

**The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English**



***A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
for a Master Degree in English***

Option: Arts dramatiques et lettres Anglaises

**Migration and Blackness in James McBride's
The Color of Water (1996) and Bessie Head's
The Cardinals (1995)**

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Academic Year: 2014/ 2015

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Contents..... | i |
| Acknowledgements..... | iii |
| Dedication..... | iv |
| Abstract..... | v |
| I- General Introduction..... | 1 |
| Review of the Literature..... | 2 |
| Issue and Working Hypothesis..... | 6 |
| Endnotes..... | 8 |
| II- Methods and Materials | |
| 1- Method: Stephen Steinberg’s <i>America Again at the Crossroad</i> | 9 |
| 2- Materials: Summaries of the Two Works | 12 |
| a-<i>The Color of Water</i> | 12 |
| b- <i>The Cardinals</i> | 14 |
| Endnotes..... | 16 |
| III- Results..... | 17 |
| IV- Discussion..... | 19 |
| Chapter One: The Quest for freedom in <i>The Color of Water</i> and <i>The Cardinals</i> | |
| 1- Blacks Land Ownership Exclusion..... | 20 |
| a- The Suffering in Suffolk | |
| b- The Suffering in the Slums | |
| 2- Migration: Black’s Unique Remaining Remedy..... | 28 |
| a- Black Characters Coming from South to New York | |
| b- From the National Road Ghetto to Cape Town city | |
| Endnotes | 34 |

Chapter Two: The Struggle for Assimilation in *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------|
| 1- | Blacks and the Harsh Industrial Reality in White citie..... | 37 |
| | a. Blacks' suffering from Unemployment in New York City | |
| | b. Harsh rules of employment in Cape Town City | |
| 2. | Economic Inequality and the Unofficial Racism..... | 43 |
| | a- Reversion to Scientific Racism and Cultural Inferiority | |
| | b- Media Discourse as a Reinforcement of Racism | |
| | Endnotes | 53 |
| V- | General Conclusion..... | 55 |
| | Endnotes..... | 57 |
| VI- | Bibliography..... | 58 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor Mr. KHELIFA for his guidance and advice that helped us for the achievement of the present work.

We would also express our gratitude to the panels of examiners for accepting to evaluate this work.

Louiza

To my mother

To my father

To my brothers: Ahcene, Hocine, Kocila

To all my friends

Nacera

To my parents

To my sisters and brothers

To my husband

To my colleagues

ABSTRACT

This research examines the issue of migration and blackness in James McBride's The Color of Water (1996) and Bessie Head's The Cardinals (1992). By drawing the affinities between the two works, we intended to argue that the experience of racism is similarly lived by the African Americans and the South African Blacks. To achieve our purpose, we relied on the theoretical guidelines of Stephen Steinberg's theory on racism as it is developed in America Again at the Crossroads (2000). The study revealed that the two societies have maintained a policy of land exclusion that resulted in both economic and social exclusion. The two works explore in a similar way the movement of the blacks from their restricted areas to the considered Promised Land of the white man's cities in search for freedom and their struggle for assimilation in two racist societies that associate Blackness with criminality and inferiority.

I. Introduction

Our dissertation entitled Migration and Blackness in James McBride's *The Color of Water* (1996) and Bessie Head's *The Cardinals* (1995) falls within the ambit of Black literary studies. It is a comparative study between the works of two contemporary writers who have made of their writings a commitment to describe the experience of being Black in the societies of the United States of America and South Africa.

The two countries of United States of America and South Africa have been struggling against racism towards the blacks. As two racial societies, their definition of *Blackness* has been associated with '*all things evil, ugly and satanic*' in opposition to *whiteness* that is associated with '*all things pure, beautiful, and godly.*'¹ The United States were obliged to find a solution to the Negro Question and to abolish slavery, making an end to the Black suffering in the South. Likewise, South Africa was faced with the Apartheid system, the harsh racial system that humanity has ever known, and had to deal with the Native Question. The dispossession of the blacks from land owning in South of USA and thus forcing them to search for freedom in the industrial North can be compared to the expropriation of the blacks from their land in South Africa. With series of acts such as the Native Land Act (1913), The Group Areas Act (1948) and The Bantu Education Act, they were forced to live in overcrowded slums and ghettos around the White cities and work in White owned mines where they should carry passes as stipulated by the Pass Laws because they were considered as strangers.²

Consequently, each of James McBride and Bessie Head has witnessed nearly the same hardship of being a black in a racial society. They denounce the effects of racism and apartheid on their own communities. James McBride is a Black American writer. He was born in 1957 to an African-American father and a Polish Jewish immigrant mother. He grew up in

New York City and Delaware where he experienced the events of the 1960s. Bessie Head (1937-1986) is a South African writer who lived in exile in Botswana from 1964 onward. She was raised in an orphanage because her White mother was not allowed to take her since the law of the Immorality Act imposed the forbiddance of any sexual relation between Whites and Blacks in South Africa.

In this respect, McBride's *The Color of Water* (1996) is an autobiography and a tribute to his white mother. It is the story of a young generation of Blacks living in New York who experienced the racist life of the 1960's, all along with reference to the life of their parents' generation who are migrants from the South. While, Head's *The Cardinals* (1995) is a novella that depicts the hard life of a black girl who is raised in a slum and left it to work in Cape Town City as a journalist in the racial society of South Africa of the late 1950's.

Our decision to compare these two works sprung from our interest in contemporary literature that deals with issues related to race, ethnicity and identity problem. Even though these two writers come from different countries, backgrounds and have different cultures, this analysis will show the affinities that these works share.

Review of Literature

McBride's *The Color of Water* has been the subject of several critics. Thomas Larson studied the novel from a psychological perspective. For him, James, the main character, tries to solve his identity problem by writing a memoir that unifies his story and that of his mother to show how the past contributes in constructing ones identity. In fact, this past lies in his mother's story. Larson argues in his critique *James McBride: Mother, Race, Memoir* (2007) that '*storing of self and other is at the core of James McBride's The Color of Water.*'³ For him, the memoir as a genre gives information of how the writer relates to his past and how a past relates to him during the time in which he writes his story. He adds that a person chooses

to write a memoir because he is “*transformed by a power or a person greater than the self and it is not easily explained.*”⁴ In the case of McBride’s memoir ‘*the self*’ is James and ‘*the other*’ is his mother. So, by writing the story of his mother, he writes his own story as ‘*he alternates chapters: she tells her story and he tells his.*’⁵ The story discloses a self that McBride does not know himself to be, because it takes years for him to understand that black community, biracial, and Christian- Jewish are parts of his mother story and also part of his personal story. As he asserts: “*I had to find out more about who I was, and in order to find out who I was, I had to find out who my mother was.*”⁶ The result, according to Larson, is that James “*reassembles new selves: one for his mother, in her own words, which [...] reassembles him [and] all this accomplished because McBride listened to Ruth, the woman she was, in part, before she became his mother.*”⁷

Another critical study which focuses on identity issue is that of Eveline Podgorski. In her seminar paper entitled *Divided Inheritance: Barack Obama ‘Dreams From my Father’ and James McBride ‘The Color of Water’* (2007), there is an emphasis on the ‘*growing up with a divided inheritance.*’⁸ She makes a comparison with Barack Obama’s *Dreams from my Father*, another memoir that deals with the issue of growing up as a part of two different cultures. Her comparison is based on the different issues that the writers tackle in their memoirs. She sheds light on the father- son and mother- son relationships. She explores the issue of mixed race and the identity struggle in both memoirs as she argues that Obama describes his life as the son of a white mother and a black father just as McBride does and both of them grew up in the same period of racial discrimination.⁹

Like James McBride’s *The Color of Water* (1996), Bessie Head’s *The Cardinals* (1995) also succeeds to entice considerable attention just after its publication in 1995. Several critics considered Head’s novella as a crucial South African literary work. Desiree Lewis claims in *The Cardinals and Bessie Head's Allegories of Self* (1996),

“The recuperation of paternal meanings in the novella identifies one direction in [Head’s] writing as the quest for discursive empowerment through the instrumentality of available language, strategies, and forms.”¹⁰

This quotation suggests that unlike the other works where Bessie Head identifies her mother as the source of her identity and the one who provides the sources of her entry into public life especially the world of writing, *The Cardinals* is preoccupied with the father. It is subscribed under the paternal narrative tradition that was widespread in the South African literature and this gives evidence to Lewis’ claim of the discursive empowerment that uses the already existing techniques. In fact, Lewis makes a connection between Mouse’s venture in the world of writing and how she is oriented toward a masculine domain with the supervision of Johnny, her own father. The mother is condemned because she rejects both her lover and her child but the father is allowed to enter Mouse’s world by breaking her silence and to the extent that he is going to enter her sexual life. The critic concludes that Mouse’s desire to write suggests that she will discover an unknown self and will gain the power to write her own identity.¹¹

That same issue of identity has been studied in the novella by Ibrahim Huma in his *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile* (1996). For him, *The Cardinals* indicates that Head is interested in exploring non- traditional relations between men and women. In describing Mouse’s acceptance to live with Johnny, Huma says that “*the pervasive desire to belong to a community is less important than belonging to oneself as a woman writer.*”¹² He adds: “*The manifestation of the father as lover in Miriam or Mouse’s life is in part indicative of Head’s defiance against [...]the Immorality Act.*”¹³ In these two quotations, he is alluding to the incestuous relation which is a result of the Immorality Act. *The Cardinals* implies that the people who set this Act are the ones to be blamed not the two characters who are trying to save their lives. Huma argues that Head is suggesting that “*an apartheid society that respects racism more than the incest taboo would not care for a relation between underclass parents and their children.*”¹⁴

Charlotte Guldemann considers the novella as a successful anti romance novel based on Head's knowledge of the production and the formulas gained during her time as a romance story writer and columnist at Home Post. According to her, it is a criticism of a vibrant black male South African journalism of the 1950's which construes the character Mouse a black female journalist in a restrictive male dominated profession. Head creates a sexually assertive black female character to express her attitude against a typical romance that does not favor independent women. She also introduces Jazz together with the meaning of the novel's title and the impending incestuous act between Mouse and Johnny to represent resistance against imposed identities under patriarchy and Apartheid. This is achieved by Head, for she creates a universe completely different from Apartheid South Africa. In fact, she connects jazz to Mouse : *"Only in this space can the naturalized discourses of the construction of woman be evaded."*¹⁵ In the epigraph, the novel's title is given meaning: *"The Cardinals, in the astrological sense, are those who serve as the base or foundation for change."*¹⁶ Through the association of Johnny with the sun, Mouse with the moon, and her mother, Ruby, with the earth, the characters create a new universe, which represents *"a world greatly different from apartheid South Africa."*¹⁷ According to Guldemann, creation, and by implication Mouse's writing, defies the incest taboo, which in Lacanian psychoanalysis is connected with the entry into language, and thus with the law of the father, as she asserts:

"The new universe and language that Johnny and Mouse usher in is [...] one of elemental dependency. [...] Thus by demonstrating this interdependency of Johnny, Mouse, and Ruby, Head, through the text of *The Cardinals*, points to the possibility of a new world, a world in which another kind of language is possible."¹⁸

Issue and Working Hypothesis

It follows from the above review that James McBride's *The Color of Water* and Bessie Head's *The Cardinals* have been interpreted from different perspectives. However, to our knowledge no study comparing the issue of migration and blackness in the two novels has been conducted. This work focuses on the characters' life in New York City and Mouse's life in Cape Town which are the best examples that reflect the black suffering from racism and Apartheid in both American and South African countries. With reliance on Stephen Steinberg's theoretical assumptions in his *America Again at the Crossroads* (2000), we will try to answer the question: how can we explain the emergence of a debate over the assimilation of the Black migrants in the two societies if we consider their presumably gained freedom? Then, to what extent has their Blackness played a role in their social and economic exclusion?

