Global Journal of Science Frontier Research: H
Environment & Earth Science
Volume 18 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2018
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-4626 & Print ISSN: 0975-5896

The Collapse of Mud Living Economies in Bessie Head's Serowe the Village of the Rain Wind

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GJSFR-H Classification: FOR Code: 040699

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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I. Introduction

South African writerBessie Head's ethnographic reportage, Serowe: The Village of the Rain Wind, is a historical non-fiction narrative in which she collects oral histories of a hundred different members of the village to explore the social reforms within a changing socio-political landscape. In this ethnographic discourse, Head excavates the liminal spaces of postcolonial Botswana to uncover the "politics of truth" from the lived experiences and memories of those individuals who witnessed a history different from the historical record of colonial trespassers. Patterned after Ronald Blythe's Akenfiled: Portrait of an English Village, Head's historical testimonies bare witness to a humble portrait of "mud living" in which in spite of Western developmental projects most women and children have few resources and suffer from food and water insecurity. Head's documentation of Serowian testimonies suggests that programs aimed at population control ignore the real economic disparities that exist within the social structures under discussion. Moreover, it testifies to the fact that patriarchal authority, political programs and the development of thanato-technologies aimed at the regulation and control of women's bodies and livelihoods are directly related to periods of socio-economic and political instability. [i]

I, therefore, scrutinize the narrative reportage and individual subjectivities to examine how colonial and post-independence capitalism altered women's reproductive systems and shattered indigenous kinship and family networks. In exhuming these voices, I bring into conversation Serowan voices to specifically interrogate the complex intersecting forces that led to the collapse of sustainable livelihoods and kinship structures. Head's ethnographic recording of oral histories share a dominant analytical stratagem—bringing awareness to the patriarchal interruption of female sovereignty and the exertion of patriarchal control over female bodies and reproduction. Her reportage suggests that multiple intersecting forces prey on women's subsistence livelihoods, most notably the invasion of capital and its polarizing effects on subsistence economies and reproduction of kinship structures. In particular, Head corroborates how maldevelopment projects and population control policies aimed at policing female reproductive systems have led to demographic collapse amongst the tribal populations.

In this analysis, I examine the collision of local pro-natalist values and the international political influence of Neo-Malthusian ethics that focus on controlling women's reproductive systems in the interest of capitalism. I argue that colonial and post-independence capitalism undermined bride price and polygamous relations and replaced them with gendered production systems, monogamous relations, and Neo-Malthusian notions that disempowered women and fueled the collapse of traditional family reproductive units. It is my hope that this essay will contribute to scholarship on how Western development and empowerment rhetoric for rural and indigenous women of the Global South interrupts and displaces traditional coding systems and subsistence livelihoods in the interest of capital, pharmaceutical commercial interests, and geopolitical population control.

II. Breakdown of The Family

Influenced by a line from Telmaque's poem, "Where is the hour of the beautiful dancing birds of the

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[i] I synthesize Ewa Charkiewicz's(2009) theory of how military strategies of thanato-economics, "wages war not only on distant others, but also, as Foucalt and Brennant point out, war against its own populations" (Charkiewicz 80).

sun-wind," Head (1981) renames "Serowe the village of the rain-wind" (p. vii). In her romantic pastoral, people live in communal harmony and "time stands still in the long silences" and birds dance through "the deep blue, Serowe sky"(p. vii). In her idyllic horizon of birds "playing and dancing" Head finds a sense of wholeness; "a feeling of how strange and beautiful people can be–just living" (p.ix) and "having babies" (p. xi). Head juxtaposes her initial romanticism of "subsistence living" with the bitter reality reported by her villagers who must endure and feed their children on the "barest of necessities" (p. ix). Amidst the playful birdsong, Head contrasts how "the breakdown of family life is one of the great debating points of the village. Of all the tribes living in Botswana, none has experienced so much change and upheaval as the Bamangwato. It was as though old securities had clung to were stripped away at one blow during Khama's rule" (p. 70). In place of traditional kinship systems, elder Serowans carry their Christian bibles and their beliefs in God, while the younger generations live amidst the collapsing family order. Head writes, "Nowhere is this more evident than in the breakdown of family life in Serowe" (p. 70). Family collapse affects old and new. Many children are birthed to unwed mothers and absent fathers, many "who will never know who their real father is" (p. 70).

