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Liminality, hybridity and 'Third Space:' Bessie Head's *A question of power*

Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia[1] · Sayyede Maryam Hosseini[1]

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Abstract Hybridity has been a controversial issue not only in eugenic hypotheses of the nineteenth century but also in the postcolonial, cultural, linguistic, and geographical contexts. It can be seen as a 'Janus-faced' entity. Theorists like Bhabha consider it as a 'Third Space' which is fraught with ambiguities, while some use the term 'liminal' to point to its location in history, culture, and society in general. This essay deals with a 'coloured' writer's coloured character in the light of hybridity. Elizabeth, the coloured protagonist of Bessie Head's *A question of power* lives as a hybrid in a state of liminality, and tries to dismiss the worldview of colonialism and the postcolonial nationalism of South Africa and reconstruct her shattered identity in the 'Third Space' of Motabeng. Elizabeth's hybridity and her iconoclastic condition are intensified by rampant liminal elements in the novel. The essay follows the intricate interrelationships of hybrid elements in terms of Elizabeth's multi-faceted character, her garden, and the borders she crosses in the course of the novel. Hybridity here is by no means a mere inter-racial issue, the attempt here is to relate this concept to the anti-conventional and iconoclastic; the things that are liminal and indefinable within established epistemology.

Keywords Elizabeth · Bhabha · Hybridity · Identity · Third Space · In-betweenness · Bessie Head

✉ Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia
moosavinia@scu.ac.ir

Sayyede Maryam Hosseini
Mshosseini891@gmail.com

[1] Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahwaz, Khuzestan 6135783151, Iran

Introduction

> It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' […] that the unconscious speaks of the form of otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the colonialist self or the colonised other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness (Bhabha 1993 117).

There are two types of experience of hybridity, one frightening and one liberating and subversive. Based on what is reflected in the novel which is highly autobiographical and arises from the specific political realities of Apartheid South Africa, the present study necessitates an image of the historical contextual state, a look at the life of the author, as well as a theoretical framework for a particular reading of the latter form of hybridity in the text. All these roll over through the research. The concept of hybridity often applies to fiction with a postmodernist approach and a personal revision of socio-historical context. So the endeavour here goes beyond ethnicity and embraces post-ethnicity and cross-pollination in hybridity.

Bessie Head was born in a mental hospital in South Africa in 1937. Her mother was white, her father a black stable boy. Obviously Elizabeth, the protagonist, had more or less the same background. Her autobiographical facts are carefully incorporated into *A question of power*. Doubtless, Head and Elizabeth share many qualities; however, they are not the same: 'Bessie Head is always more insightful, politically-aware, artistic, and analytical than her protagonists' (Ibrahim 13).

Elizabeth, the 'coloured' protagonist of Bessie Head's *A question of power* (1974)[1] has a double journey in the course of the story: a physical journey that is a movement from South Africa to Botswana, and a spiritual one which is a movement from oppressive colonialism and prejudicial nationalism to liberating hybridity as her destination. This is a transnational, multicultural as well as post-ethnicity destination. As a coloured, she must go on a quest to find the true concept of humanity, based on universal love and equality through negating fixed inculcations and even her earlier convictions.[2] She is an 'initiand,' who, as Turner suggests, on her way to regain identity and integration, must undergo 'separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation'. It is only in this way that she can gain the insight needed to become the 'prophet of mankind.' After being disillusioned with a maternal white world, and rejecting the black world of black fraternity, she decides to de-construct a world of universal brotherhood. However, her path is by no means a smooth one. There are unbearable hardships that keep her on the verge of madness. Despite these facts, Elizabeth's hybridity is the main

[1] All subsequent references in the text are to this edition.

[2] It seems that everything in this novel is in 'passing'—there is no static concept throughout the novel. Because of her mixed heritage, Elizabeth wanders in a bipolar white and black world. Elizabeth like Bessie Head herself adheres to black movements and black brotherhood. 'What did mothers, black mothers, say to children whose fathers had been lynched by the Ku Klux Klan in America'(92)? However, it is only at the end of the novel that she says to Tom (her American friend) 'I don't like exclusive brotherhoods for black people only. They wouldn't want you. You're not black' (132).

criterion in her recuperation from the 'mental breakdowns' induced by her memories in her incubuses (pp. 24, 31, 35, 38, 42, 44, 47, 50, 98…). Her partial productivity, hope, and ultimate sense of belonging are the direct outcome of her appreciation of hybridity which helps her. At the end of the novel, having tolerated shattering mental tortures and physical hardships, Elizabeth partially regains her belief in mankind's goodness and begins to love people and feel that she can 'belong'.[3]

As mentioned before, Elizabeth is a coloured woman born into a strictly defined system of nomenclatures where Manichean implications are taken for granted in daily life. Hegelian concepts of master and slave, conventional and religious divisions of good and bad, sane and insane are all concerned with binary oppositions of white and black in both literal and figurative senses and exacerbate the process of labelling and intensify concepts like subjectivity in terms of difference and otherness. For instance, Elizabeth is completely obsessed with the concepts of God and Satan, mother and father, man and woman, and white and black. She tries to categorise everything within these divisions. For the same reason, at the beginning of the story she adheres to either of the poles. Power institutes including coloniser and its 'progeny' (i.e. post-colonial nationalist) through binary oppositions have rendered the world definable bordered structures and hierarchical frameworks. Despite the tough rules and acts of purity, the contact of two completely opposing colours from two different worlds paved the way for the appearance of a third generation in places such as South Africa. Today, hybridity is considered as a new way of resistance against not only cultural colonization but also the absolutists and nationalists of the newly independent countries. Bhabha, for instance, valorises 'hybridity' as a counter-hegemonic subject position:

> Here (i.e. in the hybrid moments) the transformational value of change lies […] in translation, of *elements that are neither the One* […] *nor the Other* […] *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both (Bhabha 1994 28).

