



2004

Postcolonialism in an anti-colonial state: Unity Dow and modern Botswana

Margaret Lenta

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Lenta, Margaret, Postcolonialism in an anti-colonial state: Unity Dow and modern Botswana, *Kunapipi*, 26(2), 2004.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol26/iss2/4>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Postcolonialism in an anti-colonial state: Unity Dow and modern Botswana

Abstract

Until Unity Dow began to write, almost no Batswana writers of fiction had produced books which reached the world outside, and the reasons for this were partly cultural and partly material. Botswana has more than a century's history of defensive resistance to influences from the other states of southern Africa.

MARGARET LENTA

Postcolonialism in an Anti-Colonial State: Unity Dow and Modern Botswana

Until Unity Dow began to write, almost no Botswana writers of fiction had produced books which reached the world outside, and the reasons for this were partly cultural and partly material. Botswana has more than a century's history of defensive resistance to influences from the other states of southern Africa. The lack of investment in infrastructure and education before independence has also played a role in enforcing literary silence. When the Bechuanaland Protectorate became independent in 1966, there were a few miles of tarred road and three high schools in the whole country. Industry was almost non-existent, and commercial enterprises were few, typically small-scale and confined to the informal sector. In these circumstances the only literary voice which reached the outside world was that of a South African exile, Bessie Head, who is not my present subject,¹ and whose writings were subject to the objection, justified or not, that they lacked the authenticity of the indigene's account.

Dow's novels, *Far and Beyond* (2000) and *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2001), offer her interpretation of a small national society whose members differ greatly in their lifestyles, and are widely dispersed in geographical placing. Though the persons and events of her novels are fictional, her tone makes it clear that she would claim that the circumstances — the AIDS epidemic, the corruption of the police force, the occurrence of ritual murder, the habit of concealment — are real parts of modern Botswana. So, presumably, are the kinds of positions occupied by her heroines, who with effort and determination make their way to positions where they are entitled to power and influence. In interpreting the society in which she lives, Dow joins a tradition of southern African writing, in which the most famous practitioner is Nadine Gordimer, whose 'history from the inside' (Clingman 1986) has offered an understanding of South Africa's recent past and present to many readers. Clingman acknowledges the problems of such writing:

Gordimer is caught up in the midst of the processes she is attempting to depict. At the same time as she engages with history she is moulded by the patterns and forces she must try to assess. As much as she is an observer of the life around her, she is still a social participant in what she observes. If hers is a 'history from the inside', that is to say, it is not only privileged but also confined by its 'inside' position. (2)

This must be equally the case for Dow, with the extra condition that she is deeply involved in public life, who has on occasion taken a public and oppositional

stance as regards national policies.² Nevertheless, Clingman's claim that 'fiction deals with an area of activity usually inaccessible to the sciences of greater externality: the area in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individuals in society' (1986 1) is significant in Dow's case. Her subjectivity is of two kinds: the novels as a whole present the vision of a single Batswana woman, 'confined by [her] "inside" position'; and in the course of the works the perceptions and judgements of particular subjects are offered to the reader. These subjective understandings are essential to the moral-historical purposes of the works, since the imaginative recreations of individual thought processes reveal what their society is at pains to conceal.

My main focus here is on the more ambitious of Dow's novels to date, *The Screaming of the Innocent*, which is larger in organisation though only marginally longer than her first novel, and which resembles organisationally a nineteenth-century English novel. It may seem inappropriate to claim a resemblance between Dow's novel and George Eliot's fiction, but *Felix Holt* is a survey and an interpretation of a society which suffers from the estrangement from each of its component members. Because the major subject of *The Screaming of the Innocent* is the interactions between sections of the Botswana national community, the action moves between a remote village on the fringes of the Okavango; the bush which surrounds the village, its clinic and its kgotla [traditional assembly]; another village in which the heroine grew up and its school, government offices, a firm of lawyers and a restaurant in Gaborone; a police station in a rural centre and the secret meetings of the *diphoko* [ritual murder] men, as well as the comfortable middle class home of one of them. Different groups, with different degrees of power in the country, are depicted in all these places but, except in the village, where kinship and friendship are important, it is the power over one's fellows which derives from wealth and office that prevails. The village is not immune from corruption, but people who live there are not powerful.