In an astonishing statistic, Head writes that 97 children out of 100 are illegitimate (p. 70). Sadly, Head's statistics and oral reportage in the late 1970s provide an archeology of reproductive data testifying to the material reasons behind collapsing family structures. Family breakdown was most felt by the Bamangwato tribe in Botswana when Khama came to power to impose Christianity and "blow away" traditional customs (p. 70).[ii] According to Head, Christianity forced people to either accommodate or "abolish" indigenous beliefs, rituals, and customs, hence denying them of long-established comforts and belief systems which traditional structures offered (p. xiii). Head points out that the discipline that Christianity imposed was both "internal and private" (p. xiv). She writes: "People might not have realized this, and this might account for the almost complete breakdown of family life in Bamangwato country, which under traditional custom was essential for the survival of the tribe" (p. xiv). Yet, Head claims that not one of her interviewees were willing to go on record to hoist all the blame on Khama's reforms (p. 70).

It is questionable whether Head's reverence for Khama as a "grand" "classic" heroic figure of "great gestures" and "lofty God of Mount Olympus, the great Lincoln of Southern Africa" clouded her own reportage (Vigne, 1991, p. 177). Coreen Brown (2002) posits that because "Khama's humanity was an exception to the general savagery, abomination and 'heathendom' that otherwise flourished in his land, she must claim for all Khama's people his finer qualities" (p. 137). European Christian missionaries courted Khama's attention and were able to influence his government by implementing ideological apparatuses to supplant tribal structures (Makgala, 2002, p. 161). Under Khama's rule, traditional customs were brutally displaced by the introduction of Western capitalist economy, crushing all signs of tribal systems on its way to progress and development. Tribal peoples were dispossessed of their land, resources, and human dignity, forcing them to live in the shantytowns of the "landless proletariat" (Clayton, 1998, p. 57).

Head emphasizes how Khama's "enlightened reforms" shaped Serowe's past and present with the elimination of indigenous customs and practices that were deemed inhumane by Christian standards, "especially the bogwera or circumcision rites in which the death of one of the initiates was obligatory" (Brown, 2003, p. 137). Among Khama's many other reforms were the discouragement of polygamous structures and the elimination of bride price (Brown, 2003, p. 137).Because "single families often made a nation," in its biological reproduction of lineages, the destruction of these kinship systems had far reaching effects on tribal continuity (Head, 1981, p. 71).

Arguably, one of the advantages of polygamy was to create cohesive patrilocal and patrilineal kinship systems that fostered relationships of power and reciprocity through nation-building. In addition, it secured "every woman in the society of a husband, and that she was performing her reproductive functions under fairly secure circumstances" (Head, 1981, p. 71). In traditional Botswana kinship systems, links of power and authority flow and interconnect through networks of patrilineal ancestries. While male members benefit from patrilineal privilege, the system also functions to provide assistance and welfare for women. Elder mothers of sons particularly benefit from the privileges inherent in this system. In comparing indigenous structures in India and Africa, Stanley J. Tambiah (1989) observes that African women enjoy some degree of personal self-sufficiency. Synthesizing Kathleen E. Gough's work on kinship systems in a Tamil village, Tambiah maintains:

The focus of interest of most African patrilineal systems is the reproductive capacity of woman and the maximum number of children she will bear; that African polygyny and matrifiliation are part of a special kind of patrilineal configuration; and that's because a married women's sexuality itself is not curbed and because her children's kinship is never in doubt. (p. 415)

The argument that women have been passive objects in a male dominated kinship system precludes discussions of women's productive and reproductive contributions to the maintenance of indigenous livelihoods. Female productive and reproductive capacities are the most vital forms of agency and

[ii] Seretse Goitsebeng Maphiri Khama was the first President of Botswana and in office from 1966 to 1980.

resistance—a fact that many feminists from both the Global North and South are afraid to acknowledge because of fears of bringing into play maligned theoretical notions of "biological essentialism."

