Displacement in *When Rain Clouds Gather*

Frank Meintjies
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9199-6144
University of Pretoria
fmeintjies@outlook.com

Abstract

In this article, I examine the representation of displacement in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969). Head not only features displaced characters but also depicts, through her protagonists, the struggles that arise from displacement. I draw on the work of prominent scholars to explore and apply concepts such as "home" and belonging, which are central to any discussion of displacement, as well as to explore the integration challenges faced by, for example, a displaced person vis-á-vis a settled community. Through a close reading of the text, I demonstrate how Head uses this work to generate important insights into displacement.

Keywords: belonging; displacement; Bessie Head; home; place

UNISA LASA
Journal of Literary Studies
Volume 40 | 2024 | #17078 | 17 pages
https://doi.org/10.25159/1753-5387/17078
ISSN 1753-5387 (Online)

Introduction

Bessie Head had a sustained and often stark experience of displacement. Born in 1937, she was exposed to racial segregation and systematic discrimination under the white authorities ruling South Africa before and after the introduction of formal apartheid in 1948. This reality, coupled with her personal experience of being orphaned, meant she was severely impacted: for example, by age 13, she was "passed back and forth between prospective foster parents" (Atkinson 2011, 270), belonging nowhere. In time, she ended up in Botswana as a refugee. She has written:

> I would not like to take on another birth in South Africa and end up a refugee in Botswana. Both are situations of endless anguish. … Why the hell did you come here in the first place, they say. (Head 1969, 12 [Head 1975, 107])

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, a novel which revolves around the experiences of an anti-apartheid activist who winds up in Botswana, she illuminates vital aspects of displacement. In this article, I begin by setting out an understanding of displacement; I then examine Makhaya's journey focusing on how the protagonist navigates displacement; finally, I explore links between the displaced person, social integration, and questions of place.

Despite the introductory paragraph, provided to accentuate the relevance and importance of the displacement theme, this article does not focus on Bessie Head as a person. Its focus is on *When Rain Clouds Gather* and how the author tackles displacement. This immediately means that the reader should not expect this article to canvass the extensive literature on Bessie Head and her life.

Numerous authors have pointed out that displacement features in Bessie Head's novels. For example, Katrak states that "geographical marginalization is figured in the exile Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and racial/ethnic marginalization in *Maru*" (Katrak 1995, 71). However, Katrak does not undertake a close textual analysis. Reference may also be made to Ibrahim, who states, referring to *Maru* (1971), that "both Maru and Margaret remain exiles of one sort or another in spite of the unifying gesture of marriage" (Ibrahim 1996, 17). This statement was made during a discussion of gender power relations in Head's work. The dislocation is not explored in great depth or through close textual analysis.

Several writers focus on the different aspects of marginalisation faced by Head's characters.[1] However, none of the above works entail an in-depth analysis of displacement in Head's novels.

1 For example, Dieke (2007) focuses on racism, while Bazin (1986), Starfield (1997), Chabwera (2008), and Al-Ghalith et al. (2023) apply a feminist analysis to Head's work. Writers such as Lewis (2007) and Ibrahim (1996) explore a range of perspectives, with the latter comparing Head's prose before and after her relocation to Botswana.

Two scholars who directly invoke the idea of place in discussing Head's work are Olaussen (1997) and Nixon (1993). Nixon writes of place in relation to Bessie Head. However, his primary focus is Head and, although he mentions that Head "gives voice to the distinctive experiences of refugees and other battled itinerants" (Nixon 1993, 253), he does not offer a close reading of one of her works of fiction.[2] Olaussen's work stands out because it deals directly and explicitly with place in relation to Head's work. It does so, firstly, in terms of the village as a setting, and, secondly, in exploring a more metaphorical connection between the village, gender issues, and place in a discussion of *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Olaussen adopts a feminist analysis—"I have chosen to draw on what is currently termed post-colonial feminist theory … [in] my reading of Head's work" (Olaussen 1997, 14). Olaussen thus takes a different approach to this article, in which I offer a detailed analysis of displacement in *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969).

Displacement impacts communities globally, not just in southern Africa. According to Those: "Human dispersal is a worldwide phenomenon. ... Oftentimes, the movement is not voluntary. People are compelled to leave their countries … by circumstances beyond their control" (Tshosa 2007, 51). This phenomenon is often linked to systems like colonialism, slavery, apartheid, and neocolonialism which have caused forced relocations, conflict, and economic hardship. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Geneva, Switzerland, notes that the "drivers of displacement are typically multi-causal" (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2017, 31), involving "a variety of natural, political, and socio-economic causes" (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2017, 21). Thus,

> displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters. (de Mello 1998, 1)

Displacement, as discussed in this article, includes two essential components: the issue of place and the notion of relocation or movement, typically undertaken under pressure.

