribal links to appoint and place people in unmerited positions.

As well, Dikeledi, a member of the ruling class gets fed up with the existence of ethnic discrimination in her society. Her concern for Margaret and her determination to let her settle in Dilepe village shows that she is conscious of the existence of good and evil in the society and wants to erase evil which is characterised by human alienation. She expresses her



disapproval with the oppression of the Masarwa tribe by confronting her brother Maru, when she hears that he has ordered for the return of the bed loaned to the Masarwa teacher. She questions Maru whether he has ever slept on a hard floor. Dikeledi is a conscious and brilliant individual who quickly recognises the ills of her society and stands firmly against them. As a member of staff of Leseding College, she happens to be the only one who comes to Margaret's aid when she is oppressed in her class by her students. In the text, she is noted for her protective attitude towards Margaret.

Furthermore, we are told that when the people of Dilepe hear of the marriage between Maru and Margaret, they react as if Maru had died. It is confirmed that: "When the people of Dilepe village heard about the marriage of Maru, they began to talk about him as if he had died" (126). The people are expressing their shock because they could not imagine one of them having any relationship with the Masarwa people talk less of a member of the ruling class getting married to a Masarwa. Although Maru is not dead, one can say that something has actually died in him – the spirit of human alienation, loathe, discrimination, injustice and exploitation has died in him. The two tribes, that is the Botswana people and Masarwa people have been reconciled through their leader Maru. Maru flouts tradition, custom and authority to accomplish his love for Margaret. His sacrificial behaviour holds testimony to the importance he attaches to human freedom. Such sacrifices for the liberation of a society, is also indicated by Will Kymlicka in *Multiculturalism and Citizenship* when he says:

*the liberal ideal is a society of free and equal individuals....The sort of freedom and equality they most value and can make most use of, is freedom and equality within their own societal culture. And they are willing to forgo a wider freedom and equality to ensure the continued existence of their nation (93).*

Maru has made tremendous sacrifices that would bring significant changes in the lives of the Masarwa people in particular and the socio-political mechanism of the society in general. To realise his objectives, he has to put behind all the benefits and privileges that accompany kingship and get married to Margaret-the girl from the stigmatised group of people.

However, Maru does not only seek to break racial and ethnic barriers but debunks the structures that have been put in place to facilitate and promote human alienation, marginalisation and discrimination. Although he abdicates the throne, his revolutionary attitude only helps to silence the people and create a new way forward for the entire society as we see in the following:

*When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, the door silently opened on the small dark airless room in which their souls had been locked for a long time. The wind of freedom, which was blowing throughout the world for all people turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air, their humanity awoken. They examined their condition. There was the fetid air, the excreta and the horror of being an oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey. They laughed in an embarrassed way scratching their heads. How had they fallen into this condition when, indeed, they were as human as everyone else. They started to run into the sunlight, then, they turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: 'we are not going back there (126-127).*



The delight that Margaret and Maru have brought to the lives of the Masarwa people by giving them a new and hopeful life cannot be overemphasised. He has also helped to free the ruling class who shall no more live with the guilt of human enslavement. Now that there will be no more disparity between the Masarwa and the Botswana tribes, there is going to be equality and opportunity for all. The Masarwa tribe will now have access to both private and public facilities, which they have been denied for reasons of ethnic bigotry.

The authors under study also show that outside racial and ethnic, there is also the accommodation of difference at the community level where individuals and small groups exist together cohesively without discrimination. We also encounter individuals who work to mend broken friendships and relationships in order to live in harmony. Like Head and Mda, Office Home in “Community Cohesion” also emphasizes community cohesion when he says: “Community cohesion [...] is about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integral whole. These divided communities would need to develop common goals and a shared vision. This would seem to imply that such groups occupy a common sense of place as well” (70). Home advocates togetherness in difference and mutual concern where the different communities come together to aspire for common goals.

Correspondingly, Mda demonstrates communal unity and mutual concern regardless of background by opting for togetherness at all levels. His work justifies the following comments by Kossew Sue in *Writing Women, Writing Place: Contemporary South African and Australian fiction*:

*South African writing over the past decade has provided a fascinating paradigm of a society in transition as it has reflected the changes from a racially divided and repressive apartheid society to a post-apartheid climate of greater tolerance of difference and the non-violent creation of the ‘rainbow nation’ envisaged by Archbishop Tutu. Many writers whose theme had been the stultifying effects of apartheid on people and place were now able to take up new possibilities for literary forms (97).*

With the advent of democracy, most South African writers changed their perspectives in order to aspire for a more acceptable society. Mda, who engaged in writing plays during the apartheid era, now switches to writing novels where he feels that he could adequately exploit the demands of postapartheid socio-political dispensation. In most of his works, he continues to emphasise the recognition, acknowledgement and accommodation of difference among the different entities that exist in his society.

