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BLACK CELEBRITY AUTO/BIOGRAPHY AND THE MAPPING OF POSSIBILITIES

by Sandisiwe Mapine

338230

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Professor Grace A. Musila

Johannesburg

2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis titled, *Black Celebrity Auto/Biography and the Mapping of Possibilities* is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination by any other university.

Sandisiwe Mapine

338230

Signature  Date: 17 February 2025

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ABSTRACT

We are currently in the midst of a memoir boom characterised by an increase in the production and promotion of memoirs by public figures. For example, in 2023, Britney Spears' memoir, *The Woman in Me* sold 1,1 million copies in the first week of its release. A few months before that, *Spare*, a memoir by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, set a Guinness World Record for the fastest-selling non-fiction book (1.43 million copies on the first day). The proliferation of memoirs and/or autobiography has led to renewed interest in its study. Much of the theoretical work around life writing has predominantly taken place in the global north and my study seeks to make a contribution from an African context. Since 2000, an increasing number of black South African celebrities have released their autobiographies. My study is a critical narrative and discourse analysis of black celebrity life writing in post-apartheid South Africa, and it examines sixteen autobiographies produced by black celebrities in the first quarter of the twenty-first century (2000 – 2024). The study also explores issues of authorship and authority which arise during the process of collaborative writing. The findings reveal that local celebrity autobiographies offer possibilities for identity formation, self-reflection, public commentary and resource accumulation. They reveal that the contents of the texts are influenced by and reveal the circumstances, politics and intention of the subject. Amongst the subgenres identified in the focal texts are the conversion narrative, autobiographical manifesto, the legacy memoir, the trauma narrative and autopathography. The study demonstrates the development and democratisation of life writing in South Africa illustrating the agency, politics and location of black subjects. It reveals the opportunities auto/biography presents for reputation management, the augmentation of celebrity capital, shaping public discourse and the accommodation of multiple voices. With regards to collaborative writing, the study reveals that oftentimes, especially where there is an unequal power dynamic, the position of the subject in relation to the author/s has a discernible influence on the voices and perspectives which come through in the narrative.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study analyses sixteen black South African celebrities' autobiographies published in the first quarter of the twenty-first century (2000 – 2024). The study aims to achieve three interlinked objectives. The first objective is an exploration of the ways black South African celebrities use autobiography to reflect on and construct their identities and subjectivities. Secondly, the study examines the extent to which autobiography provides a platform for black South African celebrities to influence public discourse while simultaneously unlocking forms of social, cultural and political capital. Lastly, the study is interested in the workings of voice and narrative authority in co-authored and as-told-to autobiographies which seem to occupy a prominent place in black South African celebrity life writing.

Among the questions the study engages with are: How do we understand the prevalence of auto/biographies among black South African celebrities in recent decades? What do these auto/biographies enable or undermine, in terms of their identities, their careers and making interventions in public discourse and perceptions? Regarding authorship and authority, does the position of the subject in relation to the author/s influence the voices and perspectives which come through in the narrative? In what ways do the selected auto/biographical texts frame the narratives of the lives told? These are the questions that drive this study's exploration of the range of possibilities — for identity formation, self-reflection, public commentary and accumulation — unlocked by auto/biography in black celebrity life in South Africa.

1.2 Contextualisation of the Study

We are in the midst of what Julia Rak describes as a global 'memoir boom' characterised by an increase in the production and promotion of celebrity memoirs. For example, in 2023, a memoir by Britney Spears titled *The Woman in Me* sold 1,1 million copies in the first week of its release. Prior to that, *Spare*, a memoir by Prince Harry set a Guinness World Record for the fastest-selling non-fiction book (1.43 million copies on the first day). The proliferation of autobiography has led to renewed interest in its study. Much of the theoretical work around life writing has predominantly focused on the global north and my study seeks to make a contribution from an African context. Since 2000, an increasing number of black South African celebrities have released their autobiographies.

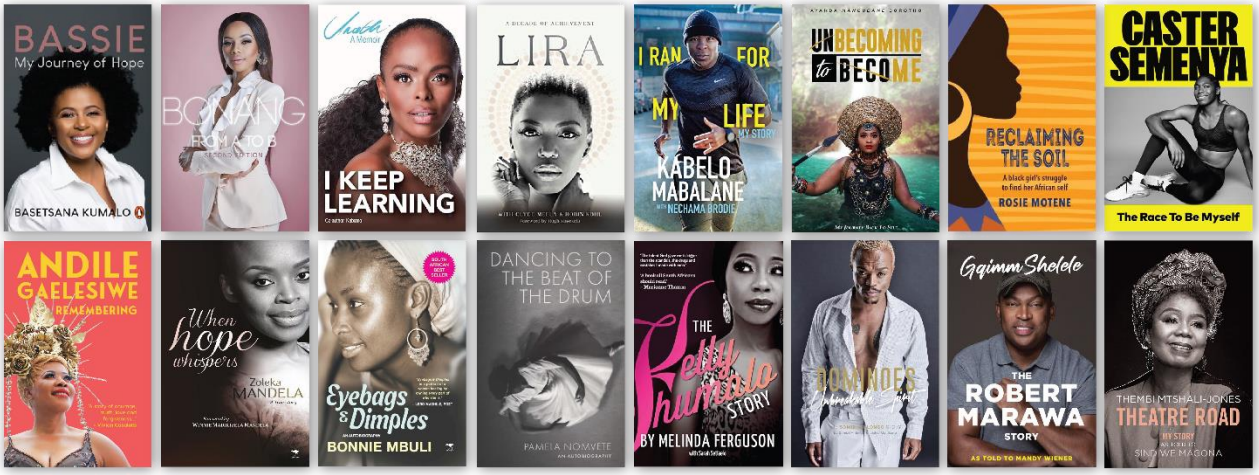
The study focuses on *black* celebrity autobiography because in South Africa, despite the Constitutional ideal of non-racialism, race continues to shape one's social experiences and prospects. The country is plagued by poverty, unemployment and inequality, all mapped along racial lines, with black South Africans being worst affected. Due to their historical oppression and its aftermaths that continue to produce marginalisation to date, there is a need for more black South Africans' voices, stories and perspectives in all genres and media, as narrative remains foundational to our understanding of societies and the logics that govern them. Fortunately, South African celebrities are riding the memoir wave in their numbers and producing life writing at a considerable rate.

This study focuses on sixteen auto/biographies:

1. *Eyebags & Dimples* by Bonnie Henna (2012)
2. *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* by Pamela Nomvete (2012)
3. *The Kelly Khumalo Story* by Melinda Ferguson and Sarah Setlaelo (2012)
4. *Making HerStory: A Decade of Achievements* by Lira, Clyde Meela and Robin C. Kohl (2013)
5. *When Hope Whispers* by Zoleka Mandela (2013)
6. *I Ran for my Life* by Kabelo Mabalane and Nechama Brodie (2015)
7. *Dominoes - Unbreakable Spirit: The Somizi Mhlongo Story* by Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng (2017)
8. *From A to B* by Bonang Matheba and Gugu Mhlungu (2017)
9. *Reclaiming the Soil: A Black Girl's Struggle to Find her African Self* by Rosie Motene (2018)
10. *Bassie: My Journey of Hope* by Bassie Kumalo (2019)
11. *I Keep Learning* by Unathi Nkayi and Kabomo (2019)
12. *Theatre Road: My Story* by Sindiwe Magona and Thembi Mtshali-Jones (2019)
13. *Unbecoming to Become* by Ayanda Mangubane Borotho (2019)
14. *Remembering* by Andile Gaelesiwe (2021)
15. *Gqimm Shelele: The Robert Marawa Story* by Mandy Wiener (2022)
16. *The Race to be Myself* by Caster Semenya (2023)

The focal texts were purposively selected with an eye for the range of issues they address regarding black celebrities' lives in South Africa, gender representativity, range of narrative styles and the different uses to which the celebrities put life writing. The selection is not fully

representative as this is a growing field of literary production, but the study hopes to (re)ignite scholarly conversation on post-apartheid black celebrity life writing and trusts that future studies will grapple with the range of texts and questions that could not be addressed here due to limited space.



Autobiography has many definitions. One definition considers autobiography to be "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (Lejeune 193). Yet another is that it is "writing that purposefully and self-consciously provides an account of the author's life and incorporates feeling and introspection as well as empirical detail" (Drabble in Thomas 13). The content of autobiography translates the recollections of subjects who willed themselves to pause, look back and narrate some aspect/s of their life story. A number of authors, like Anderson (2001), Kaplan (1992), Smith and Watson (1992), have considered the factors surrounding not only the construction of identity, but the deliberate selection of certain stories over others. For the purposes of this study, the terms memoir, autobiography and life writing will be used interchangeably even though some scholars identify memoir as a "written record of people or events as experienced by the author or a form of autobiography that gives particular attention to matters of contemporary interest not closely affecting the author's inner life" (McArthur in Javangwe 8). Though scholars have tried to differentiate between autobiography and memoir, publishers and authors use the terms interchangeably. It is also worth acknowledging that the broader field of life narrative, under which autobiography falls, is rapidly expanding due to the exploration and use of different mediums, including social media (McCooey). This study focuses on life-writing contained in texts produced commercially for public consumption.

Research shows that while they share many features, autobiographies are not the same. At least fifty-two genres of life writing have been identified by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) and later, Thomas Couser (*Memoir*). Some of the more common genres are testimony, apology, conversion narrative, confession, or, the fiction inspired, coming of age narrative. While these subgenres are not mutually exclusive, they are helpful and provide some insight into the different ways subjects have used autobiography to construct narratives, craft identities and elevate personal agendas. The subgenre is almost always identifiable by the writer's motive/s. For example, writers driven by the need to bear witness to injustice tend to write testimonial narratives where the emphasis is on the 'I' as an eye, taking in the matter to be placed on the record; through apology, the writer seeks to justify their past actions; writers of conversion narratives emphasize their transformation from a former to a new self; while "confessions tend to make intimate revelations with the hope of some redemption" (Couser, *Memoir* 38). All these subgenres exhibit some cross-cutting features which constitute conventions that distinguish autobiography from other forms of writing.

In autobiography, writers are expected to speak in the first person and take ownership of what Paul John Eakin calls the 'I-character'. There is an expectation that the writer will occupy all forms of 'I' in the text (and by extension me, my, mine etc.). The extent to which writers comply with this rule is influenced by their circumstances and personal politics, some of which will be explored later on in this discussion. Another expectation is that writers of autobiography will tell the truth. On this aspect, the reliability of human memory, truthfulness of recalled events and objectivity of autobiographical texts have often been questioned, with several writers facing accusations of appropriating their pasts to forge narratives that legitimize their present-day positions (Thale). This has cast some doubt on the reliability of these texts and their ability to give access to the 'real' person. Due to this, I am inclined to agree with Stover's claim that autobiographies present "combinations of fact, truth, memory, creation, fraud, and dissembling" (22). The agency of the subjects to determine their own selves is what makes autobiography so fascinating; what they choose to conceal can be as instructive as what they reveal.

Autobiography and the Universal Self

Arguably, autobiography's western origins have contributed to the establishment of some of its conventions and the creation of a template for a "particular genealogy, resonant ideology, and discursive imperative" (Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject* xvii). The so-called classic or canonical autobiographies reproduced an I-character based on a specific notion of 'selfhood', which lends itself to a universal human subject whose identity is embedded in a history of heterosexual white male privilege (Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body*). Smith argues that the universal self embodies an identity that is self-reflexive, autonomous, neutral, rational, self-regulating, and stripped of colour in the literal and figurative sense. The universal self, with its particular historical view and experience of life and living, is exclusionary. The occupation of this universal self comes with the tacit imposition of whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality and detachment. Henry Louis Gates Jr details just how exclusionary the universal writing subject was, especially at the expense of black people during Atlantic slavery. The recognition of black writing and black subjectivity was unpalatable because that would imply that they were capable of reasoning which would undermine the foundations of white racism and oppression (Gates Jr 54). This is why when enslaved African Americans started writing their stories, they needed a white person to vouch for them as the authors of their work. Without this endorsement, the writings were unlikely to be read or recognised as the product of an African mind.[1] Similarly, women were excluded from the universal 'I' character because of the sexist perception that they were too emotional to reason as well as men.[2]

Due to their glaring exclusion from the canon of autobiography, from the 1970s, feminist and post-colonial studies staged a disruption of the universal self by critiquing the idea of the "universalised, male, European, self-present and autonomous" human subject (Geesey 1). Feminist scholarship in particular helped to highlight the political consequences of the assumption of the universal self as well as the absence of women's writing and voices. While many still chose to assume the identity of the universal self, black and women writers explored new paths, opening autobiography up to new voices and processes of mediation (Swindells 1). The disruption of the monopoly of the universal self by new entrants paved the way for "outlaw genres," a term coined by Caren Kaplan (117) to describe genres which bypass traditional

[1] Examples of autobiographies that had to be vouched for include the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs (1861).
[2] Sojourner Truth's poem "Ain't I a Woman" (1851) is an example of an early text that writes back to this I-character of the universal self.

autobiography's "preoccupation with conditions and limits." Kaplan cites women's prison memoirs and testimonies as examples of outlaw genres which accommodate a variety of previously marginalised narratives. The significance of the concept of outlaw genres is that it produces revisionary forms of the 'I' (Smith) thus extending the boundaries of the I-character. Revisionary 'I' characters were used by prominent women writers including Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf and Zora Neale Hurston, to disrupt "the certitudes of traditional autobiography" and its emphasis on "chronological time, individuality, developmental selfhood, myths of origins, the fixedness of identity, bodily wholeness, the transparencies of referentiality, the will to knowledge, [and] the unified self" (Smith, *Subjectivity, identity and the body* 184). In so doing, they produced texts and autobiographical subjectivities which suited them and their "refusal to acknowledge the old positions of dominance and subordination" (Smith, *Subjectivity, identity and the body* 185). The efforts of these women ushered in a new era of autobiography where more voices could participate outside the restrictions of the universal self.

Black Autobiography in America

Angela Ards claims that since its origins, black American autobiography has been a key platform for the expression of political argument and ideological commentary. This we have seen in the black autobiography produced during slavery as well during the Civil Rights and #BlackLivesMatter movements.[3] As part of renewed efforts in African American Studies to recover the contribution and history of black women as intellectual subjects, Ards examines the way contemporary black women autobiographers "craft their life stories to engage modern political and social thought" (4). Ards' study notes that while the release of former American president Barack Obama's memoirs contributes significantly to increasing "academic and popular interest in the relationship between black subjectivity and politics," it reinforces the 'great men' paradigm (ibid). Ards argues for the recognition of the contribution of black women's autobiography to the broader public sphere. Her work examines strategies used by black women autobiographers to bring lived experience to bear on communal questions of identity and agency while navigating the multiplicity of identities that black communities present. She identifies trends in contemporary African American autobiography, some of which are applicable to the South African context like the increase in female authors. She points out that African American women in particular are now using autobiography to offer "counter

[3] See for example *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) as told to Alex Haley and *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (2018) by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele

narratives to official and often nostalgic representations of the civil rights and Black Power movements" (153). Ards also notes an increase of autobiographical narratives published by "children of the dream", beneficiaries of the struggle who are grappling with the unchartered territory of integration (155). Most of these narratives are characterised by accounts of being the 'the only' or 'the first' in certain institutions or neighbourhoods. Ards has also picked up that in America, race is no longer the sole identity marker; other subjectivities organised around gender, class, sexuality and immigration status are coming to the fore. She also underscores a growing class divide amongst African Americans, contributing to narratives where one's income bracket may mean as much for one's identity as race and gender.

Black Autobiography in South Africa

Under apartheid, marginalised groups primarily used the autobiographical medium to bear witness, navigate, make sense of or refute the realities imposed upon them as individuals or groups. While this study demonstrates that, to a large extent, post-apartheid South African autobiographies have moved towards a more introspective engagement with the subjects' identities, lives and communities, it is important to reflect on the past. Fortunately, considerable effort has been put it into the study of South African autobiography. A study by Judith Coullie examines seventeen South African autobiographies published during apartheid to evaluate their functions and what they say about "social relations and about individual perceptions of the self" (68). The study argues against extricating autobiography from its political context, which determines all matters pertaining to "identity, material relations, and the control of textual production" (11). Coullie's analysis of the subject in selected autobiographies by South African authors from different demographics focuses on "the experiences the subjects have to undergo" (285) and not so much on "an experiencing self" (ibid). A category of writing highlighted in the study is the worker autobiography, typically written by "subsistence farmers, children in rural areas, migrant workers, domestic workers, black women employed in other sectors of the economy, factory workers etc" (295). These autobiographies contain details of the effects of apartheid policies and serve to testify against the system which tried to silence them from telling their stories.

Similarly, Lynda Gilfillan examines strategies used by autobiographers to "counteract hegemonic subject-constructions" (52) in apartheid South Africa. She argues that there are "subtle forces at play in black autobiographical writing [including] the production of a communal, collective subject that subverts the conventional notion of the (autobiographical)

"I"" (52). The study, which focuses on black autobiographical writing from the 1950s to the early 1960s, shows that life writing was used to "set up a 'self' that counters the colonial 'other'… an 'I' that displaces the colonist's 'you'" (4). In this sense, autobiography was used as a tool to talk back to an oppressive system and to reconstruct identities which were denied and assaulted. Harold Ngwenya (in *Ideology and form*) takes this a step further in a study which establishes a relationship between autobiographical subjects and the collective concerns, interests, values and attitudes of particular social groups in South Africa. Ngwenya's study finds that, between the 1950s and the 1990s, autobiography provided a platform to challenge imposed identities.

Most black autobiography produced before 1994 can be classified as struggle, protest, worker, prison or political autobiography (there were exceptions, like celebrity businessman Godfrey Moloi's 1987 offering, *My Life: Volume One*). The social conditions under apartheid compelled many black South Africans to use the autobiographical medium to wage a fight against a system designed to obliterate their self-worth, voices and stories. They used autobiographical texts to challenge and work through issues like discrimination, dignity, erasure, representation and identity. Examples of such texts include Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1985), Albert Luthuli's *Let My People Go* (1962) and Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959).

Sekgothe Mokgoatsana studies the representation of linguistic identity in the autobiographical poetry of Puleng Samuel Nkomo who wrote in his mother tongue, Sepedi, as a means to self-invention and self-legitimisation. The study problematizes the issue of language use in South Africa, arguing that the legislation stating that South Africa has eleven official languages is political window-dressing because in reality, "English and Afrikaans became the two 'official' languages in state administration, education, science and commerce" (30). He demonstrates that South Africa was (and continues to be) biased against African language literature, which is why so many autobiographies are written in English. The centrality of English is supported by Catherine Woeber's study on the contribution made by St Peter's Secondary School in Johannesburg to South African literary history. It traces the education of prominent South African black autobiographers and finds that, of the black autobiographies published from 1954 to 1963, all but one of the male writers received some schooling from St Peter's School. These include *Tell Freedom* by Peter Abrahams, *Down Second Avenue* by Es'kia Mphahlele, *Road to Ghana* by Alfred Hutchinson, and *Chocolates for My Wife* by Todd Matshikiza. Mokgoatsana's central argument is that the St Peter's mission school system shaped the writers; the Western

education offered at the school impacted on the development of their hybrid identities, influenced their belief systems and informed their writings. Their education at the school 'saved' them from the effects of Bantu Education, the apartheid state's inferior education system for black South Africans. In the study, a link is established between the teaching of English at high school and the output of black South African writers (7). While they face some criticism, it cannot be denied that mission schools provided better education and facilitated the learners' command of the English language, which according to the study, was a crucial enabling factor in the writing of autobiography.

Literature on autobiography in post-apartheid South Africa highlights the prevalence of the English language. Coullie reminds us that in South Africa, English is the language of hegemony; it allows writers to reach the widest possible audience and is the "favoured language with most South African publishers" (219). English remains a 'necessary evil' in the lives of many black South Africans and without it their social and economic prospects are limited (De Klerk). Some of the worker autobiographies mentioned above were written with some considerable assistance by 'researchers,' resulting, according to Mokgoatsana (1999), in autobiographical texts "not written by the person whose life is being told, but by a specialised editor or ghost writer who is commissioned to complete the task on behalf of the subject" (41). He compares this practice to impersonation, whereby "the life of the person is fed into a text by another self" (ibid); in so doing, the writer assumes the position of authority. In the same vein, Coullie (198) argues that texts are composed according to the researcher/editor's own interpretative schema and agendas which leads to "a qualitative difference between the autobiographical text which is largely or even partially biographical (using the researcher as narrator) and the text which inscribes the autobiographical subject as narrator" (199). Due to the prevalence of the use of translators, co-writers or editors, we need to understand the implications, not only across language barriers, but also in collaborations involving people from different backgrounds.

South African Autobiography after Apartheid

Turning now to the twenty-first century, studies of the genre have started to imagine new kinds of South African autobiography. For example, Gina Wisker discusses the future of South African autobiography from the perspective of a non-South African based outside the country. She observes that "South Africa is in the exciting, challenging, often contradictory process of reinventing itself. [And] as voyeurs, viewers, readers, audiences and critics, we are looking for

new work which gives voice to the new processes and experiences, and seek to find new ways to re-read and re-interpret writing, particularly resistance writing from the apartheid era" (8). For its insights into "critical and personal responses to the changes gradually emerging in the New South Africa", Wisker (8) highlights the importance of women's autobiography and its ability to assume several crucial roles, and negotiate "the dichotomies of nation/ self, post-modern/ subject, gender /race, fiction/ documentary /autobiography" (25). Also commenting on South African autobiography after apartheid, Sam Raditlhalo (2003) states that while in the nineties, prison and political autobiography was used effectively to testify and protest against apartheid, in the twenty-first century, "new ground within a familiar field must now be tilled, for, while the South African past cannot be undone, it must be transcended" (121). Signalling a new era, he suggests a reorientation from, "who am I" to "who are we"? (242) thus, inviting autobiographers to assume the role of seers, leaders, interpreters and nation builders.

In a further contribution to the dialogue on post-apartheid South African autobiography, Lindelwa Dalamba offers a chronotopic reading of autobiographical texts by three formerly exiled South African musicians: Miriam Makeba, Joe Mogotsi and Hugh Masekela. Dalamba selects them as examples of the writing against exile by musicians with 'iconic' status in the annals of South African music and popular culture. The study traces how these three, "from their shifting perspectives of exile and return" (6), have used their autobiographical narratives to 're-member', imagine and construct South Africa. Dalamba assigns potential political significance to these works because they are written by black people "previously silenced by apartheid's national biography", and so represent the "empowering appropriation of narrative authority that allows the authors to relate tales about South Africa's musical and other pasts that are so far untold" (57). Dalamba argues for the reading of black autobiographies "as instances of heteroglossia that permeates, influences and inflects discourses on South Africa" (145). Doing this would "relativize the national biography, and create spaces within which processes of meaning-making would be possible and probable for those whose stories remain ignored in the current biography of the nation" (145). It is interesting that most of the researchers applied similar methodologies but employed a variety of conceptual approaches. The studies reviewed examined the texts through the lenses of one or a combination of theoretical perspectives including post structuralism, feminism, sociology, cultural studies and post colonialism. A few have been shaped by revisionist Christian and afrocentric perspectives. Surprisingly, only one explicitly used a "post-apartheid critical lens" (Wisker 8).

Coullie rounds up the common themes and topics of South African autobiography, namely narrations of childhood, growing up, political repression, activism, gender, work, incarceration, house arrest, exile, banishment, forced removals and sacrifice. She further identifies three categories of post-democracy auto/biography: (1) *personal memoir*, made up of texts by famous figures, renowned writers, people changed by illness or victims of crime; (2) *recovery auto/biography* characterised by attempts to recover portions of history or experience suppressed by the apartheid regime and (3) *political auto/biographies* wherein subjects narrate issues related to the self's engagement with the state, power and history (Coullie 31-35). These categories are quite broad and do not reflect the nuances brought on by gender, race, class and sexual dynamics. Also, these categories are not mutually exclusive and for African subjects, they overlap too often. For instance, in autobiographies of children of freedom fighters, their narrations might be construed as personal memoir, recovery and political auto/biography. By her own admission, Coullie was not looking at the issue through the lens of race or gender. She highlights that in democratic South Africa public figures constitute a considerable chunk of Southern African life writing, but the kinds of public figures Coullie refers to are political figures, intellectuals, clergy, artists and professional writers (Coullie 77). Of these public figures, a majority were white, for example, Ian McIntosh (2000), Max du Preez (2003), Anthony Sher (2001), Patrick Mynhardt (2003) and Pieter-Dirk Uys (2002). Also, between 1994 and 2000, white subjects published almost thrice as many autobiographies as black subjects. From 2000 to 2004, auto/biographical accounts by white subjects were slightly more than double those by black subjects (Coullie 30).

Coullie notes that scholarly literature on autobiography in South Africa is relatively silent around paratextual elements, for example, the self-portraits, the cover design and the photographs reproduced inside (77). The literature is also thin on the political economy which shapes the production and dissemination of autobiography in post-apartheid South Africa (Coullie 2006). The current study attempts to engage with some of these gaps in the scholarship.

Questions of Authorship and Collaborative Autobiography

Following global trends, the publication of celebrity autobiography has picked up in South Africa. While there is not much literature on this, Dalamba highlights some issues which emerge around the autobiographical writing of people who occupy prominent positions in the discursive spheres in which they operate. She notes that one's social position may impact on

their construction of the autobiographical self. For famous subjects, "the division and distance between the narrating and narrated 'I' cannot be escaped" (64). They are constantly written about in films, newspapers etc. and because of this, are likelier to "encounter their lives as an already finished script" (64). For Dalamba, the lives of public figures are "doubly authored," at one level, by the author/s, and at another, "in dialogue with how these musicians have been written elsewhere" (69). In their stories we find traces of other voices and discourses. In her assessment, the co-authors "crowd and overpower the autobiographical self" (64).

Carol Boyce Davies (in *Private Selves and Public Spaces*) uses the example of Winnie Mandela's *Part of My Soul Went with Him* to illustrate the influence of co-authors on autobiographical texts. The memoir, published in 1984, came about as a result of Winnie Mandela granting the editor, Anne Benjamin, lengthy interviews and providing her with "letters from her husband in jail and other documents for selection, editing and publication" (*Private Selves and Public Spaces* 274). Davies points out that when written texts are based on oral narrations, some meanings may be lost in the translation process, especially when there are ideological and racial differences between the co-author and subject, as is the case in this instance (*Private Selves and Public Spaces* 277). Through her examination of autobiography and the African woman writer, Davies draws our attention to the fact that *Part of My Soul Went with Him* "has multiple narrative frames" (274) and that it is the white editor who played a substantial role in determining its organisation into an "introduction, a prefatory tribute, some letters, and testimonies" (*Private Selves and Public Spaces* 275).

Ards identifies a trend in contemporary African American autobiography whereby a number of US hip hop stars like Sean 'Jay-Z' Carter (2010), Lonnie 'Common' Rashid (2011) and Tracy Lauren 'Ice-T' Marrow (2011) collaborated with ghostwriters to write their memoirs. According to Ards, this "relinquishing of authorial voice … raises questions about self-mastery, market influence, and authenticity" (157). A similar pattern is developing in South Africa; there is an increase in commissioned, collaborative or as-told-to writing by celebrities as will be explored in Chapter Five.

The grounds for assisted or outsourced writing may include concerns about subjects' command of the English language, writing skills, access to publishing networks and cultural capital. In South Africa, a country with eleven official languages, all of the autobiographies published by black celebrities are in English. Coullie (70) notes that the elevation of the English language by society and the publishing industry can be an obstacle and constraint to those who struggle

with it. When it comes to autobiography, most readers are bound to the notion that autobiographies must be 'written well'. I will cite one example to illustrate South African society's standards and expectations regarding English: in 2017, South African celebrity Bonang Matheba released her autobiography titled *From A to B*, which was riddled with grammatical mistakes. The text had sentences like "Somizi didn't even realise why I had stopped friends with him. He thought it was because of something he thinks I think he did, but it was none of that.[4]" Images of the pages were posted on social media platforms and this sparked a trending hashtag #tweetlikebonang under which people deliberately wrote in broken English. This story was covered in tabloids as well as mainstream news sites. During his August 2017 *There's a Gupta on my Stoep* South African tour, Trevor Noah's set included a joke about the Bonang book.[5] In what must be a first, national bookseller Exclusive Books recalled *From A to B* and offered 'dissatisfied' buyers a full refund for their purchase. Matheba, an African woman of Tswana descent, was publicly mocked for what South Africans describe as "being dribbled by English." Her unedited words, which upon closer scrutiny, are an accurate reflection of how South African youth speak, were lampooned for not meeting certain standards of fluent written expression. This episode may shed some light on why black celebrities seek assistance with the writing process. Matheba's challenges shed light on the perceived necessity of co-writers in a South African context. The co-writers are usually employed based on their superior command of the written word. The process usually begins with the subjects telling or submitting their raw stories to writers who transcribe and edit them into autobiography. In ways which vary from subtle to glaring, an editor or transcriber can make their presence felt in the narrative (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 2010). When the writer is allowed or assumes full control of narrating the story, they are in a position to exercise authority over the subject matter and insert their versions of the meanings of certain events or experiences (Davies, *Collaboration and the Ordering Imperative*). Breaking with the past, we are seeing the emergence of a new generation of collaborative texts, where black South Africans, instead of white South Africans, are the scribes for black subjects. According to Coullie (46), this development reflects social changes and promises new issues for theoretical consideration.

[4] "Exclusive Books 'recalls' Bonang's book, says customers can get refund." *The Citizen*, 8 Aug. 2017, www.citizen.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/exclusive-books-recalls-bonangs-book-says-customers-can-get-refund/.

[5] "Trevor Noah pokes fun at Bonang's book errors." Times Live, 11 Aug. 2017, www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2017-08-11-trevor-noah-pokes-fun-at-bonangs-book-errors/.

To assist with reading strategies, Smith and Watson (*A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*), compiled a toolkit for the analysis of autobiography. They urge us to consider the context or historical moment in which the narratives were written, published and circulated as well as the intended cultural meaning and contribution. They also pay attention to what the corpus of published works reveals about the political, social, cultural, linguistic and economic forces at play in that particular context. In analysing the construction of subjectivity, we are encouraged to pay attention to the kinds and features of the models of identity adopted by the narrator. In the South African context, subjects have many identity markers available to them including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and class.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

According to David Silverman (2013), "research problems are not neutral. How we frame a research problem will inevitably reflect a commitment to a particular model of how the world works" (49). This project's theoretical framework draws on the concepts and theories of celebrity capital, relationality, critical discourse analysis, encoding/decoding and theories of narratology.

Celebrity Capital

Olivier Driessens defines celebrity capital as accumulated media visibility or recognisability that results from recurrent media representations (543). Most well-known individuals receive attention and media coverage based on some "special qualities" like "being a great singer, a gifted actress, being photogenic or extraordinarily beautiful" (546). Celebrity capital can also be ascribed through self-promotion, family relationships (in the case of royals) or through notoriety. Driessens (543) argues that celebrity capital is not just a special category of symbolic capital but its own special kind of capital (see Bourdieu 1986).

In most instances, and this is where its usefulness comes in, celebrity capital is easily convertible into other resources, such as economic or political capital. Donald Trump's transition into politics is an example of this. This study draws on the work of Driessens on celebrity capital in reading Lira, Bonang Matheba, Basetsana Kumalo and Unathi Nkayi's use of life writing to not only tell their stories, but also position themselves in ways intended unlock resources and other forms of capital, as my study demonstrates in Chapter Three.

The Literary Marketplace

According to Sarah Brouillette, we are witnessing a remarkable expansion in the commercial production of literature (52). The number of titles published annually across the globe is growing and "the way manuscripts are acquired, turned into books, marketed and sold" (53) has evolved. Through commercialisation, publishing has assumed the characteristics of standard business (51), and as such, the overall functions of the publishing industry have grown "to include marketers, editors, agents and the organisation of the various subcontracted activities" (67) in addition to the traditional roles of "printing, binding, typesetting, and bookselling" (67). Another key development in publishing in recent years has "involved the status and positioning of authors" (63). Aggressive marketing and authorial branding through appearances and book signings have become necessary for books to do well; the names and personalities of authors "have become key focal points for the marketing of literary texts" (65).