He posits hybridity as a form of 'liminal' space, where the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' occurs (Bhabha 1994 38). He terms this space the 'Third Space.' Elizabeth, as a coloured, belongs to this space. She has been placed in the 'in-between' space of Botswana. She is a liminal figure on the verge of the Kalahari desert:

> I'm afraid of the edge,' he (shorty, Elizabeth's son) said. 'I think a lot of things have fallen of the edge. *The edge is where the sun comes up. And the other edge is where the sun goes down* [emphases added]. I asked my mother if that

[3] To consider the novel a (semi)-autobiography entails referring to similarities between the protagonist and Bessie Head. This tone of determination and hope can also be traceable in Head's letters. Offering a glimmer of hope, Bessie Head writes in a letter:

> Many people pointed out to me that I was not black enough. I began to feel queer, that something was wrong somewhere and that my destiny led me along other paths. Some people can hog the black skins for themselves but I have to opt for mankind as a whole. You know, my friend, a combination such as I of two nations finally establishes the human race. (Vigne 1991, 64).

> was the edge and she said yes…. My mother says once [the ghosts] fall off they just keep on falling and falling because there is no bottom. I can never go far away from *home* in case I fall off too (95).

Liminality and ambivalence

The 'Third Space' is inhabited by the liminal figure of the hybrid. Bhabha (1994) argues that the hybrid, 'living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender' has the ability 'to translate the difference between them into a kind of solidarity' (170). Being productive, 'interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative,' it blurs the limitations of existing boundaries and calls into question the established categories of culture and identity. According to Bhabha (1994), 'Third Space' is an 'ambivalent' site where cultural meaning […] [has] no 'primordial unity or fixity.' 'It is that Third Space […] [which] ensures […] that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew' (37). Elizabeth as a hybrid is born in a society with rigidly defined territories. Despite her earlier adaptation to the condition of the apartheid system and nationalism and their tortures, she decides to leave South Africa and live in a liminal location. Throughout her journey, she has to repeatedly cross the boundaries, in terms of building a garden in 'the place of sand' and growing 'Cape Gooseberry' in Botswana and fighting 'soul personalities'[4] who are living in her dreams. Wilson Harris sees the 'Third Space' as the '*assimilation of contraries*' and 'occult instability which presages powerful cultural *changes*.' '[A] willingness to descend into that *alien territory* may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the *split-space* [up to this part emphases are added] of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture […] by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space,' we may elude the politics of polarity' (Quoted in Ashcroft 209).

This 'in-between' and 'interstitial' grey space 'belongs' to neither of the poles and stays in 'in-between' the borders. This 'in-betweenness' makes its inhabitants indefinable, elusive, and 'passing.' These 'ambivalent' and liminal spaces are those of hybridity. As an outcome of the inter-racial/cultural/geographical/linguistic/and even religious[5] meeting, hybrids are crossroads of history, a generation with no particular 'original' history and origin, who are emancipatory for some, and for others a devilish and sterile race. Excluded from both maternal and paternal white and black worlds, respectively; Elizabeth having been banished from South Africa, 'belongs' to this 'in-between' realm:

[4] There are four 'soul personalities' (Sello the monk, Sello in brown suit, Dan, and Medusa) that occupy Elizabeth's mental life. Each one is representative of a period and a group. Dan is the nationalist absolutist: 'Someone told her he was […] an African nationalist in a country where people were only concerned with tribal affairs' (104), Medusa was expressing 'the surface reality of the African society' (40), Sello the monk is representative of priests' cruelty, and Sello in the brown suit becomes a representative of bourgeoisie (see also Kim 2008).

[5] As it is the case with Bessie Head herself, and her tendency towards an Eastern religion like Buddhism and mixing it with Christian beliefs, it should be noted that although there are frequent references to Buddha, Elizabeth does not accept it blindly. Sello, one of the 'soul personalities' in charge of Elizabeth's tortures is described as 'Brahmins or Rama'(15).

> She was forced to take out an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the 'never to return' clause. She didn't care. She hated the country […]. There wasn't any kind of social evolution beyond that, there wasn't any lift to the heart, just this vehement vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks (19).

Despite its earlier oversimplified biological and racial implications, hybridity has always been an abiding controversial and multi-dimensional issue (see also Young 1995 6). Theorists like Frantz Fanon point to it as a source of schizophrenia, others consider it as sterility,[6] while for Bakhtin and Bhabha mixed-heritage communities due to different reasons have a liberating potentiality either permanently or temporarily.[7] Bessie Head in her autobiographical novel *AQP* presents a complicated 'Janus-faced' concept of hybridity which is both pessimistic and optimistic (i.e. hybridity as both preserver and destroyer). She dismisses the earlier definitions concentrated on eugenics and presents a new picture in which a lonely woman can build her identity. Elizabeth is living in the borderlines both biologically and figuratively. She is a product of multidimensional hybridization. Like the 'passing' protagonist of the story, everything in the novel is dynamic. The reader can witness how Elizabeth's view evolves and she dismisses the dehabilitating inculcations about mankind. The novel starts with Man's Fall:

> Only man can fall from God
> Only man.
> That awful and sickening endless, sinking
> sinking through the slow, corruptive
> levels of disintegrative knowledge…
> the awful katabolism into the abyss!