In more fully exploring the meaning of displacement—its impact on the uprooted individual and the struggles that arise from it—consideration is given to concepts such as belonging and home. Those displaced are bereft of a sense of belonging. In exploring belonging, this article draws on Antonsich (2010), Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), and Probyn (1996), with Probyn arguing that belonging "captures … the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become"

2 Ako writes: "Nixon does not dwell sufficiently on the way the 'crossroads of dispossession' function in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. He lays more emphasis on how this applies to Head's own life and to historical characters like Khama the Great and Seretse Khama rather than on her fictional characters" (Ako 2000, 6)

(Probyn 1996, 9). According to Antonsich, belonging is concerned with "how, as an emotional feeling, it comes to be attached by an individual to a particular place so to generate what I call place-belongingness" (Antonsich 2010, 645). Antonsich and Probyn, in these comments, are signalling how belonging has a social and an affective element, where the former refers to how people form connections and feel integrated within various social contexts and the latter to how feelings of acceptance, inclusion or exclusion play a role in how people experience belonging. According to Lähdesmäki et al., belonging "comprises of [*sic*] situational relationships with other people and social and cultural practices stemming from these relationships, which are fundamentally political and include emotional and/or affective orientations" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 28). Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) thus add the political dimension. This dimension alludes to how an uneven power distribution in society frequently imposes a sense of exclusion and how political structures enable or restrict the attainment of belonging.

Regarding the spatial aspect, it seems that the notion of belonging is often, but not always, connected to place, with Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) arguing that belonging refers to "relations that are context-specific and thus require contextualized definitions" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 28). For this article, Antonsich's employment of "place-belongingness" (Antonsich 2010, 645) is relevant; when belonging is discussed in the context of displacement, the issue of place is pivotal.

Regarding the idea of home, it is important to note that "home" here refers not to a physical space made of bricks and mortar but to an existential and symbolic concept. Yuval-Davis asserts that "belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (2006, 197), and Antonsich views belonging "as a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place" (Antonsich 2010, 645). Extrapolating from Head's life and as depicted in the protagonist's experience in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the absence of a sense of home forms part of displacement. The idea of home is linked to place but is also different from it. Although *place* is imbued with meaning as humans occupy it and is given meaning through human culture and human interaction, *home* carries with it a deeper sense of the individual subject's relationship to it. As Ulf Hedetoft has stated,

> In fact, our home is where we belong, territorially and culturally, where "our own" community is, where our family, friends and acquaintances reside, where we have our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world. … It is also a significant determinant of individual "identity", that elusive but still real psychological state of feeling in sync with oneself under given external conditions. (Hedetoft 2002, 4–5)

The second sentence in this quotation, particularly, including the reference to the "psychological state of feeling in sync with oneself," brings forth the more distinct meaning of home: the affective element. It gestures to the intimate and the personal.

In this article, I do not deal with "identity," even as I concede that identity issues come up in a discussion of belonging.[3] Support for not invoking the word identity comes from various authors cited in this article. Lähdesmäki et al. state, "It seems that in recent scholarship, the concept of belonging has emerged alongside, and partly replaced or challenged, the concept of identity" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 3). Probyn asserts that "the concept of belonging captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment … and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong … a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state" (Probyn 1996, 19). In an article entitled "Beyond 'Identity'" (2002), Brubaker and Cooper state that they "take stock" of the "work 'identity' is supposed to do and suggest that this work might be done better by other terms, less ambiguous, and unencumbered by the reifying connotations of 'identity'"(Brubaker and Cooper 2002, 1).

Also relevant in displacement is a focus on the relationship-building element in the new place, the locality where the displaced person tries to make a life for themselves. Here, we draw on Flusser (2005), who speaks of "the new image of humanity as the knotting of relationships" (Flusser 2005, 325) and posits:

> We must imagine a net of relations among human beings, an "intersubjective field of relations." The threads of this net should be seen as channels through which information like representations, feelings, intentions, or knowledge flows. … The threads knot themselves together provisionally and develop into what we call human subjects. The totality of the threads constitutes the concrete lifeworld. (Flusser 2005, 325)

This view emphasises the extent to which the individual is a social being. It asserts that the threads are not merely something that flow from the individual's actions; the suggestion is that they constitute the individual. When such connections are lacking, the individual lives with a debilitating hollowness. This is because "the self is an abstract, conceptual point around which concrete relations are wrapped" (Flusser 2005, 325). In Flusser's terms, human beings are defined through relationships with others; if this is so, one can extrapolate that social connections are pivotal in starting a life in a new place. Importantly, Flusser develops the ideas (reflected in the quotation) with respect to the migration context. He states: "[Expelled persons] become immigrants somewhere. This desettling and unsettling are usually viewed negatively …. I will try