Botswana society as Dow perceives it is not characterised by unity or mutual support, and the absence of these qualities is disabling to the nation. The breakdown of unity is not a matter of recent political divisions. Not only the republic of Botswana but the political unity of the territory which it occupies and the social bonds between the people who inhabit it are relatively new, despite the fact that the country is not strictly speaking a colonial but an anti-colonial creation. According to Julian Mockford, the unifier, Khama the Great, was born about 1828 and, crucially, baptised a Christian in 1862 (Mockford 1931). As chief of the Bamangwato people, he ruled a land beset by Boers from the Transvaal, Germans from South West Africa, Matabele from Zimbabwe and British from the Cape Colony. He attracted to himself other peoples who needed the protection of a great chief. In 1885 he negotiated with the British, whom he took to be the safest protectors available, that his territories should become the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland. Khama's Christianity was the central force in his

life: his subjects were obliged to join the London Missionary Society church, his kgotla opened with a prayer; he prohibited polygamy and initiation rituals as well as the sale of alcohol (Mockford 75). Throughout his long life (he died only in 1925) he was able to secure his country against annexation or large-scale white settlement. His nation, which has evolved into modern Botswana, nevertheless did not have the simple unity of a people who believed in their common ancestry.

I am not suggesting that this simple unity was a norm in nineteenth- or twentieth-century southern Africa: Sol Plaatje was probably the first novelist-historian to depict, in *Mhudi* (1930), the upheavals of peoples in the subcontinent and the new alliances which characterised the period. Terence Ranger has pointed out more recently that the heterogeneity, social and economic, of African peoples in the nineteenth century was general:

...nineteenth-century Africa was *not* characterised by lack of internal social and economic competition, by the unchallenged authority of the elders, by an acceptance of custom which gave every person — young and old, male and female — a place in society which was defined and protected. Competition, movement, fluidity were as much features of small-scale societies as they were of larger groupings. (248)

These 'features', however prevalent, were likely to be more evident in a newly constituted state than elsewhere. Though Khama's subjects in his lifetime were to a degree held in political and economic stasis and therefore in sameness of condition by his power, by fear of foreign pressures, and by British parsimony, Dow's thesis is that in the present, when these pressures have been weakened or removed, economic competitiveness, and all the forces which proceed from it, are working disruptively throughout Botswana.

The Act of Union of 1910 'provided for the eventual transfer of Bechuanaland ... to South Africa,' but this provision was qualified by the proviso that 'the transfer was to take place only after consultation with the chiefs and following the approval of the British Parliament' (Picard 11). The Batswana chiefs consistently and 'firmly opposed' the transfer of sovereignty to South Africa (Picard 11), and Botswana resistance to South African interference, and indeed to all outside influence, is now a tradition established in the nineteenth century and reinforced in the twentieth. The natural increase in population and the absence of investment within the Protectorate obliged Batswana people to seek wage labour in South Africa, especially in the mining industry. Migrancy, with all the disruptive social effects which Head and Dow portray, in the case of the latter through her references to the AIDS epidemic, became an important part of the Bechuanaland economy. Underdevelopment at home is a necessary stimulus to migrancy, and the will of South Africa to use Bechuanaland, later Botswana, as a reservoir of labour was an influence on the British government and a factor in preventing investment. Rural areas, especially those remote from Gaborone, and where water supplies were short, remained undeveloped, and an imbalance

between rural poverty and the urban areas, which Dow shows as having worsened in recent times, began to develop.