And ends in the Ascension:

> *The man*
> *Can fly about the sky,*
> *Sky butterflies can fly,*
> *Bees can make honey,*
> *And what else can fly?*
> *Sky birds, sky aeroplanes, sky helicopters,*
> *A fairy man and a fairy boy*
> *Can fly about the sky.* (205)

[6] Young points that people used to think of hybridity as sterility and infertility. Since animals like mule are sterile, they generally thought of hybrids as infertile and so doomed to extinction. Hybrids, sooner or later will be absorbed by one of the pure species.

[7] Bhabha considers cultural hybridity as the site of narration where the clashes and inherent discrepancy annihilate the illusion of monopoly of a sole system or reasoning. While for Bakhtin, it is the polyphony of the novel with its dialogic aspect that paves the way for redemption form the long preserved beliefs. Likewise, Elizabeth discarding 'Godlike figurehead' and celebrating ordinariness and polyphony claims, 'It was as though a crossroad had been reached and that [ordinary] people would awaken to a knowledge of their powers […]. None of mankind's God-like figureheads recorded seeing what she saw in this nightmare soul-journey' (35).

This particular stand of the novel is only due to the particular stand of Bessie Head as a liminal figure. She is just like a romantic poetess who believes in the internal revolution while at the same time her writings tend to be highly social dealing with the 'ordinary man.' Surprisingly, we see that this ordinary man is like Blake's 'Albion' who later on wants to challenge the concept of God and in this way Elizabeth as an ordinary being becomes an Odysseus and the novel tends to be an epic. In her endeavours to establish a garden to reconcile the 'ordinary man' and the environment, Elizabeth is similar to Marx's nostalgic pre-'alienation' man as all members of the group can directly make use of their own products. As a liminal figure, Head combines numerous elements; the genre (nomenclature of literature) fabricated by her is one of these hybrid elements; the seemingly autobiographical genre is also a romantic epic. The overwhelming romantic concepts of quest and love are mingled with epic elements of fighting against 'power maniac' gods to gain 'self-esteem' and grandeur. It is exactly because of what Bhabha says about hybridity: 'the moment in which the discourse of […] authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling […] complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text' (Young 1995 21).

Bhabha's notions of 'Third Space' and 'in-betweenness' are mainly related to racial and cultural ruptures of colonial authority, whereas hybridity in *AQP* is not only biological, neither is it only limited to colonial structure. There exists a complex nexus of power and liminality operating within the novel. Here, it is used in relation to Elizabeth's position as 'neither white nor black enough,' to her life 'on the edge of Kalahari Desert,' to her Edenic garden, her body, and even to her identification with the entire universe. This in-between location becomes a space for the protagonist to overcome her traumatic experiences and schizoid self as Fanon informs[8] and to recollect her sanity. Bhabha designates the nation as narration. Elizabeth's body can also be considered as a narration that reflects the long-established history of oppression and exclusion; it is also a representative of narrating a new history of hybrids. Throughout the history of western thinking various—sometimes fiercely controversial—concepts of the human body have been elaborated. In this essay it has been represented as one of the salvaging liminal spaces.Elizabeth's body as a 'text' is inscribed by no means by one single culture and 'origin.' As she herself says: 'Then he (Sello) turned and showed Elizabeth a small, round, deep opening in the earth from which her soul had emerged. It was a black, shapeless mass with wings' (43). Therefore, she is 'a floating signifier' with no particular signified and origin. There is no womb or mother but a black shapeless mass. In this case, her body would be an endless chain of deferral signifiers in a never-ending structure. Body in the western epistemology especially in the Enlightenment, is defined as a unified form which represents the boundary that distinguishes the self and the other, man and woman, inside and outside to reinforce

[8] Whereas Fanon views hybridity as the source of schizophrenia, it should be noted that, for some critics like Deleuze and Gauttari, it is the schizoid self that can overcome the capitalist society.

binarism.[9] While in the case of Elizabeth, we see her as a hybrid woman who does not have white or black 'skin;' furthermore, Head's character is a wombless woman who has a child. Her dreams are full of distorted bodies. The 'soul personalities' are exaggerated and even caricature-like characters in spite of the fact that the reader is reminded that they (Dan and Sello) have real and normal counterparts in the external world. Dan with a huge penis, Medusa and her extraordinary vagina, Dan's seventy-one-nice-time girls with exaggerated sexual images are deliberately deformed. Interestingly, even Bessie Head's minor characters' bodies, for instance the undernourished body of Elizabeth's son Shorty, reveal her fragmented and never belonged world and in so doing they become representatives of the Bakhtinian concept of body and carnivalesque. That is why, to quote Shorty, they are not 'standard.' Just like people in carnivals, they wear masks, and live in an interstitial or better to say a hybrid subversive space.[10] In the case of Elizabeth and her universalism and her search for a universal love and Man, we see how the boundary of body and world shatters. Her universal quest happens inside her, her symbolic deaths and rebirths are both internal and universal. It shows that the inner realm of the body is completely interwoven with the external world's and in this case it is an exemplary of Bakhtin's communal body. For Bakhtin, the body embodying the carnival is not the biological body of an individual, but something universal. There are no boundaries between one's body and its surrounding, 'the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world' (Bakhtin 1984 26). Consequently, the body becomes a universal text and an interstitial space that thwarts the nationalist bourgeois like Dan to consider it as a separate form of an apparently unified 'subject' in order to control it.[11] As a hybrid, Elizabeth herself is a carnival; she is full of imitating and 'mocking' faces that try to imitate and destabilise the ruling ideas of the ruling class by means of twisting dream/reality worlds and her madness. Elizabeth as a female identifies her body with Osiris' dismembered body.[12]