3 For example, in Head's other novel, *Maru* (1971), Margaret faces issues of working out who she is, how she can develop a positive self-concept against the racist abuse she suffers as a child, how she should relate to the Masarwa people, and how she should assert herself against the power of men. This example brings out issues of defining oneself (the issue of understanding oneself as an individual), how we define ourselves through the lens of the groups we belong to, and how social structures shape that definition—issues at the centre of "identity." In an article entitled "Quest for Identity in Bessie Head's Novel, *Maru*," Mali and Ghorpade (2001) explore questions of identity in relation to the character Margaret. In her article exploring anti-racism in one of Head's novels, Dieke discusses how Margaret must "get out of the reified status into a process of becoming" (Dieke 2007, 4). Here, Dieke foregrounds how Margaret in *Maru* is engaged in the process of defining herself.

to tease the positive aspects from them" (Flusser 2003, 25). One positive aspect is that "the expellee" (Flusser 2003, 27) has the potential to form life-giving and dynamic relationships in the new place. When Makhaya arrives in Golema-Mmidi, a key part of navigating displacement is developing such a webbing through which there can be two-way flows of understanding, meaning, and connection.

Another concept that illuminates understanding of the displaced person's struggle emanates from Murrani (2020) who refers to "the agency of the migrant" (Murrani 2020, 181) or the "agency of the displaced" (Murrani 2020, 182). She elaborates:

> Displacement realises the unequal power relation between the migrant as the *other* and those who are settled and rooted; it also foregrounds the struggle between agency and structure. However, this very tension gives rise to the migrant's agency, in the first instance, as a survival mechanism and later as a creative form of expression. (Murrani 2020, 181, emphasis in original)

Being in a weaker position is what, to use Murrani's phrase, "gives rise to the migrant's agency" (Murrani 2020, 181). In Murrani's framework, the displaced person (a) feels pressure to survive—to find creative ways to make connections and a means to make a life, despite starting from a weaker position—and (b) is spurred to create a sense of home in the new place.

This article also leans on Bornewasser's (1993) perspective; he allows us to grasp the tension between "natives who have never changed their place" (Bornewasser 1993, 1) and foreigners—who "are not obliged to observe the norms and traditions of the host system" (Bornewasser 1993, 4). Bornewasser suggests:

> From the beginning of their lives, people tend to establish a familiar world around themselves. They assimilate (and sometimes accommodate to) their external environment … and internalize it. By that way, people exert more and more control over their world: they learn which people in which positions belong to their social environment, they learn the meaning of symbols, what kind of behaviour might be expected and which events are to be predicted. Finally, the familiar environment … has become a place of safety. (Bornewasser 1993, 2; ellipses added)

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Makhaya Maseko leaves South Africa as a political refugee for "mixed personal and political motives" (Wilhelm 1983, 3). He undertakes a hazardous journey to Botswana, where he collaborates with Gilbert Balfour on a project to improve traditional farming methods. Makhaya seeks escape from the blows of apartheid and strives for some solace and healing from the violence it engendered in him. The article focuses on what I (arguably) view as the kernel of this novel: the issue of displacement—how the protagonist experiences and responds to the displacement he encounters. He yearns for belonging and a sense of home, for that sense of being enmeshed in community, which Flusser expressed as the "knotting of relationships" (Flusser 2005, 325), but Makhaya must first navigate being an outsider, facing rude,

guarded, and hostile treatment. Arriving in Golema-Mmidi, he gradually navigates the pressures of displacement and eventually integrates into the community through the relationships he forms.

To Golema-Mmidi

As stated before, Makhaya has diverse reasons for leaving South Africa. He shares some of these with an older man who assists him on the South African side of the border. The conversation begins with a discussion of the Zulu origins of Makhaya's name: "'But look here, old man, I'm no tribalist. My parents are—that's why they saddled me with this foolish name'" (Head 1969, 9). Makhaya's dislike of tribalism has significance. It begins to reveal a person capable of what Okolie and Abonyi term "'border crossings' … whether these are racial, ethnic or national" (Okolie and Abonyi 2022, 10). They assert that "for Bessie Head, the characters that can successfully empathise with others are those who have 'crossed borders'" (Okolie and Abonyi 2022, 5). This capacity is linked to open-mindedness, a quality that a migrant needs—and needs to find in others—to have a better chance of settling in a new place. Makhaya's name reveals a break between his parents' perception of him and his understanding of himself. The name, he says, "'is the wrong one for me. It is for one who stays home'" (Head 1969, 10). Indeed, the name is ironic when considering that Makhaya is a man predisposed to "cross borders" (Okolie and Abonyi 2022, 7) and who leaves his community and native land behind for an uncertain future.