After the marriage of Seretse Khama to a British woman in 1948, when South Africa's anger at the heir of a black ruling family's making a cross-racial marriage³ appears to have influenced Britain's decision to exile Seretse Khama, Botswana's determination to remain separate became stronger. As first president (and representative of the previously ruling house) from 1966 until 1980, Seretse Khama opposed any kind of alliance or even appearance of friendship with South Africa. Zimbabwe in this period was in the throes of its war of independence, and ties to a white government, already evidently to be toppled, would have been undesirable. Under later presidents similar policies have been followed.

Conservatism and a respect for structures perceived as traditional is part of the Botswana ethos. The occasions of dislocation from the past in Botswana, perhaps because there have been several of them — Khama's accession to the throne as a Christian monarch, his social decrees, the establishment of the Protectorate — have not been as complete as in other countries; the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 in South Africa, for example, produced a more radical disruption in a pre-colonial society, if only because it brought about the confiscation of land.

The term 'traditional' is however at least as problematic in Botswana as in all other postcolonial countries: many peoples, with different languages and cultures, sought security under Khama and though Tswana is the official language, it has not supplanted the others. Yet though it would be inaccurate to claim that Bamangwato ethnicity and the national identity of the Botswana are identical, it must not be forgotten that as Leroy Vail has pointed out, ethnicity is a recent construct, to a great extent contemporaneous throughout southern Africa with the construction by Khama the Great of the modern nation which was to become Botswana (Vail 1–19). Recognising this, we must also recognise that any fellow feeling between individuals in tribe or nation is likely to depend on personal generosity or a learnt sense of community, and may be absent from the ambitious and unscrupulous.

Influences from outside Botswana have not so much been imposed (with the exception of Khama's Christianisation of his people and his social decrees) as found attractive and voluntarily adopted when they reached the country. Amongst these imports has been the value for material riches (cars, luxurious houses) and the Western education which has the potential to improve the lifestyle of the whole community or to place great power in the hands of a few.

No simple model of colonist and colonised nor configuration of white self and black other⁴ which might follow from such a model is applicable in Botswana. Its present postcoloniality is a matter of influences imported in the post-independence period as much as those accepted during the days of the Protectorate. White residents in the past have been mainly officials, whose residence was temporary, or settlers in numbers which allowed them to be absorbed readily into Botswana life.⁵ In the present there is a small population of foreign business

people and people concerned to offer expertise related to welfare work in the community. In *The Screaming of the Innocent* the only white person is a visitor from Britain who is instructed by a young lawyer on the value of the Botswana way of life, with respect to its difference from Britain (112–13).

Dow represents in her novels a general unwillingness to admit that Botswana society may be defective, and a tendency to prefer the concealment which in *Far and Beyon* she depicts as allowing cruel sexism to continue, and in *The Screaming of the Innocent* as offering only token condemnation of more extreme practices. The country as she portrays it is a place where individuals, rural and urban, rich and poor, belong simultaneously to the world of their remote ancestors, the pre-Christian peoples whom Khama the Great united, to the Protestant Christian world which he established — and which retained many of the social values derived from its past — and to the sceptical, individualist-materialist world of the present, whose values have been imported after 1966 together with the institutions of the modern world. Her characters choose, or alternatively are chosen by, any one of the systems of animism, Christianity, opportunistic individualism or a combination of some or all of these. The hybridity of these people is an unstable mix which differs between individuals, but is not the less real because the Batswana are less inclined to acknowledge it than other nations.

Dow's sense is that Botswana patriarchy is strong but not absolute, and that the place allowed to women in the family at least is an important one: *Far and Beyon* begins with the heroine's mother's joy at her birth and her happy sense of the child's future. Mara, the mother, is a woman held in traditional patterns by her lack of education and economic opportunities. When AIDS strikes down her two elder sons, she can only understand her losses in the traditional way: they must be the result of the malice of a secret enemy. Such an understanding is divisive to her small community and can do nothing to halt the epidemic. Mosa, whose full name given in celebration of her birth is *Mosadi* — woman — is the girl who changes this.