Like Brouillette, Joe Moran outlines the absorption of the publishing industry "into a global entertainment and information industry" (35). This has led to what Moran describes as "the unrestrained reign of hype" (36) which is characterised by "lavish promotional campaigns, which give an unfair advantage to certain authors in the quest for public recognition" (41). The reign of hype creates and prioritises celebrity authors, those "whose name and fame have been built up to the point where reference to them, via mention, mediatized representation or live appearance, can serve as a promotional booster in itself" (41). Moran and Brouillette's mappings of the literary marketplace is useful to my study's interest in how authors such as Lesley Mofokeng, Sindiwe Magona, Mandy Wiener, Melinda Ferguson and Sarah Setlaelo packaged the life stories of Somizi Mhlongo, Thembi Mtshali-Jones, Robert Marawa and Kelly Khumalo respectively.

Relationality

In the field of psychology, relational-model theories hold a view of the self as one that is "shaped by and inevitably embedded within a matrix of relationships with other people" (Schapiro 2). These theories speak to relatedness and the human desire "to maintain our ties to others and to differentiate ourselves from them" (Schapiro 2). Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn Brewer identify three kinds of self-representations: an individual self, based on one's unique characteristics, a relational self "based on personalised bonds of attachment" and a

collective self, based on one's identification with a larger social group even where there are no "close personal relationships among group members" (2).

In autobiography, relationality emerges in discussions of life narratives and constructions of the self. Relationality is not reflected in self-constructions which draw on the notion of the universal self, which is self-centred and based on an "egoistic secular archetype" (Mason 321). Relationality is more common in women's life writing as it is more outward looking and relational in its presentation of the self; it does not conform to the universal self's self-centeredness and pursuit of a "climatic victory for one force" over another (321). Mason examines the pre-nineteenth-century life writings of Anne Broadstreet, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and Margaret Cavendish to demonstrate that each of these showcases "recorded patterns of relationship to others that allowed these women, each in her own characteristic way, to discover and delineate a self and to tell the story of that self even as it was being uncovered and coming into existence" (323). Women's life writing, according to Mary Mason, accommodates dual vocations, the "doubling of the self-image" as well as the "harmonious merger and identification with a collective consciousness" (323).

Relationality is an important concept in autobiographical studies and it has influenced how we approach women's life narratives, mindful of the ways in which "women present relationship to an 'other' as a constitutive element of self-revelation" (ibid). Similarly, according to Joannou Maroula (33), women's life writings reveal "the construction of personal identity in which investment in the communal is at least as strong as investment in the individualistic." This means, as Carolyn Steedman (4) suggests, that for women, "the narration of a self" cannot be understood in isolation from an 'other' it acknowledges, implicitly or explicitly, and with which it is in a constitutive relationship. Moreover, this 'other' may be either "a concrete individual or a generalised subject" (ibid). Some of these subjects, identified by Carole Boyce Davies ("Private Selves and Public Spaces"), are political struggle, family, social-cultural history and racial order. Adetayo Alabi (2005) identifies relationality in African autobiographies wherein the individual life "becomes a way of discussing… the relationship between the individual and the community" (5). Marciana Were (2019) uses the autobiographies of Nawal El Saadawi and Ayaan Hirsi Ali to "illustrate how African female autobiographers re-member and redefine their identities as relational to both maternal and paternal figures" (170) using the "narrative techniques of the filial voice for specific purposes" (183). Some of these purposes include unmasking problematic relationships with the state and problematising constructions of

daughterhood and womanhood (Were 183). The concept of relationality as a "rhetorical device" (Were 170) is useful for my reading of how black South African celebrities employ their positions in relation to the population, certain individuals, systems or institutions to explore their autobiographical identities.

Critical Discourse Analysis

My research is influenced by social constructionism which assumes "a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge" based on the premise that "the ways in which we understand and represent the world are historically and culturally specific" (Jørgensen and Phillips 6). Social constructionist theories seek to establish links between knowledge, social processes and social action (6). Critical discourse analysis is one of the theories located under the umbrella of social constructionism. Citing Michel Foucault, Jørgensen and Phillips define discourse as a "group of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (12). A study of discourse, according to Foucault, can determine the ways in which language use is occasioned or situated in the contexts in which it takes place (in Jørgensen and Phillips (118). Foucault used critical discourse analysis "to investigate the structure of different regimes of knowledge" as well as the "rules for what can and cannot be said" (Jørgensen and Phillips (13). This is made possible because "statements that are produced within a specific domain are rather similar and repetitive" (ibid).

Identity is made up of subjective positions facilitated by discourse/s. In other words, identity "is equivalent to identification with subject positions which discourses offer the individual" (Jørgensen and Phillips 42). Each subject position corresponds with "expectations about how to act, what to say and what not to say" (Jørgensen and Phillips 41). One of the ways this subject positioning is achieved is through interpellation which is the use of language to construct "a social position for the individual and thereby make him or her an ideological subject" (Jørgensen and Phillips 15). Interpellation occurs when one accepts how and when they are addressed. For example, when a woman responds to a child referring to her as "mum," then that woman has become interpellated by that identity (Jørgensen and Phillips 40).

To assist in the study of discourse, Norman Fairclough developed a three-dimensional model which proposes the consideration of the linguistic features of texts, processes related to their production and consumption (discursive practices) as well as "the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs" (Jørgensen and Phillips 68). In examining how it

operates in social practice, critical discourse analysis is used to investigate "how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text" (Jørgensen and Phillips 69). These texts, and the corresponding discourses, are reproduced through intertextuality, where references are made to other texts, or through drawing on earlier events. While the use of intertextuality anchors the meaning of texts, critical discourse analysis "ascribes a degree of agency to all social groups in the production and negotiation of meaning" (Jørgensen and Phillips 16 citing Gramsci) thus moving away from the notion that meaning is embedded in texts and not open to interpretation.

Encoding / Decoding Model

According to the encoding and decoding model by Stuart Hall, texts are polysemic and offer a variety of meanings. Writers and producers of texts have preferred readings of their texts. Different genres, in the form of "recognizable type, content and structure," are made possible through the "conventionalization" of texts, to conform to "a set of extremely tightly-coded rules" (Hall 6). The way genres are structured or encoded serves "to delimit its meanings within that specified field, and effects a 'closure,' so that a preferred meaning is suggested" (Hall 9). In engaging with the decoding of texts, Hall determined that there was no way to "ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning… [as] encoded by the producer" (9). Readers can go along with what may be the preferred meanings or they can adopt negotiated or oppositional reading strategies. Reading is "not only the capacity to identify and decode a certain number of signs, but also the subjective capacity to put them into a creative relation between themselves and with other signs" (Terni in Hall 140). The concepts of encoding/decoding, negotiated and oppositional readings are generative for the study as some of the texts offer representations which cannot be taken at face value when read alongside contrasting information in the public domain, as is usually the case with public figures.

Theories of Narratology

Theories of narratology are concerned with patterns or codes within a story and how lives are repackaged into stories. People are storytellers by nature and their "narratives provide access to identity and personality" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 7). People's stories are often constructed around "a core of facts or life events," and the "selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation" of the events relayed (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 8). These stories are subjective narrative constructions and may contain some distortions and omissions which

may not correspond to events as they occurred. The life story, as a narrative, allows subjects to "construct their identities and self-narratives from building blocks available in their common culture, above and beyond their individual experience" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 9).

Susan Lanser (1986) draws attention to the fact that "feminist insights about narrative have been … overlooked by narratology" (674). Lanser's work asserts the importance of a feminist narratology to highlight "the role of gender in the construction of narrative theory" (675). A feminist narratology, according to Lanser, "takes into account the contributions of women as both producers and interpreters of texts" (676). According to Kathy Mezei, the concept of narratology enables us to view life writing in terms of its "subject positions, cultural formation, the laws of genre, and the universality and stability of narrative forms" (5) and this relates to my study's interest in the construction of identity and the shaping of public discourse.

1.4 Methodology

I employ discourse and narrative analysis to interpret the selected texts. The texts are read both along and against the grain of the presented narratives; in other words, the texts are not decoded in accordance with the preferred meaning embedded by the authors. In addition to that, where applicable, focal texts are read alongside historical debates and relevant current affairs material (including media content). This enables me to locate the texts in their social and historical contexts.

Discourse Analysis

According to Touria Drid (2010), discourse analysis as a method assists researchers to "uncover the regularities of language that surpass the sentence" (20). The focus of discourse analysis extends beyond the texts and considers the context, that is, the broader social situation in which language is used (20). Coherence is considered a strong marker of the presence of a particular discourse, as such, discourse "cannot be perceived by examining its constituent parts… [but] structured relationships among the parts that result in something new" (Schiffrin in Drid 21).

This study adopts a functional approach to discourse analysis. This requires that we examine "the regularities which utterances show when situated in contexts" (Drid 22) as a great deal of

significance can be obtained from the analysis of "the situation [which] justifies some linguistic choices … made by language users" (23). According to this approach, the role of the discourse analyst encompasses investigating "the relationship of utterances to the situations or environments in which they are said or could be said" (23).

Narrative Analysis

As discussed in the sections above, celebrities use narratives to craft their identities and life stories. Narrative analysis views personal narratives as "meaning-making units of discourse" which allow narrators to "interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce the past as it was" (Riessman 705). Narrative analysis, as a specialised form of discourse analysis, "searches for the way participants make sense of their lives by representing them in story form" (Henning 122). Elizabeth Henning (123) provides some guiding questions to assist in narrative analysis. They are:

- In what kind of a story does a narrator place herself and those about whom she narrates?
- How is this story a part of a larger societal narrative? What discourses are evident in the story?
- How are the coherence and cohesion of the story maintained? Why is the teller sharing this story?
- How is the story plotted and how is conflict presented? Are there epiphanies in the story?
- What is significant about the beginning and the end of the story?

1.5 Description of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is the current introductory chapter, which outlines the aim of the study to explore the possibilities that the auto/biographical medium affords black South African celebrities for identity formation, self-reflection, public commentary and resource accumulation. It introduces, as the theoretical framework, concepts of cultural capital, relationality, critical

discourse analysis, encoding/decoding and narratology. It also maps out key debates in scholarship on life writing.

Chapter 2: Becoming, Unbecoming and Black Celebrity Life

This chapter focuses on self-representation in the autobiography. It examines constructions of subjectivity and identity by the celebrities. The focal texts were selected for the variety of self-construction narratives they present, which include narratives of overcoming the challenges of being a black woman in South Africa, growth towards economic success, triumph over addiction and survival. Among the questions it asks are: How have black South African celebrities used autobiography to reflect on and construct their identities and subjectivities? How do subjects identify, locate and describe themselves? Are there coherent and consistent narratives at play? What discursive strategies are used to construct identities?

Focal texts:

1. *Unbecoming to Become* by Ayanda Mangubane Borotho
2. *The Race to be Myself* by Caster Semenya
3. *I Ran for My Life* by Kabelo Mabalane and Nechama Brodie
4. *Reclaiming the Soil: A Black Girl's Struggle to Find her African Self* by Rosie Motene

Chapter 3: Celebrity Autobiography and Forms of Capital

This chapter seeks to analyse the ways celebrities have used the autobiographical medium to unlock different forms of capital. It identifies the kinds of self-representation and narrative strategies used by selected celebrities to align, increase or cement their cultural capital, commercial value, position and bargaining power in different contexts. How does the autobiography lend itself to the unlocking of different forms of capital? What opportunities, in the world and literary marketplace, does the publishing of autobiography afford selected celebrities? How do these auto/biographies fit in to the subjects' self-positionings in different marketplaces?

Focal texts:

1. *Making HerStory: A Decade of Achievements* by Lira, Clyde Meela and Robin C. Kohl
2. *Bassie: My Journey of Hope* by Basetsana Kumalo

3. *I Keep Learning* by Unathi Nkayi and Kabomo
4. *From A to B* by Bonang Matheba and Gugu Mhlungu

Chapter 4: Private Lives, Public Discourse

This chapter investigates how autobiography provides a platform for black South African celebrities to draw on their personal life stories to comment on public discourse. The selected texts attempt to influence public discourse on a range of social issues, including depression, addiction, emotional abuse and cross-generational patterns of sexual violence in South Africa. Some of the questions the chapter explores are: How does the autobiographical form lend itself to commentary on public discourse? How have celebrities used their life stories to intervene in public debates? What issues emerge from a close reading of selected autobiographies? What do we make of public responses to these narratives when they were published?

Focal texts:

1. *Eyebags & Dimples* by Bonnie Henna
2. *Remembering* by Andile Gaelesiwe
3. *When Hope Whispers* by Zoleka Mandela
4. *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* by Pamela Nomvete

Chapter 5: Whose Story is it Anyway? Authorial Authority in Black Celebrity Life Writing

This chapter focuses on authorship, narrative authority and autobiography. The focal texts were selected for their presentation of a variety of author-subject dynamics. In the selected texts, we find instances of a man writing a woman's story or white people narrating a black person's experiences. The authors were also selected for the range of professions they represent, specifically, entertainment journalism, academia, artist management and publishing. In engaging with the texts, this chapter examines the concept of authorship, authority, the position of the subject in relation to the author/s, as well as the choices of language, voice and narrative strategy. It also considers the motivating factors behind the different collaborations.

Focal texts:

1. *Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit - The Somizi Mhlongo Story* by Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng
2. *Gqimm Shelele - The Robert Marawa Story* by Mandy Wiener
3. *Theatre Road: My Story* by Sindiwe Magona and Thembi Mtshali-Jones
4. *The Kelly Khumalo Story* by Melinda Ferguson and Sarah Setlaelo

CHAPTER 2: BECOMING, UNBECOMING AND BLACK CELEBRITY LIFE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with self-presentation and how it plays out in autobiographical texts by selected black South African celebrities. Most auto/biographies have some features in common: protagonists tend to share details about their birth stories, childhoods, reflection on their upbringing and meaningful recollections about loved ones like parents, grandparents, siblings etc. Each narration however, branches off into a number of trajectories and outcomes allowing the different subjects to establish certain aspects of their identities through writing. In this chapter I explore constructions of identity and strategies of self-representation in the autobiographies of four black South African celebrities: Kabelo Mabalane (*I Ran for My Life),* Ayanda Mangubane Borotho *(Unbecoming to Become),* Caster Semenya (*The Race to be Myself)* and Rosie Motene (*Reclaiming the Soil: A Black Girl's Struggle to Find her African Self)*. I demonstrate how each writer is very intentional around the construction of their autobiographical self in order to achieve specific identity related objectives. I posit that the selected texts are implicated in the construction of particular identities for the four protagonists and that they should be read as strategic moves to protect, repair or build their reputations in the public domain they occupy as celebrities.

2.2. Kabelo Mabalane's Conversion Narrative

Autobiographical life writing as we have established in the previous chapter, helps authors to tell their life journeys in a textual form. The first text I shall consider is *I Ran for My Life* (2015) by Kabelo Mabalane and Nechama Brodie. As a public figure, Mabalane's story is of interest to a range of overlapping publics made up of journalists, his fans, family, friends and associates. Due to this, his life story is told to an engaged audience who probably already know of him. As a celebrity, he is subject to the rules of the celebrity terrain where many private details are widely shared and speculated upon. Celebrity subjects feature in multiple overlapping landscapes, namely, the field of their work, marketing campaigns, traditional media (often tabloids) and social media. As a result, they "regularly inspire (multiple) biographical treatments across different media" (Mayer and Novak 149) which compete with each other for the story of the real Kabelo Mabalane. Autobiography helps him to navigate and negotiate his 'known-ness.'

A perusal of the chapter titles in his memoir suggests some deep reflection by Mabalane on a range of issues and topics he considers important for readers to know. The titles, such as "I am the Monster," "Solo to Sober," "Endings and Interventions," signal a story built around his identity at different stages of his journey. In addition to the chapter titles, the sequencing indicates that the story progresses in a particular way. The title, *I Ran for My Life*, together with the chapter titles and sequencing, invite us to read the story as both a confessional, and a conversion narrative. The template of a classic conversion narrative follows a formula whereby the protagonist narrates a tale of their "descent into darkness" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 838), to a crisis whose resolution leads to the formation of a new, faith-based identity. In the conversion narrative, the protagonist presents distinct and contrasting identities based on two lives, namely, "a life before conversion and a new life after conversion" (Dumanig, David and Dealwis 1).

In the next few sections, I examine Mabalane's choice of the conversion narrative as the format for this life story, how he frames it and the extent to which he achieves the conventional outcomes anticipated by the conversion narrative. The usefulness of this kind of narrative, especially for public figures who need it, is that it presents opportunities for reputation makeovers.

In the world of celebrity, reputation is currency. Some celebrity actions, utterances and associations have proven to be career limiting. There are celebrities who have lost social media followers, fans, jobs, and endorsement deals because of public *faux pas*.[6] What constitutes a *faux pas* is determined by the timing, environment and social context. In some spaces, skimpily dressed women are frowned upon and considered inappropriate, while in others, they may be considered highly attractive. Similarly, some communities condemn infidelity while others consider it tolerable. Oftentimes utterances or actions which "break the loose norms of social acceptability" (Velasco 1) or those linked to greater social ills are judged more harshly. At this temporal juncture in South Africa, public figures accused of violent acts against their partners tend to lose some of their social standing due to the spotlight on Gender Based Violence. In recent history, such figures include Arthur 'King of Kwaito' Mafokate and Thato 'DJ Fresh' Sikwane accused of battery and rape respectively. Similarly in the USA, Robert 'R' Kelly, who was known as the pied piper of RnB, is 'cancelled' as a result of a global protest movement,

[6] South African examples include Somizi Mhlongo, DJ Tira and DJ Fresh

#MuteRKelly, for sexually abusing minors.[7] Previously, it used to be that any publicity is good publicity, but this is no longer necessarily the case in the age of cancel culture. Cancel culture, as it is used here, "is a form of public shaming initiated on social media to deprive someone [a public figure] of their usual clout or attention" (Velasco 1). Nowadays, many DJs shy away from playing R Kelly's songs because he is cancelled in the eyes of the public. In another notable case, singer Chrisette Michelle was cancelled by the African American community after agreeing to perform at Donald Trump's Inauguration in 2007, when many others declined.[8] Black radio stations stopped playing her songs and fans boycotted her music performances. Such is the influence and extent of cancel culture in the twenty-first century. The phenomenon of cancel culture is important to bear in mind as we engage with Mabalane's past actions which would warrant the publishing of a conversion narrative as part of his reputation management.

Mabalane, by his own admission, engaged in many activities which should have gotten him cancelled. His narrative documents how the former bad boy and self-proclaimed Pantsula for Life changed his life.

Before looking into his past transgressions let me go back a few steps and discuss our protagonist's claim to fame. From the late nineteen-nineties, the South African public was introduced to Kabelo Mabalane as one third of the sensational kwaito music trio known as TKZee (based on their initials Tokollo, Kabelo and Zwai) whose hit songs include "Shibobo" and "Phalafala." Often compared to American hip-hop, kwaito is "an authentic, uniquely South African post-apartheid musical and cultural phenomenon" which originated in South Africa's townships and inner-city landscapes (Vilakazi 12). From the early nineties, this genre gave young Black South Africans like Mabalane the means to negotiate the socio-political limitations on their self-expression as black youth in a post-apartheid society characterised by race-based inequality (See Vilakazi 2012; Livermon 2020). Rangoato Hlasane and Bhekizizwe Peterson describe kwaito as,

> an innovative musical, visual and social practice that is the result of the agency, resilience and creative acumen of black youth and their relentless

[7] Tenz, Courtney and Louisa Schaefer. "R. Kelly cancelled: What to do with art by predatory men?" *DW*, 26 Feb. 2019, www.dw.com/en/r-kelly-cancelled-what-to-do-with-art-made-by-predatory-men/a-47695769.
[8] Wootson Jr., Cleve R. "A black R&B artist hoped singing for Trump would build a bridge. It derailed her career instead. *Washington Post*, 18 Jan. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/01/18/black-rb-artist-hoped-singing-trump-would-build-bridge-it-derailed-her-career-instead/.

> commitment to explore the totality of material, socio-political, bodily and affective experiences, power relations, anxieties and dreams that are a part of their everyday urban sociality (360).

Kwaito was commended for the good it did for the nineties black youth but also criticised for its well documented associations with reckless behaviour, misogyny, violence and drugs. In his earlier work on the genre, Peterson notes that "kwaito has been associated with or blamed for a wide range of social-ills and acts of social deviancy and criminality that are attributed to young people" (Peterson 198). Similarly, Xavier Livermon says kwaito is "a male-dominated art form entrenched in certain forms of masculine gender performance and patriarchy" (location 3147) and that "the association between kwaito music and 'the thug' has been prominent from the beginning" (location 3192). At the peak of the genres popularity in the early 2000s, many male kwaito artists lived like rock stars, and as such, the lyrics of many popular kwaito hits are apolitical with a heavy focus on partying, fashion and fast cars. As one of the pioneers of kwaito, Mabalane is implicated in some of its controversies. At the time of writing, kwaito artists Sipho 'Bricks' Ndlovu and Thulani 'Pitch Black Afro' Ngcobo are serving jail time for rape and uxoricide respectively. Many prominent kwaito stars, like Bonginkosi 'Zola' Dlamini and Mandla 'Mampintsha' Maphumulo, have faced allegations of women abuse. Mabalane is part of this generation of artists, and has experienced his fair share of bad publicity over the years. Consequently, his early relationship with the media was not an easy one. At the height of his fame as a young kwaito star, journalists would describe him as "angry, insolent and controversial;"[9] he was "notorious for his arrogance" and "nasty attitude" (ibid).

In *I Ran for My Life*, Mabalane narrates a descent into darkness (imagery usually associated with the religious discourse of darkness vs light). He recounts in detail his many experiences and poor choices under the influence of drugs and alcohol both of which he admits he consumed in large quantities. Considering South Africa's high rate of alcohol-related road deaths,[10] Mabalane is lucky not to have become a road death statistic or killed somebody, which he almost did, according to this confession,

[9] Madikwa, Zenoyise. "Controversial Kwaito star almost broke." *Sowetan Live*, 28 Oct. 2008, www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2008-10-28-controversial-kwaito-star-almost-broke/.
[10] "South Africa has some of the heaviest drinkers in the world." *Business Tech*, 10 Aug. 2019, businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/332909/south-africa-has-some-of-the-heaviest-drinkers-in-the-world/.

> Another night, I was on ecstasy, and I had been drinking. I was driving, heading towards Sandton, tripping off my head, drunk, in my friend's 4x4. The robot went amber and I guess I floored it. And suddenly there was this pizza delivery guy on a motorbike. As I hit him, I just remember this pizza flying all over the place. I ran to a garage across the road (Mabalane 64).

In the incident cited above, Mabalane knocked a motorcyclist down and fled the scene. With that one accident, he could have killed a man. It is this kind of behaviour and callousness which contributes to South Africa's road carnage statistics. On average, 2000 people are killed on our roads annually. Drunken driving is a contributing factor to these high figures. In 2016, the South African Medical Association declared the country's alcohol consumption levels a "national disaster"[11] and Mabalane was part of this disaster. Under the influence of alcohol, he demonstrated the "aggressive impulses and loss of behavioural control" (World Health Organization 11) identified by medical researchers. In addition to the public risk he posed when behind the wheel, Mabalane also makes reference to a "baseball bat phase" (Mabalane 94), where he would frequently hit or threaten innocent people with a baseball bat he kept in the boot of his car for precisely this purpose: "I bought it with intention" (71) he confesses. As a frequent drunk driver and violent man, he was admittedly a menace and part of a bigger societal problem.

Mabalane creates a spectacle of this phase of his life by adopting a dramatic narrative style. He plays up and emphasizes how bad he was, effectively setting the scene for his remarkable conversion. His conversion narrative would not achieve the desired effect if he downplayed his former recklessness and disregard for authority.

In the text, Mabalane mulls over his guilt and says, "maybe I am contributing to that myth of famous people who always get away with crap" (88). As part of his conversion (which requires full disclosure) Mabalane reveals, in what appears to be a strategic disclosure, that he "hit a woman once" (88). He does not reveal when or under what circumstances. This makes me suspect that this very limited disclosure is a strategy to reveal enough so that it is not a secret which can be used against him in the future, but not enough to get him cancelled (the woman's identity and the extent of her injuries have since been made public).

[11] "Alcohol abuse in South Africa - a national crisis." *Soul City Institute*, www.soulcity.org.za/news-events/news/alcohol-abuse-in-south-africa-a-national-crisis.

In Mabalane's world, not getting caught is the end game, confirmed in a chapter titled, "I am the Monster," in which he says, "these men we see as monsters, it's also something that can be closer than you know. You can be the monster. You just got lucky that you didn't get caught" (88). He admits to feeling sympathetic towards Molemo 'Jub Jub' Maarohanye and Oscar Pistorius, celebrities who were convicted for their crimes. The former killed children in a drug fuelled road racing incident while the latter served a jail sentence for the murder of a romantic partner (which he still maintains was an accident). Reflecting on their cases, Mabalane admits, "I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that it could have been me" (88). With these revelations, Mabalane is intentionally painting a picture of just how bad he was in the past. According to co-author, Nechama Brodie,[12] "he [Mabalane] wasn't afraid of speaking about things he'd done in his life. He was amazing with his detail." Full disclosure is a characteristic of the conversion narrative and his collaboration with Brodie, a feminist journalist and scholar whose work focuses on femicide and gender-based violence, lends credibility to his claims.

Mabalane uses his narrative to frame his dark phase as a mistake and a personal crisis. Instead of glorifying his reputation as a bad boy, he uses the text to express regret, which is another key feature of the religious conversion narrative: the protagonist must demonstrate introspection, self-judgement and remorse. Regret must be expressed to facilitate new ways of being, and to enable the converted, like Mabalane, to forge an identity "structured around a radical transformation from a faulty 'before' self to an enlightened 'after' self" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 2115). As the conversion story follows the protagonist's path from a previous to a new self, it prompts "reflections of who one is, who one was, and where one is heading" (McGinty 6). This repositioning, reflected in the title *I Ran for my Life*, signals, from the perspective of the narrating I, the musings of a converted man.

In autobiography, identity, as previously explained, is conveyed through the narrating I and the narrated I. The narrated I is located in the past, and is "the version of the self that the narrating I chooses to constitute through recollection for the reader" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 724) and is conjured by the narrating I which speaks about "there" and "then" from the present tense (at the time of writing) (McGinty 42). As the protagonist and author of *I Ran for my Life*, Mabalane occupies the roles of both the narrated and the narrating I. In a conversion narrative specifically, the role of the narrating I is to make "a subjective

[12] Makhoba, Ntombizodwa. "Kabalo Mabalane: Rebel with a new cause." *News24*, 6 Oct. 2015, www.news24.com/News24/kabelo-mabalane-rebel-with-a-new-cause-20151006.

evaluation" of the conversion (McGinty 43). As such, Mabalane uses the narrating I to consolidate his disparate identities and "to assign personal meaning to the changes in life and to mediate a sense of continuity" (McGinty 33). Conversion narratives showcase the significant shifts in the "personal beliefs, quests, and desires" (McGinty 9), of their protagonists and "demonstrate a personally and socially recognized transformation of the self" (McGinty 7). According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (cited in McGinty 33), "a successful alternation [conversion] requires, among other things, that the old reality be reinterpreted within the apparatus of the new reality" through formulations such as "then I thought... now I know." Towards this end, Mabalane frequently employs the narrating I to evaluate and distance himself from his former self. Accordingly, he shares reflections such as, "I started to think clearly about myself – and I realised I was actually a bit of a nasty person. I wasn't as great as I thought I was" (94). A significant part of the conversion narrative's success lies in the narrator's performance of atonement and humility.

Readers learn that Mabalane's conversion is mental, physical and spiritual. First, he goes through drug rehabilitation for his addictions. Afterwards he deals with his physical state. He states that he got tired of being overweight as a result of an unhealthy lifestyle, and resolved to alter his body image from "being fat to being a sex symbol" (Mabalane 123). He transforms his body by taking up running which leads him to participate in and complete the approximately 90.2km Comrades Marathon. Athletics becomes an important part of his life, evidenced by the last seventeen chapters of the text dedicated to the topic of running. These chapters contain motivational tips, training programmes, guides, and nutritional advice for runners. His new expertise in running anchors his conversion and puts him in a position to attract new fans, clients and corporate endorsement deals in the fitness community. The cover image of Mabalane in his runner mode and gear, consolidates this positioning.

From a spiritual perspective, Mabalane's autobiography tells the story of his repentance and salvation through Christianity. In the tradition of the classic conversion narrative, his story maps "the process, gradual or sudden by which a self … [previously] divided, consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities" (James 157 in Ullman 191). He opens up about his decision to commit himself to God, enrol at bible school and become a Pastor at Rhema Church.

Considering his background and conversion, Mabalane's life as narrated in *I Ran for My Life* ought to be read as a "social performance intended to reassure both the individual and others in order to facilitate a reintegration of the penitent into the community" (Horbury 585). Through its publication, Mabalane appears to have negotiated for himself a second chance resulting in "an alternate and desirable standing in [the] community" (Ayometzi 45). Mabalane himself confirmed *I Ran for My Life's* conversion strategy in an interview, saying "the title itself tells it all, I ran away from all the things that were not doing me any good, like my battle with substance abuse and the highs and lows of the music industry … the book [touches] on faith and how that helped me transform to who I am today, so I ran for my life towards the things that would build me."[13] Indeed, by the conclusion of the story he has arrived at a new faith-based identity which is currently reflected in his public persona and on his social media platforms. On his Instagram account, for example, he describes himself as #Pastor KabeloMabalane #KingAndPriest.[14] Similarly, his X (previously Twitter) biography describes him as the 'Son of the King!', a popular Christian reference to the kingdom of God. These bios demonstrate that he is intentional about using social media to consolidate and promote his makeover.

The public and the media have embraced the new Mabalane. He is seen as a role model and makes headlines for positive reasons, like, "Kabelo Mabalane celebrates being sober for 21 years"[15] or "Kabelo Mabalane ran from Joburg to Durban to help feed 10,000 kids for a year."[16] In 2019, four years after the release of *I Ran for My Life*, he launched Kumo (named after his son Khumo), a health and wellness store, in Johannesburg.[17] Kumo's vision is to be "an inspirational lifestyle brand that inspires people to fulfil their potential through the discipline and passion of sport, and ultimately (as a result) to transform their lives to become the best they can be."[18] He has turned his life around and has been publicly rewarded for it, as illustrated by his brand endorsement deals with leading sports brands. According to Ezra Horbury (601),

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[13] Ncokazi, Zipo-Zenkosi. "Muso pens his life story." *Dispatch Live*, 14 Nov. 2015, www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2015-11-14-muso-pens-his-life-story/.
[14] Mathobela, Phuti. "Meet Pastor Kabelo Mabalane!", *Daily Sun*, 19 Nov. 2019, www.dailysun.co.za/Celebs/meet-pastor-kabelo-mabalane-20191119.
[15] Gaanakgomo, Constance. "Kabelo Mabalane celebrates being sober for 21 years." *Times Live*, 3 Sep. 2023, www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2023-09-03-kabelo-mabalane-celebrates-being-sober-for-21-years/.
[16] Seemela, Masego. "Kabelo Mabalane ran from Joburg to Durban to help feed 10,000 kids for a year." *Times Live*, 22 Dec. 2022, www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2020-12-22-kabelo-mabalane-ran-from-joburg-to-durban-to-help-feed-10000-kids-for-a-year/.
[17] "Kabelo Mabalane launches a health and wellness store Kumo." *Yo Mzansi*, 30 May 2019, www.yomzansi.com/2019/05/30/kabelo-mabalane-kumo-health-and-wellness-retail-store-sandton/.
[18] Chiothamisi, Thomas. "Business Owned by Kabelo Mabalane." *Start Up Mag*, //startupmag.co.za/2021/05/business-owned-by-kabelo-mabalane/.

"there are few prodigals for whom the arc of riot, repentance, and forgiveness does not leave them with a net benefit" and, as Mabalane's story demonstrates, "to fall and be redeemed proves better – socially, financially, and even morally – than to never fall" (ibid).

2.3 Ayanda Borotho's Autobiographical Manifesto

In this section, I demonstrate that Borotho, a television actress, has very specific ideas around identity and is very intentional in the construction of her autobiographical and public identity. I explore how Ayanda Borotho uses her autobiography, *Unbecoming to Become* (2019), to position and distinguish herself in South African public imaginaries. At 420 pages, Borotho's self-published offering is the longest of all the 16 texts considered in this study. She has a lot to say, which in itself is part of the message. She joins the increasing number of black women taking up space in the public sphere, and South Africa's predominantly white literary marketplace.