The protagonist and the older man continue their discussion:

> "Ha, I see now," the old man said, pretending disappointment. "You are running away from tribalism. But just ahead of you is the worst tribal country in the world. We Baralongs are neighbours of the Batswana, but we cannot get along with them."
> [Makhaya] burst out laughing. "Oh, Papa," he said. "I just want to step on free ground. I don't care about people. ... I want to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe the evils in my life will correct themselves." (Head 1969, 10)

Makhaya's response suggests that, although he is averse to tribalism, he primarily wants freedom from the apartheid system's controls and indignities. When he hopes that "the evils in my life will correct themselves," he doesn't specify the evils, but the novel goes on to reveal his shadow side. The reader learns that alongside Makhaya's "gentleness" (Head 1969, 102), he possessed a "torrential fury" (Head 1969, 125) and the capacity to be "murderously angry" (Head 1969, 66), to the extent that "taking a man's life meant little to him" (Head 1969, 66)—all of this rooted in his experience of confronting "a twisted perverted mentality which pinned up little notices over a whole town that said: This town is for white people only" (Head 1969, 133). These "evils in [his] life" in the quotation above and the "inner harmony and peace he was striving for" (Head 1969, 33) signal the intrapersonal reasons propelling him to seek a change. These expressed reasons for his flight signal the complex interplay of motivations, aligning with the United Nations perspective of multiple factors.

In the novel's second paragraph, the narrator notes: "The inner part of him was a jumble of chaotic discord, very much belied by his outer air of calm, lonely self-containment" (Head 1969, 7). The suggestion is that the hazardous elements and the uncertainty of moving to an unknown place create this deep anxiety. What is the source of this uneasiness? One part may be the charge that arises from engaging in something elicit—crossing a border surreptitiously. The other part very likely also has to do with the anticipation of what Murrani described as "the unequal power relation between the migrant as the other and those who are settled and rooted" (Murrani 2020, 181). At the core of this unease is a knowing or sensing that what lies ahead may be difficult or destabilising in the sense Murrani suggests. It may also be that Makhaya—being educated and having "worked for a newspaper in Johannesburg" (Head 1969, 33)—has the knowledge or intuitive sense that, in Steiner's phrasing, "the host environment, … instead of facilitating the building of a new home, rejects the migrant" (Steiner 2009, 4).

In another part of his journey, Makhaya experiences being treated as an outcast. He meets an old woman who may be able to assist him:

> He greeted the old woman in Tswana, politely calling her mother. ...
> She did not return the greeting. Instead she demanded, "Yes, what do you want?" She had a loud, shrill, uncontrolled voice, and he disliked her immediately.
> "I was looking for shelter for the night," he said.
> She kept quiet…. Then she burst out in that loud, jarring voice, "I say you are one of the spies from over the border." (Head 1969, 12)

In this encounter, Makhaya faces hostility from an old woman who, in the same scene referenced above, "spat on the ground as an eloquent summing up of what she thought of him" (Head 1969, 13). Nothing in his conduct justifies her negative reaction; she treats him poorly merely because he hails from "over the border" (Head 1969, 12)—this cool reception strips away Makhaya's illusions. Coming from a country where white people with authority lord it over black people, he now faces discrimination of a different order. This experience deeply unsettles Makhaya. The experience aligns with Probyn's view: "It seems to me that the processes of belonging are always tainted with deep insecurities about fitting in, of even getting in" (Probyn 1996, 40). For Makhaya, drawn to Botswana by "whatever illusion of freedom [that] lay ahead" (Head 1969, 7), this encounter deepens his sense of displacement and not fitting in. This experience with the unfriendly woman very likely increases anxieties of both "getting in" and "fitting in" (Probyn 1996, 40).

Later, Makhaya walks into a police station to register with the authorities, as refugees must do: "[The police officer] said coolly. 'I … want to impress you, so that you don't start any funny tricks around here. You may think this country is a quiet backwater, but we have the most intelligent service in southern Africa'" (Head 1969, 19). This statement is emblematic of the guarded or hostile responses that officials frequently mete out to migrants. Here, Makhaya is given the message that the door is being opened

for him; however, it is a circumscribed welcome. The words "around here" are a subtle reminder to him that he does not belong. Although he is a policeman, Appleby-Smith is also in this scene functioning as a protector of borders. In this connection, Schimanski describes *When Rain Clouds Gather* as "a novel of border zones" (Schimanski 2007, 74). This links with Ako's conception of people in the novel as border crossers, as mentioned earlier. Thus on the one hand, "the spaces … borders separate may conventionally be described in terms of inclusion (national territory) and exclusion (foreign territory)" (Stotesbury 1990, 76).

On the other hand, during civil war and indeed for migrants, border lines go everywhere, meaning they occur in places other than just the borders of countries. For many migrants "inclusive space has been officially designated exclusive space" (Stotesbury 1990, 76), to use a phrase Stotesbury uses when referring to South Africa under apartheid. But, "borders everywhere, of course, shift and yield" (ibid.), and it may be argued that this allows the migrant to look for gaps for inclusion. Makhaya has thus come face-to-face with Appleby-Smith's role and powers in terms of policing the boundary between who is included and excluded in Botswana. He needs to work out how he will proceed (how he will navigate or manoeuvre) from here, given the sentiment and ground rules conveyed by the police officer.