[9] Despite the fact that cognitive theories believe the very process of recognition occur when one appreciates opposites; Elizabeth's perfection is achieved when she mixes the opposites in terms of her body and, later on, all aspects of her life. She is the site of 'reconciliation of opposites' whereas the onset of the novel indicates how she is tormented by concepts like heaven and hell, man and woman, good and bad, and even God and man.

[10] It cannot be denied that carnivals according to Bakhtin are a temporary masqueraded response capable of revolution; likewise it should be noted that one should not oversimplify Elizabeth and her creator's quest as finished and permanent. The story's conclusion remains problematic.

[11] Michelson (1999) notes, 'Bakhtin makes the important point that this carnival body is a communal body, contained in the collective mass of the people, not the biological individual. In carnival, the body is valuable precisely because it is not a closed unity, but violates the boundaries between self and other, self and world'.

[12] Although it can be argued that for Bakhtin the carnivalesque, grotesque representation of the body belongs to the culture of laughter, there are undeniable similarities between the two. Both Bakhtin and Bhabha reject the apparent monolithic and clashless use of the language and dominance. Both, believing we are rather in a state of becoming than being, challenge the simplistic reading of binary relations. They both—one in the form of heteroglossia and the other through mimicry—have faith in the *infectious* potential of the deprived even the most marginalized. Both claim that the notion of complete dominance of a group over others and 'official authoritarian truth' should be replaced with 'cohabitation' in 'contact zones.' In both mimicry and carnival, a kind of 'dialogical coordination' is emphasized. Bakhtin's

In spite of being a mother, being the outcome of violation of natural choices according to eugenic beliefs, Elizabeth is continually reminded of her sterility and 'lack of vagina'. However, just for the same reason (i.e. in disregard of essentialist epistemology of Western institutes), hybridity becomes heterogeneity, violation of the long-preserved rules of the oppressor, fusion and reconciliation of opposites which represents fissures and internal instability of oppressive worldviews. For Bhabha, hybridity is the moment of disillusionment of the colonial authority. It is 'a problematic of colonial representation…that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority' (Bhabha 1994 114). It is exactly the case with Elizabeth and her 'disavowed' identity: '[n]one of the perfects would listen to her side of the story' (16). Her denied knowledge is based on her personal experience of exclusion from white/black realm and rejection of the Western epistemology.[13]

Elizabeth should deconstruct the essential performance of a puppet-like figure that Head represents at the beginning of her story. She must be a 'performative subject' as opposed to the society's 'pedagogical object'. However, as long as she does not embark on separation, as Turner points to, there will be neither quest nor negation. Thus she becomes an expatriate and goes on a self-exile. Her exile is another important emblem of her liminality. In this case, she becomes an 'unhomely' refugee who carries the burden of two cultures while excluded from both. In her search for universal peace, she becomes a 'peace-maker' and should translate, negotiate, and bridge the white/black world into a third world. As Elizabeth notes, Motabeng (the village where she lives as a refugee) is located near the Kalahari desert, on the borderline. It is a space that provides the circumstances crucial to the articulation of Elizabeth's new identity and her new 'beginning' apart from her 'origin'.[14] In this respect, Motabeng acts as a metaphor. Like Elizabeth who is accused of lacking a vagina and subsequent sterility, Motabeng is also the place of 'sand,' a 'wasteland' on the border of the Kalahari Desert. However, the ironical point is that both Elizabeth and the land are productive. Elizabeth is not only a mother, but also a crafty gardener who grows hybrid fruits in her garden and the

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Footnote 12 continued
'parodic stylization of generic' of the comic novel *becomes* Bhabha's 'hybrid mimicry' where 'the world of divine authority is deeply flawed […] the language of the master becomes hybrid—neither the one nor the other' (Bhabha 1994 33). Both believe that our language—Bhabha talks about the English language for example in *The heart of darkness*—is 'double-accented,' 'double-voiced,' hybrid and hence '*pseudo-objective*. '(See also Bhabha's "Signs taken for wonder" in *The location of culture* and Bakhtin's "Discourse in the novel").

[13] The term 'episteme' is used by Foucault to indicate the dominant knowledge and discourse in each particular era. Here, the term of 'Western epistemology' is used to show the framework of the imperialist's imposed knowledge (see also Wolfreys et al. 2002).