Unbecoming to Become combines storytelling with poetry, commandments, statistics, history lessons and affirmations. This amalgamation results in an unconventional autobiographical text. Caren Kaplan introduced the notion of out-law genres to classify unconventional autobiographical texts. Citing, for example, women's prison memoirs and testimonio, Kaplan elaborated on how these texts bend rules and disrupt the conventions of traditional autobiography. These out-law genres can take many forms and one of these, defined by Sidonie Smith, is the "autobiographical manifesto". At a high level, one can describe the autobiographical manifesto as one in which the protagonist takes on certain societal issues (environmental, political, economic etc.) and uses their writing to advocate for awareness, action and/or change. The autobiographical manifesto illustrates subject agency through writing that is "purposeful, bold, contentious [and] contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, the old politics" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 308). I demonstrate that *Unbecoming to Become*, through its extensive engagement with "experiential politics" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 307) is an autobiographical manifesto. Smith outlines several objectives of the autobiographical manifesto: to appropriate/contest sovereignty; to bring certain issues to light; to announce or perform publicly; to speak for a group; to speak to the future (in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 309 – 315). The autobiographical manifesto "always foregrounds the relationship of subjectivity to power" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 315) and in

this regard, functions as "an arena in which the revolutionary subject can insist on identity in service to an emancipatory politics" (*Life Writing in the Long Run* 308). I will show that Borotho's narrative aims to "issue the call for a new, revolutionary subject" (*Life Writing in the Long Run* 315) and offer "an agenda for a changed relationship to subjectivity, identity and the body" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 308).

From the onset, the overall cause or agenda for this autobiographical manifesto is signalled through the titles of the different chapters, such as: "Dethroned," "Becoming Damaged Goods," "Makotification," "#MeToo," "Raising a Rebel Queen," "Divorcing Me," "Becoming His," "Divine Feminine, not Feminist." These chapter titles speak to a variety of experiences, positions and labels many black South African women, including myself, are familiar with.

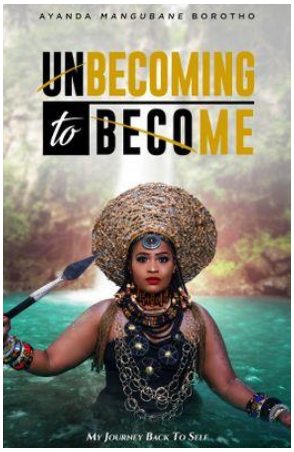
From the chapter titles, one can reasonably make the inference that *Unbecoming to Become* addresses issues pertaining to women abuse, motherhood, marriage and identity. Based on this, I read it as a manifesto for the empowerment and benefit of black South African women. Such an endeavour is in line with what decades of scholarly work has discovered about women's autobiography: that it offers considerable insights into "women's life issues, growing up female, coming to voice, affiliation, sexuality and textuality, the life-cycle" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 6). Women's autobiography, in particular, tends to direct the attention of readers "to the historically and culturally specific discourses of identity through which women become speaking subjects" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 37). Through *Unbecoming to Become*, we witness Borotho, like many women before her, taking advantage of autobiographical writing as a means of "negotiating the past, reflecting on identity, and critiquing cultural norms and narratives" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 2).

Unbecoming to Become is located in post-apartheid South Africa, and as such, reflects some of the shifts seen in South African life writing. Prior to 1994, *black* South African autobiographers, regardless of gender, engaged primarily with the "social function of countering [racist] hegemonic definitions of identity and social roles" (Ngwenya, "Ideology and Form" 222). In comparison, all the texts selected for this study have been produced by a generation of politically free black writers who write as autonomous individuals and not as 'natives' or 'kaffirs' as envisioned by the apartheid state. They are not, on a political level, compelled to "occupy subject-positions imposed on them by dominant discourses and social institutions" (Ngwenya, "Ideology and Form" 3) or spend their time challenging these

impositions. They write and express themselves outside of the confines of the more established struggle, exile and prison narratives.

Unbecoming to Become was published in 2019, 25 years into a democratic South Africa marred by high levels of poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence and cross-cutting inequality.[19] As of 2024, many South Africans continue the fight for equality, dignity and a decent standard of living. Black women in particular, regardless of whether they are from the townships, villages or suburbs, continue to bear the brunt of patriarchy, traditional norms and social expectations. This social background forms the backdrop to Borotho's autobiography and the rationale behind her manifesto. Her autobiographical performance then, is "a product of and a response to social, historical and cultural conditions" (Ngwenya, "Ideology and Form" 14). As an autobiographical manifesto, it approaches "autobiographical self-representation in relation to socio-historical factors such as the writer's class position, the historical period covered by the autobiography and the common concerns, attitudes, values and interests shared by the writer's social group" (Ngwenya, "Ideology and Form" 187). With this in mind, I approach *Unbecoming to Become* as "an articulation of the struggles, failures and achievements of a South African black woman who is both typical and unique" (ibid).

My first engagement with the text is through its cover page which has been constructed to carry certain meanings. Through the use of colour and design, the words Becoming Me are embedded in the main title, *Unbecoming to Become*. The words Becoming Me are written in a contrasting colour which makes them stand out to create the double naming effect seen below.



[19] See more in *Inequality Trends in South Africa: A Multidimensional Diagnostic of Inequality*, Statistics South Africa, 2019, www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-19/Report-03-10-192017.pdf.

The subtitle, *My Journey Back to Self*, read in conjunction with the main title *Unbecoming to Become*, signals that this text primarily engages with who the subject is and aspires to be. The idea of being able to journey 'back to self' taps into the discourse of popular psychology focused on self-awareness and self-help. According to Louise Woodstock (2006), "authors of self-help books … construct their authority based on personal narratives of self-transformation" (21). Such authors subscribe to notions of positive thinking and that a "change in the thoughts of an individual will in turn change the shape of the world" (324). According to Eva Illouz, when "the language of psychotherapy left the realm of experts and moved to the realm of popular culture … it interlocked and combined with various other key categories of American culture, such as the pursuit of happiness, self-reliance, and the belief in the perfectability of the self" (155). Over time, this crossover "has produced a [therapeutic] narrative of self that has deeply transformed autobiographical discourse, that is, how life stories are conceived, told, and negotiated" (Illouz 155). To Illouz, Oprah Winfrey is an excellent example of the application of the self-help and self-improvement discourse in autobiographical representations. Illouz argues that Winfrey's "vast cultural and economic enterprise has depended on her capacity to perform her inner self … to convince her audience of the authenticity of her suffering and self-overcoming" (179). The implications for identity, according to Illouz (180), is that "in becoming therapeutic, the self becomes both more private (centered on its inner interiority) and more public (in possession of a language to make private life accountable and subject to the objective evaluation of others). Winfrey's teachings, reflect a New Age culture with a racialized sister sensibility to create a unique female centered ministry for her largely female audience" (33). Similarly, *Unbecoming to Become* "tells women they have value, that their words, their stories, are important" (Driedger in Crowley 45). Self-help and self-management narratives "place a tremendous power in and responsibility on the self" (Woodstock 321), suggesting that the "answers to life's difficulties are to be found in the personal interior rather than in the social surround" (325). We see this at play in Borotho's discussions on marriage and submission wherein she presents self-determination as the answer to gender-based discrimination, a stance which sometimes downplays the historical, structural and institutional factors beyond the control of women.

In addition to the title, Borotho also uses the visual elements on the cover image to signal the contents of her autobiographical manifesto. On the cover, she is depicted in a warrior pose holding aloft a traditional Zulu spear. This symbolises her readiness for battle against patriarchy and her Zulu culture's oppressive tendencies. Her culture is represented by her

accessories - beaded Zulu bracelets and *isicholo*, a traditional hat worn by married Zulu women. Her *isicholo* is unconventional in that it is not constructed from fabric, but from a shiny metal which lends it the appearances of a crown. Borotho is half submerged in a pool of water, but her facial expression and posture indicate that she is not adrift or in any danger. In some instances, water symbolises and is commonly viewed as "a source of life, as an instrument of purification and as a locus of regeneration" (Tounouga and Brock 283). The flawless make-up (eyelash extensions, red lipstick, sparkling eyeshadow, defined brows etc.) presents a modern feminine aesthetic. Inside the text are descriptions which confirm and are congruent with the meanings encoded in the narrative's cover's page. For instance, Borotho describes herself as "a black African woman and not just a black African woman but a black African woman born in South Africa with Zulu roots" (352). *Unbecoming to Become* is written specifically from the perspective of Borotho as a Zulu woman occupying the role/s of daughter, granddaughter, mother, wife and public figure (amongst others). Borotho inserts herself in familiar conversations and debates amongst women, and uses this background to articulate what it means to be a woman in this social context. She sheds light on a range of private and public experiences, and through her autobiographical self, performs and asserts the "politicisation of the private and the personalisation of the public" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 312).

Borotho, born to the Ngubane family, is the first born of three children and the only girl. She begins her narrative in childhood, indicating that she grew up in an equitable home with "no idea of the ideology of patriarchy" (Borotho 17) until her paternal grandmother, "unknowingly introduced [her] to the reality of this world" (ibid). The grandmother demonstrated and informed Borotho that, to the Ngubane family, her value as a female was beneath that of her younger brothers and that "no amount of love, service or taking care of her could change that" (30). This marks the first time Borotho felt "insignificant by virtue of being female" (30). According to Zulu tradition, the family lineage is passed down through boys and not girls. While Borotho acknowledges that her grandmother "was simply articulating what she knew to be the reality of many women in this world, of those who came before her and the millions who came after her" (33), she experienced a deep "hurt from knowing [she] was not as important as the boys" (38). By sharing these experiences, she foregrounds the inequalities of a society where "girls are inevitably born into a power dynamic that automatically places them inferior to boys" (ibid). Throughout the narrative, she critiques a range of societal norms or practices which normalise, serve and entrench patriarchy. These include the practice *yokuzila*

(mourning) which compels widows to wear black when the same is not a requirement for widowers (25 – 27), the fact that surnames are passed down through male kinship (35 - 39), the gender pay gap (125), objections to women breastfeeding freely in public (238 - 240), toxic masculinity in the entertainment industry (295 – 297), rape (301 - 314) and assault (315 – 324).

One of the key objectives of Borotho's manifesto is the disruption of patriarchy. Towards this end, she cleverly uses the prologue and epilogue to frame her narrative. Consider the prologue:

> *Dear God,*
>
> *I have a question.*
>
> *God: Ask child.*
>
> *Ayanda: Is it true that you created me in Your image and likeness, would it be true that You manifest Yourself in creation twice? First as a superior being in men and second as an inferior being in women?*
>
> *God: Who told you that?*
>
> *Ayanda: The world God.*
>
> *God: Do you believe them?*
>
> *Ayanda: Well, no, but it's hard not to when the world is the way it is.*
>
> *God: I see.*
>
> *Ayanda: What should I do God?*
>
> *God: Find yourself.*
>
> *Ayanda: Pardon me God? I don't know what that means.*
>
> *God: Go on a journey to find yourself. There where you find yourself, you will find Me and you will find your answer also* (Borotho 9).

Now consider the epilogue:

> *Ayanda: I found her God.*
>
> *God: And …?*
>
> *Ayanda: She's everything that I knew her to be.*

God: And what did you know her to be?

Ayanda: Your image and likeness God.

God: You were always in the original state I created you in Queen. The world just gave you different eyes to those I gave you. Promise me this …

Ayanda: What God?

…

God: Go and tell my people who they are.

Ayanda: How?

God: Write a book that will set my girls and women free of the world (Borotho 419).

Borotho employs the prologue and epilogue to declare that she considers God to be the highest authority in all matters pertaining to humankind. This is her way of reminding readers that all social hierarchies are man-made and not determined by God (as per 'His' refutation). She introduces a feminist interpretation of the biblical story of creation to argue for gender equality and uses it to advance and anchor her transformative agenda. In pursuit of its objectives, the autobiographical manifesto engages "the ideological systems pressing specific identities on specific persons" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 312) and "contest[s] dominant discourses surrounding the subject, discourses through which the subject is objectified…" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 313) which is what Borotho is doing in her prologue and epilogue. Through them, she establishes and "offers a point of departure for the current generation to resist a former generation imposing its multifarious technologies of identity" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 357). Accordingly, she uses the epilogue to rationalise her claims to equality and self-ownership, "I owe no one anything … I belong to no man but God" she asserts (Borotho 419).

Borotho's navigation and critique of social systems includes the interrogation of certain titles. She rejects titles like '[celebrity] it girl' 334 – 337 and 'i-straight / main chick' (62 – 66). Other titles like *makoti* (daughter-in-law), she attempts to negotiate. One title she adopts and embraces wholeheartedly is queen. In the epilogue, even God (as imagined by the author), addresses her as 'Queen'. Queen is a recurring title and metaphor throughout *Unbecoming to Become.* As indicated earlier, the hat (*isicholo*) that she wears on the cover resembles a crown and crowns are usually associated with royalty. Borotho says, "when I call other women Queen,

I mean it" (387). The first textual reference to queens is in the dedications page where she acknowledges "every Queen alive" (Borotho 7) and thanks "every King who sees her (sic) Queen" (ibid). The narrative contains a chapter with the title "Raising a Rebel Queen" (346 – 372), wherein she presents her views on raising girl children. A queen, according to Borotho is a woman with authority and "Divine Feminine power" (375). She lists and profiles Queen Aminatu, Queen of Sheba, Queen Nefertiti, Queen Ranavalona, Queen Cleopatra and Queen Nandi as "evidence of the existence of … Divine Feminine power as it previously manifested in the world" (375). Her own mother, she describes as "a shining example of a warrior queen" (414), which incidentally is an apt description of Borotho on the cover page with her crown and spear.

Salient points of this autobiographical manifesto are contained in one of the poems found towards the end of the story. It reads,

"It's you Queen

It was you Queen, dethroned by oceans of lies

Yet your wings carried you to the shores of truth

..

Who told them you were damaged

When it's you Queen, who leads tribes of Kings you birthed

…

It's you Queen whose ashes are gold

Buried when you married

But your tears watered your roots

…

It's you Queen the eagle that flies with broken wings

It was you then.

It is you now and eternally

Divine. Feminine. Reigning Queen" (387 – 388).

The poetic extract above presents a consolidation of the experiences, positions and labels this autobiographical manifesto spotlights. For example, with the line, "*Who told them you were damaged",* she is speaking to and speaking out on behalf of women who have had children out of wedlock. In Zulu, and African culture in general, this renders a woman "officially damaged and unworthy" (95) to her family and society. She addresses this in a chapter titled "Becoming Damaged Goods." Owing to her own unplanned pregnancy, her immediate family gave her the silent treatment, and she recalls an occasion where "my grandmother, my aunt and her husband, were called to come and see the disgrace that was me" (84). She remembers her "walk of shame" (84) from her bedroom to the lounge where they were all gathered to speak harshly to her. This treatment is a reality for many black single mothers and Borotho makes it a point to show that the 'damaged' label is in relation to a woman's prospects as a wife (in the future); essentially 'damaged' women are those who have jeopardised their prospects of marriage. Indeed, this issue arises a few years down the line when Borotho meets a potential husband (who was not the father of the child). During the *lobola* (customary 'bride price') negotiations, she had to deal with "the matter of [her] worth being a subject of discussion" (189). As she recalls, "I already had a child so *Inkomo ka Ma* [a mother's cow], which represents a virgin bride and also happens to be the most expensive cow, could no longer be part of the discussion. I was damaged goods, and this was going to reduce my price significantly" (189). Furthermore, because she was 'damaged' goods, "there would be no white veil or dress on the wedding day" (191) as these privileges are reserved for "untainted" brides. As part of her advocacy work, Borotho narrates this experience to highlight society's double standards on these matters, saying,

> these discussions about our worth are dictated to us by men who probably have more flaws than us. The one who is paying lobola for you can have ten children from ten different women, no one will question his worth… yet [women] are subjected to value calculations before we are married (190).

She challenges women to "remove our own veil that hinders us from seeing patriarchy for what it is" (191) and asks, "what makes men pure and what display do they put in front of everyone to prove they are not damaged goods?" (ibid).

Borotho's poem contains the line, *Buried when you married,* in reference to the challenges and identity crisis she experienced upon assuming the role of a wife, a role which has had an impact on her identity. She narrates that the transition to wifehood was challenging for her, citing that "for a woman, there are drastic adjustments she is required to make after she gets married, whereas with most men, very little changes" (195). In a chapter titled "Divorcing Me, Becoming His," she engages with the negative impact of marriage on a woman's identity (after taking his name). In her narration, she refers to an erasure and an, "identity crisis … incited by a pressure to conform to the role of a wife" (202). She says, "I was only living out an identity that came with being a married woman. Who I was before that simply didn't exist yet I so desperately missed being me" (197). She describes a strong sense of losing herself, which she traces back to their dating days, when she felt that "the compromises I was making were chipping away at who I was … [the chips] were subtle but progressive with every single time you gave in, change this, change that, hide this, behave like this, look like that and before you know it, there's nothing left to chip away at" (181). For Borotho, this loss of self was compounded by the submission required of wives "by virtue of patriarchal gender hierarchy'' (200). She problematizes "the submissive state of being that requires us to give up a big part of ourselves" (201) and criticises our society's obsession with "the submission expectation of the wife as the main qualifier for a good wife … [forgetting] all the other things that make her enough" (ibid). In her description of her husband's position (in relation to her), she writes 'authority' and 'head' (11) in quotes to indicate to the reader that these titles do not emanate from her. In so doing, she signals that she does not actually believe him to be a head or an authority she should submit to. Her view of herself as a *Reigning Queen,* made in the image of God as indicated in the epilogue, drives Borotho to question and refute the submission of women to men. As a queen and maternal figure, her argument is that "it would not make sense for God to make us the essence of life and then make us subject to those we give the very same life to" (387). She criticises "society's expectations" (209) of a good wife and declares her refusal to submit: "I may not be a submissive wife by the standards set for wives but I am a phenomenal woman and that is enough. I no longer apologise for who I am, and who I am becoming as my own definition of a wife" (209). Her autobiographical manifesto is the vehicle through which she makes it known that, "I tried until I was tired of trying to be a standard of a submissive wife that I didn't understand, when in fact there were so many other beautiful things about me" (201).

In the same vein, she critiques and demands new ways of thinking around the idea of "Makotification … the process of qualifying as a hardworking, serving, good *makoti* (daughter-in-law)" (210). Many black South African women are familiar with the title *makoti* as used by the husband's extended family, friends, community members and neighbours to refer to a wife. The 'job' description of an 'ideal' *makoti* is to take care of the proverbial village; it is just one of those non-negotiables in many black cultures in South Africa. The extent of the services rendered depends on the different families, but there is certainly an unspoken bare minimum or standard. I can relate to the *makoti* discussion because when I got married in 2019, my mother took great pride in announcing to my new mother-in-law (in a room full of older women) that I was well trained in all aspects (cooking, cleaning, washing etc.). Borotho questions why the gold standard for a wife is how well domesticated she is. She says,

> women do it out of obligation because they have to deliver on being a good makoti. Even when we are exhausted and we are on the verge of having a mental and emotional breakdown, we persevere and push forward. We are not allowed to be tired because good makotis don't crack (217).

The relatability of the text depends on readers' familiarity with this discourse. The *makoti* discussion speaks to ongoing conversations in South African public discourse and is a recurring topic in contemporary black South African women's debates on social media, women's magazines, radio talk shows, TV talk shows etc. It is common amongst black South African women (married into African families) to share stories of working until sunrise with swollen feet ahead of big family events, with newer *makotis* expected to do more than the senior ones who came before them.

Borotho's autobiography taps into Lauren Berlant's notion of intimate publics which she defines, "from a theoretical standpoint, [as] a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general … [creating] a place of recognition and reflection" (VIII). One's participation in the language/s of particular intimate publics is informed by an anticipation that its consumers "share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (ibid). According to Berlant, autobiographies present "a collective story about the personal that is not organized by the singular autobiography" (X). As such, we read autobiographies such as Borotho's, not purely as accounts of the personal but as "autobiographies of collective experience" (Berlant VII). Indeed, as argued by Judith Butler (2005) when a subject tells its story, it finds that its "self is already implicated in a social

temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration" (8). Butler asserts that "the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making (21). The crux of Butler's argument, as it relates to my interest in Borotho's construction of identity, is that "there is no I that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no I that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning" (7). According to Butler, the I which emerges from the process of giving an account of oneself "does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of … norms and … frameworks" (Butler 7). Borotho confronts 'makotification' and criticises the "eternal probation and induction" as well as the "one frame fits all approach" (217). According to Borotho, "that a makoti can't cook doesn't make her less of a woman. That she doesn't like cleaning doesn't make her less of a woman" (217). While this may be true, not many women would declare this to their in-laws, but such is the autobiographical manifesto, it "contest[s] dominant discourses surrounding the subject, discourses through which the subject is objectified in strategic difference" (Smith 437).

Borotho's autobiographical manifesto contributes to the growing number of narratives by black women using autobiography as a vehicle "to construct their own subjectivity and agency" (Fongang 393). Her engagement with her subject position as a wife, daughter, mother and sister also demonstrates the "recurring relationality in women's life writing" (Couser, *Memoir* 20) whereby they define their selves and forge their identities in relation to others (Stover 2003). Borotho capitalises on "the relationship between subjectivity and autobiographical practice" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 29) and uses it to "to talk back, to embody subjectivity and to inhabit a range of subjective 'I's" (ibid). She is setting boundaries where none existed. As an autobiographical manifesto, it makes a strong case for the emancipation of African women. To read *Unbecoming to Become*, is "to attend to the historically and culturally specific discourses of identity through which women become speaking subjects" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 37). Despite some potentially controversial revelations, Borotho declares that she is not worried "about close members reading this book" (Borotho 412) and her stance is bold: "All through my life I have worried about what people think of me and how they perceive me. For over three decades of my life I have lived through different narratives created for me. I am done doing that" (412). Her public stance is taken against histories, traditions, structures, and even women who enforce patriarchal hegemonies, she is re-writing herself and her own narrative, a choice that resonates with Smith's observations:

"the autobiographical manifesto is a revolutionary gesture poised against amnesia and its compulsory repetitions" (Smith in Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the LongRun* 438). Borotho writes,

> I'm well aware of the fact that this book will shake the foundations of many people. It challenges the social expectations, cultural conditioning and people perceptions that sets the narrative that dictates the self-worth for girls and women. However, by unlearning and reflecting on the untrue narratives girls and women are told and taught about themselves and learning a different truth, girls can begin the Unbecoming to Become journey of restoring their identity, reclaiming their power and redefining their self-worth (Borotho 413).

Unbecoming to Become functions as a site for "the re/production of knowledge" (ibid) which "can facilitate changes in the mapping of knowledge and ignorance, of what is speakable or unspeakable, disclosed or masked, alienating or communally binding" (Smith and Watson, *Life Writing in the Long Run* 183). Her writing allows her to expose "words that were said to us that we couldn't reject, standards that were imposed on us that we couldn't meet, experiences that happened to us that we didn't invite" (Borotho 399).

2.4 Rosie Motene's Scriptotherapy

In *Reclaiming the Soil: A Black Girl's Struggle to Find Her African Self* (2018) Motene tells the story of her unconventional background as a black girl raised by a white family in apartheid South Africa and the effects of this arrangement on her life and identity. As the title suggests, she writes from the perspective of a black girl who was denied her African identity and the struggle to find it. Motene's self-making project is intimate and inward focused. Hers is a useful example of the kind of South African autobiography which, according to Ngwenya ("The Historical Dimension of South African Autobiography" 1), "provide[s] invaluable insights and perspectives into the complex history" of our country and "play[s] a key role in the construction of new post-apartheid self-empowering subjectivities" (ibid).

In this section, I unpack how identity, race and trauma are at the core of *Reclaiming the Soil*. According to Motene, the narrative was "initially written out of anger and confusion" (Motene location 64) but, she says, "as I embarked on my journey, the writing helped me heal internal

wounds that I did not even realise were festering inside – from my childhood through to my adult life" (location 64). Motene joins many "autobiographers … [who] have undertaken to record their life stories as a form of self-therapy" (Chandler 4). In her assessment of the therapeutic dimensions of autobiography, Marilyn Chandler (6) posits that "telling a life story is [a] purgative, reconstructive, integrative [and] transformative activity." Chandler likens the autobiographical writing process to psychotherapy; in both instances, the writer and patient heal through talking. The writer, like the patient "moves from the task of finding words and images, to patterning or recognizing pattern, and finally to forming a gestalt or narrative plan that brings the many discrete elements of experience under one rubric to make them into something that can be perceived as a whole" (Chandler 7). In her assessment, "the three aspects of healing most closely replicated in the autobiographical act are catharsis, or purgation; restoration, or return to wholeness; and transformation, or making new" (ibid). Through the process of writing, traumatic encounters are given "comprehensible contours and boundaries" (13) creating a kind of closure or "symbolic completion" (10) for Motene. According to Suzette Henke "autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy" (xv). Henke coined the term scriptotherapy to describe "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience …" (ibid) in recognition of the fact that "the authorial effort to reconstruct a story … could offer potential for mental healing…" (xii). Psychologists and experts on writing therapy have discovered that "writing or talking about emotional issues can have multiple health benefits, including … reduction in stress, reductions in emotional and physical health complaints, and decreased depression" (Pennebaker 162–4 in Moy 23). The experts posit that "the mere act of disclosure is a powerful, therapeutic agent" (Pennebaker 162 in Moy 23). Jeannie Wright and Man Cheung Chung (287) identified the sorts of people likely to benefit from scriptotherapy, they include: "people who, for cultural or other reasons, are silenced by shame or other inhibiting emotions and feel unable to speak" (citing Bass & Davis, 1988; Bolton, 1999b), people who are in inner turmoil and need to 'unpack the mind,' externalise and organise their thoughts and feelings (citing Bolton et al., 2000; L'Abate, 1992; Riordan, 1996) as well as people who need to disclose and exorcise a particular memory of stressful or traumatic experience. Motene fits these profiles and *Reclaiming the Soil: A Black Girl's Struggle to Find her African Self,* ought to be read as a testimony and a form of scriptotherapy.

According to Chandler, such texts tend to engage with the following questions and themes: "What has happened to me? Why did it happen? How? How can I relate these events to the rest

of my life? How can I communicate my experience to others, and why should it be told?" (7). These questions drive the narrative along a particular trajectory and they give an indication of the issues the subject grapples with as they find themselves in the story told.

Motene (Rosie) was born to Path Motene and his wife, Jacobeth. They were migrant workers who left their village of Phokeng (in Rustenburg) to find work in Johannesburg. Path was a petrol attendant and Jacobeth was a domestic worker. In 1974, Jacobeth became pregnant and her employers determined that she would go home to give birth, then return with the infant for three months then it would be sent back to the grandmother in the village. However, before three months was up, the Finkelstein family "fell in love" with the baby (Motene location 269) and insisted that Jacobeth keep her around. This is how Motene came to grow up in the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg as the "new toy" (location 276) and "little black princess of the Finkelstein kingdom" (ibid). Through Motene, the Finkelsteins created the anomaly of the spoilt little black girl. They afforded her a lifestyle that she would not have enjoyed in the village. They gave her access to a privileged life of seaside holidays and frequent restaurant visits. Her bedroom "was decorated like a princess's palace" (Motene location 540) and her "cupboard was always filled with the latest designs, fashions and trends in clothes and shoes" (location 518). These experiences moulded young Motene in substantial ways which removed her from reality. She recalls: "I was told that I had become the fifth child in the Finkelstein family. I even called myself Rosie Motene Finkelstein. I completely set aside my Setswana name at this time. I was not Tebogo – but I was Rosie" (location 262), "a Finkelstein more than a Motene" (location 281).

Throughout her childhood, Motene felt that she belonged in Johannesburg with the Finkelsteins, not in Phokeng where she was born. She confesses that she absolutely "hated going home to Phokeng" (Motene location 562). She describes the trips to Phokeng as her "ultimate nemesis" (location 98) and the Finkelsteins would threaten to send her there as punishment when she was being naughty. Phokeng had no electricity and no running water, and to Motene it was a place "for black people" (location 661). Motene hated, "the food, the environment, the language and the way people stared at [her] whenever [she] spoke English" (location 661).

In 1999, Motene became famous for her portrayal of Tshego in the popular television soapie *Generations*. Noticeably, her character spoke only English, unlike the rest of the cast who were multilingual combining English with Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sotho and Tswana. Amongst the

other black actors, Motene stood out because she spoke no "black language" (Motene location 1483). Her English is spoken with what South Africans describe as a twang, an accent associated with 'Model C' students. Model C schools were previously Whites Only public schools which, from the nineties, started admitting black learners. These schools had better resources and were superior to black public schools in the township. When they started admitting black students, proficiency in the English language was a requirement for admission, and in most of them, black learners were prohibited from speaking their home languages. Apartheid created a hierarchy of languages, with Afrikaans and English at the apex. At the time many black people viewed English as a high-status and necessary language (Shinga). Motene says, "I refused to speak an indigenous African language. I also had a constant reminder at home, on TV, and at school, that black was inferior. I was perpetually being shown that a white way of life was vastly superior to any other way" (location 502).

Consequently, black model C students who spoke English like Motene were often accused of being coconuts. Coconut is a term used in South Africa to describe "[a black] individual who is of a certain social class, attended model C [or private] schools and behaves in ways that are not deemed as black but white" (101). They are called coconuts because, like the fruit, they are brown on the outside and white on the inside. Coconuts are often accused of "denying their roots, culture and heritage" (Letshufi 23). This is something young Motene freely admits to, saying,

> when I visited the homes of [white] friends, I used to hope that the domestic workers would not greet me. If they did, using the vernacular, I would respond with: Sorry! I only speak English. This became so normal for me that as soon as I heard the slightest utterance of a vernacular language, my tone would change, becoming aloof and even hostile (Motene location 554).

Studies have shown that women's autobiographies tend to highlight their ongoing struggles for recognition and their navigation of the power dynamics within family structures, and Motene's is no different in this regard. A significant part of Motene's early autobiographical identity is constructed around her interactions within and with the Finkelstein family. She reflects on what for her was a pivotal moment as far as her identity is concerned. When Motene was in high school her white father (Joe) died. She recalls that many people came to the home to offer their condolences to family but she was ignored; nobody comforted her. At the funeral, her siblings, "the four white children were called and came forward … but my name was not called. I could

not believe it" (location 424). The story of Joe's funeral is told in a chapter called "I am my daddy's daughter too." After the funeral, she was also excluded from shiva, the week-long mourning period activities observed by Jewish families and this shattered her. She says, "I had always considered Joe my daddy and he had considered me his daughter, although clearly the rest of the family did not. They had chosen the most wounding time to show me that I did not belong" (location 436) and this shocked, confused and hurt her deeply. It dawned on her then that she was not Rosie Finkelstein as she had always believed. She was not recognized as one of them and all that she could do was to cry silently in her room "while the rest of the family mourned the passing of [her] father" (location 436). She realized that she was in fact, only the maid's daughter.

Motene's agony about her identity crisis and misplaced sense of belonging is not unique. For example, Panashe Chigumadzi in her lecture titled, "Why I Call Myself a 'Coconut' to Claim my Place in Post-apartheid South Africa" (np), expresses a similar struggle saying, "the fantasy of a colour-blind, post-racial South Africa has been projected onto us coconuts, but our lived experiences are far from free of racism … no matter how hard we work or how well we speak, we remain black." According to Chigumadzi (np), the coconuts' "proximity to whiteness" allows them "to begin to critique it in ways that aren't as easy to do when on the outside", which is something Motene does in *Reclaiming the Soil*.

Motene's journey back to 'the soil' as referred to in the title, enables her to reflect on the racist 'whitewashing' she suffered at the hands of her foster mother. She reveals that her upbringing led to an identity crisis she still struggles to fix. The text is an effort on her part to undo years of the relentless enforcement of white supremacy at the Finkelstein home. Motene's narration helps her to articulate and process the loss, rejection, anger and confusion she experienced as a result of her unconventional upbringing. She accepts that she "had unwittingly been moved across apartheid's great divide … [and] faced many challenges that were quite foreign to many black girls [her] age" (Motene location 85). She says,

> The writing has opened up many conversations with my biological family and friends, and with myself. It has also created a better awareness of who I am. The book may offend some people or create confusion for them, but ultimately, I have written this to express my feelings and more importantly to honour the people in my life who for many years I placed on the black … I mean … back burner (location 65).

Even though they were her benefactors, Motene's narrative exposes and condemns the racist ideologies she was raised with. According to Abigail Hunt and Emma Samman (2020), in South Africa, domestic work was and continues to be "the preserve of poor black African women" (102) which can be a source of shame and anger for some of the children who witness the "low social status and undervalued nature of domestic work" (ibid). As such, Motene decries the treatment of her mother, who "for thirty odd years" had the responsibility of "cleaning the house, raising the children, wiping buttocks, washing dirty linen and scrubbing floors" (Motene location 238). In all senses, her mother "was a servant and the Finkelsteins were the masters" (location 238). The enforcement of racism in the Finkelstein house rules shaped Motene's relationship with her biological mother, reducing it to a "relationship between a mistress and a servant" (location 290). Even though they seem to have done what they thought was the under the circumstances, Motene's narrative gives the impression that she blames the Finkelstein's for not facilitating a healthier relationship with her mother and recalls with resentment that "whatever my mother did for the foster family, she had to do for me – in the same manner of a subservient servant in her employer's house" (ibid). All the trust and love which should have been directed to her biological mother was reserved for Motene's foster mother.