On the journey, we can see Makhaya's lack of belonging. He is in the "no-man's-land" (Head 1969, 19), akin to being between the separating fences of Botswana and South Africa. It is a barren place in terms of human connection and flourishing and an insecure place. I relate this barrenness to Flusser's view and to his sense of the hollowness that arises when the "threads" (Flusser 2005, 325) of mutual existence and that "constitute the concrete life world" (ibid.) are absent or have been unknotted.

In Golema-Mmidi

In what can be seen as the second part of Makhaya's story arc, a new set of challenges emerge. These difficulties are associated with community acceptance and are linked to challenges of integration.

Emerging from the police station, Makhaya meets a kind soul from the village, Dinorego, who assists him with his entry into the community. This development echoes Dikeledi's role in *Maru* (1971), helping Margaret settle in Dilepe. Dinorego and Makhaya meet serendipitously outside the police station near Golema-Mmidi. "'Come and stay with me,'" Dinorego says (Head 1969, 21), and introduces Makhaya to others in the village. These introductions come with endorsements. For example, he tells Mma-Millipede: "'I have brought my son about whom we spoke the whole week'" (Head 1969, 70). These introductions provide a foothold for Makhaya. Head suggests that while the displaced person will be tested and must draw on their resources, they must also be on the lookout for a helper. Her creation of this role suggests that, despite the usually gruelling experience, some human connection may emerge to lighten the

burden. This links to Ako's (2000) ideas of other open-minded persons who come together to help create new worlds.

In the grip of a severe drought (Head 1969, 35), the village of Golema-Mmidi is a difficult place. It had rigid gender divisions: "Dinorego was the only male full-time crop produce in the village" (Head 1969, 35) and, as Gilbert experienced it, "the village kept out anything new and strange" (Head 1969, 100). The chiefs are looking to take over national power, but they face new competitors, their own sons, making the chiefs a "disgruntled section of the country" (Head 1969, 47). The paramount chief Sekoto, enjoying his local power, seeks to preserve his cultural authority and extract some entertainment by pitting Gilbert against his sub-chief, who is his troublesome brother: "Either the young man would be completely destroyed, or he could completely destroy his brother" (Head, 1969, 34). Makhaya enters this dynamic by residing at Gilbert's home and joining his cooperative. In a move that bears out the contention of Okolie and Abonyi (2022) when they assert that "most host environments offer rejection instead of assistance" (Okolie and Abonyi 2022, 28), Matenge targets him. Matenge tells Makhaya: "'Most of the trouble here is caused by people from outside, and we don't want you. We want you to get out. When are you going?'" (Head 1969, 65).

Matenge piles on the insults: "'You know what a South African swine is?' he said. 'He is a man like you'" (Head 1969, 66). Referring to Makhaya as a "swine" is a dehumanising remark, with the text suggesting here how easy it is to target displaced persons through the use of slurs, insults, and labels. Murrani refers to these power relations when she states, "Displacement realises the unequal power relation between the migrant as the other and those who are settled and rooted" (Murrani 2020, 181). Indeed, these unequal power relations take a starker form when the settled person is a power-hungry official.

In the village, there are clusters of closed-minded thinking, but there are also free thinkers amid this reality. The text suggests that Dinorego and Mma-Millipede embody this freer spirit but are not entirely free of concerns about strangers. Bornewasser discusses how "foreigners elicit some kind of affective reaction like anxiety leading to opposition, mystification and sometimes even hostility and attack" (Bornewasser 2009, 3). We see this in Mma-Millipede's struggle to form an opinion of Makhaya (Head 1969, 98). The narrator notes, "No matter how hard she tried, she could not form a judgment on his character because of her inhibition about foreign men" (Head 1969, 99). This response contrasts with her expression of empathy toward Makhaya: "'Do you eat well, my son? … Do you often get ill?'" (Head 1969, 71). Such remarks "seemed like mountains of affection to the lonely Makhaya" (Head 1969, 71). People such as Mma-Millipede, who reach out across boundaries, help Makhaya navigate displacement.

His landing in Golema-Mmidi is the commencement of several strands in how he navigates displacement and takes steps toward his integration. To link to Flusser's concept, he is beginning to constitute himself in the new place.