The differences between the compromises in belief made by individuals are shown to be conditioned by many circumstances: whether they live in a rural or urban area, the degree of their access to education, their material success, their gender, and their temperaments and interests. Their multiple loyalties may be innocent: Mara, though she seeks enlightenment concerning the deaths of her sons from a diviner, is also committed to a form of Christianity (13–15; 156–57). Her lack of formal education and generational placing allow her to remain undisturbed by the conflicts between her different belief systems. Her daughter, Mosa, and her son, Stan, indulge their mother by taking part in the funeral and cleansing ceremonies but are aware of questions unanswered and problems unsolved.

Dow shows that more damaging than ideological confusion is a nihilism common amongst the powerful, who are aware of, yet secretly contemptuous of, all the belief systems in their society and the frequently inconsistent compromises

between coexistent values made by its members. Secret transgression and the outraging of all moralities are the markers of strength amongst these depraved individuals, who use power to oblige others to accept what they do. In *Far and Beyon* a conversation takes place in a staff meeting in a school:

‘Like I said the last time when this topic came up, I do not see what we can do about the problem of girls falling pregnant. Girls will always fall pregnant, that is just the way things are. That is nature. So I say we have heard the figures, let us just pray to God we do not lose any more girls and let us go on to the last item on the agenda.’

...

Mr Merake was invited to make a comment. ‘I have to agree with Mr Kolo. If these girls are loose there is nothing we can do about it. Maybe it is even best that the really bad ones become pregnant and leave early before they corrupt the rest of the school. You know what they say about a rotten apple.’

Those who did not agree had long given up trying to put their views forward.

(140–41)

These men habitually use their power over their pupils to seduce them, but have no difficulty projecting responsibility for the sex they demand on to their victims and implicitly asserting that males have no causative role in extramarital pregnancies. Mr Merake’s comment about loose girls is a piece of double-standard moralising, and the two speakers are inviting the rest of the staff to become complicit, as we are elsewhere told the educational authorities are complicit, in a cruel and exploitative process. Their colleagues do not actively oppose them, and this is a crucial point for Dow, from which much of the subject matter of *The Screaming of the Innocent* proceeds.

She will use such nihilistic figures in her second novel, showing that they are destructive because they acknowledge no obligation to their society which might prevent them from preying on their fellows. They could not, however, act as they do if their society were not profoundly male-favouring. In Chapter Fourteen of *Far and Beyon*, for example, Mosa and her brother, Stan, discuss the moral precepts given to a man and woman who are to be married traditionally. Husband and wife are instructed separately:

‘Well, Uncle Maruping did advise Tshupo to try to avoid hitting his wife. He said ... he said ... if he ever had to hit her he should not hit her around the face.’ Stan stopped, his body tense as if he was expecting an explosion. Mosa said nothing but her look made it clear that she expected the whole story.

‘And Rra-Masu added that he was never to use his bare hands to hit his wife. He said a belt or a switch, but never his bare hands. He said that a man who uses bare hands could get into trouble as he could easily kill his wife...He also advised that the first year would be critical in establishing his authority.’ (143)

The series of precepts given to the wife is more formal:

‘A wife holds on to the house pillar for support and comfort before shouting about her problems.’

‘A wife does not ask her husband where he has been.’

‘A husband may go chopping in a neighbouring field. Only a wife with long ears will hear things she does not need to hear.’

A husband served cold food will go looking for warm food someplace else.’

...

‘There is no house without a leaking roof but you do not see women in the streets telling all and sundry of their problems.’ (151)

Stan’s embarrassment suggests that there are forces at work in his society which cause him to feel shame at the way in which gendered roles in marriage are defined, the male being encouraged to see his wife as his destined victim and the wife being pressed to accept this role. The existence of other codes is apparent in the way that both the man and the woman are being taught concealment: Tshepo is being instructed not to hit his wife in a way which will allow people to see the evidence of his violence, and not to kill her because the law will punish him. His wife is being taught to conceal his infidelity or neglect. Society’s indulgence of men who are grossly exploitative of women is apparent in both novels, but in *The Screaming of the Innocent* Dow has linked it to more dangerous forms of self-indulgence which are tacitly allowed to men.