While many African Marxist Feminists argue that polygamous structures locate women in passive positions of gendered subordination, it is also true that women enjoy a certain degree of inherent value as producers of children whose reproduction is imperative for the safeguarding of pastoral kinship systems. Children contribute to the functioning of the kinship system through maintaining and in some cases extending the cohesive social unit. Their labor in cattle production and agricultural output are vital to the economy of traditional subsistence livelihoods (Tambiah 1989, p.415). In The Pastoral Continuum: The Marginalization of Tradition in East Africa, Paul Spencer (1998) observes that the articulation of polygamous structures provides a "meaning life style to which pastoralists remain committed. The evidence from successful pastoralist cultures in particular suggests an institutionalized complex that adjusted to change" (p. 2). Polygamous kinship structures are strategic interdependent arrangements aimed at maintaining indigenous knowledge needed for survival and adaptation amidst changing and often vulnerable social and ecological conditions. Head reports some extended families had close to six hundred members and the introduction of monogamy has had a devastating effect (71). Akin to large family run enterprises with vast geographical networks of exchange, loan, and gift circuits, these alliances are crucial in times of severe drought conditions. Although in a different geographic and tribal location, evidence from my own research with the Barabaig pastoralists in Eastern Tanzania corroborates Spencer's observations that polygamous relationships were (are) necessary in order for indigenous pastoral economies to grow and survive. [iii]

The patrilocal kinship system was able to sustain itself through an adult royal lineage led kgosi who joined in an assembly (Kgotla), which acted as a juridical body to hear cases and provide resolution for village conflicts. The kgotla's administrative decrees were distributed and reinforced by male head's of their particular family units, the Kogtla overseeing community cohesion. Although land itself was held in common and was distributed by the Kgosi through patrilineal structures, women maintained customary land privileges as wives and members of their individual family units. [iv]

According to a Setswana saying "*Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho,* –The *kgosi* is *kgosi* by the grace of the people.[v] Designated with its privileged position by the people themselves, they can remove the *kgosi* for abuses of power not in the interest of the community. Head (1995) narrates the checks and balances within the kgosi in which corrupt dikgosis like Matenge are confronted by the local villagers in her novel, When Rain Clouds Gather. She further observes the "treasured" meeting places of women who took over the kgotla to discuss issues of their own concern.

Head (1981) observes that after the end of Bamangwato leadership "a gaping hole" swelled in "the fabric of society. Its main victims are women who now rear large families of children on their own outside the security of marriage" (p. 71). In particular she witnesses the impact of Christian institutions on existing kinship structures:

Marriage in church certainly struck the final deathblow to polygamy but the immense amount of change and strain people have endured seems unfortunately to have struck a deathblow to the male. He ceased to be the head of the family, and his place has been taken by a gay, dizzy character on a permanent round of drink and women, full of shoddy values and without any sense of responsibility for the children he so haphazardly procreates. (p. 72)

Many villagers still recall royal ancestry of tribal chiefs and headmen, their family line extending back in history to embrace the vitality of its deep historical roots. Like the "Testament" and "just as sacred," traditional polygamous structures as well as marriage itself disintegrated with Khama's reforms (Head, 1981, p. 71). Head (1981) observes that: "All Seowans live with the tail end of the polygamy story" (p. 71).

Head's oral history taken from 34 year-old weaving instructor Ndoro Sekwati reports on the impact of marriage dissolution. As stated by Sekwati, "Women are no longer certain of marriage but they still have children and have to support them" (Head 199). Sekwati describes how in the past the only aspiration girls had was marriage; the only knowledge they possessed was that of plowing the fields. "There was no other life for women, outside of that" (Head 198). Instead of money, the women received food, which she says is "the history of our women fright from the olden days; they have no other history. Many women still live like this, but the one big change that has taken place is that marriage has now become a thing of the past" (Head199). Yes, women still bear children, but outside the protective kinship network of food security.

[iii] Leveled on top of polygamous structures is another hierarchical stratification based on gerontocracy in which young men and women are dominated by senior elders.

[iv] See Van Allen, Judith Imel. "Free Women: Kinship, Capitalism, Gender and the State in Botswana." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2002. Print.

[v] See Ørnulf Gulbrandsen *The State And The Social: State Formation in Botswana and its Precolonial and Colonial Genealogies,* 2013.

One of the many factors leading to the breakdown of the family is the elimination of the tradition of bogadi, bride price—"the offering of a gift of cattle by a man to his wife's family at the time of marriage" (Head, 1981, p. 72). Bogadi was essential to the foundation of family life by creating a network of bonds and circulating resources over an expansive geographical area. Head (1981) writes:

It (Bogadi) was a marriage contract and without it there was no marriage.

All children born of the house of bogadi were recognized as legitimate.