The first relationship he fosters is with Gilbert. He recognises something compelling in Gilbert, and the agricultural work Gilbert draws him into has a calming effect on him. Being part of the cooperative seemed to be a good space for Makhaya's introspective work. It may be argued that working with the earth has a grounding effect. As Smuts (2023) argues, "Makhaya's search for a home—and of what it means, after the hardships he has endured in South Africa—cannot be separated from his discovery of the elemental nature of the place in which he finds himself" (Smuts 2023, 4). If these hardships occurred in what Smuts describes as the "toxic nature of the environment he has left behind" (Smuts 2023, 5), implicit in Smuts's argument is that Makhaya's engagement with nature serves as part of the detoxification he needs before he can establish a sense of belonging in Golema-Mmidi.

The narrator states that "agriculture was something he grasped at to save his own life" (Head 1969, 123). The narrator expands:

> Makhaya found his own kind of transformation in this enchanting world. It … was a putting together of the scattered fragments of a life. (Head 1969, 122)

The "putting together of the scattered fragments" may allude to Makhaya coming to terms with his intrapersonal issues. But, equally, we could interpret it to mean that Makhaya is beginning to weave threads, á la Flusser, that would constitute him in the new place. "Putting together" in this sense would mean that he is beginning to change from the person defined as one who, in the narrator's words, "would never stop putting people away from him" (Head 1969, 132).

Another part of Makhaya's efforts toward integration is the forging of bonds with the village women and through that, with the village. Head sketches scenes of him working alongside the women:

> They stood back awhile … but once it struck them that he paid no attention to them as women, they also forgot he was a man and became absorbed in following his explanations. And this was part of the magic of Makhaya's personality. He could make people feel at ease. (Head 1969, 106)

Makhaya's approach seems to intrigue them. It is a listening approach. This is Makhaya, whose "general expression was one of absorbed, attentive listening" (Head 1969, 7), as the reader is told in the novel's third paragraph, and who, after he meets Dinorego, "listened in his absorbed, attentive way" (Head 1969, 25) to the older man. With the women, Makhaya deploys his listening capacity to assist him as he navigates displacement and finds positive connecting points with people in the new place.

In these scenes, Makhaya forms the links that Flusser (2005) refers to, making those connections through which meaning and true connectivity can flow. He is weaving the "threads" (Flusser 2005, 325) needed for inclusion and belonging, and engaging in the "knotting of relationships" (ibid.) to constitute himself in this new place.

There are two other ways that the threads are strengthened. A key strengthening thread is the powerful romantic one that is affirmed as the novel draws to a close. Makhaya asks Paulina, "'… if you'd like to marry me?'" (Head 1969, 188) and Paulina agrees. This development represents the start of Makhaya's fuller inclusion in the community, to be solidified through the socio-cultural ritual of marriage.

Another powerful tie-in to the community occurs when Makhaya joins the community in collective action against Matenge. It begins when Matenge summons Paulina—"'I am sent to bring you to court. The chief has a case,'" says the servant mandated to fetch her (Head 1969, 175). The backdrop is that Matenge, having returned from a hospital stay, finds "too many independent-minded people [in Golema-Mmidi" (Head 1969, 145) which sends him "into a fuming rage" (ibid.). Seeking a scapegoat, he picks on Paulina Sebeso.

The "news [of the summons] travelled swiftly from hut to hut" (Head 1969, 175), and a crowd gathers outside Matenge's house, and he panics. The narrator observes: "Matenge … retreated indoors, in panic, running from window to window and door to door, barricading himself inside" (Head 1969, 178).

At some point during the crowd's silent waiting, Makhaya arrives from the fields—"How long had this strange game been going on, Makhaya wondered?" (Head 1969, 178)—climbs the stairs, "broke down the door" (Head 1969, 178) and finds Matenge's lifeless body hanging from a rafter. As the drama subsides and the villagers head home, according to the narrator: "They could not, all at once, total up the good things in this struggle, how it had made them true comrades, how they would not ever have clarified their ideas had they not lived under the shadow of blind oppression. These things would come with tomorrow" (Head 1969, 182). The narrator observes that it is a powerful moment for the community—"It would go down in history" (Head 1969, 180). In this scene, Head demonstrates how a depth of connection is being consolidated between Makhaya and the villagers. They have bonded through their collective involvement in the change process.

Two key developments have occurred. First, through Flusser's lens, Makhaya has strengthened the "threads" connecting him to other community members by becoming involved and creating shared experiences. He is also forming an emotional attachment to Golema-Mmidi. Second, he has bridged the "us" and "them" divide that Murrani (2020) and Bornewasser (1993) describe as shaping the relationship between newly arrived migrants and settled communities. By standing with the community, he has become part of the "us."

In several and layered ways, Makhaya is gradually integrated into Golema-Mmidi. The once-displaced outcast, "the individual, who was seeking his own living life" (Head 1969, 136), has shed most of his concerns about adjusting to Botswana and has been able to "free his mind of hatred and concentrate his mind on the details of life in Golema-Mmidi" (ibid.).