Throughout the text we find that Motene's story revolves around her relationships with her two mothers. As a young girl, she adored her foster mother and looked down on her biological mother, a status quo which only changed in her adult years. Motene addresses her detachment from her white foster mother in a chapter titled "The Glass Bell" and "Shattering the Glass Mould." This part of the narrative is where she most expresses herself as a form of scriptotherapy. She employs a filial voice to relate her experiences with her two mothers. In literature, the filial voice is relational and belongs "to a daughter, a granddaughter, a female descendant" (Were 171). Marciana Were argues that female African autobiographers tend to "creatively deploy the narrative techniques of the filial voice for specific purposes" to affirm or "to problematize constructions of daughterhood and womanhood" (183). The use of the filial voice, "allows women to speak up, [and] to tell their own stories" (Fleig 55) in relation to their mothers and grandmothers. Airing the formerly repressed feelings towards Mrs Finkelstein she says,

> All my life I have lived under a one-way glass bell that you designed for me. You could see me but I was only allowed to see out when it suited you… I

> always danced to your tune. I danced and jumped while my family sat outside, with no say, watching their child being manoeuvred and pushed around… when I questioned or asked anything, you whitewashed the glass, not allowing me to see. In the meantime, the spill of the whitewash was left on the ground and it created a foul stench (Motene location 145).
>
> …
>
> As I grew, the space in the bell closed in. There was very little oxygen and breathing became difficult. I took a huge gasp of air and suddenly heard a crack in the glass. You tried to cover it up but I breathed again … I created another crack; soon there were many cracks … Your wealthy hands could not keep the cracks covered anymore, not the expensive clothes, not the fancy food or your rich insults… I have now found myself in the middle of all this shattered glass, and the whitewash residue has left a stench like milk gone stale. The stale smell of being your child when it suited you hangs on me, and the pain of the distortions necessary to live within the glass bell is a lesson well learnt (ibid).

While Motene claims Joe as a father, and writes fondly of him, her foster mother is not afforded the same treatment. Mrs Finkelstein goes from 'mom' to 'the mother figure.' Motene refers to 'the mother figure' (in quotes) numerous times establishing emotional distance where once there was none.[20] The metaphor of the glass bell paints a picture of a childhood where Motene was sheltered but also suffocated by a cold and manipulative mother whose name is never divulged (the only family member whose name is not revealed). While it is possible that the name is not revealed to protect her identity, it seems likelier that Motene no longer wishes to be associated with her and is erasing her.

The Rosie who emerges by the end of the text is an unapologetically African woman and an activist for women's empowerment. The knowledge that her words may offend the Finkelsteins is of no concern to her. Her concern and priorities now are the people she had put on the 'black/back' burner as she says. She uses *Reclaiming the Soil* to honour and reintegrate herself into the Motene family she had turned her back on. At the age of 38 Motene cuts ties with the

[20] See Motene locations 289, 318, 319, 352, 367, 383, 457, 465, 519, 547, 554, 700, 705, 751, 753, 790, 920 and 1110 for references to 'the mother figure'.

Finkelsteins for causing her emotional harm and for not facilitating a healthier relationship with her biological mother.

In the end, the Motenes are the heroes of her story. They are the ones she sought comfort in when one day she "felt a sharp pain on [her] left side [and] an excruciating headache" (Motene location 2086) on her drive to work. She says,

> I cried in the car – on the roadside – and I asked aloud what should I do? Do I bite the bullet and go crawling back to the foster family and succumb? Then it struck me – go home! It was during this amazing moment of pain and loss of who I am, that I came to a full realisation that both my parents were alive and well – ready to love me without any pretence or quibbles (Motene location 2086)

At the moment, she gained clarity on who she really was and where she belonged.

> The smartness and wisdom of the urban life went out of the window as I realized that no matter what, I belonged to the parents that life, love and nature gave me … I called my mother – the love of my life and the woman who loves me unconditionally. I was still in pain and I asked if I could come home, without hesitation she said: 'Rosie *ngwanake, e tla gae'*- Rosie my child, come home (Motene location 2093).

She packed her life into storage and three days later went to Phokeng to stay for several weeks. "The journey home was like a period piece in a wonderful Hollywood movie" she says (Motene location 2108). For the first time in her life, she spent quality time with her parents, happily participated in village chores and tried to learn some SeTswana – everything she detested as a child. She developed a newfound appreciation for Phokeng and its "beautiful landscape … rolling hills [and] breath taking sunsets" (location 2206). Today she praises Phokeng's "rich and proud space and heritage" and laments the fact that "I always wished that I would wake up changed, into a white person, and leave this entire proud, profound and immeasurable heritage that I am" (location 2209). With her return to Phokeng, Motene reconnected with her roots and began the quest to find her African self as suggested by the title of the text.

Motene says, "this book has helped me to reclaim what remains of my soul and to hold on to what I need and want" (location 120). *Reclaiming the Soil* is a healing and "emancipatory narrative" (Tembo 63) with "a deliberate and purposeful performative act" (ibid). In the end, we see that the process of storytelling provides Motene with "a lens to recover … [her] voice silenced by history" (Were 5). Her past experiences provide building blocks and contribute to her current identity as "an Afro-Yiddish princess,"[21] and a black Jewish girl. Nowadays Motene identifies as "a Pan African queer feminist, activist, speaker, and media proprietor… [who] uses her experience, privilege, expertise, writing, and voice to speak up on issues around GBV and LGBTQI in Africa"[22].

2.5 Caster Semenya's Testimonial

Caster Semenya is a professional runner, two-time Olympic Games gold medallist and a three-time World Athletics Championships gold medallist. In 2023, she released *The Race to be Myself: A Memoir*.

In terms of sub-genre, *The Race to Be Myself* is deceptive. Due to Semenya's accomplishments, one approaches it expecting a sports memoir, but it exceeds the conventions of the genre's preoccupation with glory, triumph and "extraordinary bodies" (Pipkin 45). It also bypasses lesbian autobiography's tendency to present "accounts of the process of becoming conscious of oneself as a lesbian, about accepting and affirming that identity against enormous odds" (Martin 83). Lesbianism, in these texts, "becomes the central moment around which women's lives are reconstructed" (Martin 83). This is not the case with Semenya. While lesbian autobiography centralises the disclosure of one's sexual orientation (coming out) and tends to "describe a linear progression from a past shrouded in confusion or lies to a present or future that represents a liberation from the past" (Martin 89), Semenya's "sexual identity is not a singular focus" (Martin 91). As she says, "I never hid who I was or felt I had to… I have never been in a 'closet'") Semenya (54). She claims to have no understanding of the "coming out of the closet thing" (54). She simply informed her family, "Look, don't expect me to come with a boyfriend because it will never happen. When I grow up, I'm going to marry a woman" (Semenya 55), and that was that. In *The Race to Be Myself* Semenya presents lesbianism as "natural, self-evident, [and] original" (Martin 85), doing the important work of "countering

[21] "Rosie Motene." *Wiki Mzansi*, 22 Nov. 2018, www.wikimzansi.com/rosie-motene/.

[22] Rosie Motene, *Soundcloud*, www.Soundcloud.com/osieotene

representations that have rendered homosexuality invisible, perverse, aberrant, or marginal" (Martin 84).

As a public figure, Semenya got thrust into the limelight when she became known as the athlete with the questionable gender categorisation. The controversy began in August 2009. She won gold and she set championship records at the African Junior Championships. Her performance in the 800-metre race "would eventually land [her] in a gynaecologist's office at a private hospital in Pretoria and change [her] life" (Semenya 120). Later that month, she would win the 800m race at the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships in Berlin with a record-breaking time of 1:55.45. Her victory "was followed by an international outcry in which the athlete's sex and gender identity were challenged by the media, the public at large, other competitors, and by organisations governing international athletic competitions. Publicity and outrage centered on Semenya's physical appearance, her muscularity and her seemingly masculine gender comportment" (Behr and McKaiser 169). So began her fight against the global regulatory body. Since then, her eligibility and properness to participate were questioned repeatedly "culminating at the end of July 2019 with her suspension by the IAAF" (Loland 584).

The course of these events, as I will demonstrate, had a great impact on Semenya's identity and race to be herself. There are various factors, twists and turns to this story - all of them stemming from her gender testing. Semenya is not the first athlete to be subjected to this treatment. Until the nineties, both the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) imposed "mandatory sex testing for women in sport" (Mahomed and Dhai 549). While it has done away with the mandatory aspect, the IAAF still reserves the right "to initiate examinations if a female competitor somehow raised 'suspicion' or if someone were to 'challenge' her sex" (IAAF in Schultz 286). Furthermore, despite a lack of credible evidence that testosterone increases female athletic performance, the IAAF has Eligibility Regulations for Female Classification for athletes with Differences of Sex Development (DSD) in place. According to these DSD Regulations, Semenya and other athletes with heightened testosterone levels are "considered non-eligible for middle distance running races in the women's class" (Loland 584) and to participate, they are required "to use medical interventions to lower their testosterone levels" (Mahomed and Dhai 548). It is worth noting that these rules target competitors only in the 400-meter, 800-meter and 1,500-meter distances – categories dominated by African runners. The IAAF claims

that these measures are put in place with the "aim of preserving the integrity of female athletics" and to keep the competition "fair and meaningful" (Mahomed and Dhai 548). Yet, the same organisation "has not applied similar regulations to male athletes, whose performance can also be influenced by natural and biological traits. Tough male athletes who excel are applauded, whereas robust and resilient female athletes who excel have their abilities questioned and doubted" (Mahomed and Dhai 550). In addition to that double standard, the IAAF has turned a blind eye to other biological variations "that offer specific competitive advantage. These include increased numbers of fast-twitch muscle fibres, exceptionally long limbs, extra-large hands and feet, and increased aerobic capacity. In addition, social and economic factors such as nutrition, access to specialist training facilities and coaching further enhance competitive gain" (Mahomed and Dhai 550).

In the text, Semenya is granted the space to scrutinise, ridicule and challenge various (new and long-standing) perceptions, norms and distortions around the issue of gendered identities. To do this, she needed to adopt a genre that would advance her objectives, i.e., enable her to assert her gender against dissenting institutions, rules and traditions. I have already alluded to the limitations of the seemingly obvious sub-genres for Semenya's memoir. This brings to the fore the question of whether certain "struggles give rise to new forms of literature, or is it more a question of the adequacy of their representation in existing narrative forms" (Beverley 91). The text follows the conventions and exhibits the characteristics of a sub-genre called Testimonio, where the narrator is "the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (Beverley 92 - 93), a narrator also concerned "with a problematic collective social situation in which the narrator lives" (Beverley 95). The situation Semenya finds herself testifying about can be traced back to the afore-mentioned 2009 African Junior Championships where her performance prompted the IAAF to issue a directive for Semenya's gender to be tested. She was subjected to two tests. At the first test which took place in South Africa, she was told by a sympathetic doctor that she was "not built like other women" (Semenya 127) and her chances of participating at the world championships scheduled to take place later that month in Berlin were "very low" (ibid). This view was based on the gynaecologist's prediction that Semenya's blood contained levels of testosterone higher than permitted for female athletes.

When she was first informed that she was to undergo gender testing, she agreed because in her mind the matter was straightforward, she says, "I knew what the word *gender* meant so I wasn't bothered" (Semenya 126). When asked by the doctor if she was in fact a boy, she recalls, "I

laughed. I'd been accused of this before... I have nothing to hide, doc. I'm a girl. I have only girl parts … if you know what a vagina looks like, that's what you're going to see down there" (Semenya 127). She had no idea of the turmoil that was in store for her. At the time her thinking was simply, "I didn't have the curves African women are famous for and I still hadn't gotten my periods, but those things didn't matter to me. I dealt in practicalities" (Semenya 128). Until that point, her sense of identity was intact. Granted, from a young age when she started racing, there were pockets of curiosity around her boyish build and abilities. She recalls instances where she would "strip and walk to the communal shower area and suddenly … would find [her]self surrounded by girls who just happened to need to rinse off" (Semenya 80). She says "they would stare at everything" (ibid) on her body but she was fine with it as she had nothing to hide.

Her sense of identity was stable and intact before it was threatened in 2009. This is clear from her description of herself before 2009. For example, "in my part of the world, the issue of gender is simple. If you are born with a vagina, then you are a girl. Hanging with boys, dressing like a boy, playing sports with boys, having muscles etc. didn't change your gender" (Semenya 20). She moves from the premise that one's build and behaviour have no bearing on one's gender. She acknowledges that she was born different, "all of my sisters took after my mom – they were short, very curvy and pretty, while I was tall, with a wiry muscular frame. They'd wear skirts and dresses and form-hugging clothing, while I preferred my clothes to be loose" (Semenya 25). She establishes her position on gender very early in the text, stating that, "there are many ways to be a girl" (ibid). She reveals that she "never took to dolls the way it is assumed girls should" (Semenya 18) and that as she "grew bigger and stronger, [she] made it known that [she] didn't want to do things like cooking or cleaning" (Semenya 28). None of these differences made her question her status as a female. She says,

> I knew growing up there were other girls like me, meaning girls who didn't sprout breasts, who had deep voices, or girls who were not into girl things. I grew up with some of them, played soccer with them. They were around just like I was around. It wasn't anything we ever talked about directly. There was no conversation like, 'Hey, I see you are one of those girls who likes to do boy things'. It was something acknowledged without words (Semenya 164).

Before her gender test, her response to non-believers was simple: "I had no problem going right up to them and introducing myself. 'Hello I am Caster. I am a girl, would you like to see? I can drop my shorts here for you'" (Semenya 80), she says.

After the events of August 2009, which I will detail, Semenya's gender became "a much-analyzed global media event" (Munro 383). The issue of her gender testing ahead of the big race in Berlin was leaked to the media and the ensuing speculation made her an "accidental celebrity" (Turner *et al*. 77 in Schultz 284); propelled into the spotlight by circumstances beyond her control. The international press in particular, "played an important role in initiating and perpetuating her accidental celebrity by issuing breaking news about her tests, uncovering political corruption and regularly commenting on the affair" (Schultz 285). By the time she raced, she was aware that "rumours about [her] being a boy were going around" (Semenya 150). Semenya grew increasingly and painfully aware of the scrutiny, "sports and entertainment commentators discussed my facial features, the size of my arms and legs and breasts, the muscles on my abdomen. They would zoom in on pictures of my crotch and wonder what could possibly be going on between my legs" (Semenya 5). They suggested that Semenya did not "adhere to standard definitions of femaleness" (Schultz 288), implying that she was "some type of a freak" (ibid). Elizabeth Grosz (25 in Schultz 288) defines a *freak* as "an *ambiguous* being, a being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life. Freaks are those human beings who exist outside the structure of binary oppositions which govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition". Garland Thomson (10 in Schultz 285) "uses the term enfreakment to define the social construction of deviant bodies. Images of Semenya were … put on display for the observer's gaze. The media coverage, both verbally and visually, reinforced particular regimes of visibility" (Young 336). Her case "reflects a public anxiety about the intersexed body, a body that disrupts heteronormative sex and gender binaries and raises questions about the 'natural' body" (Young 344). Jaime Schultz notes that "the most prevalent image of Semenya in the early days of the scandal show her with a stern look on her face, her arms bent and raised as if flexing her biceps. It is a masculine gesture, connoting power and strength and, for many, seems incongruous with cultural expectations for womanhood" (287). Elsewhere, Stephanie Young further notes that "the media's fanatical coverage of Semenya reflects the lack of education and everyday knowledge about intersexuality within society. The hypervisibility of Semenya's body calls us to consider the invisibility of intersexed individuals and their lived experiences as a whole" (343). The media's representation of the Semenya case prompted Mark Behr and Eusebius McKaiser to

make the observation that “our genitals – the things we call private parts – are paradoxically the most public parts of our bodies. No part of the human body is more monitored, surveilled, censored and subject to censure than that which is claimed as a private part” (179).

For Schultz, “through the predominance of certain headlines, photographs, descriptions, exemplars and insider comments … the press located Semenya within three intersecting representational frames” (284). First, as discussed above, “journalists characterised her as an unfortunate human oddity; the consequence of fickle biology that they conceptualised through a discourse of en-freakment.” Secondly, Schultz argues that “South African politicians and sports officials celebrated Semenya as a symbol of national solidarity made manifest by chastising neo-colonial organisations for doubting her sex” (ibid). To the South African government, Semenya became “a symbol of ‘everything wrong with Western civilization’” (Schultz 298). According to Semenya, “I became a symbol of how Black people have been violated and exploited throughout history” (Semenya 165) which caused “politicians [to have] press conferences day and night” (Semenya 166). Thirdly, Schultz argues that Semenya was made “an icon of regularly stigmatised sex, gender and sexuality [and a poster child for] a variety of issues, including those that involve intersexuality, inferential homophobia, sexual prejudice, queerness, female masculinity, and trans bodies” (Schultz 292). For that reason, “activists cheered Semenya for bringing the question of intersexuality to the attention of a mass audience” (Schultz 284).

Semenya became a media spectacle. The media storm began while she was in Berlin where she was the focus of “television people from all over the world [and] on every channel, in every language” (Semenya 157-8). She describes the headlines about her as “crazy” citing the examples: “‘PROVE THIS IS NOT A BOY’, ‘HERMAPHRODITE CONTROVERSY’, ‘SOUTH AFRICA’S GOLDEN GIRL MAY BE A BOY’ and ‘MAYBE NOT 100% A SHE’” (Semenya 158). She went from obscurity to international fame in a matter of weeks, as an eighteen-year-old. Her experience was amplified by the global attention lending a uniqueness to her case. As such, her “testimonial "I" does not invite us to identify with it … there is no pretence here of universal or essential human experience” (Sommer 108). Upon her arrival from Berlin, she received a hero’s welcome in Johannesburg. She says,

> People were singing, shouting, dancing, waving the South African flag and holding up printed and handwritten signs that said, “OUR GOLDEN GIRL”, “CASTER YOU ARE A BEAUTY”, “CASTER, YOU GO GIRL”, “OUR

> FIRST LADY OF SPORT". Others were holding up newspapers with my birth certificate plastered on the cover and a headline that read, "YES! SHE'S A GIRL (160).

She immediately recognized that the attention and support were about more than her gold medal. She says, "I knew this was a celebration but nothing seemed right to me. I'd won gold, but the celebration seemed about something other than my actual win" (ibid).

The Race to be Myself is a raw and painful account. I noticed that the parts narrating the gender tests are strewn with expletives. She was enraged when she first learnt of the controversy around her gender. Semenya relates that she told a friend, "… they are here trying to say I'm not a girl. Maybe I just won't go … That's one part of me. The other part of me says, FUCK THEM. FUCK THEM AND THEIR MOTHERS. I'm going to the championships, I run this thing. I trained hard. FUCK THEM ALL" (Semenya 129). It appears as though in her references to her gender testing, she is attempting to inflict and use language as violence directed at her detractors, furiously colouring outside the lines of what is considered proper writing language.

Her testimony about the second gender test conducted in Berlin is crude for several reasons. First, she was in a foreign country surrounded by people with "cold eyes and even colder demeanours … [the] room was chilly and smelt like it had been disinfected" (Semenya 142). Secondly, it felt like an ambush because it took place without prior warning (it was meant to be a rest day for the athletes). Thirdly, all communication was conducted via a translator because among the people in the room that day, "none of them spoke English, or maybe they pretended not to" (141). She says,

> What I knew in that moment was that if I didn't let them look inside my body, I wasn't going to be allowed to run in the final. This wasn't about me having a vagina. They'd just seen it with their own eyes and touched it. And this wasn't about something in my blood because they had plenty of my blood already. So why did they need to look inside my vagina? It's one thing to spread my legs and let them look and touch me, but this, *this* was a whole other level (Semenya 143).

If testimonio "is a form of resistance literature [which] … disrupts mainstream literary conventions" (Kaplan 122), then Semenya's response is consistent with the subgenre's conventions. In response to the situation, she resorted to the use of crude language. "OK, you want to see my vagina? Do what the fuck you need to do. Let's get on with this shit, then. You are wasting my goddamn time" (Semenya 141), she retorted. "I was taunting them with my words. I wanted to irritate these people in the way they were irritating me" (Semenya 142) she admits. She says, "I don't know if they knew my words were rude, but they understood my tone. No nonsense. What was happening here wasn't respectful anyway" (Semenya 142). Semenya reflects a consciousness "of working in a translated, borrowed language … from [a] marginal position vis-a-vis existing discourses…" (Sommer 121).

After the prodding, the IAAF-sanctioned officials sought to conduct an internal examination via the insertion of a tool in her vagina, which is where she drew the line. She told the translator, "I will not allow that … they're going to have to find another way … they can go in my ass. (Semenya 143). She repeated it, "slowly and loudly, 'ASS-HOLE. GO. IN. THE. BACK' Then I made the universal sign for a hole with one hand, held the index and middle fingers of my other hand together, mimed a penetration, and then pointed down past my vagina" (Semenya 143). In the text, to get through the narration of the experience, she assumes a persona steeped in bravado. After her objection she says, "I lay on the table, legs wide open, watching these crazy fuckers discuss how they were going to get inside my body" (Semenya 144). The team relented, and had to go via the back. She says, the doctor "seemed uncomfortable and irritated" (Semenya 144) and that she "enjoyed" (ibid) his discomfort. Furthermore, she tells the reader that when the said doctor finally "took the wand out [her] asshole" (Semenya 145), she wishes that she had "taken a shit right there so that the doctor would be even more irritated…" (ibid). Semenya's narration evokes Beverly's (1992) insights on testimonial narrative:

> The dominant formal aspect of the testimonio is the voice that speaks to the reader in the form of an "I" that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention. This presence of the voice, which we are meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated (Beverley 96).

Testimonio by its very nature "always signifies the need for a general social change in which the stability of the reader's world must be brought into question" (Beverley 103). While other

"autobiographers can enjoy the privilege and the privacy of being misunderstood … those who testify cannot afford or even survive it" (Sommer 130).

Semeya's text is about her effort to reclaim her identity. Semenya took the controversy, the media spectacle, and the intrusive examinations personally, "to me this was fight for my life, my identity, my livelihood" she says (Semenya 287). The centrality of her identity in the text is signalled through some of the paratextual elements in the form of the title, dedication, subtitles and endorsements. The title, *The Race to be Myself*, alludes to a return to selfhood. It is dedicated to "those who are born different and feel they don't belong in this world" in solidarity with those whose identity is marked with difference and belonging. The back cover features a blurb by the celebrated South African presenter, writer and comic, Trevor Noah, endorsing *The Race to be Myself* as "a story that makes us all interrogate our humanity and the world we build with our actions every day." The opening chapters such as "God Made Me," "A Different Kind of Girl" and "I Am Not Afraid" refer to her identity. The IAAF's definition of her, in the form of the results of her gender tests, were leaked to the world by an Australian newspaper. Semenya writes:

> I found out, along with the rest of the world, that I did not have a uterus or fallopian tubes. The newspaper reported I had undescended testicles that were the source of my higher-than-normal levels of testosterone. They went on to call me a hermaphrodite. In my culture, this term does not apply to people like me, but the world media forced that label on me ... Sometime later, the term would change, and some people would refer to me as "intersex" and as having a DSD – a disorder or a difference of sexual development (173).

This was a painful and alienating experience for Semenya, "it was as if the entirety of humanity had discovered some kind of alien that looked like them but wasn't them that had been living amongst them" (Semenya 173). She says, "it was feeling like you were being wiped off the map of humanity. I did not have the language then to explain it. I barely have it now" (Semenya 179). Semenya became "a casualty of scientism and sports associations that presume to define and police sex" (Munro 2010: 388 in Schultz 284). The scrutiny and commentary "emphasized the biological conceptualizations of her sex identity (i.e., female, male, intersexed) rather than addressing how Semenya defined her own gender identity" (Young 334). She "identified as female, [but] the scientific world did not accept her identification" (Young 335). The battle to correct Semenya's gender illustrates the ways in which sports perpetuate the "nurturance of

categories called ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ to coincide with the concepts ‘male’ and ‘female,’ ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ … despite the vast evidence that there exists an infinite spectrum of differently sexed and gendered bodies” (Behr and McKaiser 174). Behr and McKaiser draw our attention to the problematic “role of sport in reinforcing socially constructed binaries and essentialisms” (Behr and McKaiser 178) and argue that “it is time we held sport morally accountable, as we do linguistic systems, for its role in sustaining incoherent and biologically fraudulent categories” (ibid).

The text is a reminder that she has not allowed herself to be defined by science or the media. She says, “to be honest, I didn’t care then, and I don’t care now what the medical findings are. I have a vagina. I don’t have a penis. I don’t have this Adam’s apple thing men have. I don’t have a beard. I have breasts. I was born a girl and raised as a girl, that was the end of the argument for me” (Semenya 184). She asserts herself “while I have faced significant hardships throughout my life, I want to make clear that my story is not one of pain and torment, but rather about hope, self-confidence, and resilience” (Semenya 3). She identifies herself as the sole authority on who she is, clarifying that “what has been said about me in the media is not who I really am” (Semenya 3).

In one of the most unequivocal statements about who she is, she states, “I will not apologise for who I am or what I am. And I refuse to be categorised as anything other than what I believe myself to be. People have the right to identify as they see fit” (Semenya 198). As far as she is concerned, “I am a tall dark-skinned, African woman with well-defined muscles, a deep voice and not a lot up top. I know I look like a man. I know I sound like a man and maybe even walk like a man and dress like one, too. But I’m not a man” (Semenya 6). She has sacrificed her career for her ideals; instead of agreeing to take hormone-altering drugs, she insists that she is not going to be bullied into taking on “an identity that did not fit [her] soul because some doctors had taken … blood and images of [her] organs” and determined that something was wrong (Semenya 198). In her own words, she is “not a hermaphrodite or an intersex or a DSD or anything other than a woman” (Semenya 198).

Known for her preference for suits, in September 2009 Semenya appeared on the cover of *You* magazine looking different (see Young 2015; Behr and McKaiser 2013). The headline read, “Wow, Look at Caster Now! alongside the words, We Turn SA’s Power Girl Into a Glamour Girl—And She Loves It!” (Young 337). She had on a curly wig, make-up and sparkly

accessories which caused some scholars to criticise what was widely perceived as an "editorial decision to impose femininity on Semenya" (Behr and McKaiser 169). She says,

> This magazine shoot is still discussed in women's and gender studies classes. People have written entire dissertations about how my naturally masculine gender expression was made to conform to feminine gender stereotypes. I'm fully aware of that … I just want to tell the world what actually happened from my perspective as an eighteen-year-old (Semenya 170).

Semenya's version is,

> When we arrived at the magazine's offices, I was told the theme for the shoot was "Glamour Girl'. The room was full of outfits, everything was sparkly and shiny … My first thought was, "OK, yes. Let's have some fun". I had left my village only six months before winning the world championship. I was a teenager, and I wanted to experiment. I'd always wondered what I'd look like, what it felt like to wear clothes like these (Semenya 169).



After years of speculation from "politicians, journalists, gender academics, people on the street" (Semenya 170), she assures readers of her agency; participating in the shoot was her choice. She says what she remembers from the *YOU* magazine experience is "all the fun I had that day" (Semenya 168). This incident illustrates the dissonance between well-meaning fans who think they are protecting her and the reality that she was consulted and accepted of her

own volition. This supports the view that her story was appropriated by multiple interest groups, imposing their own interests. Behr and McKaiser note the use of Semenya's "body and her person for national ends" (173) when Malema and the ANC came to her defence in politically motivated displays of solidarity which, according to Neville Hoad, "can perhaps be explained by a justified imagination of the injury done to Semenya" (401). In this regard, Semenya's story is comparable to Sarah Baartman's. Pumla Dineo Gqola observes that Baartman's story was hijacked into a nationalist narrative when her remains were returned to South Africa. President Mbeki's speech on the day made "connections between Bartmann's individual story and the larger dispossession and racist project which influenced slavery, colonialism and remaining systems of white supremacy in the contemporary world" (*What is Slavery to Me?* 65). In Semenya's case, politicians, feminist and queer activist communities imposed their interpretations on the misinformed basis that she was a helpless rural girl with no say.

Having argued that this is Testimonio at work, for the sake of transparency, I must also state that I do not believe that Semenya wrote the text. According to Yelin, autobiographies "narrated in the first-person, without quotation marks … [imply] frank confession and direct access to subjectivity" (*Celebrity Memoir* 23) but this is not necessarily the case with Semenya's text which, for example, makes references to dollars instead of rands (91) or pounds instead of kilograms (17). The apparent concealment of the presence of a ghostwriter "actively veil[s] the collaborative production process and seek[s] to collapse the distinctions between narrator, implied author, and actual author" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 23). However, for the sake of the study, I have taken the position that "unless there is some textual evidence to the contrary, I attribute the words in these texts to their celebrity author-subjects, despite the fact that as critical readers we can only ever infer who is speaking behind the collectively-produced, first-person 'I'" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 23).

What matters for this analysis is the end product which exhibits characteristics of the testimonio which "represents an affirmation of the individual subject … in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle" (Beverley 103). Towards that end, Semenya declares, "I am still fighting, so I am not in peace, but I have made peace with whatever cross this is I have to bear. I will never be in peace until I and every other woman like me can run free" (Semenya 301). These testimonio or "testimonials are related to a general text of struggle" (Sommer 130) and Semenya's struggle is to remain a woman. To herself and

to many in South Africa, Semenya is "born a woman, identifies as a woman, and is regarded as a woman" (Mahomed and Dhai 548) but according to the IAAF, she is not. This impasse prompts us to think of the consequences for the people on the borders. Court cases are ongoing but their rulings will come too late for Semenya whose body clock is ticking past her sporting prime. Semenya's case drew the attention of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Special Procedures prompting it to issue an open letter to the IAAF highlighting its "contraventions of international human rights norms and standards including: the right to equality and non-discrimination; the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right to physical and bodily integrity; the right to freedom from torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and harmful practices" (Mahomed and Dhai 549). In testimonio "it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount" (Beverley 94) and Semenya's intention is to expose the fluid nature of gender and to convene the necessary dialogue around this issue.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter interrogated the possibilities offered by the publication of autobiographies for black South African celebrities in terms of what it enables regarding their identities. I analysed four key texts and explored the possibilities they offer for conversion, for healing, for testimony and for advocating for change. Through their stories, we are invited to bear witness to their growth and turning points. Each of these, formulated as conversion narrative, autobiographical manifesto, scriptotherapy and testimonial, demonstrates the usefulness of the autobiographical medium in negotiating challenges and creating new ways of being for individuals whose lives are located in the public sphere and subject to public scrutiny by virtue of their work in public-facing industries such as arts and culture, sports and media terrains. To a large extent, the four texts analysed in this chapter are successful self-construction projects with each narrative presenting a different 'before' and 'after' frame of its subject. They relate their personal journeys and highlight those events or experiences which led to who they were at the time of writing. As subjects, they reflect on identity formation and evolution from previous selves to newer versions they portray on paper. In this chapter, these new selves are evaluated, taking into consideration other biographical information circulating in the public domain, for example, newspaper archives, interviews and social media; and how these fragments of information inflect the autobiographical Is.

CHAPTER 3: CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FORMS OF CAPITAL

3.1 Introduction

My study seeks to map the possibilities proffered by autobiography to black South African celebrities. In the preceding chapter, I explored a range of possibilities offered or enabled by autobiography for self-reflection, identity formation, repair, and crafting of new identities. In this chapter I explore the possibilities autobiographies offer to celebrities in terms of unlocking different and often intersecting, forms of capital. For this discussion, I focus on four texts: *Bassie: My Journey of Hope* by Basetsana Kumalo (2019), *From A to B* by Bonang Matheba (2017), *I Keep Learning* by Unathi Nkayi and Kabomo (2019) and *Making HerStory: A Decade of Achievements* by Lira, Clyde Meela and Robin C. Kohl (2013). These four autobiographical subjects all possess distinctive forms of fame, which, Holmes and Redmond (11) would say, "is the product of capitalism, and which implies a particular connection to the historical evolution of public visibility, and its relations with the mass media and changing notions of achievement" (Holmes and Redmond 11). Nkayi is a musician, broadcaster and a former judge on the reality TV show, *Idols* (South Africa). Matheba is a broadcaster, social media influencer and businesswoman. Kumalo is a former Miss South Africa, socialite and television producer. Lira is a musician. They are public figures who are frequently invited to speak, perform or make appearances at functions, schools and corporate events. All four have created or endorsed several branded products amongst them alcohol, reality TV shows, fashion, toys, and now books. It is the building and boosting of these profiles, and the compounding of celebrity capital through life writing that is under scrutiny in this chapter.