[14] Said (1975) differentiates between 'origin' and 'beginning' claiming that 'a beginning is 'what might be called an *intentional* act' 'this one avoids the passivity of "origins" by substituting the intentional beginning act of an individual for the more purely circumstantial existence of "conditions"' (31). 'The necessary creation of authority for a beginning is also reflected in the act of achieving discontinuity and transfer […], it must also connect the new direction not so much with a wholly unique venture but with the established authority of a parallel venture' (32).

land is also where she grows her garden. Furthermore, there is a great repository of *underground water beneath its dry surface*:

> Seemingly, the only reason for people's settlement there was a good supply of underground water. It took a stranger sometime to fall in love with its harsh outlines and stark, black trees […]. The preponderance of mud huts with their semi-grey roofs […] gave it an ashen look […]. The rain dried up before it reached the ground (19–20).

This space can also act as a metaphor for a new creation. Although, at the beginning of her quest, Motabeng seems to Elizabeth as a 'wasteland,' as time passes, she discovers the hidden potentiality of the 'grey' land. The garden becomes a microcosm for an Isis-like Elizabeth where the dismembered Albion and Osiris can be 're-membered'. The significant point is that the phallusless Osiris is completely analogous to the wombless Elizabeth. Furthermore, Elizabeth's creation of the garden makes her an Isis-like figure. She is both Isis, the goddess of fertility and nature, and Osiris, the powerful god of death; this also means that she is both male and female. Despite these similarities, Head's mythology is again different from the Egyptian version because unlike Osiris whose dismembered body is gathered by Isis, it is Elizabeth herself who has to 're-member' her fragmented 'text' and identity through remembering her past and liminal origin in her 'soul' quest. These features highlight Elizabeth's liminality. Elizabeth's act of productivity is very similar to writing a new history: 'Her version of agriculture was so poetic and fanciful, she was so liable to fill in her gaps of knowledge with self-invented agriculture, she obviously amused and irritated the English manager of the farm school' (112–113). It is through parody and imitation that one presupposes emancipation of Elizabeth and the 'ordinary man'. That is why despite the similarity between Elizabeth's myth of creation and that of Christianity, she continually implores: 'Oh, God… [m]ay I never contribute to *creating* dead worlds, only *new worlds.*'(100) [emphasis added].

People like Elizabeth, using Bhabha's terms, challenge the 'structure of meaning and reference,' and in doing so, they interrupt the process of 'representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code'. It is exactly in this way that Head and her eccentric schizoid protagonist question 'the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past' (Bhabha 1994 37).

The condition of being 'coloured' in South Africa is 'halfway [and] […] not defined—and it was this *lack of definition* [emphasis added] in itself that was […] observed like a taboo, something which no one… could ever admit to' (Bhabha 1994 13). Elizabeth is burdened with what Bhabha calls a colonial identity, a sort of half-way house between coloniser and colonised, a neurotic and ambiguous identification with both (i.e. the white and black worlds); and a sense of exclusion at the same time: '[Medusa] started shouting in a shrill, high voice: "We don't want you here. This is *my land*. These are *my people*. We keep *our things* to *ourselves*"' (38). This very sense of inclusion and exclusion breaks the traditional rules of definition and formulation, and makes Elizabeth a liminal character who lives on the 'edge' where for Shorty, Elizabeth's son, 'sun rises and sets.'

For Bhabha, the 'Third Space' carries the *international* meaning and culture. It is exactly what Elizabeth is looking for in her quest. Throughout the novel, she impatiently yearns for 'universal' love, humanity, and equality. Her universalism is radically different from that of the Western Enlightenment's humanism that, creating a universal culture, believes people to be homogenous with essential attributes, and is also complicit in oppression. This universalism is neither like the Pan-Africanist nor the nationalist concept of purity of race. As Nixon notes, "for Head the nation was less an organic community than a set of administered categories that militated against her efforts to cultivate community and ancestry" (Nixon 1993 111). Elizabeth's universality is something 'in-between' incarnated in her garden where people gather from different parts of the world without being homogenised and 'civilised.' The garden as a part of nature is in harsh contrast with civilisation of the west and the 'City' of Christianity. According to Bhabha, this space challenges culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, that is supported by the originary past.

As mentioned earlier, Elizabeth is an 'unhomely' refugee who lives in a self-exiled Diaspora. Bhabha defines 'unhomeliness' as a 'condition of *extra-territorial* and *cross cultural initiations*.' For Bhabha unhomely is not homeless, it is where 'the *borders between home and world become confused* [emphasis added]; and the private and the public become part of each other […] it is disorienting' (Bhabha 1994 9). Elizabeth's ambivalent and ambiguous condition as a hybrid person gives her power. Her unhomeliness allows her to be elusive in the face of categorization and formulation. It is this concept of unhomeliness that catalyzes Elizabeth's later achievements and helps her to be the prophet of man: 'She said there is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophet' (206). Bhabha believes the 'unhomely' world is the world of the coloured and hybrid, it is not definable. This space can distort time and place. Reading the novel, one can feel everything has been completely mixed up; the boundaries have been deliberately violated. Elizabeth identifies herself with homosexual men (violation of gender lines),[15] also with God and vegetables (violation of ontology and identity). She is a 'coloured' (violation of apartheid concepts of Christianity, and Nature). She belongs to the realm of taboo (i.e. shame family).[16] And despite being an outsider in Motabeng she belongs to it. Just like her protagonist, nothing is impossible for Head, at least, in her semi-autobiography. Writing a fictional autobiography renders Head an opportunity to trespass the limits imposed on her as an ordinary deprived liminal woman. The very form of the novel, as a result, is a hybrid and liminal one.