Our basic assumption stems from the fact that the theme of migration and blackness is a major theme shared by the two writers. Their novels are depicting the fight for freedom and the struggle for assimilation in both societies, American society of the sixties and South African society of the late fifties. Both societies take the fact of being black not only as a color prejudice but it is considered as a sign of economic and cultural inferiority sustained by pseudo- scientific theories and a persisting unofficial racism.

In the Introduction section, we give a general idea about our work's subject matter providing the reader with a small representation of the two literary works under study with a brief reference to the contexts in which they are written. We have then established our topic focus and issue and Working hypothesis. In the Methods and Materials section, we present Stephen Steinberg's theory *America Again at the Crossroads* (2000). We also provide the reader with general summaries of James McBride's *The Color of Water* and Bessie Head's *The Cardinals*.

In the result section, we reveal the findings reached through our study. In the discussion section, we discuss and analyze the two works under study to explore the theme of migration and blackness in a way that makes the reader understand the black question in both USA and South Africa. To achieve this, we have divided our work into two chapters; the first one deals with the blacks' quest for freedom through migration and the second one depicts their struggle for assimilation once in the migrated areas. In fact, each of these two chapters can be divided into subsections such as the blacks' land ownership exclusion as a basis of their suffering, and migration which are both related to the first chapter dealing with freedom. As for the second chapter dealing with assimilation, it has as its components; the blacks' harsh industrial reality in the migrated cities and the unofficial racism which has as its basis the economic inequality. Indeed, this is explained in Steinberg's theory *America Again at the Crossroads* to which we have to make reference in our study.

Endnotes

¹ John. W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 04.

² Ibid., 1-8.

³ Thomas Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative* (USA: Ohio University Press, 2007), 167.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 266.

⁷ Larson, *Memoir and Memoirist*, 167.

⁸ Eveline Podgorski, *Divided Inheritance: Barack Obama, Dreams from my Father and James McBride, The Color of Water*. Seminar Paper (Germany: Auflage, 2007), 3-5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Desiree Lewis, 'The Cardinals and Bessie Head's Allegories of Self'. *World Literature Today: South African Literature in Transition* (University of Oklahoma, 1996), 77.
Accessed: 04/12/2014 05:38) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40151855>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²Ibrahim Huma, *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile* (USA: University Press of Virginia, 1996) 48.

¹³Ibid., 49.

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵ Pia Thielmann, 'Critical Essays on Bessie Head', review, by Sample Maxine. *Africa Today*. Westport, 2005,112. Accessed: 25/12/2014.

<<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ral/summary/v036/36.1ojo-ade.html>>

¹⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹⁷ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸ Ibid., 118.

II. Method and Materials

This section is concerned with the presentation of the method to which we make reference to guide our study. Steinberg's theory *America Again At the Crossroads* is based on historical events that happened in America during the thirteen decades that followed the abolition of slavery that we try also to transpose to South African context. It is also concerned with the materials that we use and to which we try to apply Steinberg's theoretical concepts about migration and blackness. It is concerned with the summaries of the two works under study McBride's *The Color of Water* and Head's *The Cardinals* which are issued from two different contexts, American and South African, from which many affinities can be drawn.

1. Method

Stephen Steinberg's Theory: *America Again at the Crossroads* (2000)

America Again at the Crossroads is dealing with the issue of racism in the United States of America. Steinberg emphasizes on the failure of the American policies to put an end to racism. He enumerates a set of lost opportunities to assimilate the blacks that resulted in a migration movement initiated by the black southerners toward the north either to flee the racial oppression or to respond to the attractive calls of the northern whites when they were in need of them.

To begin with, Reconstruction which provided civil equality for black Americans did not last for a long time as Dubois confirms in his study *Black Reconstruction in America*: "*the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun then moved back again toward slavery.*"¹ But according to Steinberg this reconstruction failed in including a redistribution of land. This would guarantee self sufficiency for the freedmen and secure their political rights. As the promise of land redistribution was not kept after the civil war, the freedmen were obliged to

work as sharecroppers and tenant farmers and forced them to endure a form of debt servitude that restricted their freedom.² The unfulfilled dream of 'forty acres and a mule' and the growing of the racial oppression pushed those desperate blacks to migrate to other towns mainly Kansas.

Known as 'the exoduster movement', this migration involved a great number of blacks who were called 'exodusters' and saw themselves as fleeing Egypt for the Promised Land like the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. 'Pap' Singleton was their leader and he has been labeled the father of the exodus and the Moses of the Colored People. Several colonies were established by the blacks and developed into flourishing agricultural communities with churches, newspapers, hotels, businesses, and all the needs of a town. The black towns endured the Depression and most of the residents dispersed to cities in the North and West. However one community, Nicodemus, still exists as a living symbol of what the blacks could have been if they had not lost the opportunity '*to be masters of their own destiny.*'³ Steinberg in his work has met people living in that town. He interviewed two women full of memories of the migration movement. They told him stories about the hardship they suffered from and also told him about racism in the surrounding communities. One of them easily uses the word 'master' to address him even though she had never been a slave; she was only the daughter of a freedwoman. As he says '*it is an example of how proximate the slavery is to the present.*'⁴

The great wave of the European immigration had an impact on the employment practices that were based on racist assumption. A color line was maintained by the employers and white employees. In fact, they preferred the white European labor force to the black African- Americans. The result was the exclusion of the blacks from the industrial work. Thus, the migration movement was restricted and few blacks migrated to the North. This policy of exclusion makes America lost the opportunity to assimilate the blacks into the mainstream economy.⁵

During the Second World War, ideological, economic and demographic changes have stimulated the southern blacks to migrate. At the level of ideology those blacks were assimilated in the USA army to fight for American democracy against the fascists. Whereas, at the level of economy and demography, in that war period there was a lack of labor force that necessitated the opening of the northern labor markets for them. During this period the blacks gained a considerable economic and institutional power.⁶ They also developed large and united communities in major Northern cities. However, the situation changed at the end of the war as they had to accept the fact that victory was not secured for them as they returned to the second class citizenship.⁷

The securing of the civil rights movement for African- Americans had signaled the end of the official racism. The segregation in the public sphere was ended by the changes brought by the civil rights movement. However, Steinberg remarks that there is a persistent and widening gap between blacks and whites in incomes and living standards.⁸

Race history has demonstrated that the African- Americans were never included in the American dream. The failure of the Civil Rights revolution in eradicating the inequalities between the whites and blacks gave rise to racism and bad social behavior, each feeding on the other. According to Steinberg, this is the context of the recent scientific racism, a racism which is sustained by *The Bell Curve*. It is a book written by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray and has received an extraordinary reception in the mass media. It represents the apogee of the 'backlash' and it is qualified as a retreat to the struggle for equality between the whites and the blacks.⁹ They used the argument that intelligence exists independently from the environment. It is rather found in the gene and constitutes a matter of biological inheritance. In this respect, the existence of a permanent underclass is sustaining this argument. Indeed, blacks are destined to remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic curve so any ameliorative social policy is doomed to failure.¹⁰

Steinberg ends his theory by saying that race history in USA had known periods of racial advance that were followed by periods of retreat. It observed the pattern of two steps forward and one step back.¹¹ This leaves America in a dilemma and again at the crossroads whether to take the road back to the black and racial past or to open a new path for the reconciliation between black and white citizens. The lesson of history is that racial oppression always comes from the upper class and the search for black liberation comes from the bottom. The problem is that America has never had a political will to cope with racial tensions until it is forced by the events. So the means for change would be a '*mounting pressure*' and a resistance from the blacks.¹²

2. Materials

a. Summary of *The Color of Water* by James McBride

The Color of Water is a novel (memoir) written by James McBride and published in 1996. The story is set in New York City during the 1970s and 1980s with some past events in the form of flashbacks that took place in Suffolk, Virginia during the 1920s and 1930s. The main character, James McBride, is telling his own story with reference to that of his mother, Ruth Jordan McBride. The result is two stories weaved in one which centers on James as a Black child who is confused about his identity because he is black and his mother is a white woman. He wanted to know where he comes from so he asks his mother '*I'm black or white.*'¹⁴ Ruth keeps repeating that he is a human being; his color does not matter, and all that counts is his faith in God and his school. She tries to keep him and his brothers out of the racial conflicts and divisions that were spread in the American society in the sixties and seventies, but as James says: '*yet conflict was a part of our lives, written into our very faces, hands and arms.*'¹³

Ruth, James' mother, is a Jewish white woman who lived in the South during the 1920s and 1930s where she witnessed the hard conditions of the blacks in the south. She left her family in Suffolk, Virginia, and settled in New York to marry a black man named Andrew McBride, also called Dennis. He had also migrated from the South, North Carolina, to settle in New York in order to pursue music. He repeatedly says to Ruth that he would be hanged at home North Carolina if they knew that he married a white woman. After having eight children with her, he died out of lung cancer. Years later, she will marry Hunter Jordan, another black man who fled the Jim Crow laws in the south to settle in New York. He helps her to take care of her black children who are now twelve. James loves his stepfather Hunter, especially those 'migration journeys' to the south when he took them there to visit their grandparents and their cousins.