Celebrity capital is an important notion throughout this thesis, but it takes center stage in this chapter. Olivier Driessens defines celebrity capital as "accumulated media visibility through recurrent media representations" (553). Driessens' work builds on Pierre Bourdieu's foundational study, *The Forms of Capital* (1986). In making a case for symbolic capital, Bourdieu argues that social class cannot be understood in terms of economic capital alone, and identifies the role of factors such as education, competencies, skills, taste, status, reputation, upbringing and authority, "in generating and maintaining class distinctions and correlatively in enabling or obstructing social mobility" (in Tyler and Bennet 377). Bourdieu categorizes some of these factors as symbolic capital and others as cultural capital. In response to these ideas,

Driessens identifies a need "to separate celebrity from symbolic capital analytically [because] celebrity capital or recognisability resulting from media visibility is not tantamount or reducible to symbolic capital or recognition" (551). He explains that, "an agent can realise a certain amount of celebrity capital, but this does not automatically imply its recognition, when other forms of capital are more important in that field" (ibid). To illustrate, Driessens makes the example of a Belgian celebrity professor who

> gained celebrity capital through circulation in entertainment media [and] symbolic capital within the media field [for] being an eloquent and funny presenter, [which] did not result in symbolic capital in his original and main field, academia, where his media performances were largely considered irrelevant (552).

In other words, the professor's value in media circles did not translate as value in his other field of the academy. My analysis will be influenced by the view that each of the four texts under scrutiny seeks to extend the celebrity capital of the subject into other fields with a view to unlocking forms of capital that are directly or indirectly bankable.

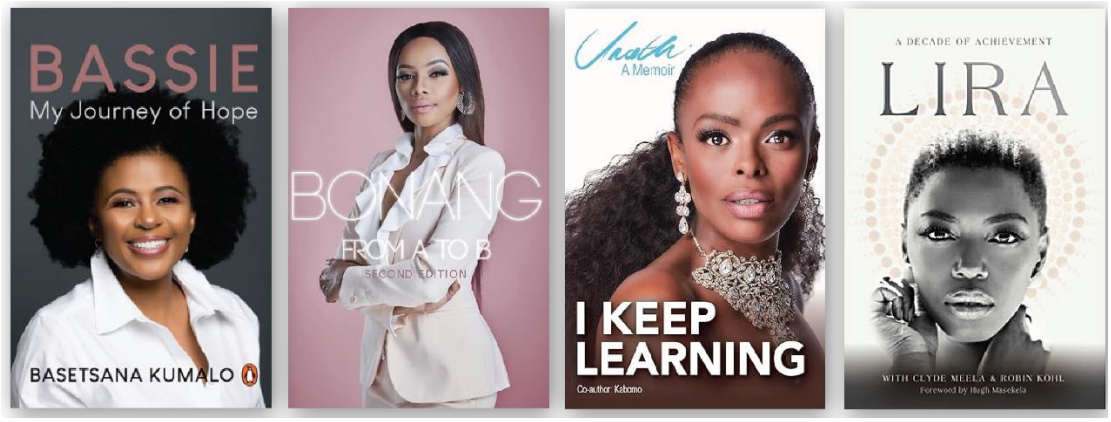
My first observation about these texts is that there are discernible similarities in the aesthetics and styling. Compared to male celebrity covers and to celebrity auto/biographies of women in other lines of work (say politics, academia or engineering), these covers are highly stylized and gendered through the makeup, fonts and colours used (nudes, pastels and hues of pink). The femininity depicted on these covers indexes a recognisable trope identified by Pumla Gqola as the "New South African woman (NSAW)". According to Gqola, who bases her theory on the "the abundant literature on how historically societies in transition have produced new identities, and specifically femininities, [there are] a range of highly circulated aspirational subjectivities in post-apartheid South Africa" amongst them, "the trope of the New South African Woman" ("The New South African Woman" 119). Gqola says,

> the New South African woman is a working, urban, upwardly mobile woman she has the career, and she is ambitious and driven. She has smooth skin, straight, shiny hair and tastefully manicured nails, and an arched brow, all of which communicate through the body a specific location within a global economy and a very controlled feminine aesthetic whose transgression is ridiculous ("The New South African Woman" 123).

Transgression in this case means looking like "train wrecks" identified by Gqola as the "NSAW's unwanted sisters" ("The New South African Woman" 133). Train wrecks seldom generate bookings as cover stars, brand ambassadors or MCs at major events; and so, Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira as women in the entertainment industry, with an eye to these lines of work, look immaculate. Consider that,

> the modern monstrous woman, in the form of the celebrity trainwreck, [is] a source of interwoven fascination and horror that we just cannot look away from. This … monstrous-feminine plays out especially on the site of the female celebrity body, through a morbid fascination with 'scary' weight loss or weight gain, signs of degeneration, bruises on the skin and losing the singing voice. Thus, the female celebrity body is read as a sign that she is, or is not, (in gendered neoliberal terms) a successful performer (Hopkins 154).

The covers of the four texts (see below) were designed to look appealing and to sell. In the literary marketplace, an effective cover page is one which will "inform as well as attract, be true to the contents, and be tuned to the market" (Clark and Phillip 221). To capitalise on the pull factor of the four celebrities, the publishers put Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira's faces on the covers.



When we look at the aesthetics of the four front covers, they are comparable to and reflect what is commonly seen in South African women's magazines "such as *True Love* and *Destiny* [which] are deeply invested in her [NSAW] circulation" (Gqola, *The New South African Woman* 123). The magazines are not only invested but also responsible for the production and circulation of the image or trope or definitive aesthetics of the NSAW. Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira have each appeared on these magazines' covers; they are active participants in

shaping and reproducing this aesthetic. As examples of the NSAW, each of these women "is constructed visually and textually and finds high circulation on television and magazines" (Gqola, "The New South African Woman" 122), and each represents "the aspirational woman that television dramas and popular soap operas seek to celebrate" (ibid). The quality and styling of the text covers represent a desirable and "demonstratable class mobility" associated with NSAW (Gqola, "The New South African Woman" 121). Through the cover pages, Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira signal their success. Scholars have established that

> there is a close correlation between fame, selling and desire: Capitalism requires consumers to develop abstract desire for commodities ... Celebrity culture is therefore partly the expression of a cultural axis organized around abstract desire. It is an essential tool of commodification since it embodies desire. In particular, it provides consumers with compelling standards of emulation (Rojek 2001: 187 in Redmond 30).

Looking good therefore, "intensifies th[e] effect, creating a celebrity elite and minimising the opportunities of those outside to achieve recognition" (Drake 274). On any given week, "the iconic faces and perfect bodies of the celebrated will be attached to a brand that fuses their values together" (Redmond 29). The covers of their narratives function as billboards advertising the Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira brands.

3.2 Basetsana Kumalo's Legacy Memoir

I argue that *Bassie: My Journey of Hope* (2019) is a legacy memoir. A legacy, according to the Collins dictionary is "money or property which someone leaves to you when they die" or "something which is a direct result of [an event or period of history] and which continues to exist after it is over." Rachael Freed, in *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies*, writes,

> legacy work is different from autobiography, memoir, life review, and genealogy not so much in what is written, but in our intent. We write to preserve our personal, familial, and communal histories. We write to express who we are and what we value, to mark our place in the world, to be witnessed by others, to build community, to be remembered. We write to bless those who come after us with our love and wisdom. (2)

The word legacy is repeated several times (see pages 2, 18, 104, 195, 196, 222 and 239). In the prologue she states upfront that she "started thinking about the legacy" she has created and decided to write it down not only for her family but also for the public. She says that she wants South Africans who have embraced her over the years to know "the essence" of her, "not from a magazine cover story, or a television or radio interview, but in [her] own words" (2).

Kumalo's story is set against the backdrop of the new South Africa. The story starts in Soweto, which she describes for the reader as "a township located in the south-west of Johannesburg … created in the 1930s when the government of the day started separating people according to race, thereby creating black townships" (7). The effect of foregrounding that she was born in Soweto is that it shows that she started her journey at a disadvantage, excluded as a "non-white from living in the most developed areas" (ibid). She was not born into privilege and has worked for what she now describes as her "charmed life" (2).

Encouraged by her mother, Kumalo (then Makgalemele) entered and won Miss Helio, Miss Phefeni, Miss Soweto, Miss Black South Africa and Miss Northern Transvaal before she was crowned Miss South Africa in 1994. The significance of her reign as Miss South Africa is that it coincided with the year of the country's first democratic election where Nelson Mandela emerged as the country's first black President: "It was an extraordinary year for South Africa and for me personally", she says (2), and her entire story is underpinned by the events of this historic year. In some quarters, beauty contests are considered as "platforms for upward mobility through the opportunity to win cash prizes, scholarships, or celebrity status" (Balogun 24), but Kumalo gained more than that due to her reign coinciding with the establishment of the 'new' South Africa. Accordingly, the sleeve of her proudly proclaims that "Basetsana Kumalo shot to fame as Miss South Africa in 1994 and soon became the face of South Africa's new democracy." Drawing from Oluwakemi M. Balogun's *Beauty Diplomacy*, I view Kumalo's Miss South Africa reign as an illustration of how the world of beauty diplomacy operates and the opportunities for cultural, social and economic capital accumulation, it unlocks. According to Balogun, whose focus is on Nigerian beauty contests, "women's bodies and their labour symbolically stand in for the nation, elevating national profiles and materially integrating countries into the global economy" (13), which was also the case with Kumalo whose "visibility, status, and achievements [were] used to corroborate national advancement" (ibid). In the eyes of the global community, apartheid (pre-1994) South Africa was a pariah state, so Kumalo had her work cut out for her as one of the players representing South Africa

in the global arena. As a beauty diplomat, she fulfilled the role of an "aesthetic labourer" (Balogun 71) doing national service "to symbolically restore the public face of the nation" (Balogun 16). The timing of her reign coupled with her public association with Mandela made her a de facto cultural ambassador and a high-profile participant in the newly constituted country's global public relations campaign. She reminisces: "I was travelling the world; introducing Madiba, leader of the rainbow nation, as a keynote speaker at global events; delivering speeches and motivational talks … I became a true reflection and representation of what was possible for a black girl-child, a symbol of hope" (Kumalo 57). She carries this status to this day, building a brand based on the values of ubuntu, inclusivity and non-racialism as espoused by her hero Mandela. Her text includes several images of her with the late global icon. The back cover, seen below, depicts an image of a young Kumalo sitting with Mandela's hand nestled in hers. In another image, she and the statesman are shown with their faces close together, the tips of their noses touching while gazing affectionately into each other's eyes.



The inclusion of these images serves to infuse her story with 'Madiba magic'. While she does focus on her own achievements, to a large extent, Kumalo's autobiography builds her legacy by establishing relationality with Mandela's work and memory. In addition to images, there are 114 references to Mandela in the text. She evokes Mandela's name repeatedly to create a strong association with his brand and considerable socio-political capital. The Mandela surname appears 39 times (on pages I, xi, 33, 37, 59, 65, 66, 67, 81, 92, 174, 183, 185, 188, 190, 191, 193, 194, 195, 196, 218, 248 and 250) and the word Madiba (Mandela's clan name) appears 75 times (on pages xi, xiii, 3, 33, 37, 38, 44, 50, 57, 59, 65, 81, 92, 103, 104, 105, 166, 181, 182, 183, 185, 187, 188, 189, 190, 193, 194, 195, 196, 247 and 250). The close association with Mandela is bankable and grants her special status as one of Mandela's favourite daughters, alongside the likes of Oprah Winfrey and Naomi Campbell. Kumalo is intentional about this, and spells it out: "I think it was a conscious decision by Madiba, as president, to embrace me so openly, purposefully and intentionally, and I think that's part of why South Africans rallied around me" (Kumalo 50). Kumalo purposefully taps into the goodwill around his name and

reminds readers that she continues "to promote the values that Nelson Mandela espoused and represented, and to honour him and his legacy" (Kumalo 195).

As part of its legacy work, Kumalo's memoir engages in self-promotion and the consolidation of celebrity reputational capital. As indicated above, winning Miss South Africa opened doors for her but it took years of networking to build her status as a celebrity role model. It appears that her narration has also given her a platform to not only showcase the strength and quality of her networks, but also to draw on their endorsement as currency to legitimise Kumalo in readers' eyes. These endorsements come in three forms: firstly, under the heading *Praise for the book*, secondly under the forewords, and thirdly under a section called *Paying it forward*. Under the *Praise for the book* section are contributions from Doreen Morris (custodian in chief of the Miss South Africa Pageant from 1994 to 2000), Zelda la Grange (Mandela's former private secretary and author of *Good Morning, Mr Mandela* (2014), Graça Machel (Mandela's widow), Pastor Ray McCauley and his wife Zelda (leaders of Rhema Bible Church). The forewords are penned by two big names: Advocate Thuli Madonsela (South Africa's first female public protector), who emphasises that, "Crowned Miss South Africa when the main achievement of beauty queens was marrying the most eligible bachelor and thereafter pursuing philanthropy courses, Basetsana Kumalo, nee Makgalemele, took a road unimagined. As M. Scott Peck once said, that made all the difference" (xi). The second foreword is written by Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (South Africa's first and only female deputy President to date), who highlights that, "readers will experience a valuable teaching moment through the description of how Bassie went about building her business empire, and how she learnt to use her connections, hard work and perseverance to become a brand. Hers is a story of beauty with brains" (xiv). Amongst the contributors under the *Paying it Forward* section are Bonang Matheba, Nomzamo Mbatha, Somizi Mhlongo and Pearl Thusi – all popular A-list media personalities and influential public figures in their own spheres. Their contributions corroborate Kumalo's claims of being a legend. For example, Matheba writes that Kumalo "successfully managed to diversify herself from Miss South Africa into a *Top Billing* presenter and then executive producer, … she inspired my career as a media personality and multifaceted woman. In some ways, I have taken her life as my blueprint" (229). Mhlongo also vouches for her star power saying, "I first met [her] when [she] entered Miss Soweto and I was like, there's a star right there. There is something special about this woman" (239). Kumalo has cleverly selected credible personalities whose own brands she could leverage. That all these big names agreed to pay homage to Kumalo is testament to how influential she has become. She is a celebrity's

celebrity whose star continues to sparkle thirty years since winning Miss South Africa in 1994. These endorsements demonstrate and reinforce her self-ascribed title of social icon (as seen on her website www.basetsanakumalo.com).

Ultimately, as I claim, this text is a legacy memoir intended to document and profile her achievements, talents and business ventures. She does this throughout the narrative, but more evidently in a section aptly titled *Brand Bassie* where she unpacks how she built her personal brand into what it has become: "the early 2000s were significant in terms of building my brand", she says (137) and she lists all her business ventures, including a Bassie Cosmetics range which "did well" (138), a Bassie Sunglass Collection which "enjoyed a good run" (ibid) and Stature by Bassie, a fashion label which "did exceptionally well" (ibid). Although she has since discontinued all of them and moved on to more lucrative ventures, the point she gets across is that everything she attached her name to did well. She attributes this to "being in the right place at the right time, with the right concept" (139) and that her brand "espouse[d] three aspects: integrity, credibility and innovation" (139). Reflecting on the growth of her name as a brand she says,

> the late 1990s and early 2000s were intense in terms of building the Bassie brand. I was really breaking new ground in the way I leveraged my public personality and built a business out of the brand. Of course, it helped that I was on television in people's living rooms every week [due to presenting *Top Billing*, a weekly television show on SABC 3]. One of the interesting things – and something that really benefitted me – was that I had crossover appeal. People of all races embraced the Bassie brand, so there was a market for the cosmetics, eyewear and clothing I was offering (139).

Not only is she announcing that her name is synonymous with commercial success, she is also making it clear what sets her apart – a crossover appeal not enjoyed by many black celebrities in South Africa's racially divided society. As a case in point, the first black woman to win Miss South Africa (in 1993) was Jacqui Mofokeng who according to Kumalo, "paid a heavy price…" (49) as the public and the white owned media "were awful to her. She was vilified and insulted. Every horrible thing that they ever wanted to say on a public platform about a black girl - big nose, fat bum - they flung at her" (ibid). Due to the seismic socio-political shifts in the country, Kumalo's experience the very next year was totally different; she was embraced by the white media and became the first black person to grace the cover pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *Femina*,

You, *Huisgenoot* and *Fair Lady* magazines. Kumalo was welcomed and afforded access to spaces previously closed to black people "between 1994 and 2004, I was on television every week. I was in people's living rooms and became a public figure. It is one thing to be in a pageant – when you reign is over, you carry on with your life but *Top Billing* gave me national prominence" (107). Kumalo reminisces about this period, taking her readers down memory lane: "For one thing, I was the first black female host of a show that was being watched predominantly by white viewers. White South Africans were the core audience when I joined *Top Billing*, but that soon began to change as black people, who aspired to that [affluent] lifestyle, started to watch" (108). During her *Top Billing* days "as the first Miss South Africa to become a television host (108)" she was recognised and rewarded for her crossover appeal,

> *Femina* nominated me as one of the top ten most glamorous women in South Africa, *The Sunday Times* and *Elle* magazine voted me as the most stylish female entertainment host, *Style* magazine nominated me as one of South Africa's best dressed women, and I was listed as one of the top personal brands in *The Sunday Times* top brands survey. I was also named one of the hundred most influential South Africans and was a brand ambassador for LG Electronics. I also had the pleasure of cruising in the Cadillac SRX as the face of the brand when it launched in South Africa (Kumalo 138).

My argument that the function of the narration is to consolidate Kumalo's legacy and capital is confirmed by a glance at her website www.basetsanakumalo.com which reveals the congruence between its contents and the contents of the narrative (especially the section called *Brand Bassie*). For public figures like Kumalo, the purpose of a website is to have a platform where one's various offerings can be viewed, and where applicable, purchased. On the website, she is described as a social icon, businesswoman and keynote speaker amongst other titles. Her journey and evolution anchor the overall sales pitch. Like the text, the website pins her legacy down to the fact that,

> When she turned 20 she entered and won Miss South Africa 1994 and in the same year went on and became the 1st runner up at Miss World. A fierce competitor, winning these pageant titles was only the beginning of Basetsana's love story with the South African public. She spent her reign as Miss South Africa raising funds for various organizations and charities, but also using this time to network with as many influential local and international people as she

> could, showing that drive and resilience that she would later portrait (sic) in her entrepreneurial career. [23]

Both the text and website present a beautifully packaged story of Kumalo's perseverance, success and integrity, positioning her as an ideal keynote speaker, brand ambassador, business partner and/or affiliate. The website (see screenshot below) showcases the companies that have used her services.



Kumalo represents the trope of the New South African Woman produced at "the intersections of post-apartheid class, gender, and race aspiration" (Gqola, "The New South African Woman" 120). Kumalo's success represents a loosening of "apartheid limitations of women's lives [which] worked through violent intersectionalities of white supremacy, patriarchy and class oppression, the latter often used interchangeably with economic alienation rather than capitalism per se" (ibid). Her story signals "both a departure from hegemonic apartheid femininities and an attempt to imagine the kind of agentic existence women might aspire to in a free country" (ibid). As an NSAW, Kumalo "embodies economic progress, consumer status, and achievement as a mode of self-assertion … the specific coupling of financial freedom with demonstratable class mobility ultimately leads to the NSAW being a highly corporatized and monetized figure" (Gqola, "The New South African Woman" 121). Due to this, some would critique *My Journey of Hope* as a neoliberal feminist text. Neoliberal feminism, according to Catherine Rottenberg, "seems perfectly in sync with the evolving neoliberal order … [and] offers no critique – immanent or otherwise – of neoliberalism" (419). Rosalind Gill, in her exploration of "new feminist visibilities in postfeminist times", found that contemporary feminist texts are "exponents of an individualistic, entrepreneurial ideology that is complicit with rather than critical of capitalism" (617). Stories like that of Kumalo's are criticised for their implicit "suggestion that equality has been achieved—indeed, [and] superseded" (Gill

[23] https://basetsanakumalo.com/brand/

624). Indeed, while Kumalo acknowledges some of the challenges facing ordinary South Africans, her text "emphasize[s] female empowerment and individualization, and construct[s] women as active subjects who are free to shape their own destiny" (Gill in Adamson: 4).



Kumalo's text is concerned with building a lasting legacy, and this necessitates foregrounding her milestones at every opportunity. One page of her website displays all her major business interests (in the television production, mining, travel, retail and property industries), each with a hyperlink to that particular entity's domain. These are also the same entities she discusses in the text under a section titled *The Hustle is On*, wherein she provides a breakdown of her accomplishments and lessons learnt. Kumalo is a prime example of the "growth of [black] women's entry into public and politically powerful spaces in various capacities" (Gqola, *The New South African Woman* 120). Kumalo indicates that its release was timed to coincide with and commemorate "twenty-five years since [she] was crowned Miss South Africa, twenty-five years of being a television producer, twenty-five years of being an entrepreneur, twenty-five years of [her] walk with Christ, twenty-five years of democracy in this country" (1).

In her quest to build her legacy, Kumalo cleverly links her brand to that of Oprah Winfrey's, similar to how she aligns herself with Mandela's legacy. Oprah hasn't endorsed her, but Kumalo points out that,

> Oprah has played a significant role in my life as an individual, a broadcaster and a producer. She has not mentored me in person, but I've drawn so much inspiration from her as a successful businesswoman and media mogul, and, more importantly as an individual … she is someone whom I greatly admire and look up to… As a black woman, I feel that in her I have a role model, a blueprint of what a black girl-child can be and achieve … How can you not want to strive to be a better person when you have received the counsel of a Madiba or spoken to an Oprah (105)?

In her article titled, "Memoirs Take a Daring Turn in South Africa," Neelika Jayawardane (np) makes the observation that "this [post-1994] generation of memoirs is a project of re-envisioning the way authors see themselves." She expresses "optimism about the power of memoirs" but raises a concern about the "clear disconnect between the 'truth' and 'reality'" wherein "power dynamics are downplayed …[and] subsumed in the grey idealism of 'non-racialism'" (ibid). She says that "by leaving out so much, these memoirs mirror the desired, official narrative of the new South African state. They re-inscribe the idea of a progressive, united triumph over apartheid, devoid of internal divisions or repressions" (np). While this may not be Kumalo's intention, there are several instances where her text does seem to be part of the "narratives chronicling how black South Africans overcame debilitating inequalities [through] their 'intrinsic' ability to endure and be resilient in the face of apartheid history and neoliberal violence," downplaying the country's complex socio-political inequality. Jayawardane's main concern is the likelihood that,

> those [readers] at the receiving end of the worst of apartheid get the message that they can make their way out of extreme poverty by making good choices, and that it is within the individual's ability to overcome all violence with hard work and willpower. … [a] fairytale that maintains that they [the marginalised] could "rise up" if only they worked harder (2013).

The narrative reveals that Kumalo is part of the socio-political elite in terms of her networks and relatively unfettered access to some of the country's most influential and powerful people. She lives in a world of affluence and we see evidence of this in some of her revelations around her wedding for example. She says, "When I say everyone came to our traditional wedding, I mean 1500 people (if not more) came to celebrate with us … people had so much to eat and drink" (Kumalo 79). The average South African would not afford to host a feast of this magnitude. The venue for her white wedding in 2000 was arranged by none other than former President Mandela himself. She recalls that, "I mentioned [to him] that I would love to get married by a river [to which he responded] 'Oh my friend Douw Steyn [a South African billionaire] has got a house at the Vaal" (81). Mandela's personal assistant was immediately instructed to give Steyn a call and just like that, Kumalo says, "Douw let us use him home, and I had my dream wedding by the river" (ibid). Kumalo adds that "everything else we did for the wedding was paid for out of our savings" (ibid). Their savings certainly went far considering that as part of the wedding décor, the Kumalos "bedecked [Douw's boat] with hundreds of

cream roses from Mauritius. Hundreds" (82). Then, for their honeymoon, they went on a cruise aboard "a luxury liner called *Voyager of the Seas* [which] started in Miami and cruised around the Caribbean islands – Jamaica, Tahiti, Cozumel and so on" (85). Because she felt sea-sick for most of the cruise, they "spent another week in the Bahamas to make up for it" (ibid). A charmed life indeed for a township-born black woman to have access to such connections and wealth a mere six years after the end of apartheid.

3.3 Bonang Matheba's Marketing Memoir: Selling Dreams

One of Kumalo's protégé's, Bonang Matheba, released *From A to B* in 2017. It came out when Matheba was at the high point of her career and had just launched the first season of her own reality show called *Being Bonang*. At the top of her game, Matheba remains a regular feature on many high-profile red carpets and big stage events.

The plot of the Marketing Memoir begins with a strategic selection of childhood memories. Chapter one of *From A to B* is titled "A star is born" and it invites readers "to place the author in the appropriate historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, and to become acquainted with his or her personality, values, and temperament — all important in understanding the focal experience" (Bloom 40). In setting the stage for her eventual stardom, Matheba makes several claims about herself as a child, for example, "I do not remember a time in my life when I was not the centre of attention. Like a queen bee is at the centre of its hive, that is how I remember my life to have always been" (5), or "I was always being looked at", or "I was often told how talented I was" or "even when I wasn't the star of the show, if you look at my childhood pictures, I was always the child in the front and centre, because I wanted to be seen — bright eyes, big smile, always at the ready" (9). She says that one of her high school teachers wrote her a note which read, "you are going to touch many lives. You are going to be very successful. With that personality of yours, you need to be on TV, because you need to show it to everybody" (46). These anecdotes introduce the narrative that she was indeed born a star and allow her to create linkages between her fame and name, "Bonang [which is] a request, a nudge, a command to look at something" (vi). Here, Matheba uses the autobiography to remind her readers and fans alike that her status as a celebrated public figure in the limelight is almost predestined, a natural unfolding of an inevitable celebrity destiny.

In his study of working-class autobiography in South Africa, Thomas Thale detected certain "appropriation[s] of history" characterised by the "utilisation of the past as a narrative strategy

for self-portrait" (616). Some trade unionists used the past as "a fertile resource for locating themselves within the discourse of resistance politics" (Thale 615). Their autobiographies "select incidents from their childhood and invest them with new meaning … suggesting… that their activism has had a long duration" (Thale 615). This repurposing of the past to confirm and legitimise the present-day self is what Matheba appears to be doing in *From A to B.* The details in the narration of her younger self pre-empt and legitimise her present-day celebrity identity.

The text specifies how, after years of auditioning for television roles, Matheba finally got her big break as a presenter in 2007 when she joined a television music show called *Live*. She ushered in a new generation of television presenters who were young, good-looking, bold and fun. She interviewed and mingled with popular musical acts and soon became a celebrity in her own right. Queen B, as she came to be known, left *Live* and branched out into radio, event hosting, entrepreneurship, and online content. It did not take long before she became a celebrity appearing on magazine covers and attending industry events. Her fan base grew exponentially and today her social media following is amongst the highest in South Africa. One of the daily newspapers reported that "Queen B … ruled social media even before the word 'influencer' was coined" (Tjiya 2021). She is the star of her own reality show called *Being Bonang*. She is one of the stars and co-producers of a film called *Public Figure* which premiered at the Manchester Film Festival in the UK and was aired at the Socially Relevant Film Festival in New York. In 2019, under the label House of BNG, she launched a range of luxury bottle-fermented sparkling wines making her the first black woman to become a member of the prestigious Cap Classique Producers Association. She was invited to be part of this association by a major wine farm which recognised the bankability of her brand and its association with a luxurious lifestyle. Also in 2019, Matheba won the award for African Influencer of the Year at the 45th annual E! People's Choice Awards held in California. In 2020, Matheba was selected amongst *Forbes' Magazine* 50 Most Powerful Women in Africa. Matheba is great at what she does, but these opportunities were not obtained off skill alone; she has invested heavily in the accumulation of celebrity capital. She has built a brand around her persona, image, name and voice.

Throughout the text, Matheba positions herself as the golden girl with the magical sparkle; it is the essence of what *From A to B* is selling and advertising. The word sparkle comes up several times and is a recurring motif throughout the narrative. Firstly, "Invest in your sparkle" is the subtitle of the narrative. Secondly, last chapter is titled "Holding on to your sparkle" and

thirdly, the narrative ends with the words, "I have my sparkle, I have found it … my biggest priority is not to only invest in that sparkle, but to hold on to it tightly. Invest in your sparkle!" (Matheba 182). She demonstrates an astute awareness of her unique brand offering, and says,

> it's very important to note that my star started rising at a time when brands were thinking differently about celebrities, and black celebrities in particular. The tide was certainly in my favour. There was an increasing awareness in their public clout, their pulling power. When I became aware of that, I realised as well that I needed to watching the branding trends if I was going to make it further than this (Matheba 95).

A big fan of Bassie Kumalo, Matheba also emulates global superstar Beyoncé's model of doing celebrity. According to Ellis Cashmore (2010), "not only does [Beyoncé] personify youth and beauty, glamour and affluence, luxury and money, [she] turns them and, in the process, herself, into items of trade that confer some of her status onto consumers" (138). Beyoncé trades on her name in many fields, from music to movies to merchandise (fashion, fragrances and so on) (143). Matheba also has other offerings which include lingerie, makeup, alcohol and shoes. In consumer culture, celebrities like Matheba and Beyonce are "muses … [who] embody exchange values. As such, they are living commodities themselves: their very presence whether at a premiere or at the gym has value" (147). Like Beyonce, Matheba is plying her trade in a "consumer culture in which celebrities command attention, occasionally adulation and, routinely emulation, … [a culture] predicated on the principle that anything … is tradable. In other words, it can be bought and sold in a market" (148). Matheba calls herself Queen B (like Beyonce), has a legion of fans who call themselves the Beehive (like Beyoncé's Beyhive) and is obsessed with styling. *From A to B* takes a page from brand Beyoncé and presents the readers with a visual feast; every chapter in the text is preceded by a full-page photograph of Matheba in various modes (e.g. glamorous woman, a sexy vixen, as a boss and so on (see below). Like Beyonce, Matheba's brand juxtaposes racy with sweet.



I argue that *From A to B* is concerned with reputation above all else, and the glaring omissions in the narrative reveal this. An example of such omissions is her highly publicised involvement in a messy love triangle. In 2015, the late award-winning rapper Kiernan 'AKA' Forbes embroiled Matheba in a scandal by conducting a secret love affair with her while his (famous) girlfriend, DJ Zinhle Jiyane, was heavily pregnant with his child. The affair became public when the scorned Jiyane outed Matheba as the other woman in her relationship. Jiyane uploaded a scathing statement on her website which read:

> A week before our daughter was born, I found out about an affair between Kiernan (the father of my child) and Bonang Matheba. I also received confirmation of all rumours through an honest conversation which I had with Kiernan, who confirmed that the affair had been going on for over 5 months.[24]

This salacious story trended on social media, with many expressing their shock that Matheba allowed herself to be a 'side chick' and a 'homewrecker'. Concerned at the prospect of the cancellation of her lucrative endorsement contracts with Revlon and Woolworths (amongst others), Matheba went into damage control mode. In a desperate move, she retaliated by attempting to silence Jiyane with a letter from her lawyers instructing the DJ "to withdraw the statement she made on her blog about the affair and apologise on the same medium she made the statement."[25] This move backfired when the DJ publicized these developments, inviting the

[24] "AKA confesses to cheating on DJ Zinhle."*The Voice of SA,* AKA confesses to cheating on DJ Zinhle with Bonang – theVoiceofSA

[25] "Bonang Matheba sues DJ Zinhle." *The Citizen*, 13 Sep. 2015, www.citizen.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/760782/bonang-matheba-sues-dj-zinhle/

ire of social media. This made the story trend even more, garnering bad publicity for Matheba. This story, which casts her in an unflattering light as a homewrecker is not mentioned at all in *From A to B*, which is telling about the public relations objectives of the narration. She is taking her own advice that "sometimes your reputation is beyond what you can manage, but what you can manage … you must guard jealously" (Matheba 182). Matheba says, "My name mean[s] something, being aware of that [is] my ticket to strengthening my brand and increasing my media footprint (Matheba 87). Unlike the memoirs studied in chapter one, whose focus on personal identity, redemption and repair of bad choices necessitate a degree of frank confrontation with poor life choices, the Marketing Memoir prioritises its Public Relations agenda, and in this case, air brushes unfortunate life choices out of the brand positioning exercise. For the marketing memoir strategic silence is conventional. While in mainstream life writing debates the withholding of certain facts or giving incomplete accounts is viewed as the antithesis of truth telling, the Marketing Memoir calls for a reading beyond the limits of conventional criticism. Accordingly, Matheba does not mention that copies from the first print run of *From A to B* were recalled due to grammatical errors. Fortunately, the recall did not negatively affect her brand because she sells the allure of luxury, media presence, consumption and young vibrant energy - and to her fanbase and corporates alike, that remains intact regardless of the controversy surrounding the first version. Arguably, the social capital generated through Matheba's physical allure, work ethic and influence cushioned her from being cancelled or written off. She was also cushioned by the fact that her fanbase comprises multiple audiences with different investments in her celebrity (radio, television, live events, merchandise, reality content etc.).