[15] In her letters to Gordon, she even believes that her mind is male 'that quiet rhythm of deep feeling which so often builds up in me is so powerfully masculine that I was forced to create powerful males to bear the tide of it […]. It's simply my personality. I can't express myself as female. I can't stop thinking outside female bounds, in broad horizon terms, like a man […]. I know my head is male and I simply accept that […].There is something tough and masculine in me that will suddenly make me do bold, unexpected, courageous things, and I concentrate on that quality to the detriment of my feminine side' (Pucherova 2011 120).

[16] For further study consult Zoë Wicomb's "Shame and identity: The case of the coloured in South Africa."

The sense of exclusion and lack of belonging, at first shatters Elizabeth's identity and causes her 'mental breakdowns,'[17] and afterwards paves the way for her to resist categorization, essentialism, and 'nothingness.' The very act of gardening is analogous to writing, and 'writing is a way of resistance' and recuperation. The garden can be considered as a significant leitmotif in the novel. After losing her job as a teacher and being hospitalised due to her mental collapse, Elizabeth is introduced by her friend, 'Eugene,' to the garden group. From this moment onwards she begins her gradual painful recovery.

The garden has several implications in the novel. For one thing, it points to the Garden of Eden. When Elizabeth, as a hybrid, embarks on building the Garden of Eden, she 'creates a new world' and disregards the old dead world. The new community is indicative of a new beginning. Adam is replaced by Eve. Furthermore, Eve is not white; she does not belong to the traditional realm of binary opposition of 'goat and sheep.'[18] By creating a new Eden and a new myth of creation, she deliberately ignores the concept of God presented to her by priests and missionaries. 'God, and any gesture toward the idea of God, stood clearly apart in her mind from all the gimmicks and foolery of the priests' (146). In this way, she decides to redefine her identity.[19] When Head creates a God-like man, she adds another liminal issue to the book.

The garden is also an evidence of Elizabeth and Motabeng's fertility. Hybrids are not 'self supporting;' they are natural anomalies, and incapable of production and breeding: 'products of inter-racial unions are either infertile, or if fertile, after a few generations will revert 'to one or other of the species from which they sprang' (Young 1995 14). However, when Elizabeth grows a garden in the 'place of sand,' she turns the wasteland of Motabeng into her new utopia[20] and an emblem of her

[17] 'The novel explores the deep sources of the protagonist's trauma in order to lay bare the very roots of human suffering. Experiences of exclusion, denigration and mocking rejection in both South Africa and Botswana have contributed to Elizabeth's insecurity and isolation' (Gagiano 2006 48). Bhabha (1994), on the other hand, believes that the 'unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence' (11). Naturally, madness and trauma can have a double function.

[18] Hybridity has been considered as a pejorative and un-natural phenomenon. There are many jokes related to hybridity. For example, 'God made the white man, God made the black man, God made the Indian, the Chinese and the Jew—but Jan van Reibeek, he made the coloured man (Adhikary 2005 20). 'I know I am black, an' I know that God meck two colour, black an' white, but it must be devil meck brown people, for them is neither black nor white!' (H. G. Delisser, *Jane's career* 56 quoted in Kolijan 2006 35).

[19] Talahite (2005) says: 'The garden acts as a tool for re-examining the colonial myth of the land in the South African literary tradition, while at the same time rewriting the Christian myths of creation and creativity that have traditionally been shaped around patriarchal images of the land […] female temptation, or unbound female desire and sexuality. One of the ways in which the novel constructs a series of counterpoints to these notions is by representing the garden as the site of bonding and desire between women' (142). Despite frequent negative representations of men like Dan and Sello, I strongly believe that Elizabeth like her creator is by no means a feminist. We may consider her as a womanist or even a gender-blind person whose sole desire is salvation of the ordinary Man.

[20] Garrett (1999) differentiates between utopian and pastoral fantasies. He considers both of them as an emblem of dissatisfaction with the condition of the person. He believes that, 'positing the ideal in the past or future is a deliberate political act, for the ideal can be seen as a reaction or response to the real.' However, utopian fantasy is social, optimistic, and active; while the latter is personal, pessimistic, and passive. The first one looks forward to progress, while the latter is retrospective and nostalgic. In the case

productivity as a hybrid. Although based on eugenic beliefs of the nineteenth century, the 'wombless' Elizabeth is doomed to sterility and as a result to 'a planned death' (179), she decides to grow a garden. Thus the garden becomes a complex symbol and text for Elizabeth's fertility, and a metaphor for Bhabha's 'interstitial or Third Space' where Elizabeth uses her 'negative activity'[21] to challenge the oppressors' boundaries. In terms of Bhabha's definition of 'negative activity' the garden as produced by Elizabeth becomes a space 'beyond' the established boundaries and beliefs of the colonised and the coloniser. The garden also becomes identical with Elizabeth herself. It has been placed on the edge of the desert where it rains very rarely; therefore, it is expected to be futile as well. However, Elizabeth grows 'Cape Gooseberry' which is an imported and hybrid fruit in the garden and in this way she helps the poor economy of the people of Motabeng and 'fashions' her new self. The local people know her as 'Cape Gooseberry'. In terms of Turner's theory, Elizabeth, as an initiand, after physical 'separation' from South Africa and mental departure from inculcated epistemology, and living in the 'margin' of Motabeng, 'reintegrates' herself in the light of her personal/universal garden. In the end, Elizabeth succeeds in establishing a local community with universal dimensions. This liminal community is called the 'garden group.' This group is also a hybrid group, an amalgamation of different races, nationalities, and genders. The garden in this sense becomes a universal 'Third Space,' as Talahite (2005) mentions, an 'inventory model of universal community, and a female agency' 'beyond' the demarcation of nations, racial prejudice and segregation (143). It becomes a site of development and recuperation. However, development in the story is different from the European and apartheid version of civilisation and 'culture'. Elizabeth's garden is not the site of technology and modernity but that of liminality and hybridity. As Bhabha says:

> It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles […] narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identification in strategies of subversion […]. For the colonial, hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects […] a negative transparency (Bhabha 1994 110).