A Layered Analysis

The conceptual framework enables further probing of Makhaya's displacement and his responses. Firstly, the concepts of belonging proposed by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) and Antonsich (2010) are integral to this discussion. For Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), belonging involves "emotional attachment" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 11) and "place attachments" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 10) and a nexus between the two. For Antonsich, it is not surprising "given the emotional connotation associated with belonging as feeling at home in a place, [that] this notion is also rendered in terms of a sense of rootedness" (Antonsich 2010, 6). Using these concepts, one can see the depths of Makhaya's displacement. He is un-homed because he leaves South Africa to escape what he experiences as a thoroughly dehumanising context, and on his journey experiences, to borrow Probyn's phrase, a "loss of bearings" (Probyn 1996, 114). If belonging "comprises of [*sic*] situational relationships with other people and [related] social and cultural practices" (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 28), Makhaya is stripped of these as he arrives.

Secondly, Probyn's ideas of movement and desire are relevant. Having surged across the border and into the new territory, Makhaya is an example of one who is "caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning" (Probyn 1996, 19). It is yearning that takes him forward on his odyssey. Probyn's ideas of an in-between state are also relevant here. She states: "Thus, while belonging may make one think of arriving, it also marks the often-fearsome interstices of being and going, of longing, of not arriving" (Probyn 1996, 31). Makhaya's journey exemplifies the "fearsome interstices"; his passage into Botswana is filled with uncertainty and risk.

Thirdly, Flusser and Murrani's work is very relevant to the context of the arrival place, that setting that can be the incubator of home. Flusser's reference to the "knotting of relationships" (Flusser 2005) helps explain Makhaya's efforts. He starts building relationships in Golema-Mmidi, creating, as it were (and to restate), the "channels through which … feelings, intentions, or knowledge [flow]" (Flusser 2005, 325). These links, which are vital as Makhaya seeks to convert Golema-Mmidi into a zone of comfort for himself, become a two-way flow of "feelings" (Flusser 2005, 325) and "intentions" (ibid.). We see this two-way flow, for example, between Mma-Millipede's and Makhaya. The text states: "The relationship between them from then on was to be one of continuous give and take, and who took and who gave and when and how was never counted" (Head 1969, 133). Also, his link with Gilbert, in another example of the wovenness he is establishing, contains within it a mutuality and reciprocity—"Makhaya

… was someone he now leaned on heavily for courage to push ahead with his idea" (Head 1969, 123) and in turn Makhaya, when "he met Gilbert, he was almost a drowning man" (Head 1969:81) but could "[turn] to agriculture for his salvation, and also to Gilbert" (Head 1969, 81).

Through weaving his experiences into the village and through forging linkages of belonging, Makhaya is transforming. These human connections and their transformative effects tie into Flusser's observations that "I am that to which *you* is said," (Flusser 2005, 325; italics added) and his view that "the self (I) is an abstract, conceptual point around which concrete relations are wrapped" (Flusser 2005, 325). Through the relationships he forms in Golema-Mmidi, Makhaya is constituting himself as a person in the new place.

Murrani's (2020) notion of the "agency of the displaced" (Murrani 2020, 182) also provides a valuable lens. Makhaya takes action geared to assist him in settling in. Even though he knows little about agriculture, he plunges into agricultural work. This exercise of agency keeps him from yielding to despair. It also helps him form connections and feel integrated within the social context that is Golema-Mmidi.

Conclusion

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head depicts the struggles arising from displacement. In his process of responding to displacement, the protagonist can tame his anger and overcome his disillusionment with past involvement in social issues. He encounters the abusive exercise of power—actions determined to entrench his discomfort and exploit his vulnerability—and feels the sense of being on "a lonely road" (Head 1969, 124), misunderstood and stigmatised. However, he eschews despondency and continues with his quest to find belonging and a "living life" (Head 1969, 136) in Golema-Mmidi.

In applying the concepts of commentators like Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), Antonsich (2010), and Probyn (1996), we learn how concepts such as belonging and home can be used to deepen our understanding of displacement and its impacts. Deploying the ideas of Bornewasser (1993), we get a clearer understanding of resistance in the host setting and—viewed through the lenses of Flusser (2005) and Murrani (2020)—we see how the displaced person can forge relationships that constitute making a home in the new setting. In her novel, Head has raised critical issues about displacement and—in the manner that Makhaya has attained a greater sense of wholeness and formed new human connections in Golema-Mmidi—highlighted the possibilities of a displacee attaining integration in a new place.