James and his brothers lived in a society that does not accept black children with white mothers. They find themselves struggling with identity issues for being members of a biracial community. When he finally confronted these issues, James has discovered that in order to understand himself, he has to understand his mother's background.

After the death of his stepfather, he suffers a lot and turned to drug use and crimes. During a visit to his sister Jack in Louisville, he met a group of poor black men who sank into drinking to flee the harsh reality and their miserable living conditions. After spending time working with black men, James became convinced of the importance of self-reliance and hard work. He began to trust God and to work toward self-improvement, so he decided to pursue his dream of becoming a jazz musician and writer.

b. Summary of *The Cardinals* by Bessie Head

The Cardinals published in 1995. It is set in 1937 in a large slum area around the National Road when a young beautiful lady knocks at the door of Sarah's shelter giving her a bundle where a little baby is put and placing five shillings on a wooden table. The little baby Merriam grew up in the slum till the age of ten when her foster father drives her out with his bad treatment. However, it is in that slum that she begins to learn to read and write. She owes this to an old man who before he dies, has handed her a book entitled '*The Art of Letter Writing*'. As she flees from the slum, losing conscience, she finds herself in a hospital but no one is there to claim her. So, she is given a new name and birth date; Charlotte Smith born in 6th January 1939. She is placed and replaced in ten houses till the age of sixteen when she is to be responsible of her own care. She has worked as a tea girl before starting to work as a journalist in *African Beat* newspaper's branch in Cape Town. Johnny, her work mate has named her Mouse, and accompanies her to the slum area around the National Road where ten people were burnt to death in a big fire to make a report. Mouse informs him that it is there where she spent her childhood. He is astonished and he questions her how she has managed to escape conditions like those, she replies that she only wanted to learn to read and write. From this time, he knows and understands why she is so cold and indifferent in her relation with the others. She even does not respond to his intended provocations. This is the result of years of struggle, undernourishment and complete lack of love and happiness she experienced all along her life. To approach her, Johnny invites her to live with him in his small house pretending to teach her how to be a good writer. She always makes barriers toward his confessed love, a thing that Johnny tries to overcome till the end of the story. In fact, all along the story we learn that Johnny is her biological father; a reality that both of them ignore.

A series of racial incidents are reported in the novel such as the 'underdog' living conditions of black people in the slums, violence as reported in Johnny's story rewritten by Mouse, the little baby's (Merriam, Charlotte and Mouse as she is named and renamed) origins being a

result of an illegal relationship between Ruby, a rich woman and Johnny a black fisherman. In fact, she does not accept the idea of being her husband as he is poor and ill dressed. There is also the government township built in order to move people from the slums that Johnny describes as a hell with the lack of sufficient commodities. The sailor who is arrested for committing the immorality act by having sexual relation with a non white woman is another racial incident to be mentioned. Moreover, Johnny's family relations being a brother of a prostitute sister from an early age and also his mother who has children from different men are examples of the demoralization of the blacks that classified them as an inferior race.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Steinberg, 'America Again at the Crossroads', in *Theories of Race and Racism, ed.*, Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 561.

² Ibid., 562.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 563.

⁵ Ibid., 564.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 565.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 566.

¹⁰ Ibid., 567.

¹¹ Ibid.; 568.

¹² Ibid., 569.

¹³ James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 92.

14 Ibid., 29.

III. Results and Discussion

1. Results

Throughout our dissertation, we tried to investigate the theme of Blackness and Migration in McBride's novel, *The Color of Water* and Bessie Head's novella, *The Cardinals*. By drawing the affinities between the two works, we intended to argue that the experience of racism is similarly lived by the African Americans and South African blacks. To achieve our purpose, we relied on the theoretical guidelines of Stephen Steinberg's theory on racism as developed in *America again at the Crossroads* (2000). The study revealed that the two novels explore in a similar way the movement of the blacks from their restricted areas to the white man's territories in search for **freedom** and their experience of being blacks in two racist societies.

The analysis of the **theme of freedom** has disclosed that the two novels show similar characteristics at the level of the setting and characters' movement. '**Blacks land ownership exclusion**' revealed that black characters live under the pressure of the white man who pushes them into restricted areas. We noticed that the two settings of **Suffolk** and **The National Road Slum** show a similar experience of blacks' suffering from exclusion. Accordingly, '**Migration, as a Remaining Remedy**' has shown that black characters are leading a tragic life in both settings. So, they undertake a migration movement toward the white cities to find a solution to their restricted freedom and searching for better opportunities. Like McBride's characters [Dennis, Jordan Hunter and Chicken] that suffered in the South and sought freedom in New York City, Head's Mouse, Johnny and James are characters who also fled the harsh racist conditions at the slums and ghettos, in search for a better life in Cape Town city.

From the analysis of the theme of **assimilation** of the blacks in white cities, we came to the result that once the migrants have reached New York City and Cape Town City, it is no

longer a question of **freedom** but it is rather a **struggle for assimilation**. In fact, the chapter entitled '**Blacks and the Harsh Industrial Reality in White Cities**' uncovered the difficulties that black migrants have met to integrate. So, Dennis, Hunter and even their children have undertaken another journey of suffering from the color line established in employment. Likely, Mouse, Johnny and James in *The Cardinals* have experienced the **racial exclusion** from the **mainstream economy**. Moreover, '**Economic Inequality and the Unofficial Racism**' has revealed that in both novels **racism is a continuing process** and the economic gap between the whites and the blacks is still widening. In '**Reversion to Scientific Racism and Cultural Inferiority**', we have reached that **both societies** have made reference to **ideological justification** to the increasing poverty of the blacks. It has been revealed that in both novels, the white men associate blackness with **criminality** and **lack of refinement**. They develop **stereotypes** about the black people. Thus, '**Media Discourse**' disclosed the use of **media** as a means to reinforce stereotypes about the blacks being **criminals** and **culturally inferior** to maintain the white supremacy.

Our study of the similarities between McBride's *The Color of Water* and Head's *The Cardinals* has allowed reaching the result that both writers converge in the use of the two themes of **migration** and **blackness**. Undoubtedly, the affinities come from the fact that both of them are contemporary writers who deal with issues of **race**, **ethnicity** and **identity problem**. Then, as black writers they could not escape their experience of blackness in the two societies of America and South Africa.

2.Discussion

In this section of our dissertation, we shall discuss **Blackness and Migration** as shared issues in James McBride's *The Color of Water* and Bessie Head's *The Cardinals*. The thematic similarities between the two works will be highlighted through two chapters. In the first chapter, we are going to discuss the theme of freedom as it is conceived in the two contexts of America and South Africa. In fact, we will analyze the theme of Blacks' ownership exclusion as a threat to the would-be gained political rights and the theme of Migration which is the blacks' unique remaining remedy. In the second chapter, we will shed light on theme of assimilation of the blacks in the United States of America and South Africa to argue that both writers converge around the same conception about the persistence of racism in their respective societies. We will explore the harsh industrial life of the blacks in White cities. Indeed, we will also discuss McBride's and Head's appropriation of the idea of economic inequality to shed light on the unofficial racism and the use of media to reinforce racism. We shall take Stephen Steinberg's theory on racism developed in *America again at the crossroads* (2000) as a paradigm to this literary analysis in order to argue that the American context and its historical experience with racism can be transposed to the South African context with its experience with Apartheid. Thus, we are going to show that similarities between the two novels are the result of the closeness of the two writers experience with Blackness. Settings, characters and themes will be the literary devices that will guide our argumentation to grasp those similarities in the two novels.

Chapter One:

The Blacks' Quest for Freedom in *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*

This chapter intends to discuss the two novels within the confines of the fight for freedom that is undertaken by the blacks in America and South Africa to take their destiny in hands. As we will explain in this chapter, each of the black characters has a different experience with freedom but they all share the problem of not possessing a piece of land as a refrain to reach that desired freedom. As qualified by Steinberg, this is remained an unfulfilled dream that will result in a massive migration movements of the blacks.¹ Black characters in both novels are under the pressure of the white man who exploits them, in the case of *The Color of Water*, or pushes them into dirty ghettos, in the case of *The Cardinals*.

1- Blacks' Land Ownership Exclusion

According to Steinberg, "*a massive redistribution of land not only would place [blacks] on a path toward self- sufficiency but it also would have secured their [...] political rights.*"² As he explains in his theory, the first lost opportunity which is caused by the expulsion of the blacks from land ownership results in the threatening of their freedom and a non assimilation socially and economically as we will show in the two novels through the hardship they endure in Suffolk, Virginia and also in the National Road Slum and Cape Town in South Africa. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to depict the racist treatment of the blacks and their sufferings. In fact, the sufferings in Virginia town and the National Road slum around Cape Town can serve as evidences for the policies of exclusion that were maintained against the blacks in America and South Africa.

a. The suffering in Suffolk

In *The Color of Water*, One can argue that McBride uses the character of Ruth to describe and comment the events in the South. He succeeds to give interesting details of what was life for Southern blacks of the thirties and the forties through a white woman's eyes. In fact, Ruth's description of the setting in the South during the 1930s reveals much about life at that time. The setting is Virginia town in the South of the USA. It is divided into two sections, Norfolk section which is occupied by the whites and Suffolk which is the black section of the town with a set of railroad tracks that divided the two sections of the town. Ruth says,

[...] Lord, you wouldn't believe it. Shacks with no running water, no foundations, no bathrooms, outhouses. No paved roads, no electricity. Sometimes Mameh and I walk down those dirt roads behind the store and so many of those roads dead-ended into woods. That's how life was for blacks down there. A dead end.³

This passage unveils the hard conditions under which those Blacks are living in Suffolk. First, the suffering in Suffolk is a social one. In fact, McBride uses a set of events to target the difficulties that faced them in their daily life. Those characters were deprived of any medical care. Many epidemics and diseases were spread and they could only offer to buy the BC powder "*that was their doctor*"⁴ and that was available in Shilsky's store.