In *The Screaming of the Innocent* an important element which symbolises the lingering beliefs of the pre-Christian past, and at the same time present-day class and gender inequalities of an extreme kind, is the cultural practice of *dipheko*, which involves the ‘harvesting’ of organs from living children for magical purposes. They are believed to bring good luck and material prosperity to the men who obtain them. Men who live in what economists call the modern sector avail themselves of such ‘medicine’, in the knowledge that they can buy the silence of the authorities and prevent the investigation of their victims’ disappearances. Dow’s Botswana is one where the rich can easily exercise such powers, because of the alienation between rural and urban people. This alienation is not ignorance or detachment: the rich and urban prey on the poor and rural, and to that extent they need them.

Some people live outside, or are relatively independent of the structures of power: the young people of Tirelo Sechaba, the national service organisation, belong to this group. Though most of them are indifferent to what is happening, and long to return to modernity and its comforts in Gaborone, the best of these young people are shown as being the hope of their nation. To spend a year in Tirelo Sechaba is a necessary preliminary to tertiary education.

Dow makes it clear that ‘nihilistic’ individuals are to be found in every area of Botswana society where power is exercised, and the first three chapters of *The Screaming of the Innocent* are devoted to insights into the minds of men who will carry out a *dipheko* murder. Each chapter, offering the secret thought processes of a man willing to kill a child to serve his purposes, answers questions about how men can be attracted to such a monstrous crime. In the first chapter,

the reader is offered the reflections of Mr Disanka, a successful businessman, who whilst congratulating himself on his achievements watches a little girl skipping with her friends and plans her murder. Dow's rendering of Disanka's thoughts shows that his feelings for his intended victim move between the sexual and the predatory.

'God, she's perfect', he whispered to himself. The body was just right. She had no bulbous protrusions yet — he could barely make out the two nodes, just ready for his purposes. And what a tight little butt she had. He was sure that when she was skipping, under her flailing arms was exposed fine fur, not yet hair.... She was just right for harvesting. As he watched and his mind went back to the previous harvesting, memory crushed into anticipation, and a pool of pleasure spread through his body. (5–6)

As he watches the child, Disanka complacently reviews his behaviour as a husband, a lover, a father and a public-spirited member of the community. Interwoven with these thoughts are the suggestions of the narrator that everything in Disanka's life has the purpose of serving his own pleasure and aggrandisement. The account of his life is prefaced by the sentence, 'He was, by all accounts, a good man' (1). Public opinion — which is aware of the fact that he is habitually promiscuous, and though a loving father to his legitimate children, careless of the illegitimate — is willing to pass this verdict on him because he is rich and powerful and on the surface generous. It is made clear that in the making of this monster of self-indulgence, his community must take responsibility — he is 'a man who lived within the society's boundaries' (3). This is not quite true: Mr Disanka wishes to appropriate what even his community would deny him, but it is as a result of the indulgence extended to him by his community that his desires have become so extreme.

The second chapter presents a different case: Bokae, a headman who is permanently dissatisfied because he believes that he ought to have been a chief, and who, as a minor magistrate, 'hated women, chiefs, lawyers and parliamentarians' (11), because each group claims or possesses rights which he believes should be his. His anger has estranged him from his society and he is brutal to all over whom he has power.

The third man, Sebaki, is a deputy headmaster who resents the limitations of his position, and who habitually resorts to 'witchcraft' (19) to secure the promotion which the narrator shows that he does not deserve. Through 'the region's network of witchdoctors' Disanka learns that he is likely to agree to join them. The exchange between the men when Sebaki is recruited for their project indicates that they share a perverse value system which is secret but known to all those who seek unmerited advancement:

'We're looking for a man with a hard heart, a heart of stone, a heart of a real man.'
The selection criterion.

'You've found your man, sir.' He was a confident applicant.