But its ramifications went deep and stretched out to all the children a woman might bear in her lifetime, irrespective of whether another man other than her husband might have fathered her children. It also had undertones of a sale bargain, as if women were merely a marketable commodity. Of the five principal tribes in the country only the Bamangwato and Batawana have abandoned the bogadi tradition, and there seems to be nothing to bridge the ill-defined gap between one way of life and another. No one seems to know what the right sort of relationship between men and women should be, that would be sacred and of mutual benefit. (p. 72)

Varying opinions exist on the significance of bride price: According to Radcliffe-Brown's juridical thesis, bride price is a sort of "indemnity" and remuneration to a family that loses one of its members (qtd. in Tambiah, 1989, p. 414). Driberg argues, on the other handthat "women were not bartered away in Africa in communal transactions" (Tambiah, 1989, p. 414). The transactional nature of bride price suggests a "marriage settlement" that created a sense of equilibrium between the bride and groom's families (Tambiah, p. 414). Labels such as "'inequality,' 'domination,' 'prejudice,' and male chauvinism,'" were designated to describe it (Tambiah, p. 414). African aphorisms such as "Cattle beget children," and "We are bought like cattle" fueled theoretical designations as a form of commercial purchase for marriage (Tambiah, p. 415). Polygamy and bride price go hand in hand with securing economic stability amongst kinship relations. As socio-economic and political transactions, they are interconnected to the reproduction and reproduction of their traditional communities over time.

In Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy, Daniel P. Black (1997) reports bride price also served as a "form of insurance for the good treatment of the daughter" (p. 29). The "material presentation" acted as a binding agreement tendered for the daughter's future physical security. If a husband mistreated a daughter, she had recourse, as her male family members would intervene by beating and punishing him "(experientially) the injustice he inflicted upon his spouse" (Black, p. 31). In addition, married women seldom went hungry, as husbands who left their wives and children vulnerable to food insecurity were treated with village disdain. Husbands were expected to provide for their family and if they didn't they incurred the scorn and social ostracism from other village members. "So important was it to provide for one family adequately that, on occasions, a husband would help his wife with female-centered activities, which yielded an economic contribution to the family" (Black, p. 31).

According to the historical observations of Head's Keitese Lefhoko, "Men used to love their wives in the old days and women were tough to get. Their parents made tough bargains too. I really don't know what has caused the breakdown of family life because there are so many factors to consider, but I do know that women no longer regard themselves as a prize that has to be won" (Head, 1981, p. 75). In another one of Head's oral histories, Balebe Olegeng reports, "I don't know for sure when married life broke down, but by the time I started to notice the world, I could see there was no more marriage here in Serowe. My grandmother had been married and so had my mother but in my time, marriage suddenly went out of fashion" (pgs. 75-76). Balebe Olegeng claims that most villagers "grew up" without polygamy and bodagdi. In the past, the dominant question asked was: "Who was your father?" (Head, 1981, p.77). "If you had no proper father you were nothing in the society" (Head, p.77). Similar inquiries persist today, and some women are humiliated by conceiving children "outside marriage" and so have equipped their children with a prepared response: "My father was killed by a train" (Head, p.77). Balebe Olegeng insists that she has told her children the honest reality of her situation. "When they asked me who their father was I said: 'You have none'" (Head, p. 77). She asks: "What can we do? You can't force a man to be a father" (Head, p. 77). Both metaphorical and very real, this patriarchal capitalist train has left a mass grave of broken relationships and vulnerable indigenous communities on its path to "progress" and "development."

Head quotes C.G. Mararike's short story Why Marry? which narrates the escapades of a D.D.'s single beer drinking son B.B., a graduate of the London School of Economics, who "could have married if he wanted to but saw no point 'in buying a cow if he could get its milk free'" (p. 73). [vi] Mararike's narrative suggests that among other things, that implicit in sexual relations is a quid pro quo of future obligation if the terms of consideration are negotiated for the whole instead of the parts. He further implies that the failure to live up to these terms is a result of women who willingly breach the terms of their own sexual arrangements by delivering "the milk" without any consideration of future obligations as a the result of the sexual transaction. The

[vi] Printed in the Botswana magazine, *Kutlwano*.

consequence is that the system of incentives for men and protections for women entering into sexual relations have evaporated, and relationships that once were "sacred" and of "mutual benefit" has also vanished (Head, p. 72).