There was also segregation in education as Ruth explains that they have "*a white folks' school and a black folks' school*."⁵ Another factor of suffering is the insecurity. As a matter of fact, the law was not for the black men in Suffolk during the thirties. They were living under the threat of the Ku Klux Klan who massacred and killed them without receiving any punishment. In describing the brutality of the white folks, Ruth says "*You know death was always around Suffolk. It was always so hot, and everyone was so polite, and everything was all surface but underneath it was like a bomb waiting to go off*."⁶ The story of Mayfield boy who was found floating in the wharf tied to a wagon wheel is just one of many examples of such racist deeds that went unpunished by the law. Another form of racism can be depicted in

the prohibition of any sexual relation between blacks and whites to the extent that “*They would kill a black man for looking at a white woman in the South in those days.*”⁷

Furthermore, beyond that social suffering **the problem** of the black characters in Suffolk was an **economic** one. They were unable to get jobs that would secure them a good income. They were either tenants who work for the benefit of the Whites or they were just starving of hunger as they try to fish turtles and crabs from Nansemond River. It is shown by Ruth’s description: “*This was the thirties, the depression, and folks were poor and they used guns and fishing rods to survive.*”⁸ In addition, black women are working as **servants** with low incomes in white men’s houses as it is the case of the black servant that took care of Shilsky’s wife since “*He hired a black woman to look after Mameh [...]and he paid her so little.*”⁹ Those blacks do not possess any property or any land to work and earn their livings. In fact, a comparison to Shilsky, the white Jew immigrant, reveals that he is more privileged than them. In a short period of time he has been able to possess a grocery store in Suffolk as he “*worked at the local synagogue, but he had his eyes on the so- colored side of the town with the aim of starting a grocery store there.*”¹⁰ As his daughter Ruth mentions:

“You know, the thing was [...] to be white and number one too. That was a big thing in the South. You’re white and even if you are a Jew; since you’re white you’re better than a so-called colored.”¹¹

This quotation suggests that the problem is related to color; you are accepted by the society if you are a white wherever you come from, but you are excluded as a black whatever you are. Although his income comes from those black customers, Shilsky’s treatment for them is racist. He considers them as thieves not to be trusted. He has a gun in his store ready to be used if anyone wanted to fool with his money; “*he thought black folks were always trying to steal from him.*”¹²

McBride explores the theme of exclusion of the blacks both at the level of economy and society. As a black writer, he makes of his novel a stage where the sufferings of his

people are uncovered. As a matter of fact, he has not witnessed directly the events but he knows how to use his mother's memoirs to deplore those racist attitudes. Such issue is made clear when we refer to our study's theoretical guidelines which claim that after two centuries of slavery the debate over the political rights of the blacks began scarcely to raise the blacks' awareness about the importance of land for the resolution of their problems.¹³ So, the denial of the right of property is at the origin of the black characters' suffering in Suffolk. As we have seen, the characters are no more slaves but they are struggling with racism at both social and economic levels. In fact, in Southern USA of 1930s and 1940, black people's situation was characterized by "*inferior educational opportunities, behavioral restrictions imposed by Jim Crow laws, political disenfranchisement, and racial violence.*"¹⁴ They were socially and economically "*affected most strongly by the reorganization of southern agriculture, and by the increase of farm mechanization.*"¹⁵ The sharecropping system, on which it was built, had **dispossessed** most rural blacks from any **land property** and resulted in a form of debt servitude that restricted the freedom of workers and kept them tied to the land.¹⁶ Thus, the persisting segregation in southern towns and cities concentrated male workers into unskilled jobs and female workers into domestic service. This is clearly shown by the description of Virginia town by McBride. As we have seen the town is divided on the basis of color and the black characters are confined in Suffolk where they lead a poor life. As a result of that exclusion, "*large numbers of black tenant farmers were displaced and forced to migrate in search of an alternative economic opportunity.*"¹⁷

b. The suffering in the National Road Slum

Like in *The Color of Water*, the Setting in *The Cardinals* reveals much about the issue of blacks' exclusion as an outcome of racism. As we will argue, Steinberg's conception of the dispossession of African Americans from land owning can fit the South African Blacks who are pushed to live in restricted ghettos and slum areas as a consequence of the Apartheid

system. They do not possess any land. The only properties they can afford are those shacks. As it is suggested by Steinberg this deficit affects their lives at different levels. The first setting of the story is a slum area around the national road; an area occupied by black people. From the beginning of the novella, Head provides us with a detailed description of the National Road Slum as *“it was a large slum area of tin shacks, bounded on the one side by mile-long graveyard and on the other by a city refuse dump and the sea.”*¹⁸ Through this description, Head informs her readers about the living conditions of the inhabitants there and about the social status they belong to. She goes on in her description of the slum simultaneously with the arrival of Mouse’s mother with a bundle in her arms to give it to a woman named Sarah. The woman *“wrinkled her nose in distaste as the stench of the refuse dump and the slum assaulted it holding the breaths at intervals, she keeps her way carefully through the sand, night-soil and stagnant water between the shack houses.”*¹⁹ In fact, the ‘shack dwellers’ as Head calls them are condensed in a small space. Then, Sarah’s shack informs us of the poor living conditions of those blacks because it is

“a small space with every possible bit of junk crammed into it, boxes stuffed with rags and faded clothing, an old cracked mirror in a corner, a torn, stained mattress competing for space with battered pots, an oil stove, blankets and a small, shaky wooden table.”²⁰

It is also done to show the blacks’ ownership expulsion especially of land. This is transmitted by Head in an intelligent manner showing how privacy and intimacy are both impossible to people living in the slums. These people live in overcrowded slums where ghettos are much closed to one another while the whites occupy large and huge houses in the nearby big cities. Ruby’s visit to Sarah’s house in the slum causes great astonishment and curiosity of Sarah’s neighbors. One of them even dares to enter her house after the lady’s departure and questions what the lady has to do there. She even gives her own judgment about the affair saying: *“what kind of woman is it who will sell her child for five shilling.”*²¹ The other neighbors’ curiosity is also depicted by Head to show the closeness of the ghetto houses though this time in a

shameful way. They only keep watching the lady pretending that they are minding their own business. In Head's terms,

The neighbors were curious but guarded about showing it. Living in such close proximity to each other, they tried to keep up pretence of each man minding its own business knowing full well that what little entertainment they squeezed out of life was in exchanging gossip about each other.²²

From this passage, it is clear that the blacks in South Africa occupy specific narrow areas in which they are condensed to such an extent that there is no privacy among the neighbors. However, the remaining huge areas of the country are occupied by the whites as the case of Cape Town city in *The Cardinals* to be opposed to the slum around the National Road occupied by the blacks. This can serve be served as a vivid illustration of what Steinberg refers to in his theory as land ownership exclusion as a result of racism and segregation. In fact 'segregation' is as it is defined in Webster's dictionary

'the separation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means.'²³

This can also drive our attention to the fact that these restricted areas are deprived from the necessary commodities of life. So entertainment is something far to mention or to think about by those people as Head explains in the above quotation; the only entertainment they have is exchanging gossip about each other. Even in townships that the government built to move people from the slums are not much better than the slums as Johnny writes in his report that his white boss PK refused to publish,

[...] the township is miles and miles away from any shopping centre. In this ghetto 80,000 people have only: 1 Bucher where they may buy meat.1 Dairy where they may buy milk.1 General dealer where they may shop.1 Barber where they may cut their hair.1 Beer hall where they may drink.²⁴

Additionally, if education in Suffolk is racially divided into white and black schools, children in the National Road Slum do not have access to education since they are black children in a “*community that could neither read nor write.*”²⁵ They should help their parents in the household work; they are sent “*to fetch water at the tap a mile away from the slum.*”²⁶ But most of the time, they are playing in the refuse dump where they search for something to eat. In this respect, Johnny, one of the black characters, refers to that slum and its inhabitants as follows,

A hell-hole [and] the terrible thing about that slum is that it marks people who have lived there, and bred and intermarried, with a facial structure and mentality that is like something inhuman. It’s just an oozing, indiscriminate mixture of muck, incest and hell-fire. It stamps the individuals who live there so that they look like nothing on earth. [...] everyone knows it is the dumping ground for illegitimate babies.²⁷

The issue of land exclusion has also resulted in economic problems for the black characters especially when it comes to get jobs. In fact in such condensed areas of slums the characters cannot find any work to do so they migrate to work either in Cape Town or even to work as miners in the properties of the White men. They should carry the ‘*humiliating little bookas they enter the white man’s territory.*’²⁸ So, another instance of suffering from racism is shown in the case of women’s work as servants in white men’s houses at Cape Town city. For example, Sarah works at Ruby’s house in Cape Town. As for men, they work as laborers in the town. Head describes them as they “*crept out of the tin shacks to work as laborers in the town*”²⁹ and at Friday evenings when they receive their pay, they spend all the night in riots of violence and drunkenness.

Similarly to *The Color of Water*, the theme of exclusion from land owning in *The Cardinals* is shown by depicting the sufferings of the black characters in the National Road Slum. Steinberg maintains that the expropriated people need a redistribution of land that will secure their self sufficiency and their freedom³⁰. But, it also remained an unfulfilled dream in

the case of *The Cardinals* because the black people are condensed in the slum. As we have shown, they suffer economically because they could not find jobs to secure a better life for their children. The impact is that they live in unhealthy shacks and strive with social problems of poverty and lack of education. Bessie Head lived in a time when the government was maintaining the policy of Apartheid. They had expropriated the blacks from their land by the Natives Land Act (1910) and the Pass laws (1952) which restricted the movement of the blacks in the country. So, they were pushed to live in ghettos and slums that were “*helplessly eroded and overcrowded*”³¹ around the White cities. Besides, Head is making use of that issue of exclusion to express her political anger and to protest against discrimination she herself had experienced as a black in such restricted areas of the colored people.³²

It is clearly shown that McBride treats the theme of blacks’ land ownership exclusion in the same way as Head in *The Cardinals*. In fact, both link the social and the economic suffering of the blacks in Suffolk and National Road Slum to that denied right of possessing a piece of land. The impact of exclusion and the suffering is highlighted by the tragic life of the characters in both stories. The two settings of Suffolk and National Road Slum show a similar experience the suffering of blacks from exclusion. Such exclusion has an impact on social, economic and educational levels. Thus, the result is a migration movement toward the white cities that is initiated by the blacks in order to flee their harsh life and to search for better economic opportunities in those industrial cities. Steinberg argues that “*a number of emigration schemes were explored by blacks desperate to escape the tightening noose of racial oppression.*”³³ So, the growing of the racial oppression pushes those desperate blacks to migrate to other towns. In this respect, the next issue to be investigated in the two novels under study is that of migration as a solution to that restricted freedom.