'What is this man I've found willing to do?'

...

'Anything. Everything. The ultimate thing.' He was firm.

'The ultimate thing?'

'Yes, the ultimate thing.'

'We're hunting a lamb.' Mr Disanka paused and watched his captive's eyes. 'What kind of lamb are we hunting?'

'A hairless lamb,' came the whispered answer. (2003 21)

Sebaki knows the formula; he has contemplated this kind of crime before. Though I have called such men nihilistic, implying that they are contemptuous of all the decencies which people in society acknowledge, Disanka, Bokae and Sebaki are not without beliefs, since they desire the potent magic that can be made from organs cut from a living child, but these beliefs are monstrously beyond what any sincere member of a society, Christian or animist, can hold.

By the fourth chapter the murder of the little girl has taken place in the bush outside the village where she lives, and has been hushed up by the police and people powerful in the state, though the reader learns this later. The ritual dismemberment takes place just off-stage in the novel, because 'just off-stage' is its positioning for the entire society.

The protagonist who will empower the villagers against the forces of official inertia has to be a girl who can understand and bridge the gaps in society. Leroy Vail quotes a Tswana proverb, 'women have no tribe' (Vail 15) and it appears, both from the protagonist and from the woman head of Tirelo Sechaba, that women are indeed far less integrated into the structures of power than men in Botswana. Vail writes of the propensity of southern African women to seek 'to act independently, even to the extent of seeking divorces or leaving the rural areas.... This produced acute conflict between the genders' (Vail 15). It is clear in Dow's novels that she is deeply interested in women's wish to act independently, as well as in the conflicts which are produced by their insistence on doing so. Amantle Bokaa in *The Screaming of the Innocent* resembles Mosa in *Far and Beyond* in that she is empowered by knowing herself the brightest in her humble rural family, chosen by her parents for education. She is for a year a member of Tirelo Sechaba. Sent to work in the rural area which includes Gaphala, she understands what has happened there though she may not be effective in supplying a remedy. She is a relatively sophisticated young woman, with connections in the capital.

In the clinic to which Amantle has been sent there are nurses who in theory supply medical treatment to several rural villages. The delineation of these two women gives Dow the opportunity to explore the corruption of what might be called the lower middle class: they resent being posted to a rural village and punish their patients for their unhappiness. As far as they dare, they neglect their work, and when Amantle arrives, they take the opportunity to punish her for her prospects, for the fact that she will escape from the village in a year's

time, and simply because her rank for the moment is lower than theirs. They allocate to her, to indicate her low status, the task of cleaning out the storeroom. Though this task is intended only to humiliate her, it sets the plot of the novel's present going. She discovers on a shelf in the storeroom a box of bloodstained clothes, labelled 'Neo Katang', the name of the little girl who disappeared five years previously. The discovery of the clothes, which the villagers understand as proof that there has been concealment of facts around Neo's disappearance, precipitates general anger, which focuses first on the nurses: 'They've never treated us with respect. They look down on us. How do we know they didn't hide the clothes?' (55). They are taken prisoner by the villagers, who decide to use them as bargaining chips in the coming struggle with the authorities. The narrator claims that they are targeted because they are 'government employees' (55), a suggestion that people in remote areas feel estranged from and hostile to official power.

Amantle, nominated by the villagers as their spokesperson, refuses to be bullied by the police. She has power — more than she first realises — because she has the confidence afforded her by formal education, and because she has already learnt how to organise herself and others in opposition. A flashback to her childhood shows that her education has been a matter of rapid assimilation of knowledge and a degree of resistance to ideology — both processes which serve her well. Because she is female, men attempt to claim that their gender makes them superior to her; because she is strong and confident, she demonstrates that despite the 'tradition' which they assert, the law is on her side.