Elizabeth in building the garden uses her own experience and 'desire' as opposed to western epistemology. The very act of growing Cape Gooseberry in Motabeng is anti-conventional and unprecedented. As Mekokha (2006) believes, 'experience points to acquisition of knowledge through the experiential dimension of understanding' not the pre-given epistemology (109). To speak of experiences is to speak of consciousness of reality and having an 'analytical mind.' In this way

Footnote 20 continued
of Elizabeth, utopian fantasy is dominant. Elizabeth runs away from her past, from 'slums of South Africa where she grew up, from me and mine' (128).

[21] Bhabha (1994) takes the term from Frantz Fanon's *Black skin, white masks*. He says: 'The negative activity is the intervention of the 'beyond'[…]: a bridge where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross cultural initiations.' (40–46).

Elizabeth becomes a sign with no particular signified who leads the new society, since she disrupts symmetries and does not let them be a closed and exclusive system. The garden represents a powerful image that attempts to redefine the relationship between the social world and the individual self. One must be careful not to apply the Enlightenment and capitalistic definitions of experience as something achieved by an individual that frees the person from others. Experience in *AQP* is precisely in accordance with Bakhtin's theories. For him, it is a communal and liberating opportunity, a 'carnival' to free and appreciate the suppressed and neglected other 'self' of Elizabeth that has been suffocated. Elizabeth's experience is dialogic. It is an offspring of the juxtaposition of her nightmares, the taken not the given lessons from her past and her conversations with 'soul personalities,' with her social life in the garden group, and with silenced people like Kenousi. Therefore, Elizabeth's carnival is both romantic and highly social. Although like romantic poets she is in search of love and Man (Blake's Albion), her journey is completely social and she is in search of ordinariness.[22] It is through gardening that Elizabeth elevates the barren landscape of Motabeng into a habitable home (Margree 2004 16). That is why, despite having been excluded from South Africa, she can finally belong. 'As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging.' (206).

AQP is the novel of borderlines and trespassing (see also Ronning and Johannessen 2007 71–89). Bessie Head deliberately presents a protagonist that is highly obsessed with binary opposites. She delineates how her immature protagonist is mentally broken down under the influence of these opposites, and in the end, gaining insight, she comes to know one can be both God and Satan. She must overcome the sense of otherness imposed on her by the bipolar white/black world, respectively. Bhabha defines the interstitial space as a 'borderland' which is neither there nor here but somewhere 'in-between.' Being on the threshold, Elizabeth crosses the boundaries. Campbell writes that paradoxically Elizabeth's experience of 'otherness' as a coloured, unstable, female exile enables an inclusive understanding of world experience (Young 2010 237). Bhabha believes that the apparently unified culture of the coloniser (in *AQP* it is the culture of the 'power-maniac') is against innovative 'newness.' It clings to an imaginary and invented past to solidify its dominance. Besides, borderlines pave the way for a hierarchical relationship while Elizabeth is in search of 'ordinariness' as the ideal state of humanhood. Edward Said (2002) believes borderlines pave the way for polarity of we-versus-they. He argues that these 'conceptual frameworks' naturalise differences and act as a catalyst to further oppression:

> Thus to build a conceptual framework around the notion of us-versus-them is […] to pretend that the principal consideration is epistemological and natural—our civilisation is known and accepted, theirs is different and

[22] Head's desire for ordinariness has also been discussed by Susan Linda Beard in "Bessie Head's syncretic fictions: The reconceptualization of power and the recovery of the ordinary." Beard claims the notion of ordinariness includes Elizabeth's activities such as gardening to gain her sanity while Head is using an extraordinary eclectic method.

> strange—whereas in fact the framework separating us from them is belligerent, constructed, and situational (507).

Said advocates crossovers 'beyond' the 'national and ideological barriers' that are produced by nations and civilisations under the pretext of differentiation. Elizabeth is also a victim of these segregatory systems. She lives in a world where people are never regarded as individuals with independent identities. 'In South Africa she had been rigidly classified coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There were races, not people' (44).

Borders crossed

As said before, there are different borderlines violated in *AQP*. Schimanski (2007) points to the 'border poetics' and says they are divided into five important categories: '*Textual, topographical, symbolic, temporal* and *epistemological borders*' (73). The biological or the 'Colour' border can even be added to this category. Temporal borders of the story are related to Elizabeth's birth, marriage, her life in South Africa and Botswana; time is a double—linear and non-sequential—concept, simultaneously. The latter aspect of time is related to Elizabeth's dream where past, present, and future are undistinguishable.[23] Elizabeth's own condition as a migrant or refugee is a determining factor in this regard;

> If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities— migrant or metropolitan— then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a 'centred' causal logic (Bhabha 1994 141).