2-Migration: Blacks’ Unique Remaining Remedy

As we have previously explained, Racism in America and South Africa has resulted in the exclusion of the blacks socially and economically. Such powerful economic and social implications will trigger migration movements that change the history of the black population in both societies. Known as the great migration in America and the labor migration in South Africa, these movements have uncovered other layers of racism that gave birth to the equation of migration and blackness that is the core of our dissertation. As it is stated in Steinberg's theory *America Again at the Crossroads*, a group of blacks known in the American history as "Exodusters" migrated from the South to the American Northern cities as a result of the unfulfilled dream of the "forty acres and a mule", and that of land redistribution. They established settlements that later on disappeared as they joined other cities to flee segregation and hardship. However, one colony named Nicodemus resisted and remains to the present day as a symbol of how the blacks would be if they have been given the opportunity to face their own destiny and be self reliant. This issue is present in both works under study, namely *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*. The black characters in both novels are subjects of migration from one place to another to flee hardships and the segregation they have had to confront every day. However as it is the case with the "Exodusters", the bitter reality is found wherever they go as it originates in their blackness.

a. From Virginia Town to New York City

Migration as a theme takes a central role in McBride's novel *The Color of Water*. It is essentially worked through the movements of the characters from the Southern cities to the Northern White cities of the USA. If we consider that characters in the story can be divided into first and second generations, one can argue that the journeys of migration are closely related to the parents' generation which has experienced the hardship of racism in Virginia as it is previously explained in this dissertation and decided to rush for the great cities of the North like New York City to search for better opportunities.

One of the representative figures of such groups is the character of Andrew McBride. He called himself by his middle name, Dennis. He is James' father and Ruth's first husband. He is the prototype character of a southern man leaving for the north to pursue his dreams. In fact, Dennis has grown up in High Point, North Carolina. He was the only child of his family but he found himself obliged to leave home in his middle twenties and come to New York *"because he wanted to pursue music, mostly classical and religious music."*³⁴ He wanted to fulfill his dream in the City of New York but the reality would strike him with disillusionment. He had been obliged to work as a leather-maker and artisan in a factory owed by Aunt Mary, a Jewish white immigrant.

In addition to Dennis, Jordan Hunter is another character that highlights the idea of southern blacks' migration in McBride's novel. He is a black man who is raised on a farm in Henrico County, near Richmond, Virginia. He fled the South around 1927 because of the Jim Crow Laws. As James tells his story *"a white sheriff had locked him up for peeking under the tent of a traveling circus without paying, and when the sheriff went to lunch and inadvertently left the cell door open, Daddy eased out of the jailhouse and caught the first thing smoking', he never returned to Virginia for good until he died."*³⁵ Those words by James explain exactly the situation of his father who had to flee the hard conditions of the south to settle in the north as it is the case of all the blacks.

Moreover, the Chicken Man and his friends whom James met in Harlem are all from the south as they are described: *"the men on the Corner were southern working men: plumbers, carpenters, painters, drunks, con artists, retired army lifers from nearby Fort Knox, tobacco workers for Brown and Williamson, and some just plain ol'hustlers."*³⁶ They have all escaped from their unbearable life in the south and they are struggling to find a path to a freedom far from racism but their conditions and the police treatment gives hints about the kind of life

they are leading now. Things are always difficult for Chicken Man who has urged James to leave the Corner and resume his studies to avoid such living conditions.

The use of characters that moved from the south to the north by McBride recalls the great migration of the blacks in the 1930's as it is referred to by Steinberg in his theory. A number of places were explored by the blacks who were desperate to escape the racial oppression of the South.³⁷ As we have seen all of the characters have fled racism that was widespread in the south at that time. Starting from Dennis who wanted to find a place where he could pursue his dream of music and Jordan who escaped from the Jim Crow, one of the harshest racist policies in the history of USA, to those characters in Harlem who migrated for economic reasons to find jobs in the industrial white cities.

b. From the National Road Slum to Cape Town city

All the black characters in *The Cardinals* have experienced migration. This is done in purpose by the writer to show the migration movement of black South Africans that marked the country during the period of time that stretches between the 1930's to the 1950's and in which the novella is set. This migration movement is similar to that witnessed by black Americans and which is depicted in McBride's *The Color of Water*. Indeed, it fits what Steinberg explained in his theory, which is based on the analysis of some historical events related to black Americans and their great migration to the Northern cities. The Blacks could not resist the hardship and segregation, the reason for which they decided to depart to cities occupied by the whites, but they will find themselves occupying specific restricted areas. They would represent the socially lower class of cheap laborers working in those growing industrial towns. This is what happened to some extent in South Africa where blacks found themselves the inhabitants of restricted areas in the nearby big cities such as Cape Town as it is the case with the characters in of Head's novella. We have previously explained in the above part of our discussion that those restricted areas are condensed slums and dirty ghettos

where blacks live deprived of all the necessary commodities of life. This is what makes them join the whites trying to improve themselves intellectually, socially, politically and economically as it is the case of the three black characters of *The Cardinals*; Mouse, Johnny, and James.

Focusing on the lives of the three characters Mouse, Johnny and James, the black migration in South Africa can be well illustrated. Throughout each character's own experience, Head succeeds to gather in her work the important causes of black migration in her country. With this, she also succeeds to give a detailed depiction of the blacks' suffering in South Africa either before or after the experienced migration. To begin with, the migration of the main character Mouse is done for an educational reason. In fact Mouse and all people of the slum around the National Road are deprived of education. The only person who is able to read and write is the old man to whom the little child Mouse owes her first experience with reading and writing. It is he who teaches her how to write her name and how to read and understand *The Adventures of Fuzzy Wuzzy Bear*; the story book she finds in the dirt of the dump.³⁸ Her passionate love for reading and writing is the main reason that pushes her to flee from the slum. Her hunger for education has grown more after the old man's death as she lost her unique source of knowledge and education. Her eminent departure or flight is also worsened by her foster-father's bad treatment. She says in her little mind that instead of fetching water, this time it is better to look for another source of life that is education. So, she finds herself in another slum which is not very different from the one she fled from. She lives there till the age of sixteen, being placed in ten different houses. In this slum, she has access to education though for a short period of three years. Growing up to be a self determined girl may help her much in her life. Indeed, she succeeds to get employed in *The African BeatNewspaper* in Cape Town.

As far as Johnny is concerned, his migration experience began when he refused to join the Five's gang. He refused to allow himself to be under another man's control. However, Five's prestige and power could not allow him stand out of his control. Thus, Johnny decided to flee the district where he lived silently and joined a small group of fishermen in a wild and hazardous life, sleeping in rough shacks on the beach. Their only contacts with the town were the brief trips they make every day to sell fish.³⁹ Working as a fisherman for a one-year period has made him sleep anywhere: in caves, in the mountain, in empty goods trucks and in waiting rooms. This is what makes him hate the hard manual labor as he himself comments *"all I am saying is that hard labor is bad for mankind."*⁴⁰ Thus, it is clear at the heart of Johnny's migration or escape lies his quest for freedom.

James is another black character who comes from a similar background as Mouse and Johnny. In fact, he grew up in a slum and it is until recently that he managed to escape and migrate to the town. Evidence from the novella shows that when addressing him, Johnny says: *"for about the past four years you have been trying to get the slum out of your system."*⁴¹ What makes him different from other black characters is that he tries to integrate himself in the world of the whites, aiming to secure his gained economic comfort. Indeed, he never dares to question PK's instructions, the head master of the African Beat newspaper where they work, about the way the newspaper reports should be. In this respect, Johnny makes a criticizing remark, *"your writing bores me to death every single story I have read of yours is about the happy little colored man and the colorful Malays"*⁴²

From all what preceded, it is clear that **Migration** is a recurrent theme in both McBride's and Head's works. In fact, characters' movement from those restricted areas of the blacks to white cities is similarly deciphered in both stories. We have Dennis and Mouse who are motivated by their dreams. Then, Jordan and Johnny are seeking release from the social pressure while Chicken Man and James are asking for economic improvement. Besides, all of

those characters are expecting an easy assimilation in the white industrial cities and better opportunities as it is referred to in Steinberg's words: '*the migration assumed messianic overtones and the migrants saw themselves as fleeing Egypt for the Promised Land.*'⁴³ So, both of New York City and Cape Town City are respectively presented as promised lands for the black characters in *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*.

After analyzing the theme of the quest for freedom in *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*, we conclude that both works are dealing with black characters who struggle in a racial society that confine them in condensed and overcrowded areas. In both works the black characters are not allowed to possess land to reach self sufficiency. In the African Americans case Steinberg argues that they '*were never included in the American Dream*'⁴⁴ that consecrate the right of property as one of the fundamental necessities to affirm ones freedom. In the case of South African blacks, they are excluded from the policies of improvement that the government launched to improve the country's economy and they are even dispossessed of their properties as native settlers. As a result the black characters undertake migration movements to escape the harsh life they are leading to reach the two cities of New York and Cape Town. However, it is not as easy as the black characters expect. When they reach the two cities, it is almost another experience of racism they will have to face. The next chapter will help to explain how the debate and the struggle for freedom will be substituted by a debate over their assimilation.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Steinberg, '*America Again at the Crossroads*', in *Theories of Race and Racism, ed.*, Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 562.

² Ibid.

³ James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 60-61.

⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁵ Ibid., 79.

- ⁶ Ibid., 111.
- ⁷ Ibid., 107.
- ⁸ Ibid., 60.
- ⁹ Ibid., 155.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 40.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 113.
- ¹² Ibid., 59.
- ¹³ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.
- ¹⁴ Stewart E. Tolnay, *The African American "Great Migration" and Beyond*. Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 29 (2003), 215.
- Accessed: 07. 03. 2015 at <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036966>>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.
- ¹⁷ Tolnay, *The African American "Great Migration"*, 215.
- ¹⁸ Bessie Head, *The Cardinals* (USA: Heinemann, 1995), 03.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 3.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Head, *The Cardinals*, 04.
- ²² Ibid., 03.
- ²³ John. W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 01.
- ²⁴ Head, *The Cardinals*, 18.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 5.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 9.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 25.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 69.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 5.
- ³⁰ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.
- ³¹ Cell, *Highest Stage of White Supremacy*, 8.
- ³² J.M. Daymond, Introduction to *The Cardinals*, by Bessie Head (USA: Heinemann, 1995), xi.
- ³³ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.
- ³⁴ McBride, *The Color of Water*, 193.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 120-121.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 145.
- ³⁷ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.
- ³⁸ Head, *The Cardinals*, 8.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 42.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 16.
- ⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 562.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 566 .