The structures and behaviour of the police force are designed to make the reporting of crimes and the initiation of investigations difficult for rural people, who realise how little consideration of their testimony they can expect. When the Katang family, soon after Neo's disappearance, go to the police to inspect and identify the bloodstained clothes, they are told, after suffering a series of insults, that the clothes have disappeared. The detective who visits them at home in the village attempts to bully them into accepting what they know to be nonsense, but Molatsi is not to be bullied:

'Let me tell you what happened to my niece, mister detective: she was killed for *muti*; *diphoko*; *dithare*: traditional medicine. You know it; I know it; we all know it; any fool can see it. The question is 'Why are you running away from the truth?' Who are you protecting?' (68)

The detective, Senai, is in fact unaware when he comes to the village that the bloodstained clothes have been recovered, and angrily reproaches the constables who have concealed this from him. In his turn he is exposed to the anger of the station commander, who reiterates the official line about an attack by wild animals, and says 'Since when have the police been reporting to ignorant villagers about their investigations? You've told them the conclusion reached by this station, and that's that. You're not going back there again: *am I clear?*' (75).

Dow's charge against her society is that all classes of people are aware that ritual murders take place, and therefore that all the powerful are complicit in them. The pathetic case of Rra Naso, in the village, shows that the bonds of friendship in a rural community cannot prevail against the power of evil as it is allowed to exist. The structures of government contain enough people who are complicitous to offer protection to such murderers. The police, sharing the murderers' belief in their magic powers, dare not oppose them. Family members of the murderers, as must be the case, are on some level aware of what they are engaged in. Lesego, elder daughter of Disanka, sees her father and his accomplices bring home something in bloodstained plastic bags. She overhears a conversation which suggests strongly that they contain pieces of a dismembered child. It is implied that the mother of the family 'knows'; that is to say that she feels compelled consciously to resist the evidence that her husband is engaged in something secret and sinister. Lesego's horror — her father realises that she has seen something which compromises him and his behaviour becomes almost an admission of guilt — is such that she demands to be sent away to a remote school, and does her best to sever all contact with her family. Her grandmother's behaviour, equally with her mother's, shows the mixture of understanding and wilful ignorance which most people use to distance themselves from painful facts, and her would-be reassurance shows that she understands that *dipheko* is an act of oppression of the poor by the rich. She even knows that without Disanka's intervention the crime will remain unsolved.

The novel ends with the understanding that justice will never be achieved in this case: Lesego will be silent, Rra Naso is dead, and the bereaved family will soon know that the murderers have powerful protectors and accomplices. But there have been other understandings: when the Health Minister, Gape, asks, 'Why can't you just storm the place — just send in the SSGs and surround the village?' (145), the Safety and Security Minister Mading answers with an account of the other forces which have now been alerted and are at work in the community. Amantle will save the villagers from official violence, they will have learnt that they can defy the authorities; her friends the human rights lawyers will pursue the case, and public opinion will be mobilised on their side. Even Disanka knows that his wife's and daughter's suppressed knowledge of his crimes will make domestic happiness impossible for him.

What has been revealed is the nature of the divisive element in the nation, which is at the same time the divisive element in most individuals. Few dare go as far as Disanka, but almost all, at least of the older generation, share his belief that what he has done makes him invulnerable. Almost none dares to offer him and his like real opposition.

In pre-postcolonial days Lionel Trilling wrote memorably about the figure of Kurtz as 'a hero of the imagination' who chose to go 'down into that hell which is the historical beginning of the human soul, a beginning not outgrown but established in humanity as we know it now...' (32–33). Trilling was admitting

that those ‘beginnings’ survive in everyone, though in most cases they are suppressed. In modern Botswana, Dow claims, concealment is as much the rule as in Europe in the colonial era, but secret resort to atavistic violence is widely known to occur. What Trilling does not envisage — it is not his subject, and the day when Chinua Achebe will rebuke Conrad for his omission is still remote when he writes (Achebe 1–19) — is the human cost, to the community in which he is living, of Kurtz’s self-exploration: ‘those heads on stakes... their faces turned towards the house’ (Conrad 82). Dow wishes to emphasise the cost of ‘those heads on stakes,’ or at least their equivalent in Botswana — the mutilated bodies of children.