References

Al-Ghalith, A., A. Nashwan, S. A. D. Al-Ghammaz, M. Alzghoul, and M. Al-Salti. 2023. "The Treatment of Women in Selected Works by Bessie Head." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 14 (4): 968–976. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1404.14

Atkinson, Sue. 2011. "A Living Life, A Living Death: Bessie Head's Writing as a Survival Strategy." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32 (4): 269–278. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-011-9153-5

Antonsich, Marco. 2010. "Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework." *Geography Compass* 4 (6): 644–659. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x

Ako, E. O. 2000. "Crossing Borders: A Study of Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*." *Commonwealth (Dijon)* 22 (2): 5–11. https://doi.org/10.4000/1249f

Bazin, Nancy. 1986. "Feminist Perspectives in African Fiction: Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta." *The Black Scholar* 17 (2): 34–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1986.11414397

Bornewasser, Manfred. 1993. "Social Psychological Reactions to Social Change and Instability: Fear of Status Loss, Social Discrimination and Foreigner Hostility." *Civilisations* 42 (2): 91–103. https://doi.org/10.4000/civilisations.2310

Brubaker, R., and F. Cooper. 2000. "Beyond 'Identity'." *Theory and Society* 29 (1): 1–47. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007068714468

Chabwera, Ellinetie. 2008. "Womanhood in Bessie Head's Fiction." *Journal of Humanities* 21 (1): 13–24.

De Mello, Sergio Vieira. 1998. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. United Nations. UN Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, February 11.

Dieke, Ikenna. 2007. "Bessie Head's *Maru*: Identity, Pathology, and the Construction of Difference." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 31 (2): 1.

Flusser, Vilém. 2005. "The City as Wave-Trough in the Image-Flood." Translated by Phil Gochenour. *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2): 320–328. https://doi.org/10.1086/430963

Goodwin-Gill, Guy S., and Jane McAdam. 2017. *UNHCR and Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement*. UNHCR.

Head, Bessie. 1971. *Maru*. Heinemann.

Head, Bessie. 1969. *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Heinemann.

Head, Bessie. 1975. "Dear Tim, Will You Please Come to my Birthday Party." In *One Parent Families*, edited by Dulan Barber, 106–111. Poynter-Davis.

Hedetoft, Ulf. 2002. *Discourses and Images of Belonging: Migrants between 'New Racism', Liberal Nationalism and Globalization*. Aalborg University. AMID Working Paper Series 5/2002.

Ibrahim, Huma. 1996. *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile*. University of Virginia Press.

Katrak, Ketu. 1995. "'This Englishness Will Kill You': Colonial[ist] Education and Female Socialization in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Bessie Head's *Maru*." *College Literature* 22 (1): 62–77.

Lähdesmäki, Tuuli, Tuija Saresma, Kaisa Hiltunen, Saara Jäntti, Nina Sääskilahti, Antti Vallius, and Kaisa Ahvenjärvi. 2016. "Fluidity and Flexibility of 'Belonging': Uses of the Concept in Contemporary Research." *Acta Sociologica* 59 (3): 233–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316633099

Lewis, Desiree. 2000. "Living on an Horizon: The Writings of Bessie Head." PhD diss., University of Cape Town.

Mali, Ujwala Vishwas, and Pradnya Vijay Ghorpade. 2001. "Quest for Identity in Bessie Head's Novel, *Maru*." *Research Chronicler* 9 (1): 24–30.

Murrani, Sana. 2020. "Contingency and Plasticity: The Dialectical Re-Construction of the Concept of Home in Forced Displacement." *Culture & Psychology* 26 (8): 173–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X19871203

Nixon, R. 1993. "Border Country: Bessie Head's Frontline States." *Social Text* (36): 106–137. https://doi.org/10.2307/466392

Okolie, Mary J., and Chinasa B. Abonyi. 2022. "Head, Adichie and the Patterns of Migration Struggles." *Journal of Migration Affairs* 4 (2): 22–33. https://doi.org/10.36931/jma.2022.4.2.22-33

Probyn, Elspeth. 1996. *Outside Belongings*. Psychology Press.

Schimanski, Johan. 2007. "The Postcolonial Border: Bessie Head's 'The Wind and a Boy'." In *Readings of the Particular*, edited by Anne Holden Rønning and Lene Johannessen, 71–91. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401204071_006

Smuts, Eckard. 2023. "Elemental Humanity in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*." *English Studies in Africa* 66 (1): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2023.2128490

Starfield, Jane. 1997. "The Return of Bessie Head." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23 (4): 655–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079708708562

Steiner, Tina. 2014. *Translated People, Translated Texts*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760223

Stotesbury, John. 1990. “The Function Of Borders in the Popular Novel on South Africa.” *English in Africa* 17 (2): 71–89.

Tshosa, Onkemetse. 2007. “National Refugee Laws in the Light of International Standards: Some Reflections on the Refugee (Recognition and Control) Act, 1967 of Botswana.” *Botswana Law Journal* 5 (6): 49–76.

Wilhelm, Cherry. 1983. “The Face of Africa.” *English in Africa* 10 (1): 1–13.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging.” *Patterns of Prejudice* 40 (3): 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331