Some of Head's testimonies present a nostalgic reminiscence for the "old days" when men and women maintained kinship obligations. Although Head's seventy year-old Mpatelang Kgosi does not blame Khama for family collapse, he does correlate how the replacement of bride price with monogamous marriage impacted men's decision on when and whom to marry. Age and timing of marriage are now factors of consideration as "men often preferred to marry very young women. Since men had only a choice of one wife, he would wait until the age of thirty, without any contact with women until his wife was fully grown" (Head, p. 74). His chastisement of restless women who "chase money" from partner to partner never to find peace and men who chase women for sex, suggest a liberated sexual freedom unencumbered by the consequences of child birth and its traditional responsibilities. As stated by Kgosi "…no longer do men care about the position of being a father" (Head, p. 74). In Head's country of "fatherless children," Kgosi claims that under this new socio-economic arrangement of non-binding sexual relations, children are "encourage[d] to do the same" (Head, p. 74). In his most revealing opinion of the social changes, Kgosi reports:

It looks as though many new evils have come with the laws of independence. In 1967, the government introduced a new marriage law, whereby once children reach the age of twenty-one they may marry without their parent's consent. The result of this is that we now have a large number of divorces. The new style here is to be married for about two years and then divorce. On top of this, family planning was introduced. We can just give it its proper name, which is birth control. At first I did not mind all the adultery and many bad things that were going on because it was producing children. Now the women have seen that they need not bear children. One day there will be no people at all in this country because women are reluctant to bear children. (Head, p. 74)

For those women who do bear children outside the protections of marriage it is an understatement to say that life is difficult. Eighteen year-old Lebang Moremi claims she was influenced by her peers to have sex and began doing so without any information about contraception. She was sixteen when she conceived her first child and discovered "what happens to girls who become pregnant—there is no help for them, not even from the law" (Head, p. 78). Although the father denied his paternity, the District Commissioner did provide her with some economic recourse of R10 a month for child support, although most women receive little to no child support (Head, p. 78). Lebang Moremi blames a patriarchal judicial system for women's lack of protection: She observes that neither the legal discourse at the kgotla or the police camp, protects a woman" (Head, p. 78). According to Moremi, patriarchal collusion between both old and new systems have doubly marginalized women leading to the feminization of survival:

In the case of kgotla, from Chief Tshekedi's time, a ruling was made whereby a woman could claim damages in the form of cattle for the first child. There is no pressure for damages for the second, third, and so on. So a man knows that if he makes a baby with a women who already has a child, the kgotla won't trouble him to pay damages and from then onwards we women get taken advantage of. We have a second appeal for help –to the District Commissioner's office. This involves money for maintenance, not cattle. There was a new maintenance law passed two years ago whereby the men are required to pay R5 a week maintenance now. This frightens the men a little. (Head, p. 78)

Yet even with these laws, most fathers have escape[d] financial social and financial responsibility for their offspring born outside of marriage. For Marembe as well as other mothers raising children on her own, life "it is not a good life" for mother or child (Headp. 79). Children observe the behavior of their mothers, "lose respect all respect for her" and commence to follow in her pattern in a Botswana where now both mothers and daughters have internalized a socially prescribed culpability for the breakdown of family relations (Head, p. 79). In Marembe's world of patriarchal abandonment, children "run wild," daughters pattern their sexuality after their mother with "one man after another," and sons "become thieves," raiding villages for bare necessities (Head, p.79). Women bear the burden of not only providing physical and emotional security in a world of diminishing resources, but also the psychological toil of children's behavior.

III. Planned Parenthood

Head's reportage of 34 year-old Marit Kromberg, a maternal, child health services and family planning administrator, reveals the helplessness of mothers who frequently experienced the death of their babies from diarrhea. "We were trapped in a vicious cycle from which there was no release" (Head, p. 38). Health assistance aimed at prenatal, postnatal and infant care appears to have been disregarded in favor of family planning policies. Kromberg affirms this proposition as she states, "What Iwanted to do was get in on some health planning from the District council and the central government" (Head p. 138). Nowhere does she mention she wished to develop solutions to infant death and early childhood death due to diarrheal disease, malnourishment, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. Given this scenario, Botswana was ripe for Second Wave Western Feminist rhetoric of birth control and the 1968 arrival of a delegation from International Planned

Parenthood Federation on family planning to alleviate the cause of infant death—birth.