From A to B executes reputation management and self-promotion so well that any potential sponsor or campaign manager reading it would be persuaded to seek out and work with this seemingly bright, focused, wholesome, professional and popular South African celebrity. Indeed, on the strength of her high celebrity capital, doors continue to open for her: She hosted Miss South Africa in 2023 and 2024. She clinched Steve Madden's first collaboration with an Africa-based celebrity, launching the 'Steve Madden Bonang Matheba Holiday Select Collection'. Her name is often touted by fans to host the Miss Universe beauty pageant, a sign that her brand is gaining the international traction she is working so meticulously for. Her Marketing Memoir, in how she is packaged, facilitates exactly these sorts of opportunities for celebrities like Matheba.

3.4 Unathi Nkayi's Marketing Memoir: Selling Authenticity

I now turn my attention to another Marketing Memoir, *I Keep Learning* (2019), by Unathi Nkayi (and co-writer) Kabomo. As a celebrity, Nkayi is an "individual agent who accumulates capital … and who competes with other agents for celebrity capital and its recognition by other agents and institutions in the field of production" (Driessens 557). She joins the growing list of celebrities who are releasing texts which have the potential to unlock new streams of revenue, and command the attention of the public and the media. As indicated earlier, a Marketing Memoir is likely to be released at the peak of the author's popularity which was the case with Nkayi. *I Keep Learning* was released in 2019 when Nkayi was a judge on the reality TV show, *Idols* South Africa, and was also a radio deejay at Kaya FM. Through the opportune timing of the release of her memoir, Nkayi generated considerable sales, capitalising on her relevance and the pull-factor of her celebrity.

At 168 pages, Nkayi's *I Keep Learning* is a relatively slim offering which suggests a narrow focus. According to Hannah Yelin, the memoir represents a tool and "an intervention in how [a subject] would like to be received by the public" (3). The celebrity's life story "is necessarily an act of self-canonization, extending, reinforcing, reframing and capitalizing on one's existing celebrity status" (5). As a Marketing Memoir, Nkayi's narrative presents a sales pitch which is reflected in its title *I Keep Learning*. The title is conspicuous with its large, uppercase font splashed across the entire bottom quarter of the cover page. The visual emphasis on the title draws readers' attention to it. It conveys the notion that she embraces learning, defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught." The title taps into the schools of new-age popular psychology which promote the concepts of self-management and growth as continuous and worthwhile endeavours. During her promotional tour Nkayi revealed that the memoir was initially titled *A Better Me*, but she decided against it because her journey of self-discovery was incomplete.

In Yelin's view, "within the memoir's pages a space is created where the meaning of a life's work can be controlled" (4) and *I Keep Learning* does attempt to do this by not deviating too far "from the discourses of celebrity in circulation outside it and from the discourses and systems of celebrity it embodies and reproduces" (Lee 89). The range of topics and themes Nkayi explores "affirm narratives of her life and personality already circulating in the media" (Lee 88). The content in chapter titles such as "Raised by Africa," "Love," "Motherhood,"

"Weight," "Girlfriends" are topics Nkayi has spoken about on her radio show, interviews and social media. In covering the same topics, *I Keep Learning* re-presents a textual version or extension of Nkayi's public persona, profiling her in the same way an in-depth magazine feature would and in the process producing a controlled and sanitised brand that can generate other forms of capital outside of the text. At a time when discourses of perpetual self-improvement reign supreme and take up large chunks of radio and television airtime, this narrative framing of her life story compounds her brand as a radio talk show host, reality TV show judge and musician with her finger on the pulse of these self-improvement preoccupations of her audiences and fanbase alike.

Nkayi's description of her childhood self presents a version congruent with the career and brand she builds later in life. She does not dwell on the details of growing up and dedicates only the first chapter to recollections of childhood. The first chapter called "Raised by Africa," is a nod to her Afrocentric brand which she expresses through fashion, culture, language, and the causes she aligns herself with. Nkayi is intentional and strategic in associating herself with all the good Africa has to offer. She heaps praise on Africa's "… melodies, colours and food - historic, stoic and bold" (Nkayi 12). An idealised Africa is a big part of how she imagines, styles and articulates her identity: in her words, "it is because of how I experience her [Africa] in an unmistakable tangible way that I will continue honouring her in all that I do and all that I am" (ibid). She is raising the flag, embracing, and promoting all the good that the continent has to offer, thus aligning herself with Africa's aesthetics, languages and rich culture. By Nkayi's own admission, her afro-brand has the potential to be lucrative. She admits:

> I have been very fortunate to have gravitated towards people who share the same love, adoration and celebratory spirit about our beautiful continent. A lot of work I decide to do also honours the continent. One of my greatest privileges is to be the global ambassador of House of Mandela, created and owned by Dr Makaziwe Mandela [daughter of the late global icon, Nelson Mandela] (10).

Unsurprisingly then, *I Keep Learning* romanticises Africa and life on the continent using feminine and sexual discourse describing it as "beautiful" (10), "intoxicating" 11), "complex "(11), "magical, colourful, unapologetically beautiful" (2), "Magical. Real. Proud. Strong. Beautiful. Warm. Sexy" (9) – all the qualities Nkayi implicitly wants readers and fans to associate with *her*. This representation of Africa as an exotic, feminised space may strike one as reminiscent of colonial imaginaries of Africa. According to Anne McClintock, "as European

men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries" (McClintock 24) and referred to the unknown spaces they encountered as "virgin territory" (ibid). McClintock notes that,

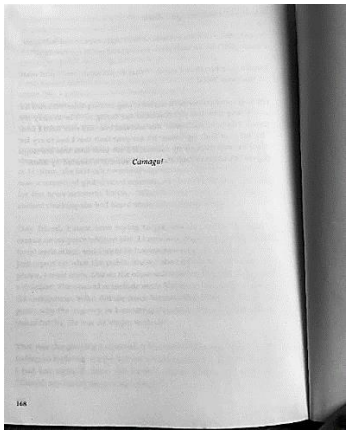
> For centuries, the uncertain continents — Africa, the Americas, Asia — were figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized. Travellers' tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men's breasts flowed with milk and militarized women lopped theirs off. Renaissance travellers found an eager and lascivious audience for their spicy tales, so that, long before the era of high Victorian imperialism, Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination — a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears (22).

According to McClintock, this discourse demonstrates colonialism's "politics of violence" (28) where women were compared to "the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned" (McClintock 31). The colonisers' feminizing of the land revealed "a strategy of violent containment… belonging in the realm of both psychoanalysis and political economy" (24). Nkayi's recollection of having massages "on the Zambezi River bed whilst zebras and monkeys walk by…" (12) brings to mind McClintock's criticism of certain films, clothing chains, perfumes which "peddle neo colonial nostalgia [of] an era when European women in brisk white shirts and safari green supposedly found freedom in empire: running coffee plantations, killing lions and zipping about the colonial skies in aeroplanes" (15). While she can be accused of romanticizing Africa in ways that recall colonial imaginaries of the continent, Nkayi's idealisation can partially be attributed to her upbringing in "foreign lands" (2). Nkayi declares from the first page that she grew up as "an African child in the United Kingdom" (1) and she further explains that, "it is because of such an upbringing and the lack of experiencing my own culture with my people at (sic) first hand for so long that I am profoundly proud to be African" (Nkayi and Kabomo 2).

Nkayi's passion for Africa complements her self-appointed status as the champion of traditional and modern Xhosa fashion. On the internet, there are many images of her wearing *umbacho*, a form of traditional Xhosa dress and fabric. Over the years, Nkayi has consistently associated herself with Xhosa designers like Sun Goddess, Asanda Madyibi and more recently, the luxury

brand, MaXhosa. In the photos section of *I Keep Learning* there are several images of Nkayi dressed in MaXhosa Africa gear (Nkayi 82) and it is the only brand afforded exposure in the entire memoir. The fashion label's website announces that MaXhosa Africa aims to "showcase the beauty, culture, language and aspiration of the Xhosa people" through a reinterpretation of "traditional Xhosa beadwork patterns, symbolism and colours". Nkayi wears the MaXhosa brand so frequently that she had to take to social media to explain that she is not an official brand ambassador, which would make her an unofficial ambassador who reaps the benefit of a chosen association with it. It is a mutually beneficial relationship which increases both their cultural and financial capital.

Nkayi's persona as a proud African (Xhosa) woman is not limited to fashion but extends to her language choices as well. Nkayi has made it her signature to infuse the English language with her mother tongue (isiXhosa) which showcases her pride in her mother tongue and roots, key components of brand Unathi. She opens and ends the narration with the term Xhosa term camagu. The first time we see the term is at the beginning, in Nkayi's acknowledgements page, which in part reads, "I am thankful for the prayers and dreams of my forefathers ... I pray to keep learning through all of you. Camagu!" For emphasis, on the last page she signs off with the word camagu (see image below), the only word on an otherwise blank page.



We need to understand the term camagu to appreciate its use and inclusion. According to Nokuzola Mndende (46), "Camagu is an exclusively Xhosa term frequently used in all situations in which the ancestors are involved. Camagu cannot be translated directly and should rather be understood as an utterance, appearing in all ritual speeches, which can be explained only in terms of the context in which it is used". The term is commonly used "to bless, to

appease, to forgive, to praise, to honour or [to say] let it be so" (ibid). In her use of this term, Nkayi identifies herself as a Xhosa woman rooted in her tradition: "When one looks at Camagu, the word carries the binding force in all the ritual practices and it carries the ritual power" (Laubscher18-19 in Mndende 48). Through its repeated use, Nkayi acknowledges the ancestral realm and portrays herself as an adherent of Xhosa spiritual practice thus creating a spiritual and conscious brand. Nkayi's demonstration of her adherence to Xhosa inspired ways lends credence to her role as a cultural entrepreneur and the distinct celebrity capital this can generate in a South African marketplace with a significant market for music with strong spiritual depth.

Her writing style and tone mirror how she speaks on television and radio, suggesting an awareness, like many celebrities who write Marketing Memoirs, that "the closer she embodied the terrain of her celebrity, the more compelling her representation of self would be" (Lee 89).

Nkayi aligns herself to Xhosa culture and with selected topical issues. She is very vocal about women's empowerment. In a chapter titled "Women" she declares, "I have come to really love my feminine energy … [and] being involved in advocacy works for women and all that pertains to them" (Nkayi and Kabomo 107). She professes love and admiration for, "women who live and breath (sic) their truth everyday" (115). In a show of solidarity with women, Nkayi reveals the difficulties she experienced when she became a wife (*makoti*). About her first Christmas with her in-laws she says,

> I was made to do all the chores that no one was willing to do, like filling up a huge bucket with chopped onions. My eyes stung, my hands smelled of onion, painful from the peeling and the chopping, washing off the dishes and other chores. It was a big culture shock for me because I had never been exposed to such (138).

This disclosure on a public platform is Nkayi's way of taking a stand against certain outdated and oppressive practices. While it may very well be genuine, it is strategic of her to align herself explicitly with women's causes because many of her fans and supporters are women (with buying power). She shares that she has been booked for Women's Month events "every year … for almost two decades" (107) and I do not think she would be getting those bookings if her message and brand did not appeal to and resonate with women. Her narration therefore gives her a platform to reiterate her position and profile as the wise big sister — the ideal candidate for campaigns and motivational speaking engagements etc.

Through her memoir, Nkayi creates a platform to facilitate her place in the fitness industry thus allowing her to earn the related cultural and financial capital. Nkayi was unhappy with her weight following the birth of her second child and reveals that she felt awful when "certain people on Twitter and even friends … would have the greatest pleasure of pointing out how big [she] had gotten" (Nkayi 69). Her body-weight issues are aired in a chapter called "Weight," wherein she details how she took up an intense exercise programme and sculpted her body into one of the fittest local black celebrities. Scholarship on the global fitness culture shows that it is a massive industry and Nkayi positions herself as an expert in this space making headlines such as, "Unathi Nkayi is all the body goals"[26] or "Look! Unathi Nkayi's body transformation is the ultimate glow up."[27] In 2018, she appeared on the cover of *Women's Health Magazine* in recognition of her role as a major player in the fitness industry. Nkayi and her trainer started hosting boot camps called *A Better U Boot Camps*, which are being promoted through this memoir (71).

3.5 Lira's Keepsake Memoir

Lira (real name Lerato Molapo) is a multi-platinum selling Afro-Soul singer and the recipient of eleven South African Music Awards, amongst them 2009 Album of the Year, 2010 Female Artist of the Year and Best Live DVD in 2015. I posit that her memoir, *Making HerStory: A Decade of Achievements* (2013) is a keepsakes memoir for fans and supporters.

A keepsake memoir is written by a celebrity in the first person for fans who are arguably "the most active and largest audience in the entertainment economy" (Liu 767). Fans in this environment are significant because their purchasing power contributes to the development of the celebrity market economy as we know it today. The value of keepsakes memoir diminishes without a fanbase to consume the stories it presents. Loyal fans are the main drivers of the "fan economy industry chain" (Liu 770) because they are key consumers and investors. Fans "are often avid collectors, and the cultural collection is a point where cultural and economic capital come together" (Fiske 43). The objects fans buy "in the consumer marketplace take on personal meaning and significance in such a way that their economic value is replaced by a personally inscribed aesthetic value" (Bennett and Rogers 30). Alongside "ticket stubs, concert T-shirts,

[26] Gaanakgomo, Constance. "'2012 vs 2021' — Unathi Nkayi is all the body goals". *Times Live*, 11 Jan. 2022, www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2022-01-11-2012-vs-2021-unathi-nkayi-is-all-the-body-goals/.
[27] Maimela, Lerato. "Look! Unathi Nkayi's body transformation is the ultimate glow up." *The Citizen*, 21 April 2021, www.citizen.co.za/lifestyle/look-unathi-nkayis-body-transformation-is-the-ultimate-glow-up/

posters, autographed photographs and brochures, fanzines, badges" (Bennett and Rogers 29), we can add autobiographies, like Lira's, to the growing list of "concrete manifestations of music listening and fandom" (ibid). Unlike regular audiences, fans invest more "time, experience and feelings in cultural products" (Liu 770). In response to this dedication, cultural industries, including publishing, "produce an enormous range of material designed to give the fan access to information about the object of fandom" (Fiske 42).

According to Holmes and Redmond, "fandom … has always involved the search for the authentic person that lies behind the manufactured mask of fame" (4 citing Dyer). Keepsake memoirs anticipate and cater for this, often appearing to let fans "get behind or to see through the manufactured nature of the star or celebrity image" (Gamson in Holmes and Redmond 4). To cater for this desire for more intimacy, keepsake memoirs come with extra offerings (compared to the average memoir) in the form of paratextual elements. The back cover blurb, itself an important piece of paratext, announces that "included in this must-have memoir is:

- Lira's own account of her journey to success and what inspires her.
- A collection of photos not previously shared with the public, as well as a DVD with Lira's performance at US President Barack Obama's second inauguration, and other never-seen-before material.

The text's paratextual elements like the title, forewords, third voice contributions and photographs function as "both secondary discourse and a disciplining strategy for interpreting musicians' autobiographies" (Sutton 208). I will now look at each of these elements briefly. Lira's memoir is called *Making HerStory: A Decade of Achievements*, a clear indication that her accomplishments are the focus. Furthermore, the authorship is attributed to her industry name Lira and not her real name (Lerato), signalling that the narrative is about the public persona. The memoir features a foreword by renowned jazz musician, Hugh Masekela. Forewords have a tendency to "interpellate readers directly, instructing them on how to contextualize and read the text that follows" (Sutton 208). The contribution by Masekela serves to "contextualize the subject's larger importance within the musical field and free the subject from the burden of single-handed self-promotion" (Sutton 211). In his generous endorsement, Masekela writes,

> Lira gives all that she can summon from deep down within the limits of what the human body is capable of bearing … Legions will always throng arenas, stadiums, concert halls and supper clubs to immerse themselves in the overflowing generosity of this outstanding performer. They come to experience for themselves the gruelling work that goes into the caressing of every note sung, the warm embrace of every single word, the grace of the way her body moves, the dynamics of every song, the magic of hypnotising sound and the beauty of a seasoned entertainer. Lira is all these things, and much more (xi).

There are also glowing tributes from several high-profile people amongst them Tobeka Madiba Zuma (a former first lady), Jo-Ann Strauss (a former Miss South Africa), Cameron van der Burgh (an Olympic gold medallist), Simon Rademan (fashion designer), Khanyi Dhlomo (business woman), Noeleen Maholwana Sangqu (television personality), Carol Bouwer (business woman), Lindiwe Mazibuko (politician), Dion Chang (influencer), Gareth Cliff (media personality) and Nianell (singer) – all these names demonstrate her considerable networks and celebrity status.

Lira's memoir was written in collaboration with two other people. The first is former journalist Clyde Meela (220 – 222) whose role is to "attest to the subject's ultimate success in a more objective manner than the standard first-person narrative" (Sutton 209). Meela's role as a co-author is to commemorate "the journey from Lerato to Lira to Superstar" (which is also the title of his subsection). He presents Lira's discography in the form of a "chronological list of albums and singles … that quantify the subject's claim to commercial success" (Sutton 213). He also includes a list of Lira's recordings, awards and career milestones. In his subsection, Meela also interviews her parents, siblings, aunt, in-laws, friends and band members who all heap praise on her, presenting Lira as a sweet, committed, humble, wholesome and talented person. This inclusion of insights from those closest to her gives devoted fans the illusion of greater intimacy and access – precisely what a keepsake memoir seeks to achieve. The second co-author is Robin C. Kohl, who at the time of the memoir's release was her husband and manager.[28] His role is to narrate the story of the different players and organisations who contributed to the success of Lira's brand. His section is aptly titled *Lira - the brand*. It provides an overview of her musical partners, collaborators, stylists, make-up artists, charities, brand

[28] Due to her interracial marriage, Lira was exempted from the makotification described by Nkayi and Borotho.

associations and business partners for the benefit of curious fans. The contribution of the two co-authors illustrates Sutton's observation that many musicians' autobiographies tend to "present a multi-perspective narrative … with a range comparable to that of an omniscient narrator, to fulfil common reader expectations: reliability, first hand expertise, incisive interpretation, and intimate detail" (209).

I will now focus on the final paratextual element, the photographs. According to Thomas Swiss, in autobiographical texts, photographs serve as "an exertion of control over self-image" and reinforce the subjectivity of the text (in Sutton 290). The subject's selection of images "can reinforce the authenticity of a narrative … or aggrandize a performance persona" (Sutton 208). Lira's memoir contains thirty-two pages of images, way more than any other text in this study. An examination of the images reveals many of the types outlined by Sutton in the quote above. Lira's images fall under eight categories, labelled as: the early years, family, personal, career, posed, outreach, performances and magazine covers. Her photographs, like most musician autobiographies show

> the subject's career advancement … unassuming family snapshots give way to visual representations of apprenticeship and hard work (often an early publicity photo both amusing in its anachronism and charming in its naïveté´), followed by professionally rendered images of sold-out concerts and/or film and television appearances, all signalling commercial success. In the same vein, subjects are commonly shown alongside other musicians, celebrities, even heads of state. Specially staged shots of the musician with older performers symbolize a link to tradition while photo opportunities with younger counterparts fix the subject as an honoured carrier of a legacy. The set of illustrations often culminates in a recent, high-quality publicity photograph that signifies the performer's stature and the distance he or she has travelled from humble beginnings (Sutton 213).

The images work with the text to capture her stardom in accordance with her aspiration to "become a respectable brand that [could] perform for kings and queens, heads of state and top business people and also to be able to sit at a dinner table and converse with them" (Lira 105). There are images of her on numerous big stages (for example, at former US President Barack Obama's 2013 inauguration) to display her star power and "a positive role model in South Africa" (Lira 114).

To be relevant, *Making HerStory* excludes all stories from Lira's childhood, and focuses on her journey to stardom. She starts Chapter One with the words, "2001 was a year of great change for me. I was 22 years old and I made the decision to give up a regular job to pursue a dream to become a singer. I also signed my first record deal in the same year" (2). She starts her story here on the premise that readers, the majority of whom are fans, are primarily interested in Lira the adult singer. Accordingly, Lira seeks to establish a rapport with the reader straight from the introduction, stating "I imagine you to be an old friend sitting across from me, and we are catching up on the past decade … thank you for choosing to pick this book up and read these words. I hope they will inspire, bless you, encourage and motivate you" (Lira xiv).

Keepsake memoirs like Lira's are overly relational in that "they relate the life story of the narrating musician to a whole network of people and institutions that have supported and promoted the writer in his/her musical and literary endeavours" (Stein and Butler 119). Lira's engagement and direct acknowledgement of the reader demonstrates a move to strengthen her fans' connection or parasocial relationship with her. A parasocial relationship is "a pseudo-relationship that results from a false sense of intimacy created during media consumption" (Horton and Wohl in Brown 257)). According to William J. Brown, "when audiences are repeatedly exposed to celebrities, they learn about their lives and begin to believe that they know the celebrity personally" (259). Lira gracefully assumes the role of the admirable star saying, "individuals, organisations and fans support me in countless ways … thank you so much for always believing. Thank you for your prayers" (Lira 122). She also humbles herself to her fans declaring that, "Africans say it takes a village to raise a child. I am an African child, truly raised by this country. I want you to be proud as Africans. I'd like you to be proud when you look at LIRA: a daughter you raised" (ibid). She validates their admiration and assures them that, in a sea of bad girls, she will maintain a good reputation. She says,

> my behaviour is governed by the goals and values I hold dear. I have a clear vision for myself and my career. I have worked so hard that I would not want to compromise all these years of building something with behaviour that is not in line with my self-created set of values and goals. It is really that simple. How would it benefit me if I were to be seen in a scandalous space? …I've heard that sex sells, for example, but this does not go with my personality as

> I sell integrity… I [am] determined to make the things that resonate with me sellable (Lira 114).

In catering for fans of her music, Lira shares the backstories behind some of their favourite songs. For example, she reveals that before making her big career breakthrough, she went through a stage of depression and she explains that "it was during this time that I wrote the song *Stay True*" then she goes on to share the lyrics to that song. Similarly, she explains that at the beginning, "My romantic compositions came from fantasies of what I wished I could be. Songs like *Inner Feeling* and the title track *All My Love* were just wishes of a hopeful young girl" (71). She shares the inspiration as well as the full lyrics for a number of her hit songs including *Ngiyazifela*, *Dumisa*, *Feel Good*, *Dreamer*, *Soul in Mind*, *Believer*, *Hamba* and *My Company* increasing its sentimental value for her fans.

3.6 Conclusion

As a sub-genre, marketing memoirs are distinguishable from other sub-genres by the author's status (vis-à-vis the timing of the release), the plot structure or sequencing of events, the fostering of parasocial connections, the explicit self-promotion and open-ended conclusions., subjects "whose name[s] and fame have been built up to the point where reference to them, via mention, mediatized representation or live appearance, can serve as a promotional booster in itself" (Moran 41). It can be argued that the texts would not have made it on to the list of bestsellers if they were authored by 'has-beens' — the colloquial term for former celebrities in the entertainment industry whose public appeal has waned. In other words, these four texts did particularly well because of the celebrity capital of the subjects. Driessens says that celebrity capital,

> can be converted into economic capital as money (e.g., through merchandising), into social capital as valuable contacts (e.g., through increased access to previously closed networks), into symbolic capital as recognition (e.g. when one's fame is recognised in a specific social field) or into political capital (e.g., by being an elected official. (555)

What I did in this chapter is to identify how these four authors have used the memoir to consolidate celebrity capital, and attempt to convert it into other forms through the marketing of the self. The celebrity status Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira inhabit and wield has been

converted through literature into "a valued power resource" (Driessens 543) towards the consolidation and compounding of other forms of capital beyond their respective spheres of influence. The subjects produced marketing memoirs predominantly focused on their achievements and strengths to facilitate more opportunities for marketing, resource accumulation, brand positioning and for strengthening connections with fans.

Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira's texts place their breakthroughs in the entertainment industry in sharp focus and highlight "what is unique, remarkable, memorable" (Bloom 37) about them to distinguish themselves from their peers. In this sense they have produced what Lynn Z. Bloom (36) would describe as single-experience autobiographies due to the focus on the attainment of celebrity status as a defining or watershed moment for the subjects. According to Bloom (36),

> The watershed experience may occur by chance or by choice, in the twinkling of an eye or over several months or years. Whether it took place in the writer's youth or maturity, the single memorable experience sets the focus and the tone for the rest of the life as it was actually lived. Everything that happens before the watershed experience prefigures it; everything that happens afterward is either an inevitable outcome of the culminating event, or an anti-climax. Such an experience is so intense that it dominates the autobiographer's purpose in writing, the conception of audience, and the emphasis, structure, authorial role(s) and persona, even language.

For each of the subjects their lives changed through the watershed experience whether it came in the form of winning a beauty pageant, securing a TV presenting job or signing a record deal. This chapter in particular, is located at the intersection of life writing, business and public relations. The four texts examined illustrate that it can sometimes be "unclear where self-making ends and brand-building begins, as celebrity authors occupy dual roles as narrative subject and commoditised object in a marketplace" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 62).

CHAPTER 4: PRIVATE LIVES, PUBLIC DISCOURSE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine how autobiography provides a platform for black South African celebrities to draw on their personal life stories to intervene and comment on topical matters in public discourse. The texts are analysed for their intervention on a range of issues including rape, depression, addiction, physical abuse and cross-generational trauma in South Africa. The autobiographical form lends itself to commentary on public discourse because it allows celebrities to use their life stories to highlight issues of public interest or benefit. The four texts under scrutiny in this chapter are *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* by Pamela Nomvete (2012), *Eyebags & Dimples* by Bonnie Henna (2012), *When Hope Whispers* by Zoleka Mandela (2013) and *Remembering* by Andile Gaelesiwe (2021). What the narratives in this chapter have in common is their focus on topics of public interest. Each of the life stories analysed here appear to be "in the service of a project larger than personal gain, opportunism, an overt political agenda, or a desire to obfuscate and impress" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 18).

4.2 Andile Gaelesiwe's Trauma Memoir

Remembering (2021) is a memoir by Andile Gaelesiwe, a popular South African musician and former television presenter. She is well known for presenting *Khumbulekhaya* (a call to 'remember home'), a show aired on the public broadcasting channel SABC1. At its peak, the show pulled almost 3 million viewers weekly.[29] The show, which first aired in 2012, depicts ordinary South Africans seeking to be reunited with lost family members, some of whom have been gone for decades. It is an emotional, raw and often heart-breaking series which has made her a household name.

The blurb indicates that "it touches on serious issues of rape and patriarchy, but also reveals a woman with a will of steel … and a commitment to living to the full." A close reading confirms that rape, patriarchy and violence are recurrent themes in the narrative. According to a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report, "violence against children

[29] Mathope, Gosebo. "#TBT WATCH: Ha monate jwang! Khumbul'ekhaya's unforgettable Rosalia."*The Citizen*, 5 Oct. 2017, #TBT WATCH: Ha monate jwang! Khumbul'ekhaya's unforgettable Rosalia | The Citizen.

remains a critical challenge facing South African society today … the legacy of violence and extreme inequality from South Africa's past is compounded by high poverty and unemployment in the present."[30] Gaelesiwe locates herself and her personal experiences within a very specific environmental context. The narrative is set in South Africa and it starts in Soweto Township. Part one is called *Growing up in Meadowlands* (a location in Soweto) indicating the historical and socio-cultural context against which the story unfolds. She indicates that she was born "in Meadowlands … just three years before the Soweto uprisings of June 16, 1976," a clear indicator of her socio-political position as a subject. Meadowlands was established to accommodate the black people forcibly removed from Sophiatown under apartheid South Africa's Natives Resettlement Act of 1954. Gaelesiwe draws extensively from her own experiences and recounts the ways violence plays out in schools (where a well-known bully hit her and attempted to rape her in a classroom), in local communities (where a boy would slap her across the face for rejecting his advances) and in the home (where she was raped by her father at the age of eleven). According to Pumla Dineo Gqola, "violence continues to retain a strong grip on our lives that postpones the attainment of the kind of free society we so optimistically awaited in 1994" (*Female Fear Factory* 54). Gaelesiwe recalls that growing up, she often hid indoors to avoid a notorious neighbourhood gangster who threatened to kidnap and gang rape her, a horrific illustration of the workings of Gqola's concept of the female fear factory. Gqola formulated the term to explain how fear "threatens women, mostly to remind us that nothing belongs to us — not even our bodies, neither in private nor public spaces … it communicates both to the target and to the audience the possibility of being the victim, and teaches and enshrines power in patriarchal society" (*Female Fear Factory* 19). Gqola further explains that,

> Paying attention to fear, its sites of generation, its targets, its beneficiaries, and the stories through which it is made sense of, helps us understand much about the structure of a society. Therefore, stories matter in and as of themselves, but they also matter because they tell us something about the societies of their placement (*Female Fear Factory* 46)

[30] "Child protection." The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, www.unicef.org/southafrica/child-protection

As indicated, the overarching theme of the narrative is rape, and it is located in a South African township setting. Gadi Benezer notes that

> traumatic events never happen in a social vacuum. They are connected to the social context in which they take place. In many if not most cases, they are related to the norms of society and to what is spoken about and what is kept silent in public. Life stories include an exposition of the relation between the private and the collective context. They can thus give a better understanding of both the personal trauma, as it is viewed within a social context, and of the social milieu, as reflected in the individual's life. (40)

Her narrative illustrates the vulnerability of certain groups in South Africa. Research shows that in South Africa, it is "children from impoverished societies [who] are more likely to be targets" of violence and child sexual abuse (CSA 12). Gaelesiwe grew up in a relatively poor home, often lacking basic essentials, "there was not always enough food, so sometimes we had to eat isikhokho from pap [crust from mielie porridge], and drink black tea without sugar" (23). She was born under dysfunctional circumstances — her father denied impregnating her mother who was a teenager at the time and abandoned her. Mother and daughter had a "complicated" and "corrosive relationship" (26) to the extent that she describes her mother as "a Hitler" (28). Young Gaelesiwe ran away from home on several occasions and even attempted suicide at the age of sixteen. In later years, as a working woman, she encountered colleagues and workplace superiors who demanded different forms of sexual favours from her.

The plot is not linear, there is no clear middle or end of the story. She explains that, "these sections reflect the sometimes disordered sequence in which memories surface in the telling. Instead of forcing them into a strictly chronological sequence, I wanted to retain the organic way in which we share what we recall" (13). Gaelesiwe's story is a trauma narrative, "a mode of writing the unspeakable" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 206). Trauma narratives

> are particularly useful in understanding the significance of trauma in people's lives. The life story approach allows room for … a holistic richness, and complexity. It gives the opportunity to explore the relation between personal and collective experience. (Leydesdorff, Selma, et al 13)

Trauma narratives often contain disturbing details. In *Remembering*, Gaelesiwe reveals that in raping her, her father intended to break her virginity. Immediately after raping her, he got angry because the eleven-year-old did not bleed and accused her of "having had sex before" (31). He was not repelled by the prospect of his daughter's blood, but was, in a twisted way, looking forward to it hence his disappointment when she did not bleed. Years after her father, she was raped again by a taxi driver on her way to school. Gqola notes that in South Africa rape is "a powerful language with which to control women in South Africa … it is a language that is now an established part of South African power" (*Rape* 53). In detailing these brutal experiences (and others), Gaelesiwe spotlights the nuances of rape culture, some of which the justice and medical fraternities do not acknowledge. From her horrific experiences over the years, she is able to contribute her own definition of rape to the discourse on the subject. She says,

> rape is a violation of a woman's private space. Rape is when a man invades your mind and personal space and tries to impose his sense of masculinity and power on you. Rape is when a man tries to use his position and influence to extract a particular result from a person of a different sex. My definition of rape is when a man thinks he has ownership of a woman's body. When he thinks you are just a piece of meat to be enjoyed. When he ogles you and eats you with his eyes. When he refuses to see you as a complete human being but as a collection of human parts that he can use to satisfy his sexual urges. Rape is not just a sexual act, it is an exercise of power. (Gaelesiwe 34)

According to Gaelesiwe, "the issue of rape and patriarchy in South Africa is a tragedy… the most endangered species, in my beloved South Africa is a woman, a black woman" (Gaelesiwe 35; 87). She uses figurative language to convey the gross violations she suffered. She describes her body as "a crime scene" which she says people have used as "a playground and as a battlefield" (Gaelesiwe 176).