Also, in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Viliki finally considers Sekatle fit to join the new government after insisting that he will not accept Sekatle in the government due to his actions in promoting apartheid in the past. Sekatle who has supported and benefitted from the apartheid regime now desires to join the black oriented government in postapartheid South Africa. However, Viliki, who is the Mayor, thinks that it is an opportunity for him to pour his vengeance on Sekatle. Against the opinions of other members he maintains that Sekatle will not join the movement. Nevertheless, Popi inquires: “Where is your spirit of reconciliation Viliki?”, “We forgave the Boers who oppressed and killed us for three hundred years. We are reconciling with them now. Why can’t we reconcile with our own people too?” (*The Madonna*



of *Excelsior* 181). Popi is promoting the spirit of reconciliation in postapartheid South Africa. Even the Bible encourages us to forgive those who have offended us so that we can live in harmony. When Peter asked Jesus how many times we need to forgive our offenders, his reply was “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” (Mathew 18;22) (*The Bible*). Only through forgiveness can we build a progressive society and that is what Popi is aware and wants his brother to forgive Sekatle. The fact that Sekatle is admitted into the party shows that he has reconciled with Viliki. The word reconciliation has become so popular that it has been featuring in the discussions of both the Boers and the blacks in postapartheid South Africa. That explains why we notice in real life that a reconciliatory commission was set up so that both races can co-exist without friction. This shows the desire to accommodate historical and political differences.

Indeed, individuals in the community attempt to settle personal differences in order to mend broken social relationships. In Head’s *Maru*, Maru reconciles with Moleka through a note which he leaves behind as he elopes with Margaret. The note states that: “Moleka, by the time you read this I shall be many miles away from Dilepe. I am marrying too, almost at the same time as you. Remember that people quarrel but they should always make it up again, Maru” (125). In this note, Maru wishes to bury their differences and renew his friendship with Moleka. Moleka and Maru who have been great friends happen to disagree because of their love for Margaret. The conflict between Maru and Moleka springs up when Maru hears of Moleka’s change of behaviour towards Margaret and the rest of the Masarwas. He has become infuriated when he notices that Moleka has lent the tribal bed to Margaret. He tells Moleka that he still owns many Masarwas as slaves whom he causes to sleep on the floor and take care of his cattle. He therefore inquires as he addresses Moleka:

*What will they [the Masarwas] do when they hear that a certain Masarwa in my village is treated as an equal of the Botswana and given a bed from my office? Won't they want beds too, and where do I find all those beds, overnight. I want the bed you loaned to the Masarwa teacher returned immediately (59-60).*

At this moment, Maru is still guided by ethnic prejudice and sees Moleka’s action as unacceptable. This brings a rift between two people who have been great friends. However, it is later understood that behind Maru’s behaviour lies inexplicable love for the Masarwa teacher. Moleka, who also claims to be in love with Margaret sees his old friend as an enemy and a rival. This has become so serious that Moleka even promises to hurt Maru. He tells Ranko: “Since Maru thinks he can send messages to me through spies, you can also take a message to him. Tell him I say that the day he approaches her I will burn his house down. He is lucky if I don’t kill him too”. (79). Margaret, the Masarwa has become the center of attraction to the extent that two great men of the ruling class are competing for her attention. However, Maru who happens to be the winner in this competition decides to mend things between him and his old friend by leaving a reconciliatory letter behind for Moleka as he elopes with Margaret. It is, however, evident that Maru seeks to make peace with his friend as he is away with Margaret. The coming together of people to work for common good goes beyond the community as we also witness it at the family level.

We also notice that families which have been disintegrated for one reason or the other decide to bury their differences and come together to form a unified family. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Niki’s relations from Thaba Nchu come to visit her after a long time. These





relatives abandoned Niki when they heard of her involvement in the humiliating incidents of sleeping with White men and posing naked to be painted. It is reported that: “They came all the way from Thaba Nchu with sacrificial poultry. Relatives of Niki. They came to celebrate Popi’s passage into the ranks of the Young Women’s Union of the Methodist Church“ (123). The fact that these relatives come to celebrate with Niki’s daughter, on the occasion of her enlisting in the membership of the young women’s union of the Methodist Church, shows that they have forgiven Niki. About Niki, it is also noted that:

*Her children often made it impossible for her to keep to herself. Their activities occasionally brought unwelcome guests. But she was proud of Popi for graduating into the union. And was secretly pleased that the relatives from Thaba Nchu had used the occasion as an excuse to visit her and to find out what was happening with her. It showed that they still cared. And that they had accepted Popi. Even though at first they have kept their distance from Niki. And had said that they would have nothing to do with a woman who had brought so much shame to their family. And when she had posed naked for the trinity and they had heard rumours to that affect her life was sealed (124).*

Poverty caused by white exploitation and discrimination pushes many blacks, especially women to engage in unacceptable behaviour which also helps to drag the image of most families in to the mire. One of the families that suffer such humiliating experience is Niki’s family whose members do not consider the circumstances that led to their daughter’s humiliating behaviour but drastically cut off their links with her. However, their presence shows solidarity and acceptance of a child they have abandoned. Pule, Niki’s husband is not left out of the reconciliation moment. After abandoning Niki because of her infidelity, indicates in his last letter that he has forgiven her. He returns home to his wife to live happily with his family. The family reunites as Pule reconciles and accepts Niki as his wife though it is regrettable that Pule does not live long after this reunion owing to the fact that he has been attacked by an illness in the mines and never had enough money to treat himself. However, what is important is that he has reconciled with his family before his death.

Head and Mda are harbingers of love and patriotism in their communities. Their works play important role in conscientising the population on the importance of love. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism* holds testimony to the role that a creative work plays in inspiring love and patriotism. He identifies this role as inherent in the arts domain. He says: “It is useful to remind ourselves that nation inspire love and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism-poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts-show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles” (141). Writers demonstrate love and patriotism by representing their societies in their works. When writers engage in the writing process, the aim is also to conscientise in order to effect change in the society. However, we must not only engage in a literature of praise before our works could be described as rich in patriotism. Writing about the wrongs of the society with the aim of seeking a lasting solution is being patriotic enough.

This article has examined the need for the society to acknowledge and recognise human differences in terms of race, ethnicity, communality and family. Head and Mda are calling on the human race in general and the African society in particular to show empathy and compassion. Guided by the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy, they bring about a socio-cultural consciousness that underscore the importance of considering the aspirations and needs



of others irrespective of our socio-cultural and political backgrounds and orientations. Head and Mda have made us understand that despite the chaotic nature of our society, human beings can still improve on their situation by making efforts to consider and accept their fellow humans. Love for one another and the respect for other cultures and people would go a long way to make our society a better place to be and today's changes can account for a better tomorrow.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

**HEAD, Bessie.** *Maru*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1971.

**MDA, Zakes.** *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

### Secondary Sources

**ACHEBE, Chinua.** *No Longer at Ease*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1960.

**ANDERSON, Benedict.** *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

**BHABHA, Homi. K.** *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.

**BOMARITO Jessica and Jeffrey W. Hunter.** *Feminism in Literature*. USA: Thomson Gale, 2005.

**EISENSTEIN, Zillah.** *The Female Body and the Law*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

**GORDIMER, Nadine.** *None to Accompany Me*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.

**HOME, Office.** "Community Cohesion" The Cattle Report, HMSO, London. 2001b.

**JOOSTE, Pamela.** *Dance with A Poor Man's Daughter*. London: Black Swan, 1998.

**KAUFMANN, P. Eric.** (ed) *Rethinking Ethnicity: Majority Groups and Dominant Minorities*. London: Taylor and Francis, 2005.

**KOCK, Leon.** "South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction" *Contemporary Literature*. Vol 48 No 3 2007 p 451-459.

**LIMB, Peter.** *Nelson Mandela: A Biography*. London: Greenwood Press, 2008.

**KYMLICKA, Will.** *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

**LUTZE, E. Karl.** *Awakening to Reality*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006.

**MBIGI, Lovemore.** *The African Dream in Management*. Johannesburg: Knowledge Resources (Pty) Ltd, 1997.

**NGUGI, Wa Thiong'o.** *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1990.

**PAREKH, Bhikhu.** *Rethinking Multiculturalism*. Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2000.

**PINKETT, Randal and Jeffrey Robinson.** *Black Faces in White Places*. USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing, 2011.

**QUAYSON, Ato.** "Magic Realism and the African Novel" in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 p159-176.

**SUE, Kossew.** *Writing Women Writing Place: Contemporary Australian and South African Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

**SCHWARZ, Henry.** "Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial Studies in the US Academy" in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. (ed) Schwarz Henry and Sangeeta Ray. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2005. P 1-20.

**TAGOE, Wilson.** "New Locations and Changing Paradigms" in *Changing Face of African Literature*. New York: Amsterdam, 2001.