As stated by Marit Kromberg: "We were able to show them that some of the women wanted it and also to demonstrate that some women feared to plan, due to the high death rate among babies—perhaps a third of any woman's babies at that time, did not live to the age of five and this made it very difficult for a mother to plan" (Head, p.139). The vacuum of human capital development created a desperate need, which Western NGOs attempted to fill with their enlightened notions of western feminist liberatory politics. Rather than understanding the traditional cultural reasons for multiple births to ensure the economic productivity and security of the family unit and establishing policies that addressed the ongoing stability of family production units, the eugenics policy proposes that Botswana women would be better off with birth control developed by transnational pharmaceutical conglomerates rather than suffering the harsh reality of infant mortality. In order for countries like Botswana to get assistance with their tribal populations who lack access to basic human resources like food and health care, they have had little choice but to enter into unbalanced Neo-Malthusian population control agreements. The government, unable to provide their own social tourniquet to control infant mortality rates, entered into a contract with IPPF to "introduce family planning" in exchange for "maternal health care and child health" (Head, p.139). Head's reportage at this historical intersection chronicles how international, national, and regional politics shape women's reproductive experiences and family structures (Mullings, 1995, p. 123). While I do not deny that the freedom to engage in sexual activity without the worries of pregnancy has emancipatory effects for women in terms of granting them behavioral "choices," it is also true that IPPF has created pockets of "stratified reproduction" in which motherhood is discouraged and sexuality encouraged amongst black and brown indigenous populations (Mullings, p. 129). [vii] In this population control ideology, African communities are ripe for contraception and population control. Yet, reproductive justice activists have argued summarily that disrupting traditional birthing codes and systems also disrupts cultural integrity and is a form of black genocide (Roberts, 1997, Ross & Solinger, 2017). The regulation, surveillance, and control of women's reproductive systems appear to be the first step in regulating, surveilling, and controlling tribal demographics. This focus on population control masks the more complicated discussions of infant mortality, poverty, and socio-economic and political inequality. In this privileged binary, USAID, transnational pharmaceutical companies and corrupt governments target tribal communities with the least amount of resources for the overconsumption of the Global North.

Although not in Botswana, Esther Wangari (2002) problematizes IPPF's planning policies of impoverished women in Kenya to interrogate the rhetoric of empowerment of reproductive technologies aimed at policing women's bodies to satisfy the overconsumption of resources by the Global North. According to Wangari, "High fertility rates in the Third World are blamed for lack of economic growth, environmental degradation, and the low status of women, among other ascribed effects" (2002, p. 298). Notions of "choice" and "free will" for women in Botswana appear to be ineludibly restricted and constrained by a similar complicated web of power relations in which the right to choose often excludes "information about possible side-effects and health care delivery," which she considers to be "blunt racism against the people of colour" (Wangari, 2002, p. 307). Their "bodies and families" become "dumping grounds" and repositories for "new and banned reproductive technologies of the West" (Wangari, 2002, p. 308).In this socio-political economic arrangement, pharmaceutical companies and the governmental elite collaborate to maintain the marginalization of unwanted peoples in a system where the elite maintain their political power by reducing peripheral factions and pharmaceutical companies economically benefit from the demand of their new contraceptive technologies.

In this case it appears that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2013) is correct when she states: "All initiatives of population control or genetic engineering are cruelly unmindful of the dignity of reproductive responsibility" (p.190). Spivak joined in a movement against Ciba-Geigy, which is now Novaris to show that these companies dump pharmaceuticals on women of the Global South, which harmfully affects their personal, cultural, and economic well-being (p.190). Spivak (1999) argues that "The blame for the exhaustion of the world's resources is placed on Southern population explosion. And hence, upon the poorest women of the Global South" (p. 385). She further notes how placing attention on the subaltern reproductive systems diverts attention to "Northern over-consumption: the two faces of globalization" (1999, p. 385). Farida Akhter takes this idea further and condemns "the individual right of woman over her own body as an unconscious mirroring of patriarchal ideology" (qtd. in Spivak, 1999, p.386). Akhter establishes how the United States established reproductive control policies in conjunction with "International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Population Council, which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and United States National Academy of Sciences" whose job it was to lay a political foundation connecting "the political elites in the Global South in order to prepare the ground for US-sponsored

[vii] I feel it is important to clarify that I am a supporter of Planned Parenthood. I am not in support of selective planned parenthood to reduce brown and black populations.

control of population growth by Third World Countries" (Morton, 2007, p. 138).