Dow’s main subject, despite the opening of the novel, is not the monstrous or the heroic individual, but what she portrays as the whole Botswana community. Though the ending resolves none of the immediate problems of the country, it is more optimistic than for example Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), which may be compared with both of Dow’s novels in that all three works deal with the development of a young woman into a larger role than tradition would have allowed her. *Nervous Conditions* is a bildungsroman, in which the impediments and the catalyst to the heroine Tambudzai’s development are the barriers placed in her way by almost the whole of her male-favouring society. And whereas *Nervous Conditions* states on its first page that it is about its heroine’s ‘escape’, and reveals that her mother and aunt remained trapped and her cousin may have met with disaster, *Far and Beyond* and *The Screaming of the Innocent* show the opposite of an escape — an individual who becomes central to the group and works to transform it. In the latter novel, this ‘group’ is the whole of Botswana society, and Amantle is only potentially the leader and reformer which she may one day become. This sense of the exceptional girl who benefits the community and may become a leader within it is part of what distinguishes Dow’s vision from Dangaremba’s, in which the word ‘escape’ signals that only the individual has been changed, and that the group remains fixed in its values. Though Dow is aware of the corruption growing in modern Botswana, she believes that some of its institutions — like the family and the rural community — besides possessing great potential for evil, may also be good and supportive of their members.

NOTES

- ¹ Bessie Head’s texts, especially *The Collector of Treasures* and *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind*, despite their distance in time from Dow’s work, nevertheless show similarities in their presentation of rural life, and, especially in her story ‘The Wind and a Boy’ (1977 69–75), the relationship between the recently urbanised and rural people.
- ² ‘Unity Dow is Botswana’s first female high court judge and has been prominent as a human-rights activist’ (*The Screaming of the Innocent*, blurb).
- ³ Picard writes ‘On September 28th [1949] ... the South African press carried a long account of a speech by the South African Prime Minister, Dr Malan ... in which he

strongly condemned the marriage and announced that he had sent a telegram to the British government in which he stated South Africa's views' (1985 15 n42). What is interesting here is Malan's belief that he had a right to express views on a marriage which affected an adjacent sovereign state.

- ⁴ Though Head claims white officials under the regency of Tshekedi Khama could be arrogant and dismissive, her description of the situation reveals her belief that these attitudes affected the regent, rather than his subjects:

relationships between Botswana and British were not at all the happy family affair the independence speeches would have us believe. The black man here was as despised by the colonial ruler as he was everywhere else. The peculiar twist matters took in Bamangwato country was that here British colonialism chose to persecute a single black man ... almost anything Tshekedi did was opposed by the colonial authority.... (Head 1981 76)

- ⁵ See for example in Serowe, *Village of the Rain Wind*, the testimony of Katherine Pretorius (Head 1981 54–57).

WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua 1988, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965–1987*, Heinemann, Oxford.
- Clingman, Stephen 1986, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*, Ravan, Johannesburg.
- Conrad, Joseph 1973 (1902), *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Dangarembga, Tsitsi 1988, *Nervous Conditions*, London, The Women's Press.
- Dow, Unity 2000, *Far and Beyon'*, Longman Botswana, Gaborone.
- 2003, *The Screaming of the Innocent*, Double Storey Books, Cape Town; (fp 2001, Melbourne: Spinifex Press).
- Head, Bessie 1977, *The Collector of Treasures*, Heinemann, London.
- 1981, *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind*.
- Mockford, Julian 1931, *Khama, King of the Bamangwato*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Picard, Louis 1985, *The Evolution of Modern Botswana*, Rex Collings, London.
- Plaatje, Sol 1989 (1930), *Mhudi*, Ad. Donker, Johannesburg.
- Ranger, Terence 1983, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', *The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, pp. 211–62.
- Trilling, Lionel 1967, *Beyond Culture*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Vail, Leroy 1989, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, James Currey, London.