As Cathy Caruth observes, "to listen to the crisis of a trauma … is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it*"* (10). Gaelesiwe announces her departure from her past, boldly stating, "I refuse to be defined by rape. I have fought tooth and nail to survive and to reclaim my power" (Gaelesiwe 58). Readers and survivors of sexual violence are invited to "find their own wisdom in themselves if they let their pain teach them" (110). She hopes that the memoir, written in her self-proclaimed role as "as an anti-sexual violence activist" (120) will be "a lifeline to someone" (205). Gaelesiwe, on her healing and

reintegration journey, has started "learning about chakras, the different energy fields, the colour spectrum, and about the magnetic fields around us" (85). She also recommends therapy, prayer, alternative healing techniques such as mediation, reiki and certain kinds of massages to alleviate trauma. Her journey to healing brings to mind Susan Rose's observations on healing from trauma: "in order to step back into the fullness of being and embrace the wholeness, in both its good and bad aspects, survivors speak of the need to pick up the strands of their being; to re-member the connections between the body, mind, and spirit and to re- integrate knowing and feeling" (171).

Gaelesiwe highlights the plight of women who are double victimised by the society (health workers, family members, police etc.) which either blames, doubts or stigmatises them when they eventually find the courage to speak out. To the people who ask "why now?" when victims speak out years after the violation occurred, she says, "I knew that if I went to the stand, as I had seen women do, they would rip me apart. For not remembering. Whereas not remembering was a coping mechanism. I am a grown woman. Sane today because I did that" (77 – 78).

In *Remembering,* Gaelesiwe strongly advocates for disclosure and emphasises that "you can't help South African women if you do not take the time to hear them. They themselves are not taking the time to look at themselves in the mirror" (Gaelesiwe 148). Literature on disclosure has highlighted a need to refine its definition to differentiate between "the act of simply telling someone, [and] a more official act of reporting abuse to an authoritative body" (Alaggia in Brazelton 181). The literature also advises that we should not view disclosure as a static event but as a fluid process which can take place over several years. After twenty years, she publicly disclosed that her biological father was a rapist and made the revelation during a radio interview: "it was a huge leap: from no one knowing about my rape ordeal to it becoming public knowledge" (79). She made this revelation knowing that she would be viewed by the public as "a celebrity who was coming out, saying she had been raped" (ibid). She launched the Open Disclosure Foundation with the slogan "talking is therapy and therapy is healing" (Gaelesiwe 84). *Remembering* is dedicated to and "speaks for all those men and women who have felt marginalised, their voices silenced, their opinions disregarded" (np). Gaelesiwe is against the systemic silencing of women about their experiences, and according to Susan Rose,

> Silence … accepts an unjust and abusive system of power that renders the victim powerless. It makes abuse possible without holding the abusers accountable. In the process of breaking silence, survivors are not only finding

> their own voices; they also are collectively creating new narratives that challenge the individual and collective denial of abuse and the reproduction of violence. In dialogue with others who can bear witness, survivors are redefining the experiences that once rendered them powerless (165).

There is now more than ever, a "multiplicity of social processes through which survivor discourse is generated" (Naples 1153). A prominent example is the #MeToo movement which was "started in 2006 by Tarana Burke to recognize experiences of sexual assault and harassment, particularly by women of color ... the movement encourages women to speak up about experiences of sexual harassment and abuse, seeks to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and provides survivors with support" (Murphy 63). The #MeToo movement has been instrumental in encouraging victims to break the silence and "to educate the society at large about the dimensions of sexual violence and misogyny, to reposition the problem from the individual psyche to the social sphere where it rightfully belongs, and to empower victims to act constructively [and] make the transition from passive victim to active survivor" (Alcoff and Gray 261). In 2017, *Time* magazine dedicated its coveted Person of the Year title to 'The Silence Breakers' and featured five women on the cover. Since then, the world has witnessed the conviction of powerful perpetrators like Hollywood movie producer Harvey Weinstein, musician Robert 'R' Kelly and actor Bill Cosby to name a few. While not all "survivors of childhood sexual assault … find it necessary to claim a public position within the discourse [or] to enter the public discourse" (Naples 1153), Gaelesiwe is amongst those who continue to do so. Indeed, "by breaking through the silence, survivors are constructing oppositional narratives that defy the taboo against talking about incest and torture, and in the process are re-creating themselves" (Rose 164).

According to Rose, "the challenge for the survivor is not only to explore the old terrain but to carve a new landscape out of it" (166). Autobiography creates an opportunity for survivors to offer "corrective readings; and to emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation, a figure, textual to be sure but seemingly substantial, who can claim 'I was there' or 'I am here"' (Gilmore 9). Through telling her story, at her own time and in her own words, Gaelesiwe assumes the role of commentator, witness and survivor. She explains why she chose to name it *Remembering*: "the word remembering has also been a mantra to assist me and to give me courage … remembering means re-membering: become a sane, productive member of society" (Gaelesiwe13).

In light of South Africa's rape crisis, *Remembering* plays an important role towards "rethinking and debunking rape myths [which] is an important part of the conversation of how to bring down the rape statistics and how to create a world without rape. Addressing them allows us to move closer to a world in which rape is taken seriously, where survivors can be supported and recover and where rape is dissuaded rather than excused" (Gqola, *Rape* 143). She found purpose in her fight for survival in part through speaking out: "having finally revealed my trauma, I felt able to reach out and develop a vision of how to help girls and women who had gone through sexual abuse, and other kinds of abuse" (Gaelesiwe 82).

In *Remembering,* Gaelesiwe raises awareness about perpetrators of sexual violence, and the traumatic effects of rape. She also presents a woman's perspective on issues about disclosure, healing, justice and advocacy. As she affirms: "I have a passion for helping the others, because … I have been able to survive every trauma, every hardship inflicted by men" (Gaelesiwe 130). Through the narrative she convenes a safe space to unpack, discuss and strategize against rape.

4.3 Zoleka Mandela's Addiction and Cancer Memoir

Zoleka Mandela is the subject and author of *When Hope Whispers* (2013). She is the granddaughter of South African struggle icons Nelson Mandela and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. As the granddaughter of one of the most famous and revered men on the planet, her celebrity is the ascribed kind. According to Chris Rojek "ascribed celebrity concerns lineage: status typically follows from bloodline" (17). People like Mandela, "may add to or subtract from their ascribed status by virtue of their voluntary actions, but the foundation of their ascribed celebrity is predetermined" (ibid). As a Mandela, she is part of South Africa's political royalty and has benefitted from the social capital generated by her family name. She released *When Hope Whispers* in 2013.

The blurb encapsulates what it is about, it reads:

> This book is Zoleka's story of healing and triumph. Told with a refreshing honesty, Zoleka's story serves as testimony to the strength of the human spirit in fighting against life's challenges. Zoleka is a living example of success in spite of overwhelming challenges; she is cancer free and enjoying sobriety (np).

The plot unfolds in chronological order from chapter 1 to chapter 42 followed by an epilogue. The individual chapters do not have titles but are divided into 3 parts, each marking a different and significant part of her story.

Part 1 focuses on her upbringing and subsequent substance abuse. Born under the shadow of apartheid, Zoleka Mandela was raised in absence and dysfunction – something she highlights early in the narrative: "with my grandfather's political career – in fact his life — unquestionably committed to an anti-apartheid South Africa, he had never been able to be the father he wanted to be for his own children" (4). Her biological mother — the icon's daughter — is portrayed as an inattentive, absent, distant and selfish figure. She was not someone Zoleka Mandela relied on or turned to for nurturing, comfort or counsel, which led her young and disillusioned daughter to seek maternal affection from others. When she discovered that she was pregnant at the age of sixteen, she hid it for eight months and informed her family a month before the baby was due. Upon finding out, her mother gave her the silent treatment for weeks. She describes her father as "the one man whose recognition I have always sought …but that man left a very long time ago" (27). Mandela indicates that she felt "rejected" by her parents and made a decision to keep "a distance" from them (177). In a glaring omission, her mother and father are not amongst those she acknowledges at the beginning of the text.

Part 1 of the narrative serves to highlight the damage caused by dysfunctional parent-child relationships. Mandela started using ecstasy and marijuana as a teenager. By the time she reached her twenties, she was addicted to cocaine and alcohol, drinking an "average of eighteen beers a day" (72). After a drug-induced psychotic episode, Mandela attempted suicide at the age of twenty. She was taken to hospital and treated for depression. Two months after her hospitalisation she checked herself into a drug rehabilitation centre thus ending her addiction to substances. Based on the facts presented, it could be argued that her abnormal and dysfunctional upbringing negatively affected her self-esteem, well-being and life choices. The inadequate guidance, quality time and attention from her mother appear to have contributed to Mandela's poor decisions and lifestyle choices including substance abuse and reckless sexual behaviour. After rehabilitation for drug addiction, she remained a sex addict who was drawn to "bad boys" (Mandela 27). She says, "I placed my value as a woman in all the wrong places, but perhaps that wasn't the problem: it was my own lack of self-worth. How I felt about myself depended on what the men I dated thought about me or made me feel" (Mandela 27) and in these relationships, she was "desperate to feel wanted, safe, protected and, most importantly,

loved" (Mandela 26). When a relationship ended, she immediately sought another one. In her words, "I moved on to the next one" (Mandela 68) or "true to form, after I'd said my goodbye, I moved on to the next" (Mandela 87). She "regularly engaged in risky sexual behaviour in unsafe places – in public toilets, on highways" (Mandela 52). She reveals that she was drawn to relationships characterised by "intense and passionate sexual encounters that followed violent and vulgar fights" (Mandela 59). She reveals: "I craved … whatever men I was dating. Being in a relationship made me feel that I mattered to someone, that I was special. Sex made me feel better about myself" (Mandela 59). By the age of twenty-two, she was "a single parent of two" (Mandela 57). Until this point, her text reads like an addiction memoir with elements of "oughtabiography" — a relatively unknown term coined by Chon Noriega to describe "life narratives focused on all the things one should have done … a discourse of regret and remorse" (in Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 199). In part, it also functions as a confessional text; a subgenre which, according to Rita Felski, "makes public that which has been private, typically claiming to avoid filtering mechanisms of objectivity and detachment in its pursuit of the truth of subjective experience" (83). Feminist confessional literature, in particular "explicitly seeks to disclose the most intimate and often traumatic details of the author's life and to elucidate their broader implications" (ibid). The confessional text "is frequently inspired by a personal crisis which acts as a catalyst" (Felski 83) and for Mandela, the crisis was signalled by her attempted suicide followed by the death of her firstborn child. She reflects with "intense guilt and remorse" (Mandela 205) the "colossal damage" her drug use caused her loved ones. She confesses that due to her addiction, she was a bad mother to her children and "robbed" them of "the mother they deserved" a reality she says will "haunt her for the rest of her life" (Mandela 82). She cites guilt as one of her "most difficult feelings" (Mandela 122) and expresses the regret that, "I should have been an amazing mother. But I wasn't" (Mandela 123).

Part 2 and Part 3 of the autobiography focus on breast cancer. After her second pregnancy, she noticed an abnormality in her left breast which she initially dismissed as a "side effect from the medication to dry up [her] breast milk" (Mandela 105). As the months progressed, "it became more defined", and became "two lumps" (ibid). She set up an appointment at a radiology practice and in March 2012 she received her "official breast cancer diagnosis" (Mandela 112). Couser observes that "breast cancer is one of a few diseases sufficiently common and of sufficiently wide public interest that it has generated a distinctive autopathographical subgenre, the breast cancer narrative — an autobiographical literature of growing significance" (*Illness,*

Disability, and Life Writing 42). These breast cancer narratives "often involve both a kind of master plot and a series of recurrent scenes and topics" (*Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* 43) and display some common elements and generic conventions, for example,

> A number of topics or scenes appear in nearly every narrative, generally in the same order: discovery by the author of a suspicious lump in her breast; diagnosis of cancer; the assessment of treatment options; some form of surgical treatment, lumpectomy or mastectomy; some form of adjuvant treatment — radiation, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, or a combination of these; recovery and resolution in the form of favorable reports and restoration of (relative) peace of mind (42).

Several scholars have explored why people tend to write autopathography (or illness memoirs) and their function. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (25) classifies pathography as a subgenre of autobiography which acts as a "bridge between the suffering self and the outside world." In her interpretation, that pathography fulfills the need of the writer "to communicate a painful, disorienting, and isolating experience" (10). Another view is that these narratives are written "out of a desire to help other patients to come to terms with their own illnesses, to obtain catharsis, to educate and criticise carers, and to make money" (Aronson 1599). Pathography unpacks severe illness for readers; "it gathers together the separate meanings, the moments of illumination and understanding, the cycles of hope and despair, and weaves them into a whole fabric, one wherein a temporal sequence of events takes on narrative form" (Hawkins 24 -25). Unlike medical reports "made up of impersonal statements by medical caregivers about symptoms, test results, and response to treatment" (Hawkins 128), autopathographies situate "illness and treatment within the author's life and linking them with the meaning of that life" (ibid). As we see in *When Hope Whispers*, autophathographies "are about disruptions, the biggest of which is the disease and its effects. The monological point of telling these disruptions is to display the author as having overcome, perhaps performatively in the narrative itself, the destabilizing implications of the disruption" (Frank 139).

The textual and cultural work breast cancer narratives perform is to "remind readers that all autobiography, especially political memoir, involves a complex intersection of the writing subject's discursive position, embodied materiality, and sociohistorical location, and that breast cancer offers a productive critical site for both self-disclosure and cultural intervention" (DeShazer 65). One of the lessons that autobiography teaches "is that identity is inherently

unstable … the struggle with "Who am I now?" turns on the idea that we are not always the same" (Herndl 241). Like many cancer patients, Mandela comes to the realization "that one both is and is not one's body, and that one's bodily identity and integrity can be severely compromised, may open up new possibilities for understanding oneself as part of a group rather than simply as an individual" (Herndl 228).

Mandela gives the reader insight into the cancer journey from diagnosis to survival and everything in between. At the beginning of her cancer journey, Mandela reveals that she felt "broken" (Mandela 117), "miserable" (121), "depressed" (122) and "let down" by her body (121). She lost all hope as well as the will to live and refused to seek treatment for three months after her diagnosis, much to the despair of doctors and her loved ones.

After three months, during which she was subjected to pleas from family and her doctor, she agreed to surgery and treatment. She went through a struggle that women with breast cancer undergo to accept the transition from their "vibrant pre-diagnostic bodies — gendered, desiring, resolutely maternal — [to] their wounded post-diagnostic bodies" (DeShazer 192). According to Audre Lorde "any woman who has had a breast removed because of cancer knows she does not feel the same" (57) and accordingly, "women's experiential accounts of mastectomy invariably disclose their injured self-image and feelings of loss, envy, and nostalgia for their old, 'ordinary' selves" (Avrahami 47 – 48). Understandably, Mandela was anxious and sad ahead of losing her breasts to surgery: "I wanted to capture what would be my last moments with my breasts … With my BlackBerry phone I took pictures of my naked breasts from every angle that I could…" (Mandela 130). After the mastectomy, she admits that "it was hard not to focus more on what had been taken away from my body, rather than the second chance I was given" (Mandela 136).

After the mastectomy she started her cancer treatments which she details for the reader. She expresses "fear about the chemotherapy … which loomed, scary and unknowable, in the future" (Mandela 144). The parts detailing her treatments are written in the present tense, taking the form of a diary, that periodic form of life writing which "records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 192). Like journals, diaries record events and occurrences in pseudo real time and the "immediacy of the genre derives from the diarist's lack of foreknowledge about outcomes of the plot of his life, which creates a series of surprises to writer and reader alike" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 195).

In Part 3, she demystifies breast cancer treatment, beginning each chapter with a countdown of the number of treatments to go, for example, "first chemotherapy treatment (fifteen to go)" (Mandela 153). Each chapter from this point gives an account of what to expect on the journey. For example, about the first session she says, "I am going to have a cocktail of chemotherapy medications administered to me intravenously" and she proceeds to name each of the drugs and its use (Mandela 153). In addition to the prospect of her hair "falling out in patches in two to three weeks" (Mandela 154), Mandela's doctor tells her to anticipate "constipation, mouth ulcers, blackening of the nail bed, darkening of the area where the drip was inserted, watery eyes, a runny nose and darkened spots on the palms and tongue" (154). She expresses shock at the size of the chemotherapy needles and afterwards experiences "bloating, stomach cramps, discomfort urinating and the worst nausea I have ever had in my life" (155). She says "these symptoms are all expected, but nothing prepares you for the shock of seeing your body change so drastically, so quickly … I am discovering first-hand what it means to have a weakened immune system" (Mandela 165). According to her, "this is what drinking poison must feel like" (Mandela 155). She keeps up the updates until her sixteenth session. She also names the different medications, what they are for (e.g., pain, nausea etc.) and their side effects.

According to a study by Rayne, Sarah, et al. (125), "breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer in women in South Africa and often patients present late." They conducted research to try to understand the factors which lead to delays in women seeking medical attention after diagnosis. Their findings suggest that, in urban areas, more than demographic and socioeconomic factors, "fear can be important in determining delay to treatment" (Rayne, Sarah, et al. 128). Relevant for this discussion are the fears identified in the study, for example, the fear of surgery, telling others, dying, the adverse effects chemotherapy as well as the fear of losing hair, breasts and employment (Rayne, Sarah, et al. 130). The proof of the impact of Mandela's advocacy efforts is that the study acknowledges her contribution as one of the "high-profile breast cancer survivors in South Africa" introducing "public discussion of treatment options and successes in breast cancer care" (Rayne, Sarah, et al. 130).

In 2013 Mandela embarked on her journey as a cancer awareness activist. She granted her first media interview to a news programme called *Carte Blanche* because she felt that her story "may be of benefit to people who are doing battle with cancer" (Mandela 254). She appeared on television without a wig on:

> I intentionally remove my wig and wear my balding scalp with pride, with the big patch on the back of my head there for all to see. Here is my opportunity to share my journey and to let people know that cancer can happen to anyone. I hope that knowing about my cancer will help people who are still battling theirs, and I hope that people who are in denial, as I was, might be inspired to take the necessary steps to save their own lives (Mandela 255).

Autopathographies, present "not only a description of how awful it is to be seriously ill, but also a testimony to the capacity to transform that experience in ways that heal" (Hawkins 129). Auto/pathographies make "illness bearable by bearing witness to a new kind of selfhood" (Vickers 395). Towards the end of the narrative, we see that Mandela's cancer activism enhances and adds meaning to her life. She declares that "bringing inspiration is a realisation of my dreams. From my family, I am drawing on a legacy that brings about change, and also one that instils hope" (260). She describes her elation at getting a book publishing deal, because to her it presented yet "another vehicle to drive breast cancer awareness" (Mandela 261). As a nod to the title, her story ends on a hopeful note:

> I have found a most rewarding purpose. As I share the ebbs and flows of my life, I hope that people identify with me, find hope and, where necessary, a reason to change their life stories. And remember that despite the tragedies of life, there is always space for love, laughter and more hope (Mandela 261).

A year after *When Hope Whispers* was published, *Lancet Oncology*, the global clinical oncology journal, published an article about her account, which I quote at length due to its eloquence and accuracy:

> the book provides clear and intimate detail about what a bilateral mastectomy means, both emotionally and physically for a woman, and exactly how gruelling chemotherapy can be. It could thus serve as a useful resource for anyone diagnosed with breast cancer who would like an honest account of what day-to-day therapy entails: in fact, the final chapters are each devoted to detailing the minutiae of each chemotherapy session. Mandela also raises awareness of what her treatments could mean for her life after cancer—e.g., her chemotherapy affected her fertility, necessitating the discussion of fertility treatments and egg-harvesting regimens with her relatively new partner. She

> also grapples straight-forwardly with the knowledge that despite enduring treatment, it is no guarantee that the cancer will not return. The end of chemotherapy, for her, appears to mark a half-life: an interval of indeterminacy ended only by hearing that she has relapsed. Fortunately, at the time of writing, this is not the case, and Mandela continues to promote breast cancer awareness. The book is heavily marketed as a story of Mandela's survival, both through cancer and through the other episodes of her life. It is upon her own journey that she concentrates. Those hoping for an insider's view on life within the Mandela family, and insights into behind-the-scenes stories during the most turbulent episodes of South African history, will not find them here … through honest, clear writing, she provides an account of what cancer feels like for every women, not just Nelson Mandela's granddaughter; it is here that the strength of the book lies" (Coburn 385)

When Hope Whispers is a pedagogical autopathography – it raises awareness, educates, and establishes a community of cancer patients. According to Herndl,

> narratives of breast cancer rebuild a sense of self by building that self into a community. In writing that self into a community and assuming a "response-ability" to the audience, these writers move toward a new identity that is much less individualistic than those one sees in much traditional autobiography (228).

After publishing the memoir, she had three more children and remained an avid cancer advocate. Her memoir and social media posts drove discourse around breast cancer. Patients interacted with her posts about cancer, sharing their own journeys and expressing their gratitude to her for being open and a source of information. For example, an Instagram user wrote on her wall, "some of us get courage from your strength," another wrote "After reading your book, dealing with cancer became very easy for me" and yet another said, "You are an inspiration to me, [I am] going through treatment. Did my surgery 4 weeks ago, throwing up, headaches, pains from the breast but I take a day as it comes. You are a warrior". Her social media platforms attracted messages like this daily from people thanking her, and wishing her well. In 2016, she was diagnosed with Luminal Type B breast cancer which she beat. In September 2022 she announced that she had been diagnosed with terminal stage 4 cancer of the bones, liver, lung and brain. Tragically, she could not beat it again. Mandela passed away on the 25th of September 2023.

4.4 Bonnie Henna's Autopathography and Autoethnography

In terms of autobiographical form, *Eyebags and Dimples* (2012), fulfils the requirements to be classified as a combination of autopathography — "autobiographical narratives of illness or disability" (Couser, *Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* 5) — and autoethnography, "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay 9).[31] Stephen Moran describes autopathography, as "a type of literature in which the author's illness is the primary lens through which the narrative is filtered" (79). Elsewhere, Moran analyses a number of autobiographical texts around depression by different writers and discovers that,

> each of the writers … regardless of the meanings he [or she] made out of depression, expressed distrust of its medical definition — a definition that was variously found to be weak, coercive, banal, conformist, and always incomplete. Literature [in contrast] explores the myths about illness – the lost but important parts of the story – that medicine frequently ignores, and supplements medical knowledge through its interest in the complexity of the individual patient's experience, rather than in norms or types (90).

In their analysis of the epistemological value of depression memoirs, Jennifer Radden and Somogy Varga established that,

> the illness memoir or autopathography is a highly popular kind of autobiographical writing. Organised around an experience of illness or disability, it usually comprises a personal reconstruction of the experiential dimension of the condition as well as reflection on its meaning and place in the life of the author (104).

Such autobiographical writing can "inform medical understanding itself, both within medicine more generally, and within medical psychiatry [due to the] growing acceptance of personal narratives in medical scholarship used for illustrative effect, and the prospect of research that builds on such narratives in more substantive ways" (Radden and Varga 100). Depression memoirs provide "veritable sources of rich description of experience [and are] characterised

[31] To the extent that Henna used writing as part of her healing process, *Eyebags and Dimples* also exhibits characteristics of scriptotherapy.

by description of experience that is richly phenomenal – emotions, feelings and moods, not merely beliefs or behavioural responses" (Radden and Varga 100-01).

Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner define autoethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (739). According to Stacy Holman Jones et al (3),

> Autoethnography consists of three characteristics or activities: the "auto," or self; the "ethno," or culture; and the "graphy," or representation/writing/ story. Projects defined as "autoethnography" engage all three characteristics. If a project only foregrounds one or two characteristics—for example, a work that offers a narrative account of an author's personal experience without consideration of culture, or a narrative work that details the nuances of culture without situating and questioning the role of the author in creating and forming the account — the work may be better characterized as a memoir or an anthropological narrative, rather than autoethnography.

Autoethnographies show "people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (Bochner and Ellis 111 in Jones, Adams and Ellis 1). Bonnie Henna states that "writing this book is an undeniable part of my destiny, it is my truth, my story, my contribution to the world" (243). She declares in the prologue: "I have taken it upon myself to break the silence and let in the light" (2012: viii) and declares that what has emerged is "the story of my life, the story of depression" (Henna viii).

Drawing extensively from their personal experiences, autoethnographers "describe moments of everyday experience that cannot be captured through more traditional research methods … [they] can write about experiences that happen in private contexts, such as the bedroom or bathroom, or everyday interactions" (Jones, Adams and Ellis 4). In so doing, they add detail and nuances that other accounts may lack. The text documents how Henna struggled with depression from childhood to adulthood, and how it manifested and affected her until she sought medical treatment. *Eyebags and Dimples* was released in 2012, at a time when the topic of depression was considered a private matter not for public disclosure; it was not as commonly discussed or understood as it has become. The media noted that "[Henna] spoke about mental health when it wasn't trendy to talk about it" (Tshabalala).

Henna explains the meaning of the title *Eyebags and Dimples* as follows, "eyebags represent the parts of me I'd always despised but have learnt to live with and accept. Dimples represent the parts of my life I have learnt to appreciate and celebrate" (243). She uses her body and life story to highlight and influence public discourse around the issue of depression. The cover depicts a face with no attempt at sophistry, no enhancers like mascara or lipstick; it shows Henna without the studio effects of the covers as is the case in the afore-discussed covers of marketing memoirs. The title, *Eyebags and Dimples,* is also a reference to her natural essence, gesturing towards authenticity: she presents herself as she is, without a filter. In narrating her story, she put her celebrity capital to good use, explaining that, "publicity is something one grows to understand and manage with time. It's not a destination but a by-product, which can either become a lethal addiction or a means to influence society positively. I'm deeply grateful for the platforms it has presented me with to share ideas and thoughts that may hopefully provide clues to a more fulfilling life, especially for young women" (Henna 237). Instead of writing the text with the aim of showing off her career achievements in the entertainment industry (although they are also mentioned), she writes as an act of service, stating that:

> this book is a love letter to all who have walked this same road, blind to the stealthy enemy that lurks among our families, churches, schools and workplaces. It's an invitation to have a conversation about what you may have refused to consider or have been fearful to explore; it's an outstretched hand to hold on to as you open your eyes to the help around you; and it's a reminder that you're not alone (Henna ix).

As a celebrity with considerable influence, Henna lends her name and public voice to fight depression. According to Jane Danielewicz, a "public voice is not something intrinsic to the writer but results from the writer's engagement and position in the world. Thus, a text with voice means the writer has the confidence and position to speak out and the potential to influence others" (423). Henna's voice with regards to the topic of depression "enters the ongoing conversation to change, amend, intervene, extend, disrupt, or influence it" (Danielewicz 425). She highlights depression in the home (families), church, school and workplace as sites where her experiences played out.

On the home front, depression ran in her maternal genes, and she does not shy away from airing her family's proverbial dirty laundry in public. Henna uses her personal life story to intervene in public discourse around depression. She reveals that her mother and grandmother both

suffered from undiagnosed depression. *Eyebags and Dimples* sheds light on intergenerational trauma and the impact of depression on one's family and health. Henna reveals that her grandmother passed away in her fifties, as a result of years of depression-fuelled alcohol addiction. She recalls that,

> the addiction had so gripped her that she resorted to drinking methylated spirits when she ran out of money to buy alcohol. And she drank it neat. She must have been self-medicating, trying to deal with some unbearable emotional pain deep insider her. Although I loved my grandmother, I was at peace with her passing because she was such a tormented woman (Henna 10).

Henna makes it clear in her narration that she is a third-generation victim of depression. She shares that,

> Gogo always seemed disappointed in my mother. Both she and my mother shared a detached, distant look that seemed characteristic of the Mbuli women. Whenever Mom was in the room, Gogo's face took on a grimace of disapproval. I never forgot that look, with her eyes scrunched up in disdain. Soon my mother began to use that same look on me (9).

She shares insights into the torment of being raised in a volatile domestic environment by a mother suffering from (undiagnosed) depression. The abuse she and her younger siblings suffered at the hands of their single mother was both physical and emotional. As the eldest of three children, Henna was beaten frequently, sworn at regularly, and always given too much responsibility for her age, saying "my mother was at work during the day, and like many black moms, she had a fixation with cleanliness. I was expected to keep the house sparkling, and failure to do so resulted in severe beatings. My existence began to revolve around avoiding beatings" (Henna 10). Henna recalls a terrifying night when her mother's depression made its indelible mark on her psyche:

> One night as we were preparing for bed, Mom announced to me and my brother that tonight was the night she was going to kill herself. We would never lay eyes on her again. It was 1990, the year our sister turned one. I was eleven.

> She'd threatened suicide countless times before so this wasn't anything new. But that night something in her words, in her tone of voice, was different, more determined. Terror rushed through me like an earthquake.
>
> …
>
> We did nothing, just huddled there together, the two of us, outside her bedroom door… for endless hours we huddled, not knowing what to expect. Would she open the door and give us hell, or was she already busy dying? I began to resign myself to a world without the only parent I had. It was the longest night of my life and it changed my life forever. That night all hope floated off into oblivion, disappearing like a hot-air balloon, drifting away until it was just a tiny, distant speck. I let go of love that night, and began to accept that life would still go on without it. I was underserving, abandoned. Halfway through the night we picked ourselves up off the floor and crawled numbly into the bed, curled up half asleep in cold fear and anxiety. It didn't matter that our mother eventually emerged from her bedroom in the morning. I had already let go of her, together with the girl child Bonnie. Through that long night, all innocence slipped away, and my childhood came to an abrupt end (Henna 36-37).

This experience traumatised Henna and her siblings, but they had nowhere else to turn to. They simply endured the relentless abuse. At times, Henna's mother would tell them, "I wish I'd never had you… you've ruined my life and destroyed all my dreams … I wish I could die and leave you to suffer" (Henna 35). The impact of these words took a heavy and negative toll on Henna, she says, "my existence, and that of my siblings, was the major reason she wished for nonexistence, which made me, in turn, wish I'd never existed … I lived with the constant guilt that she wanted to kill herself because of the evil of my existence" (Henna 35). Henna's mother denied her the opportunity to seek or access emotional support outside the home; it was drummed into her young head that "no one was to be trusted. People were mean, jealous and only wished us the worst. Like most families, she also feared witchcraft, and spoke of how easily one could get bewitched in Soweto" (Henna 12). They were forbidden from playing beyond their back yard and lived a very lonely existence. Due to depression, Henna's mother had extreme mood swings. There were "rare occasions" when she was in a good mood but, "in the blink of an eye, anger and frustration would blow over like a tempest" (Henna 29). The bad treatment that would ensue crushed young Henna's spirit:

> It baffled me that this behaviour was so similar to the things Mom had told me her mother did to her; some were in fact identical. She'd related numerous stories of my grandmother's cruel words, and the deep hurt and sadness she experienced when her mother treated her with such contempt. Yet here she was, visiting the very same horrors upon me. (Henna 29)

Through her text she seeks to advance the destigmatization of mental health challenges, as at the time of publication of her memoir (2012), it was not yet adequately acknowledged or understood. She specifically writes from the perspective of a black, previously disadvantaged South African woman who has encountered cultural challenges on her journey with depression. Linking her purpose to her environment, she says,

> With this story I hope to inspire dialogue around issues such as depression, emotional trauma and mood disorders, which are still, unfortunately, subject to social stigma and cultural taboos. I'm not sure why most black Africans are loathe to accept these conditions as legitimate, but after I was diagnosed, it became clear that many are affected by them (Henna xi)

She reveals very personal family stories, which may make the next person realise that perhaps depression runs in their family too. According to her, she wrote her memoir because,

> African culture has always prized secrecy. We veil the truth in order to protect the group; we teach each other to value group safety above the safety of the individual; we cover our wounds for fear of what our neighbourhoods and peers may say. But under such a veil wounds fester, and then we pass them on to the next generations. I cannot bear to see this cycle continue, so I have taken it upon myself to break the silence and let in the light (Henna viii)

Autoethnographies "articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience;", not to say that they "can articulate more truthful or more accurate knowledge as compared to outsiders, but rather that [the stories are told] in novel ways when compared to how others may be able to tell them" (Jones, Adams and Ellis 3). The scenes Henna describes play out in very specific localities and social conditions. She unpacks a very particular kind of abuse, the kind meted out in Soweto. When mother calls her "isifebe (whore) for losing [her] school blazer or forgetting to wash the dishes" (Henna 14), we recognise the language and the insults it conjures:

> I did begin to suspect that I might be depressed, but I didn't know where to begin to tackle such an issue. My cultural disposition and world view couldn't allow this train of thought. I'd never known a black person who was depressed. My cultural legacy demanded that I stop feeling sorry for myself; things were far worse for most black Africans, and I didn't have to look far for proof. Black people didn't sit around bemoaning their misfortune; they were professional sufferers, and just kept doing what they had to do. (Henna 137)

Autoethnographers, like Henna, use their personal accounts to "speak against, or provide alternatives to, dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural scripts, stories, and stereotypes" (Jones, Adams and Ellis 3). She recalls that, "there remained a very real barrier among the black community against any acceptance of mental illness. Most black people I shared my situation with were dumbfounded and frankly very uncomfortable in my presence. They were often just silent or pretended not to hear what I'd said" (Henna 203). Furthermore, she notes that, "I'd have gained more sympathy if my condition had been physical. In black African culture there's a belief that depression is a silly, self-indulgent Western invention; a white man's disease" (Henna 203). Her thinking is correct for indeed, according to Christopher Ellis (2003), "it was previously thought that black Africans from traditional cultures rarely suffered from what in the West is classified as depression" (342). He explains that,

> In Zulu there are, in fact, words that might approximate to the idea of depression. Dangala means to be dejected or worn out of body and mind. Khathele / ukukhathala in Zulu is used more to convey fatigue but also often carries a sense of worry, while ukukhathazeka in Zulu and Xhosa conveys upset, hurt, heartsore, sadness, grief or worry. The plurality of translation of these words emphasises the importance of context in connection with the way many mental conditions are experienced and expressed (342).