The Family Planning Board trained and supervised "female family planning workers" sending them into rural communities to educate women about birth control technology, specifically intra-uterine devices. Deemed unsuccessful at limiting birth rates, the Board coerced rural women "into accepting contraceptives" by offering financial inducements (Morton, 2007, p. 136).

In 1971, Akhter observed the collusion of USAID and pharmaceutical companies alleging that USAID noticeably augmented its financing of population control programs and identifies two motives for the increased funding:

One was the US wanted to control nationalist movements, and Third World opposition to the foreign control of resources in general, and it saw an opportunity to do so by funding population control activities; the other was that the US government wanted to help pharmaceutical manufacturers to find new markets for birth control pills. (Morton, 2007, p. 136)

Through her involvement in FINNRAGE and UBINIG, Akhter attacks government and transnational business and NGO development rhetoric aimed at women's reproductive systems instead of support and funding directed towards female wellbeing, sustainable livelihoods and family planning that includes right to have or not have children. In EcoFeminism, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) posits thatthe discussion of reproductive rhetoric is based on Western concepts of individualism and bourgeois values. Mies and Shiva asserts that "reproductive rights' for women, propagated by feminist groups in the West, have no meaning for the majority of women" of the Global South," who are covered by population control measures," political sentiment similarly repeated in Serowe (p. 190).

Certainly, all women should have the choice to give or not give birth, to choose how many children to have or not to have; however, Head's ethnographic reportage evidences something otherwise. Population control programs in Serowe have cared more about reducing birth rates than about infant mortality rates and empowering women to make informed choices over their reproductive and sexual bodies. [viii] Spivak (2013) is correct in her observation that, "all initiatives of population control and genetic engineering are cruelly unmindful of the dignity of reproductive responsibility" (p. 190). [ix]

Spivak's "movement against reproductive and genetic engineering confronts the multinational pharmaceuticals and their conglomerate associates" (2013. p. 190). In "Claiming Transformation," Spivak contends that "women are the target of contemporary international civil society, by which she means the 'United Nations and the powerfully collaborative Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)'" (qtd. in Morton, 2007, p. 134). International development projects in the form of the World Bank and the International Money Fund are designed to create politico-economic dependencies wherein the countries of the Global South become financially indebted to the Global North and led into believing that reproductive technologies are a common good (Morton 135).In a socio-political structure that seems intent on curtailing tribal existence, cultural survival questions plague Head's reportage.

According to Tola Olu Pearce (1995), interest in population control policies in the Global South is an ongoing concern recently resuscitated with today's environmental crisis and booming pharmaceutical industry (p. 200). Pierce identifies that "little attention is paid to the disproportionate amount of resources consumed by the developed world" (p. 200). Neo-Malthusian rhetoric proposes birth control as a regulatory measure to restrain unchecked population growth, which exacerbates the ecological carrying capacity of the region and poses a threat to "world ecological stability" (Pierce, p. 200). Pearce further observes that "With the growing poverty and disease in Africa, aggravated by SAPs, the fear of population invasion and resource consumption by the poor nations may escalate into fears of the health problems spread by poverty stricken nations" (p. 200). Today, Botswana

[viii] Note the 2010 Procurement Planning and Monitoring Report, USAID, a major donor to International Federal of Planned Parenthood has worked diligently to reduce stock-outs in Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia. Also of note are the shipments of intra-uterine devices (IUDs) to Uganda, implants to Rwanda, and combined oral contraceptives to El Salvador. While I am a strong advocate of "choice," I am nonetheless wary of the hegemonic exportation of Western perceptions of reproductive rights and its inadvertent (or planned?) side effects, which coerce reproductive limitations on subaltern women and their traditional cultures, traditions, and family structures.