Chapter two

The Blacks' Struggle for Assimilation in *The color of Water* and *The Cardinals*

The present chapter is devoted to discuss the theme of assimilation in the two works, *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*, to uncover difficulties that black migrants have met to integrate in the white cities. As we have already explained, the sufferings of the blacks in their restricted areas have encouraged them to consider migration as a possible remedy for their misery. But with reference to Steinberg's theory we intend to argue that it is almost another journey of other sufferings that those black characters are undertaking. In fact, white cities are mainly industrial cities with harsh rules of employment especially when it comes to deal with colored people. Such rules open the path for another question that is **the persisting economic inequality** and the **unofficial racism**. Indeed, Stephen Steinberg argues that the Blacks are excluded from the industrial work in the White cities. Thus, this policy of exclusion makes America loses the opportunity **to assimilate** the blacks into the mainstream economy and give birth to the unofficial racism.¹

The white man tries to justify the persisting gap between the whites and the blacks through scientific and ideological theories that sustain the economic and cultural inferiority of the latter and prevents them from **assimilation** in '*a perverse multiculturalism*.'² This conception of exclusion of the blacks from the mainstream white society and its justification by economic and cultural inferiority can also be applied to the South African context where the blacks are struggling for assimilation in a society that takes the color of the face as a political fundamental factor. Indeed the blacks need passports to enter white controlled areas as stipulated by the Bantu Homelands Act in 1951. The two novels under study, namely *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*, are reflecting those realities as we will argue.

1- Blacks and the Harsh Industrial Reality in White cities

Once the black migrants have reached the white cities in search for freedom, they face unexpected problems. The great wave of the European immigration in the case of America and the persistence of the White supremacy's ideas in the case of South Africa had an impact on the employment practices that were based on racist assumption. A color line was maintained by the employers and white employees. In fact, they preferred the white labor force to the black African one. This is highlighted by the unemployment problems of the black characters in both *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*.

a. Blacks' suffering from Unemployment in New York City

McBride tackles migration as a central theme in *The Color of Water*, for it is full of instances that represent the lives of the migrants in their destined cities. The focus will be on the black characters that flee the South to settle in the North where they experience hardships to get employed. From the 1940's on to the 1970's, Northern cities implement a policy of exclusion from the mainstream economy against the blacks. Steinberg claims that "*The majority of African Americans languish on the fringes of the job market or outside the jobmarket altogether and another generation of black youth grow up in poverty.*"³ As this quotation suggests the result of the economic exclusion will be unemployment for the blacks and poor living conditions.

Dennis is the first character who experiences racism after his migration to New York around 1940's. He wants to try music but "[he] almost starved to death fooling around with that music [...] they wouldn't hire a black man for the orchestras or anything like that in those days and he scuffled around and slept in flophouses."⁴ These words by Ruth explain Dennis' hard situation in trying to find a job as a musician. What saved him were his friends from hometown in High Point, Curtis and Minnie Ware. They were well if compared to most black characters and they '*housed and fed whole families that had migrated north from High Point.*'⁵ In fact there are whole families who headed north seeking release from the South but

as Ruth's description reveals; they were starving to death as they could not afford themselves anything to eat. In the case of Dennis there is no way to make a living at music, so he has found a job as a leather-maker and artisan in a factory owned by Marry, Ruth's aunt. She is a Jewish white immigrant who came to the USA with her family from Poland to flee the Nazi persecution. Now, she owns a leather factory with her husband who owns a shoe factory and they are doing business with the richest women in New York like movie stars.⁶ In comparison to them, Dennis and the other blacks have to work hardly to save their lives and their families. Besides, his marriage with Ruth highlights the instances of racism that can be observed from the part of white men, who disgust the relationship between a black man and a white woman. At the marriage bureau, the clerks were very nasty and did not want to write that paper.⁷ Also when Dennis got ill, Ruth took him to St Peters hospital where they were welcomed with a lot of stares and questions from the doctors and nurses, asking '*who is he?*' and as she replies '*he is my husband*'; they just got so cold and disgusted.⁸

In a similar way, Jordan Hunter who fled the Jim Crow found himself struggling to get a job in Chicago. Once there, he experienced hard conditions as it is said by James: "*he met up with his brother Walter in Chicago, where he was fleeced and pickpocketed from the time he hit the town till the time he left.*"⁹ He worked in slaughter houses before moving up to Detroit where he shined shoes with his brother Walter in a barbershop. After a short time, he moved to Brooklyn, New York, where they made a living by selling illegal booze.¹⁰ Thus, the journey of the two brothers from Chicago to Brooklyn uncovers the poverty that the black migrants endure in the white cities. We may argue that it can fit as an illustration to what Steinberg refers to as the economic exclusion of the blacks in the industrial white cities.

However, Steinberg claims that the exclusion of the blacks from the mainstream economy is not exclusively the concern of the migrants since it will result in the consecration of another generation of black youths who grow up in poverty.¹¹ In *The Color of Water*, we

have the example of Dennis' and Hunter's children who are suffering all along from racism and poverty in New York City. James says: "*As a boy I was confused about issues of race but did not consider myself deprived or unhappy. As a young man I had no time or money or inclination to look beyond my own poverty to discover what identity was.*"¹² Obviously, this quotation supports what **Steinberg** claims about another generation suffering from poverty. Indeed, James and his brothers were leading a poor life especially after the death of their father, Dennis. They hardly survived. The only thing that saved them was the food and clothes that people sent to help them.¹³

Additionally, poverty is not the only problem that faces the children's generation but there is also the persistence of the social racist attitudes drawn by the economic exclusion of both their parents' generation and theirs. Starting from school where they had to face racism from both the teachers and their mates. James notes that "*one afternoon as the teacher dutifully read aloud from our history book's one page on 'Negro history', one in the back of the class whispered 'James is a nigger' followed by a ripple of tittering and giggling across the room.*"¹⁴ Then, they suffer from the bad treatment of the police like in the case of James' brother, Richie. One day as he was walking in the street with his friend, a group of boys behind them have ditched a bag of heroin and when the police arrived they arrested Richie just because they found ninety dollars in his pocket and they did not even listen to him as he tried to explain that it was his college- bank- loan money.¹⁵ As James comments, "*to the cops, he was just another black perpetrator with a story, and he was arrested and jailed.*"¹⁶

Those black children are also rejected by the white men. The grocery owner in St. Albans is just one example among many others. James describes him as '*a guff white man who like many of the whites was on his way out as we blacks began to move in. he did not seem to like black children.*'¹⁷ He showed anger and disgust when he knew that Ruth, a white woman, is the mother of James, the black child. The worse came when James and his brothers

moved to live in Delaware. They find themselves lost there. They “[...] *were shocked by the racial division of the city and surrounding county, where most of the black kids attended understaffed and underfunded city schools while whites attended sparkling clean suburban schools with fantastic facilities.*”¹⁸ As we can deduce, the condition of education for those children of the 1970’s are the same ones with the conditions of education in Suffolk during the 1920’s where schools are racially divided as we have already explained in the previous chapter.

From analyzing the experience of Dennis, Hunter, James and Richie with the harsh rules of the white northern cities, we can say that McBride’s use of these characters is an appropriate illustration to the theme of poverty, an outcome of the blacks’ suffering from unemployment as it is conceived by Steinberg.

b. Harsh Employment Rules in Cape Town City

In the **South African context**, the male characters who live in the slums work as laborers in the town while women suffer from unemployment except for a few of them who also work as servants in rich men houses; it is the case of Sarah who works in Ruby’s house. People who manage to escape from the slums are also subjects of exploitation and suffering. The example of Mouse who has to obey PK’s orders is very important. She even jumps into a car of a man she does not know searching for a wheel chair to please her boss. At his return to office, James has also to respond obediently to PK’s instructions. He has to do this in order to integrate the world of the whites. In fact, this is only possible if he forgets about his own culture and adopts theirs. Accordingly, Johnny addresses James saying, “*for about the last four years you have been trying to get the slum out of your system. When you eventually get it out you are going to adopt Mozart and Bach and Chapin as culture.*”¹⁹

Besides, the other example from the work that shows the blacks' exclusion from the mainstream economy lies in the story of the black man who tries to help Mouse to find a wheel chair to African Beat newspaper. The man reports her how he could not transcend his blackness and be a scientist dealing with atomic research. His parents do not help him to fulfill his dream because they are afraid of loosening him. He desperately says, "*I am a black doesn't mean I couldn't be a scientist.*"²⁰ His blackness also affects his work life. Indeed, he works in a hotel where he is a manager in task but not in name and wage. As it is explained by Steinberg, a color line is drawn by both white employers and employees. In fact, they excluded the blacks from the industrial work preferring the European immigrants. This caused poverty and made impossible social assimilation as well.²¹ Taking examples from Head's novella *The Cardinals*, a similar situation is to be found in the South African context. The failure of the economic assimilation drove with it a social assimilation. This social failure to assimilate blacks is shown by Head through different instances. The most important is when Johnny is so hesitant in accepting PK's invitation to the party to which he invites people from both races. He even blames Mouse and does not want her to go to the party saying to her, "*you might as well tell PK that you are coming to his silly party.*"²² In fact, his description of this party as silly is not uttered by him at random but it is intended to show that intercommunication between blacks and whites is sterilized and racial attitude between both sides continues to exist. As explained by Steinberg, the exclusion of the blacks from the mainstream economy caused their underclass status. Indeed, he does not like the way white men behave with black women. James displays this when he observes,

"For Christ sake, Johnny. Why don't you say you're just a racist and that PK is going to give a mixed party and only invite men and black women and a few white prostitutes and that you hate the way black women are suckers for white men and that you'd like to pose as the defender of the black woman's virtue?"²³

James also refers to black women's cruel reality trying to convince himself that he is capable of assimilating and cohabiting with blacks. But, the reality is that James is as racist as Johnny. In fact, he also forbids this kind of parties to his wife,

“you think of everything except the real issues, James. Those you avoid. Every man feels some sort of ownership for the woman you cares about. You don't take her because you can't bear to see her leered at by men who think she comes cheap because she's Black.”²⁴

So, it is clear from this quotation that the whites' attitude toward the blacks is also racist and causes blacks to react in a similar way; that is they avoid any kind of social contact with them. Indeed, this contact that the whites try to maintain is a form of an unofficial racism with the anti discrimination treatment they pretend to preserve.