The very form of *AQP* reinforces this non-sequentiality. It starts near the end of the story, where there are numerous flashbacks to Elizabeth's different stages of life while a considerable part of the story happens inside Elizabeth's mind where time is 'in-depth' and vertical. The reader is continually perplexed by foreshadows and disjointed periods of time. Topographical and geographical borders are manifested in the physical journey from South Africa to Botswana, and from Motabeng as the 'place of sand' to her garden which is located on the border of the Kalahari Desert. Another example of geographical-border crossing is Cape Gooseberry which is geographically associated with the Coloured community in Cape Town, and becomes a 'miracle performer' in its quick growth and reproduction in the course of the story in the economic development of Motabeng (Kolijan 2006 129).

[23] The novel is a series of comments on the ways in which power and religion have been constructed through history. These are articulated through fragmented visions and images from a wide range of sources such as Roman history, Biblical stories, Egyptian mythology, and Eastern religions juxtaposed with references to modern history through references to the Ku Klux Klan, Nazism, and apartheid (see also Talahite 2005 146).

Symbolically speaking, apart from the garden discussed earlier, the symbol of woman as the 'mother-country' is also worth mentioning. In postcolonial literature woman is designated as mother-country and is a passive symbol of nationalism. In movements like 'Black Consciousness,' feminine imagery and the images of rape are rampant. In the poetry of Black Consciousness women are represented as 'passive lands,' raped and violated objects (see also Pucherova 2011 105–124). Dan's seventy-one-nice-time girls who are merely passive sex objects are killed mercilessly by him: 'He attacked her (Elizabeth's) head the way he had attacked the vaginas of the nice-time girls […]. He had a way of conveying hideous, silent, concealed laughter through monstrous images of women being raped' (180). However, this strategy seems to be useless in relation to Elizabeth who has no vagina and has an analytical mind. Elizabeth's active mind and body cross the passivity of the nice-time girls when Sello tells her: 'You have an analytical mind. You must analyse everything you see' (29).

In terms of violation of the biological borders, Elizabeth is an offspring of two opposite colours. Her body becomes a crossroad in which contraries meet and reconcile and the term 'purity' with which African absolutists like Dan are obsessed is dismissed. She turns the 'shame' imposed on her as a result of her parents' Immorality Act into a chance for revolution, violation, and resistance. The interracial offspring in the light of the Great Chain of Being is a violation of Nature. In this Chain Whites are placed at the top, while Blacks are at the bottom next to animals. Elizabeth in this way is an offspring of a human/semi-human immoral affair. The other biological liminality occurs when, as a woman, Elizabeth identifies herself with homosexual men. In this respect, she crosses the defined biological (male and female) and normal gendered borders (hetero and homosexuality). '"Strange men dressed in women clothes" […] she could not help but identify with the weak, homosexual Coloured men who were dying before her eye' (44 and 47). Homosexuality is in this story burdened with implications of a violation of the established sexual norms, as a result, those belonging to it are liminal figures that call into question issues of boundary in the light of variety of possible identities, since, like hybrids, they have an 'in-between' position. In its symbolic sense it can be considered as a deliberate satirical comment that delicately questions excommunication of 'liminals.' Hybridity and homosexuality in this way become identical as degenerative acts.

> The norm/deviation model of race as of sexuality meant that 'perversions' such as homosexuality became associated with the degenerate products of miscegenation…. The identification of racial with sexual degeneracy was clearly always overdetermined in those whose subversive bronzed bodies bore witness to a transgressive act of perverse desire (Young 1995 24).

Conclusion

Despite all the above-mentioned observations, it is not acceptable to oversimplify the novel as an explicit propaganda of hybridity. Head's masterpiece can be viewed in the light of different theories and approaches, one of which being

postcolonialism. Although at the end of the novel Elizabeth experiences a sense of belonging, there are frequent moments in which she decides to commit suicide. As a homeless refugee, a lonely woman who must take care of her son in a hostile era of poverty, discrimination, segregation, and prejudice, she suffers a lot. Elizabeth's exile is a one-way exile:

She was forced to take out an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the 'never to return' clause. She did not care [...]. In spite of her inability to like or understand political ideologies, she had also lived the back-breaking life of the all black people in South Africa [...]. You did not know why white people [...] hate you or loathe you. They were just born that way, hating people, and a black man or woman was just born to be hated. *There wasn't any kind of social evolution beyond that, there wasn't any lift to the heart, just this vehement vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks.* [emphases added] (19).

She is hospitalised in the 'loony-bin' twice. She oscillates between life and death. Head's liminal protagonist is torn between 'Eros and Thanatos.' It is only at the end of the story that having entered the garden-world, she begins to recuperate. Although the end of the story remains problematic, there are rays of hope. As Shorty says, the edge has a double-face. It is where the sun both rises and sets, and Elizabeth 'experiences' numerous falls and sun-sets in the course of the novel. However, she does not give up hope until she also sees the sunrise. Here, the reader should be reminded of Shorty's poem quoted earlier. He, despite being a child, has been a naïve eyewitness of his mother's delirium and hospitalization and can depict the concept of hope better than anyone else. He has said this nursery rhyme after his mother's recovery. The poem is full of hopeful images. The man can fly beside butterflies, airplanes, birds, and fairies in the sky. It is in this way that a 'Third Spacian,' after innumerable traumatic and horrible physical and mental crises, finally, 'Can Speak.'

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