[ix] From my research, it appears that IPPF seems to be in a deep global web of commodity exchange with USAID being one of its major supporters. In a recent job posting, IPPF actively seeks a USAID Project Director – Family Planning and Sustainable Networks (fixed term to end 2018 and subject to successful award) to "ensure USAID Mission buy-in at country level." IPPF is actively involved in reproductive commodities exchange, global procurement and supply chain commodities management in partnership with key donors, suppliers and others, e.g. the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, to support its mission. The donations are coming in from the Global North. Between July 2007 and December 2009, 15 European countries committed an additional €400 million to reproductive health, with a portion of this going toward supplies. It appears that IPPF not only deals in the flow of commodities, but Western ideologies of population control of subaltern peoples and further acts as an hegemonic apparatus of USAID to ensure "USAID Mission buy-in at country level." Such preliminary investigation substantiates Spivak's assertions that the World Bank, International Money Fund, USAID and other NGOS aid and abet economic and political dependency of the Global South by concentrating on women's reproductive wombs as a cause of poverty.

is geared to receive support from USAID, and the (UK) Government under the regional programme on Preventing Maternal Deaths in East and Southern Africa(PreMDESA) to expand contraceptive methods to include the controversial Jadelle implant a five-year contraceptive, which is NOT for sale in the US because of its deleterious side effects. [x] This is another example where US commercial market interests take precedence over human health in which products deemed unsafe for domestic are sold to disposable populations of the Global South. Reportage of this collusion was noted by Mark Dowie, Barbara Ehrenreich and Stephen Minkin (1979) in "The Charge: Gyocide: The Accused The US Government," in which they argued that US transnational drug companies systematically and intentionally engage in dumping "unsafe" and "dangerous high-estrogen birth control pills" that are "not approved for American use" in Third World countries. They further contend that contraceptive dumping is motivated by a double standard based solely on corporate profit without any consideration of existing cultural practices.

Marit Kromberg reports that the Serowans employed their own traditional custom of family planning and "child-spacing" prior to the arrival of IPPF. They believed that Serathane "a condition of bewitchment, will afflict the child if the parents do not observe the customs which cause child spacing; either by physical separation or abstinence" (Head, 1981, pgs. 139-40). Families were aware of the biological necessity of child spacing for the reproductive health of mother and child. Kromberg recounts how she used the belief in serathane as a bridge to "build on" to introduce, motivate, and "now provide mothers with modern methods of family spacing" (Head, p.140). What Kromberg did not seem to recognize was that these culturally prescribed indigenous codes of birth spacing, while certainly a method of family planning, is in direct opposition to Neo-Malthusian interest in limiting family size (Pearce, 1995, p. 203).

Kromberg also confirms how "In the old days, polygamy also helped family planning because then a husband had an alternative wife" and elder women were given a respite from on-going sexual activity (Head, 1981, p.140). Pearce observes amongst Africa's Yoruba population that "women did not always see continued sexual availability to men as a positive development" and considered "culturally imposed terminal abstinence as necessary for a well-earned rest in middle-age" (1995, p. 204). She posits the extension of women's reproductive activity through the "use of technical solutions" may actually "not always be welcomed" (Pierce, 1995, p. 205). In Head's politics of truth, this might be equally true amongst Botswana's indigenous populations with its emphasis on polygamy, bogadi, and extended kinship lineages.

The rejection by many Botswana tribals to adapt to Khama's reforms, especially polygamy, has added to the complexity of social relations. While colonialism contributed to the collapse of the family, Huma Ibrahim (1996) observes that traditional kinship polygamous relations "thrown into the modern context devastated family structure" (p. 225). Head does not shy away from the collusion of both "traditional tribal" and "Western" patriarchy in constriction of "choices" and the ongoing subordination of women. Her interviews and reportage construct a socio-sexual historiography of the myriad impositions on women's reproductive systems.

IV. Conclusion

In this essay, I have applied an interdisciplinary approach to explore the reproductive experiences, memories, and stories of women's lived and imagined realities in Bessie Head's Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind. In so doing, I have problematized how reproduction is shaped across socio-cultural geopolitical-boundaries, specifically at local/global historical junctures. Based on the often times complex and conflicting exchanges of people in real places, Head's discourses provide a materialist feminist space for understanding the socio-political ramifications of the displacement of polygamous structures, the introduction of western concepts of planned parenting and its devastating impact on tribal reproductive sustainability. Head's reportage provides a vital entry point to interrogate the complex imposition of traditional and capitalist patriarchal forces on reproductive systems and the inequitable materialist conditions that entangle women and their children in the throes of struggle and survival. More importantly, her ethnography opens another space for necessary discussions of reproductive choice, reproductive dignity, and reproductive justice-discussions, which must always include informed decisions in choosing to have or not to have children.

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[x] Jadelle is owned by Wyeth, the same company that marketed the controversial Norplant, which was taken off the US market in 2002.

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