Once in the party, Mouse feels herself in a strange atmosphere as it is depicted by Head,

“When the guests arrived, all friends and acquaintances of PK, they gaily set about lighting a big fire and grouped around it, talking and laughing. Somehow it unnerved her. The people were just a meaningless blur and the way they walked in high-pitched, false voices, frightened her.”²⁵

Another instance that shows the failure of social assimilation of the blacks in white cities because of their economic exclusion is that they are still regarded as **slaves**. This is clear through PK's harsh treatment of the three black reporters James, Johnny and Mouse. He even allows himself to call them “slaves”: “*PK stuck his ginger round the door ‘Morning slaves’ he says in a cheerful way.*”²⁶ He also repeated the same label once he finished his conversation with them “*fine Mouse, I think you'd better take over those cinema notices from James. He is piled up with work. Well get cracking, slaves.*”²⁷ To this naming, the three addressed black characters do not respond. This fits what Steinberg says in his theory that the coming generation of the black American freedmen still consider themselves slaves that they

had never been in their lives as it is the case of the two women that he questioned in Nicodemus during his visit there. They even easily utter the word master.²⁸

From all what has been said, the black harsh industrial reality in the migrated areas makes their assimilation and integration impossible to achieve. The black Americans in *The Color of Water* who joined cities seeking for industrial work has to face the harsh reality of unemployment and low wages. America preferred European immigrants in its factories, a thing that reduced the migration movement of the freed black southerners as it is explained by Steinberg.²⁹ Consequently, they had also to face segregation, poverty, social disorganization and demoralization. The same thing is depicted in *The Cardinals* as the black characters in Cape Town City are exploited by their white boss who shows hypocrite sympathy toward them but indeed he considers them as slaves. This persisting racism is an outcome of the ideology of the white supremacists ideas that exclude any assimilation of the blacks and associates blackness with inferiority.

2- Economic Inequality and the Unofficial Racism

As we have previously argued, once the blacks have reached the white cities they began to experience the hardship of the industrial life. The outcome of such experience is a **widening economic disparity** between the blacks and the whites and a persisting racism. In fact, Steinberg maintains that the United States have failed to assimilate the black African Americans during the most expansive and prosperous period in its history, the century after the abolition slavery when emerged as an industrial organization, providing opportunity to tens of millions of immigrants, and boasting the highest standard of living in the world.³⁰ Society relies on arguments that sprung from scientific theories to maintain the inferiority of the blacks. Indeed, blackness is associated with the **lack of intelligence** and the **cultural inferiority** to justify the non assimilation of the blacks in the mainstream economy. Steinberg

Steinberg remarks also that such ideas receive an extraordinary reception in **the mass media**.³¹ This represents a retreat to the struggle for equality between the whites and the blacks. We believe that this process of the justification of the economic disparity by **scientific racism** and **culture** is also applicable in the South African context as we will argue by showing the affinities in the two works of McBride and Head, respectively *The color of Water* and *The Cardinals*. We will depict the stereotypes that the white man uses to reinforce the economic inequality and how media discourse plays a role in its popularization.

a. Reversion to Scientific Racism and Cultural Inferiority

The failure of the Civil Rights revolution in eradicating the inequalities between the whites and blacks gave rise to racism and bad social behavior, each feeding on the other. According to Steinberg, this is the context of the recent scientific racism. For him, the increasing poverty of the blacks and the existence of a permanent underclass is justified through ideologies.³² They use the argument that intelligence exists independently from the environment. It is rather found in the **gene** and constitutes a matter of **biological inheritance**. This is how they explain the fact that blacks are occupying the lower class of the society. In fact, some groups- notably African- Americans- have lower average intelligence and this genetic deficit explains why they occupy the lowest strata of society.³³ In *The Color of Water*, it is crystal clear that the black characters are aware of those racist scientific theories that are used against them as it is shown in James' words:

“Deep inside I knew that my old friend Chicken Man back in Louisville was right. **I wasn't any smarter, or any wiser, or any bolder than the cats on the Corner no matter my brains or potential**” [and then he adds] “my sister told me several times you have to choose between what the world expects of you and what you want for yourself.”³⁴

As the quotation suggests, the society does not expect from a black child to be a talented person or to excel in education. They are seen as future criminals and drug sellers. Then he

adds that “*Those leaders are no better than their Jewish counterparts who spin statistics in marvelous ways to make African- Americans look like savages, criminals, drags on society, and animals (a word quite popular when used to describe blacks these days).*”³⁵ The same thing happens for him in South Carolina when he is searching for his grandfather. It was hard for the white people to believe the story that says he is the child of a white woman. As he tells:

[...]Any black man who loiters in front of a building for a long time looking it over is bound to draw suspicion from cops and others who probably think he’s looking for an entrance so he can climb in and steal something. Black males are closely associated with crime in America, not with white Jewish mothers.³⁶

These **stereotypes** are used against the blacks not only from the part of the white man but also from other ethnic groups like the Jewish who came to America as immigrants, and now occupy highest status just because of the color of their face. It is one of the major causes for which Steinberg rejects the celebration of the immigrants’ success and their children because their success is then cited as proof that blacks lack the requisite social and cultural capital that have allowed immigrants to claw their way out of poverty.³⁷

The belief that blacks are inferior by nature is also sustained by another belief which states that blacks are **culturally inferior**. In Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s theory of *Race, Reform and Retrenchment* (2000), we read that the subordination of the blacks is rationalized by a series of stereotypes and beliefs that made their conditions appear logical and natural and this includes a modern belief in cultural inferiority of the blacks which justifies all forms of racial discrimination.³⁸ This idea goes hand in hand with Steinberg’s perception of how the white man tries to justify his superiority over the blacks.³⁹ In *The Color of Water*, the evidence is mainly depicted when James, the main character, encounters the Dawson’s, white couple who is supposed to pay for his travelling to Europe with the American Jazz Band. For paying back the money he should work for them on weekends and during the summer. For one long year,

Mrs. Dawson tries to change all his behavior. She makes him dressed in a suit and bow tie that she loans him.⁴⁰ She has also “*tried to correct what she considered to be [his] poor speech and manners, which [he] did not like at all.*”⁴¹ She turns him into classical composers and literary writers. In trying to correct the black boy’s behavior the couple is only confirming the white man’s belief in the cultural inferiority of the blacks. Evidence is also found in the treatment that **James** receives in his **school**. In fact, they obliged him to dance as black stars do even though he does not know how to dance and then they mock at him, as it clearly appears in his sayings:

I was stuck at that **white school** with white classmates who are convinced I could dance like James Brown [...] I tried to convince them that I couldn’t dance [but] the white kids at school did not believe me. [He is obliged to pretend that he can dance like the black stars but even with efforts to please them] all I can get is the derision on their faces, the clever smiles, laughing at the oddity of it and I felt the same ache I felt when I gazed on at the boy in the mirror. I remembered him, and how free he was, and I hated him even more.⁴²

Scientific racism is also one of the concerns of Head’s novella, *The Cardinals*. It can be explained in relation to education and how blacks are excluded from it. As we have already mentioned in the above chapter, children of the slums are deprived of education. Mouse has to flee from the slum around The National Road to be able to have three little years of **school**. She has also to rely on herself to improve her level. She even accepts to live with Johnny in his house for the same reason. So, **education** seems to be a dream for the black population in South Africa and illiteracy is dominant among its people. In fact, the old man to whom Mouse owes her first contact with letters and words is the only person in the slum who is able to read and write. Although a drunkard person he is, he is very respected by people of the slum. The reason is that he is able of what they are not able to. They always have recourse to him to write their letters. They also need him to understand the letters they receive. Thus, they are intellectually dependent to this person. This exclusion is seen as a legitimate one since black

people's inferiority is regarded as a matter of gene and not a matter of construction as it is advocated by Murray and Herrnstein in *The Bell Curve*. Mouse (Meriam), an intelligent she is, child she notices how the old man always relies on the letter book to write his letters. She also manages with his help to write her name successfully. She even succeeds to understand the story book she found in the refuse dump. This is a proof of what Steinberg explains in his theory to **discredit the assumption of the biological racism** which places black people at the bottom considering them as an inferior race, incapable of rational thinking. Another instance that supports Steinberg's view in Head's novella is when the black man who wanted to help Mouse to find a wheel chair tells his story about his dream to **become a scientist** which is not realized because of his blackness. Indeed, he stopped his atomic research due to his **blackness** that he could not transcend. He later on expresses his regrets as he realizes that his blackness (biologically speaking) has never been a cause of not becoming a scientist. In his terms: *"Because I am a black that did not mean I could not be a scientist."*⁴³ So, what prevent him from fulfilling his dream to become a scientist is **political and social** rather than biological as he confirms in his saying:

my **parents** were **rich** and could have afforded to send me out of the country to study, but my **mother wanted to possess me**. She knew I would never come back. My father was terrified at the thought of a black man wanting to reach out beyond his blackness, or so it was for him.[...] It is hard to accept the fact that all a man aspires to is at **the mercy of power-politics and** the irrational, chaotic, wayward rule of man.⁴⁴

As far as **economy** is concerned, it is apparent from Head's novella that the blacks are economically **inferior** and dependent to the whites. Steinberg in his theory focuses on the economic inequality as a basis of all forms of racial discrimination between blacks and whites. This economic inequality is of great significance because it widens the gap between the two races at different levels in a continual process. In fact, it is this continual process of the **economic disparity** that makes **racism** from which the blacks suffer an unofficial one. In

this perspective, many instances are to be found in the novella. Life in the slums is a deprived one in comparison to that of the nearby cities occupied by the whites who are characterized by high standards of living. Moreover, **servitude** and **subordination** are restricted to the black population. In contrast, **leadership** and **patronage** (mastership) are reserved for the whites. The latter pretend to be of great heart full of humanism and generosity. An example of this in the novella is when PK refuses to get Mouse fired. As it is described by Head, “*a white boss who feels great playing father to sweet young innocent thing.*”⁴⁵. Another instance is to be found in the government policy trying to move people of the slums to the built townships that Johnny qualifies as hell from hell and organized prison camps. The reason is that the economy of South Africa is based on **cheap labor**. So, the laborers cannot afford to pay for the **rents of township houses** with their cheap incomes. Thus, it is better for them to live in slums that cost them nothing than in township houses which cost them more they can afford on their incomes. In Johnny’s terms:

“the new townships are just another hell from hell, PK. They’re organized prison camps. On the overage, incomes are so low that the people can hardly afford to pay these so called sub economic rentals. They live from day to day in fear of being dragged before the rent courts. Those who try to supplement their incomes by illicit liquor and other shady deals are constantly hounded out by the cops. A cop can enter the home any time the mood gets him. And what chances are there of raising the wages and standard of living when the economy of this country is based on cheap labor? It used to cost a man nothing to live in shacks in a slum. Now it costs him more he can afford on his income to live in a township.”⁴⁶

This fits what Steinberg assumes when considering the economic inequality as a basis of blacks’ inferiority not what the whites refer to as scientific and cultural inferiority in their ideologies to justify and legitimate their supremacy.

b. Media Discourse as a Reinforcement of Racism

Steinberg has introduced the example of Richard Herrnstein’s and Charles Murray’s book *The Bell Curve*. It is a book that is based on **scientific racism** and stipulates that the blacks are destined to remain on the curve of the society, so any ameliorative social policy is

doomed to failure. Indeed, this book, that helps to reinforce the White's stereotypes about the blacks, has been well received by the mass media⁴⁷, **Stereotypes** about the blacks are generalized and widely spread not only by word of mouth but also through images in **television, movies, newspapers**, music, comic books, talk shows, pseudo- scientific research and even **text-books**. These media make stereotypes, whose dissemination was once confined to oral transmission from one person to another; seem more like factual knowledge than personal opinion.⁴⁸ In *The Color of Water*, James McBride has introduced the role of media as a means to reinforce racism and to perpetuate the stereotypical images of the blacks. First, it is in Ruth's comment about the **TV news treatment** of the blacks that we can find evidence. In fact she pinpoints one of the crucial issues of race that is the depiction of the black man as a villain on TV news and shows. She tells her son James: "*I don't care what they **show on TV**, these **stupid boys** with guns and these murderers they show on the news. Those aren't the majority. **Most blacks** are peaceful and trusting. That's why they're made a fool of so easy.*"⁴⁹ As this quotation suggests, the television helps to shape wrong images on the blacks and reinforces the white people's stereotypes about blacks being all criminals.

In addition to the TV, we have **cinema** as another media that helps to shape and reinforce the inferiority of the blacks. As we can deduce from James' words, he has witnessed this kind of racism. He says: '*I saw the guys in the **movies**, white men like Steve McQueen and Paul Newman who beat the bad guys and in the end got the pretty girl- who, incidentally, **was always white.***'⁵⁰

Moreover, **racism** during the 1970's and 1980's is also a product of **magazines**. The latter is considered as a media that has a great influence in shaping the individuals beliefs. In the novel, James has read an article where it is referred to the children from parents of different origins as '*tragic mulatto*'. As a young boy, he does not understand what it meant and asked for more details from his mother as we can see in his speech:

One afternoon I came home from school and cornered Mommy while she was cooking dinner. Ma, what is a tragic mulatto? I asked. Anger flashed across her face like lightning and her nose, which tends to redden and swell in anger, blew up like a balloon. Where'd you hear that? She asked. I read it in a book. For God's sake, you're no tragic mul- What book is this? Just a book I read.⁵¹

It is obvious from this quotation that the stereotypes about the blacks are well received by the media. They constitute a field that helps the propagation and the continuity of racism.

As far as the use of media discourse as reinforcement of racism in *The Cardinals*, it is first shown in the editorial line of the **African Beat newspaper** which tries to reshape the racial reality of South Africa by glorifying the government's policy with blacks. As Mohamed, one of the black characters in the novella, says, "*you people do crazy business there. No one wants to buy African Beat from my shop anymore. They say it make out that the non-whites bad.*"⁵²

We have also the relation of **PK**, the head officer, with the three black reporters. He always treats them as **slaves**. He even pushes them to write things different from reality which they have to accept **to secure their jobs**. To hide reality and say it otherwise is an example of the unofficial racism. They try always to give a golden image to the harsh and dirty reality that the blacks live. An example of this is when Pk refuses to publish Johnny's report about townships because it gives a faithful depiction of life there which is not much better than that of the slums. PK suggests another report that deforms reality. Indeed, when he reads Johnny's report, he replies "*are you crazy? The head office will never take this! I told you to take human interest side: 'Mrs Kumalo lived in a hovel all her life. She never knew what it was like to have a kitchen, privacy.*"⁵³ Besides, PK always tries to show his sympathy towards the blacks though in reality he does not do any effort to help them. This is apparent when Johnny addresses him saying: "*Sorry, PK, I am not a supporter of the government.*"⁵⁴ To which PK responds "*You don't have to talk that way. You know I am on your side.*"⁵⁵ To this answer Johnny gives us Head's opinion about the situation through his comment: "*For Christ's sake,*

*PK. We don't need your sympathy you **white leftists** and sympathizers are the greatest supporters of the **status quo**. If you are so worried about freedom and justice for the underdog why don't you go and convert your white brothers and sisters who are causing all this mess and **leave us alone**.*"⁵⁶ So it is clear from these quotations that the sympathy that PK and other whites show is a false one. They never try to do real actions that help black population to gain their freedom from racial norms and practices that keep them from reaching full citizenship.

All in all, what we have seen are examples of how the mass media can be used and contribute to the production and the well reception of racist ideas and theories in both New York City and Cape Town City. Steinberg contests the use of use of media as means of propagation for the racist ideas.⁵⁷ This makes him argue that race history observes the pattern of two steps forward and one step back.⁵⁸

From the analysis of the theme of **assimilation** of the blacks in white cities, we came to conclude that once the migrants have reached New York City and Cape Town City, they find themselves struggling against different forms of racism, ranging from economic problems to social ones. In fact, the two White Cities are characterized by harsh rules of employment that are based on racist assumptions. We have depicted the difficulties that black migrants have met to integrate. Indeed, Dennis, Hunter and even his children have undertaken another journey of suffering from the color line established in employment. Likely, black characters, Mouse, Johnny and James in *The Cardinals* have experienced the **racial exclusion** from the **mainstream economy**. Moreover, **racism** in both novels is a **continuing process** and the economic gap between the whites and the blacks is still widening because **both societies**, America and South Africa, have made reference to **ideology** in order to justify the increasing poverty of the blacks. It has been revealed that in both novels, the white men associate blackness with **criminality** and **lack of refinement**. They develop **stereotypes**

about the black people and uses the media as a means to reinforce these racist stereotypes about the blacks being criminals and **culturally inferior** to maintain the white supremacy.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Steinberg, 'America Again at the Crossroads', in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed., Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 564.

² Ibid., 568.

³ Stephen Steinberg, *Neoliberal Immigration Policy and Its Impact on African Americans*, 23 Notre Dame J.L. Ethics & Pub. Pol'y (2009): 4.

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⁴ James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 194.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 236.

⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120- 121.

¹¹ Steinberg, *Neoliberal Immigration Policy and Its Impact on African Americans*, 04.

¹² McBride, *The Color of Water*, 261.

¹³ Ibid., 245.

¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸ Ibid., 180.

¹⁹ Bessie Head, *The Cardinals* (USA: Heinemann, 1995), 16.

²⁰ Ibid., 103.

²¹ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 564.

²² Head, *The Cardinals* , 80.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid., 82- 83.

- ²⁶ Ibid., 29.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 80.
- ²⁸ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 563.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 564.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 565.
- ³¹ Ibid., 567.
- ³² Ibid., 568.
- ³³ Ibid., 567.
- ³⁴ McBride, *The Color of Water*, 161.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 104.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 220.
- ³⁷ Steinberg, *Neoliberal Immigration Policy and Its Impact on African Americans*, 215.
- ³⁸ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Race, Reform and Retrenchment', in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed., Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 554.
- ³⁹ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 567).
- ⁴⁰ McBride, *The Color of Water*, 184.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 185.
- ⁴² Ibid., 105.
- ⁴³ Head, *The Cardinals*, 103.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 568.
- ⁴⁸ Kawame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr, ed., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African- American Experience* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 1584 .
- ⁴⁹ McBride, *The Color of Water*, 110.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 91.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 92.
- ⁵² Head, *The Cardinals*, 30.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 19.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Steinberg, *America Again at the Crossroads*, 567.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

V. General Conclusion

Though from different backgrounds, the American writer James McBride and the South African writer Bessie Head show a similar experience in appropriating the canon of literature as a means to denounce the effects of racism and Apartheid on the black communities. As two contemporary writers, they are experimenting with the identity of the blacks by depicting the meaning of blackness in the two societies of America and South Africa. Such experiences are the source from which the stories of the two works *The Cardinals* and *The Color of Water* stem from.

The equation of blackness and migration that is the core of our dissertation have disclosed how land is important to assert the blacks' freedom and how their economic exclusion has played a major role in the failure of a possible assimilation both socially and economically in the two societies. Both works shed light on the failure of the governments' policies to find a solution to black racism as it is referred to in *America Again at the Crossroads*; the USA and South Africa have lost several opportunities to putendfor racism. The dispossession of the blacks from land owning in the USA and the expropriation of the South African blacks from their land keep them from reaching freedom and full citizenship. This was at the basis of their migration movement in quest for freedom that they would never enjoy as they have to the present day face another problem in the migrated areas which is that of assimilation.

By transposing the African- Americans experience with racism to that of the South African blacks we have reached that the issue of racism is still the concern of the two contemporary societies. Racism is a continual process that takes the form of pseudo- scientific theories that justify a reference to ideology in order to maintain the black subordination and the white supremacy. In fact, as Steinberg assumes, the paramount truth is that these nations have never had the political will to address the issue of racism until forced by the events.¹

Our dissertation does not tackle all the issues that relate the two works, *The Color of Water* and *The Cardinals*. Our investigation had as its concern the depiction of the migration movement triggered by the policy of exclusion maintained by the government. We believe that a study of the black movements as a reaction to these policies would be of great significance to highlight the impact of racism on minorities and to suggest how an effective mounting pressure is necessary for change in the two societies, America and South Africa.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Steinberg, 'America Again at the Crossroads', in *Theories of Race and Racism, ed.*, Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000), 569.

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