Similarly, Anthony J. Marsella (2003), notes "cultural variations in the nature and meaning of depressive experience" and the implications "for assessment, diagnosis/classification, and treatment…" (3). Ellis stresses that there ongoing debates of "whether depression is biologically and medically constructed, or socially and culturally constructed" (345) illustrated by the fact that when some African patients are asked about the potential cause of their illness, they cite spirit possession, contamination, bewitchment, curses or poisoning. According to

Ellis, this speaks to "a complex cultural heritage that explains the world in different dimensions and from a more mystical, spiritual and cultural view than that of modern medical technology" (344) which could explain why the concept of depression is not accepted, discussed or understood in some homes like the one Henna was raised in. It is in response to these dynamics that Henna decided to use *Eyebags and Dimples* to confront what she experienced as a culture of silence around mental health. Hers is a cautionary tale, especially directed at African homes where depression "goes undetected and untreated, eroding the soul, escalating compounding to cause widespread destruction of families through abuse, addiction and social dysfunction" (Henna xi).

As a girl from the townships, she locates herself firmly in that ecosystem and highlights the plight of the many 'mentally disturbed' as they are commonly referred to. At some point, she feared "going crazy, like the barefoot, dishevelled lunatic … who endlessly walked every street in Soweto, from one end to another, talking to himself and defecating his pants" and told herself that was where she was headed if she "didn't get a grip" (137). Her observations confirm the studies which suggest that depression is rife amongst the impoverished African population. For example, Karl Peltzer and Supa Pengpid (2020) undertook a study to determine the social determinants of depression in South Africa. The findings of their study, which looked at depression in relation to three indicators — socioeconomic status, social capital and adverse life events — showed that "that higher values of social determinants (low income, lack of basic amenities, residing in informal settlements or traditional dwellings, lower education and sharing their household in a dwelling), and high adverse life events … increase the odds of depression" (525).

Henna's text provides a compelling personal account while responding to a knowledge gap in society and literature. Her narrative, situated in a black township, highlights the role social factors play around the issue of depression in South Africa. Henna's account in *Eyebags and Dimples* confirms that "social factors, such as negative childhood experiences, food insecurity, poor education, unemployment, poor housing quality, and discrimination, contribute to poor mental health, including depression" (Sederer in Peltzer and Pengpid 525). Her text further illustrates that "persistent economic hardships may further exacerbate … depressive symptoms among women from disadvantaged communities" (Mungai and Bayat 414). Particularly in the South African context, *Eyebags and Dimples* is a useful resource and point of reference. It addresses the belief, which runs through many black families, that depression can be overcome

through prayer, meditation, rituals, mantras, exercise or sheer determination. In such an environment, interventions like this are necessary. Through her autobiography, Henna has positioned herself as an ally in the mental health wellness community.

She uses the feelings and events from her private life to educate the public about the various signs of depressions, amongst them "plunging, roller-coaster feeling" (Henna 187); "rage, anxiety and erratic, remote-controlled emotions" (190); "lethargy and demotivation" (195); an "urge to disappear and hide" (202); "feeling overwhelmed" (209); a "lack of libido and constant fatigue" (Henna 134) and feeling like an "emotional invalid" (201). At the height of her stardom as a tv presenter, she was in the pits of depression: "if I was invited to a gathering by a friend, I wanted all the details of who would be present, so I had time to psyche myself up – what would be expected of Bonnie, how should I present her?" (90). She claims that she did not fully enjoy or celebrate the significance of her stardom because she was constantly "wrapped in a thick fog of sadness and anxiety" (Henna 77).

Eyebags and Dimples effectively illustrates how depression negatively impacts one's ability to communicate in interpersonal relationships: "when Mom didn't like what we'd done or felt we were guilty of a misdemeanour, she screamed, shouted, called us names or beat us, and we were never allowed to explain, defend ourselves or share our feelings" (Henna 199), she recalls. Later in life, she replicated this behaviour with her husband, whom she describes as "one of the most loving, kind, level-headed people" (Henna 198). About her relationship with her husband, she writes: "whenever we'd argued I would aim straight for the jugular and shoot to kill, losing sight of the goal and attacking all his weak points instead" (Henna 198). She was toxic, admitting that, during disagreements, she "would either shout and launch a razor-sharp verbal assault and then leave before he could respond, or give him the silent treatment and reject all attempts to build a bridge" (Henna 199). She exhibited the same traits in her role as a celebrity, which led to her coming across as an "ice-queen" (77) with an "indifferent, aloof, this bitch bites exterior" (Henna 135). Consequently, she drove many people away and laments "the relationships that had been compromised, the great opportunities that had been jeopardised… I wanted to stand on top of a mountain and shout to the world that it had judged me unfairly; I'd been misunderstood" (205). She surmises that her "relationships have been some of the greatest casualties of this condition" (x).

The key takeaway from *Eyebags and Dimples* is that depression can be treated. Henna shares her low points in great detail but she also offers solutions. When in 2008, she finally got to the

point of acknowledging that she had a problem, she consulted a doctor who prescribed an antidepressant called Cipralex, and later switched to Zoloft. The effects were amazing and life altering. It is this turning point which she uses to launch her call to action for other people to seek help: "I'd never felt like this in my whole life. I was so calm. I was no longer afraid, and the feeling of being watched and chased was gone… I smiled more, laughed more and didn't dread the coming day" she says, embracing the "happy pills" (Henna 193 - 6).

In 2012, she released *Eyebags and Dimples* which was well received by the reading public and it became a South African national bestseller (it is currently in its twelfth impression). Henna (who has since resumed the use of her maiden name Mbuli following her divorce in 2013) is today an active player in the wellness scene. Since its release, she has become a champion for the fight against depression, frequently speaking about it on her social media pages and during numerous media interviews. In 2018, she launched a series on Instagram called Let's Talk About It, a continuation and spin-off from her memoir. Launching it she said, "It's about TIME we talk about it, too many lives are slipping away, too many people fighting alone in the dark, help is near, join me on my IGTV for the Conversations on Depression series, don't be afraid to lean in and seek the help you need #letstalkaboutit #DepressionSeries."[32] When asked about the significance of the series, she said

> I started hearing more and more suicide stories, especially of young University of Cape Town (UCT) students. Then when UCT's professor Bongani Mayosi committed suicide due to depression, I immediately knew that something was wrong and thought it's ridiculous that we were not talking about this very pressing matter. We can no longer wait for psychologists, the government or whomever we can pay, to come fix this problem. I'm not a doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist, but I can use my platform to bring the right attention to the issue. My hope is to start a conversation about depression that will be reflective of exactly what is happening. The generation before us helped bring apartheid to its knees, so what plight are we going to take on that will stand out in centuries to come?

[32] Bonnie Mbuli [@bonniembuli]. *Instagram*, 3 Aug. 2018, www.instagram.com/p/BmBi-4CDBX0/?utm_source=ig_embed.

Also in 2018, she participated in a World Mental Health Day roundtable organised by the University of Cape Town's Alan J Flisher Centre for Public Mental Health. She was on a panel discussion titled, "Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World."[33] In 2022, she launched a jewellery line called Bon Ami. The jewellery range is an ode to mental health. The anklets, chains and earrings are engraved with affirmations such as "Let love in you're worth it", "Be kind to yourself" and "I love and accept myself' (Tshabalala).

4.5 Pamela Nomvete's Exile Memoir

In this section I look at *Dancing to the Beat of the* Drum (2012) by Pamela Nomvete, an actress who became a household name in South Africa for the role she played in *Generations*, one of the country's most popular television soapies. *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* tells the story of alienation and fragile identity that came with exile. It also reveals the emotional and financial abuse she endured because of her shaky sense of identity. About the text, Nomvete said on Instagram,

> … the theme of my book is identity. Identity pertaining to self, national and cultural, spiritual and religious (sic). Have a read if you just want to experience a period when my character was being forged out of seeming chaos! You may find it entertaining or disturbing but hopeful. Message – with all your flaws you are human and you belong.

Dancing to the Beat of the Drum is organised into four parts: "Young and Restless," "South Africa and Me"; "Slave at Home; Slave at Work" and "Once an Exile; Always an Exile" — each providing an account of important events and turning points in her life.

In the first part of the text, "Young and Restless," she reflects on how she came to be born in Ethiopia to South African parents. Before she was born, her family relocated because her father was offered a scholarship to Manchester University and he moved to the United Kingdom with his wife. There, her father "gave many talks on the situation in South Africa, and … the

[33] Marx, Maggie. "Psychiatry and Mental Health." *University of Cape Town*, 12 Oct. 2018, health.uct.ac.za/department-psychiatry/articles/2018-10-12-cpmh-commemorates-world-mental-health-day.

apartheid government declared [them] exiled" (11). From the UK, the Nomvete family moved to Ethiopia, Zambia and the United States of America. According to Zosa de Sas Kropiwnicki,

> Between 30,000 and 60,000 people — adults and children — went into exile during apartheid following the banning of opposition political organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC), and the initiation of the armed struggle in 1961. (35)

From the early nineties, when it became clear that South Africa was headed towards a new democratic dispensation, many of the exiles contemplated returning to South Africa. Some had "a fear of returning" while others held "an idealised view of this eventual return" (Steyn et al. in Marchetti-Mercer, M. C., and J. L. Roos 58). In the lead-up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Nomvete was amongst those who decided to return to the country to vote. From the onset, Nomvete signals that her identity as a South African has never been fully formed or stable, she says,

> As a child born in exile, with no real relationship with South Africa, negative or positive, I grew up calling myself a South African because my parents managed to help me understand that I had every right to claim my heritage. But the question still remained: Was I a South African? (12)

Phozisa Nkele notes that "the impact of exile on experiences of home, belonging, and unbelonging in the narratives of Black South African women" (Mkele 7) is laid bare in *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* in its narration of Nomvete's "physical and oftentimes spiritual experiences of loss and her desperate need to belong" (Mkele 26). The text educates readers about the cost of exile, perhaps in response to the view that exiles had it easy while those who remained were denied opportunities. The South Africans who returned from exile were often more educated, experienced and articulate, which created resentment in some quarters because on the surface, it does appear as though people from exile did better than locals. For example, Mfundi Vundla, the creator of *Generations* who had been in exile from 1970, beat locals to submit the winning proposal to produce a soapie for the SABC within a year of his return.

Nomvete reveals that while they did get access to better education and training, it was not easy. At the age of 14 she moved from Ethiopia to a British boarding school where "there were maybe four black students out of nine hundred" (Nomvete 20). Years later, she landed a role

as an actor at the UK's Royal National Theatre and found that she was "one of the few blacks … through those prestigious doors at that time" (Nomvete 26). She considered herself to have "insider-outsider status" (24) because of her "unblack" (26) accent and perfect command of the English language. She says, "I wasn't black enough, didn't grow up in the ghetto, and I was a strange African — too sure of myself, too comfortable in my own skin" (Nomvete 26). This feeling of being an outsider is not unique to Nomvete. Roger T. Porter examined several exile memoirs and came up with the term "out-ness" (303), to refer to writers "torn from the familiar, forced to examine themselves as figures of loss, and committed to investigating the origins and meaning of their uprooting and subsequent disorientation" (ibid). These aspects are not ventilated enough in public discourse. As Hans-Georg Schleicher says,

> The evaluation of exile is very ambivalent. Positive aspects by and large seem to prevail. Very important was the exposure of people who sometimes came from rather remote areas, they had the opportunity to interact with people from different cultures and traditions and could thus broaden their horizons. Positive was also the experience of being part of an international campaign against Apartheid, an experience of international solidarity. Political tolerance was another new experience for some. Many exiles underline how beneficial education was for them, living in different cultures, widening the horizon, learning to live with different peoples from different parts of the world. Many exiles had the advantage to be able to acquire skills they hadn't been able to obtain inside SA, especially those who were black and who had grown up under Bantu education. (4)

Schleicher also highlights that,

> … there was also the other side. Many exiles considered it a major disadvantage to miss the active involvement in the struggle inside the country, to have been removed from the heart of the struggle. Many South Africans abroad were separated and isolated. People got demoralised where there was a lack of contacts with other South Africans. Isolation was a major problem. Political exile was often overshadowed by the permanent danger of threats and attacks. Many exiles had traumatic experiences of that kind. There have been cases where South Africans couldn't cope with exile, where it deformed or destroyed their personalities. Negative experiences resulting from deep

> psychological impacts of exile have been neglected or marginalised partly due to a mentality of victory in the new South Africa. (5)

Dancing to the Beat of the Drum therefore makes a useful contribution to the discourse around the cost and effects of exile. Reflecting on her own experience and that of others she says, "we dialogued, we created, we dreamed, we fought, we made love, and we all forged a way ahead in the 'new South Africa'. Some said it was akin to the Wild West — in a way, how right they were. I told myself that if I could make it in this place, I could make it anywhere" (Nomvete 30). Despite their hopes and excitement, a number of returning exiles found no "simple, joyous homecoming" (Jacobs 2019: 27) in returning to South Africa. Several experienced discrimination or othering due to their foreign accents and poor command of the local languages (Jacobs 2019) and Nomvete was one of the returning exiles who could not speak any South African language. She says that outside of South Africa, not knowing their "home tongue was never a hindrance … [as] it was understood that English was the language we all spoke" (Nomvete 13). Nomvete recalls that,

> Landing in a 'free' South Africa was soul-destroying … and because of your confidence, you couldn't hide your frustration when those around you told you that things in South Africa were 'different.' That you were, in fact, a foreigner. That you had no more rights in South Africa than you'd had where you'd come from. That just because you had been given the vote did not give you the right to use your skills to help build a country. Your country. You were just seen as coming to get what you were entitled to. The more you wanted to share your knowledge, the more you were seen as coming to steal. (Nomvete 24 – 25)

She reminds readers that in exile they fought "a constant battle not to drown under the threat of low self-esteem" (24). She says, "because of our insider-outsider status, [we] had learned how to adapt and adjust to all kinds of situations. As a result, many of us have a great deal of confidence. We have had to fight for a place in the societies we were forced to become part of" (24). Some former exiles have said that their return to South Africa evoked "feelings of alienation, confusion, self-doubt about one's ability to function" (Melissa E. Steyn and Terri Grant 383) as well as "ruptures to personal and cultural identity, with concomitant feelings of alienation and marginality" (ibid). Amongst the former exile community, South Africa as home "has either become transformed beyond recognition, is unavailable, or is a site of inevitable

disappointment" (Porter 304). Like many others, Nomvete's story demonstrates that some exiles found assimilation difficult and acceptance conditional.

Be that as it may, Nomvete gave South Africa a chance: "I was finding my feet and the country was doing the same" (30). She soon secured a role on *Generations*, a popular television show. The show has some significance in the pop-cultural landscape. Indeed, as proclaimed on its website,[34]

> As a child of the new South African dispensation, *Generations* drove aspiration as a key foundation for the development of African and South African people. A first of its kind on local television, *Generations* broke new ground, paving the way for stories that celebrate the hopes and dreams of black South Africans who aspire to a better future.

The show was launched in 1994 and attracted millions of viewers every weekday evening. It created stars of its main actors, amongst them Nomvete who played the role of Ntsiki Lukhele. She reminisces: "I rose in about two years from being a no-name English actress to being one of the biggest household names South Africa had ever seen" (31). Nomvete had hoped that the role was going to be her "… happy ending. Girl finds her way back to her roots and rises from rags to riches. The End" (31). However, the fame and the role she played in *Generations* further eroded Nomvete's sense of identity. She encountered an internal struggle between the character of the villain she was playing and her identity in real life: "I was constantly trying to explain that Ntsiki was the character I was playing and bore no resemblance to Pamela, but no one was listening" (Nomvete 50). The intrusions and disruptions appear to be part of the terrain, "when you are famous in Africa there are no boundaries. You are accessible and people relate to you as the character you are playing - there is no filter" (Nomvete 57). Her experience showed her that she "wasn't very good at being famous" (Nomvete 64). She was "consumed by a profound hatred" of it all and reveals that how she used to look around "in envy" at normal people going about their lives while she "hated" her life (Nomvete 96). She uses figurative language to paint a grim image of her fame-induced isolation and downward spiral. She says her self-esteem "reached rock bottom," she was "in hell," in a "dark place" (Nomvete 45). She says her life

[34] "About Generations: The Legacy." *Generations the Legacy*, 2019, About Us – Generations The Legacy.

was “out of focus and chaotic,” “pure insanity” (52) and had “no direction” (Nomvete 52). In her head “nothing was clear” (52) and she had “no boundaries” (46).

In her state of complete unrootedness and vulnerability, Nomvete attended a party where she met her future husband. Soon after the relationship began, he moved into her house, bringing along with him his elderly mother and unemployed brother from Zimbabwe. Nomvete quickly lost control of her personal space, car and finances as her situation went from bad to worse. She says,

> Having MaBoy’s [as she calls him in the text] mother in the house was an experience that is hard to explain. I will refer to this lady as the Puppeteer. I went from cooking meals that were a result of my global identity to cooking only Zimbabwean cuisine because MaBoy’s mother had a sensitive stomach and was not used to the variety of spices I like to experiment with. As a result, I began to dislike being in the kitchen. Suddenly, cooking became a duty, not an exercise in creative expression. The Puppeteer would often intimate to me that a ‘good African wife cooked what satisfied her husband, gave him what he wanted in bed and kept quiet if he frequently came home drunk and reeking of another woman's perfume. I remember her adding snidely that I could be forgiven for not understanding, being from England, but that I would learn. (46 – 47)

The irony is that on paper, Nomvete represented a powerful woman – she was famous, financially stable and talented. She provides an honest appraisal of this contradiction saying,

> As Ntsiki, I provided hope in a land where black women were basically invisible. The birth of Ntsiki marked a change in the place of black women in South African society. They now had a voice, and they wanted to be heard by any means necessary. The only problem was that what was being presented on screen was a totally false representation of what my life actually looked like. (57)

Three years after the publication of *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum*, Nomvete participated in a TEDx talk where she revealed that returning to South Africa in the nineties and finding out that she was “still a foreigner” ate into her psyche and contributed to a deterioration of her self-

esteem. She says, "it looked as if my life was huge, but in fact it was very, very, very, very small. And inside I felt very small. I actually was in a place where fame and money were meaningless … I began to despise life."[35] Nomvete's life's story teaches that not knowing yourself and can have disastrous outcomes. Her low self-esteem and confusion about her place in society made Nomvete susceptible to abuse, as it played out in her domestic space. She says,

> I couldn't return home and be myself. The spaces were shrinking, my exit points were blocked. I had forgotten how to live. I couldn't see. My arteries felt like they were clogging up. And all the time, [the husband and his family] were settling deeper and deeper into my sanctuary, taking every piece of peace as they did so. The horror of it was that I was giving them permission to do so. (Nomvete 47)

When she tried to protest, she was told that she was "mean and lacking in African hospitality" (Nomvete 46) or that she was "mentally colonised … [and had] lost touch with [her] African roots and was thinking like a white woman" (Nomvete 73). In her eagerness to prove that she was a real African, she complied with the manipulation and abuse. Despite all the proverbial red flags during the early stages of their relationship, Nomvete went on to marry MaBoy in community of property – a marriage contract where both partners assume equal liability for all debts accumulated before and during the marriage. Soon thereafter he expressed his wish to engage in a polygamous marriage and Nomvete accepted this in order to prove her "African authenticity" (Nomvete 74). She was against it but convinced herself, "if this was an integral part of African culture, I wanted to understand" (Nomvete 100). Nomvete's narrative reveals the cultural norms that legitimise abuse of wives in South African and Zimbabwean makotification culture. According to Kelebogile Resane (2023), "the abuse of a makoti is in many [African] places regarded as a norm" (12). She notes that "in many ways, the makoti is expected to treat her mother-in-law, or even the whole family, as royalties. She is expected to serve them like a slave serving the master" (Resane 3). As we see in Nomvete's case, "failure to do so results in being labelled the lazy makoti" (Resane 4) or worse. Her Zimbabwean husband and his mother weaponised the makoti discourse against her. They capitalised on her insecurities and cultural alienation to manipulate and bully her.

[35] "Rise up and walk." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 11 Nov. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj2zvq60rMI.

The combination of Nomvete's insecurities, weak boundaries and fragile identity made her vulnerable to the extent that she placed herself "firmly in a hell of powerlessness" (Nomvete 46). She was taken advantage of and allowed it. Unsuspectingly, Nomvete suffered from "Narcissistic Victim Syndrome" (de Canonville in Elise 20). Research shows that in (heterosexual) romantic relationships, male narcissists are "particularly invested in patriarchal control over, and subordinating, women" (Elise 8) and will "devalue, deny, minimise and blame their romantic partner" (Gormley & Lopez in Elise 8). Compared to wealthy male narcissists who use finances to control women, those with limited means tend to "manipulate women into being the primary earner and dominate the finances which enable them to possess the materialistic items they want, without having to work for it" (Elise 2018: 64). In the end, her husband and his family drove her "to material and emotional destitution" (Nomvete 204).

Professionally, she was in a bad space as well, as she felt unseen and unheard there too. She says,

> The more I tried to speak up, the more I felt beaten down. The weapon that was consistently used against me was that I was a foreigner and therefore had no right to an opinion. This was communicated ever so subtly, but it was extraordinarily effective - with my ranting falling on deaf ears I began to implode. The poison was seeping into my system, I was becoming toxic to myself. (49 – 50)

She took to alcohol to cope and shares that she would "go to these wild soirees and drive home plastered, usually very, very late. It started with Friday nights and then accelerated to three or four times a week" (50 - 51). She was on a downward spiral and admits that, "if I had given myself a moment to reflect, I would have seen that nothing was clear; my life was out of focus and chaotic. I was surrounded by, and was myself the living example of, pure madness" (51). She says her world was "just an infinite black hole, and [she] was falling, falling, falling" (52).

She found that her status as former exile was often held against her. She relays an incident where one of the actresses on *Generations* frequently came to work drunk. She says,

> even though I was consuming copious amounts of alcohol daily, my professionalism refused to allow me to drink during working hours, so I found this state of affairs pretty disgusting. I complained constantly about it, to the point where my attitude began to make me unpopular with not only the producers but also my fellow actors. They felt I

> had placed myself on a pedestal, coming from the British stage and all. They were right. A great deal of snobbery was seeping through because my thoughts were that this would never have been allowed to happen in England. (52)

She uses this incident to reflect on what she had internalised and inherited from being an exile. She says, "Here we were, we children of exiles, adopting some of the superiority born of being products of the British system. In many ways, we felt we knew better and there were some elements in this 'African' way of doing things that needed changing" (53).

Nomvete had a deep-seated yearning for belonging, home, peace and a spiritual home. She began experimenting with a few belief systems, traditional and Western. In South Africa, she got the opportunity to meet well known historian, writer and sangoma Credo Mutwa. She says that Mutwa told her that she was a sangoma and that she "needed to dance to the beat of the drum" (89). The title, *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum*, was inspired by this encounter. According to Cynthia Cook, "Sangoma is a derivative of the Bantu word ngoma. The word means performance, drumming, dancing, celebrating, divining, and doing ritual therapy. Sangoma, the Zulu term for divining, means one who does ngoma or divining" (262). Up to that point, she was not aware that she had a spiritual calling and she was prompted by the encounter to find out more, she says, "I decided somewhere deep in the core of my being that I was going to continue to search for my spiritual identity" (89). Driven by her many problems, she consulted a sangoma, "clutching at anything that might give clarity, perspective, anything that might show [her] the way" (113). The sangoma told her "to go to Zimbabwe and talk to the mountain" (ibid). Accompanied by her husband, she made the journey to Zimbabwe but it was in vain as they failed to access the mountain, which made her feel "even more at sea than ever" (122).

She would abandon this path in pursuit of another. During a particularly difficult period, she was introduced to a pastor "who was described as a very spiritual and insightful man … thus began the next leg of [her] journey into the world of spirit" (142). She joined his church while exploring Christianity in earnest and says, "I remember deciding that I needed to learn how to speak in tongues – at the time I had this strong sense that if I could utter the right prayers, the ones that reached God's ears directly, my situation would change" (150). She went to extremes and soon went around praying for people and delivering prophesies to strangers. She recalls an "urge to go to the SABC and pray in its corridors, spread the blood of Christ along its

contaminated walls" (155) and she heeded it, sneaking into the building to pray. None of these experiences improved her life, as she remained unhappy and lost.

She eventually left *Generations* and in time, walked away from her marriage; she walked away from both emptyhanded to endure unemployment, poverty, depression, alcoholism and homelessness. She reveals that the eventual realisation that she had "opened [her] home for years to a professional, small-time thief" made her feel "like a total loser. So stupid" (Nomvete 148). She surmises, "I had let him use my success, my wealth, my hard work to hustle his way into those arenas that made him feel important … I was the perfect patsy. I wanted to throw up. The level of disgust I felt for myself is extremely hard to articulate — impossible" (136). In all aspects of her life, she had hit rock bottom. In 2007, she was got news that a director in London "had written a part for [her] in a television series that he was shooting in the next week…" (200) and that is how she got a ticket to return to England. She says, "I went back to the UK to heal; I wanted to look at South Africa, my homeland from a safe distance … It was like being born again. All of my old persona – what I had thought of like me for the last thirteen years – was washed away" (203).

At the beginning (in what appears to be the introduction), Nomvete says, "The sangomas say that when it is time to connect with your true calling, your true self, you must 'dance to the beat of the drum' (9). Signalling that she has grown and come full circle in her journey, she says in the epilogue, "I now dance to the beat of the drum, and I dream the dreams of the sangomas, the seekers of truth on the fiery continent of Africa, every single walking and sleeping moment of my life. I shall be dancing to it on my deathbed" (204 – 205). At the end of her story, she has found her spiritual home and anchoring in Buddhism. In the text's description of the author, Nomvete reveals that "her faith as a Nichiren Buddhist has enabled her to see the world as a beautiful playground of personal and universal growth" (Nomvete 4). Nichiren Buddhism refers to the Buddhas' Mystical Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo which one Nichiren Daishonin identified as a law that can "resolve human suffering … [on a] fundamental level and open the way to genuine happiness" (18 -19).[36] Incidentally, Nichiren Buddhism uses the lotus "as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law. Though it grows in muddy water, the lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms" (19).[37] Nomvete's beliefs are reiterated online; her X (previously Twitter) bio

[36] "The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism." *Soka Gakkai International*, 2024, Intro_Exam_Material_Basics_of_Nichiren_Buddhism.pdf (sgi-usa.org).
[37] Ibid

states, “as a Nichiren Buddhist, peace is my lantern” and on Instagram she frequently posts and references Buddhists like Miyamoto Musashi and Daisaku Ikeda. It appears as though she has found the inner peace to navigate life and overcome her traumas.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on identifying the possibilities autobiography presents to drive public discourse and influence perceptions. It established that it is possible to focus the attention of readers to issues of public concern like displacement, depression, rape and breast cancer. My analysis of the focal texts demonstrated that subjects can use their personal stories not to consolidate their celebrity capital but as a medium of persuasion to raise awareness and facilitate social dialogue on important matters which may benefit or enlighten readers.

South Africa is a place filled with horrors and miracles. It is a place of individual stories as well as national stories. Through the texts, they shed light on trauma, addiction, cancer, depression, exile, abuse and spirituality. Gaelesiwe, Mandela, Henna and Nomvete offer their life stories to readers in order to educate, bear witness and stand in solidarity. Their texts say to the affected reader: you are not alone; it can happen to anyone and it happened to me. As such, their narratives raise awareness and where necessary, present themselves as calls to action against a myriad of important societal issues which tend to be swept under the carpet.

CHAPTER 5: WHOSE STORY IS IT ANYWAY? AUTHORIAL AUTHORITY IN BLACK CELEBRITY LIFE WRITING

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on authorship, narrative authority and autobiography. The focal texts were selected for their distinct presentation of author-subject dynamics in collaborative or co-authored autobiographies. In engaging with the texts, this chapter examines the concept of authorship, authority, the position of the subject in relation to the author/s, as well as the choices of language, voice and narrative strategy. Does the position of the subject in relation to the author/s influence the voices and perspectives which come through in the narrative? It will also consider the motivating factors behind the different collaborations. The chapter examines four texts: *The Kelly Khumalo Story* by Melinda Ferguson with Sarah Setlaelo (2012), *Dominoes Unbreakable Spirit: The Somizi Mhlongo Story* by Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng (2017), *Theatre Road: My Story* Thembi Mtshali-Jones as told to Sindiwe Magona (2019) and *Gqimm Shelele: The Robert Marawa Story* by Mandy Wiener (2022).

The Kelly Khumalo Story was written by Melinda Ferguson with Sarah Setlaelo (2012). The subject is a controversial singer and actress. At the time of the text's release, Ferguson was a journalist and author; Setlaelo was Khumalo's manager. The material about the subject was primarily sourced through observation, interaction and interviews with Khumalo. *Dominoes Unbreakable Spirit: The Somizi Mhlongo* Story was written by Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng (2017). The subject is a high-profile media personality and entertainer. At the time of its release, Mofokeng was an entertainment journalist and author. *Theatre Road: My Story* Thembi Mtshali-Jones as told to Sindiwe Magona (2019). The subject is an iconic singer and actress. Magona is an author and activist. The story was narrated orally to the author by the subject. *Gqimm Shelele: The Robert Marawa Story* (2022) by Mandy Wiener. The subject is a popular sports broadcast journalist. Wiener is a journalist and author. The story was obtained through a series of interviews.

There are various terms used to describe the collaborative kind of writing I look at in this chapter. They include "the autobiography of those who do not write" (Lejeune 1989), "as-told-to autobiography" (Couser 1998), "dictated autobiography" (Sanders 1994), "as-told-to life narrative" (Boardman) or "revoiced narratives" (Danielewicz 2012).

5.2 Kelly Khumalo and Melinda Ferguson

The subject of the text as indicated by its title, *The Kelly Khumalo Story* (2012) is Kelly Khumalo, a singer and actress who got caught up in drugs and scandal at the height of her fame and singing career. At (one of) her lowest career points, "bad men, bruises, broken noses, broken hearts, a cocaine addiction, virginity claims, outbursts in the press, ass-creeping dresses and court cases … were the things people thought about when they heard the name Kelly Khumalo" (173 – 174). She lost bookings, acting roles and credibility in the eyes of the public. This text tells the story of her fall and rise. In this section I explore issues of authorship, interrogating, whose story is this?

It is necessary, before proceeding, to provide some background on the main author, Melinda Ferguson. In 1999, she was homeless and destitute due to an addiction to heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol.[38] She had endured years of unfathomable horrors (including being gang raped by her drug suppliers and fellow users) when she decided to turn her life around. During her path to recovery, Ferguson was waiting tables at a restaurant when she happened to serve the deputy editor of *True Love* magazine with whom she shared her story. Ferguson says,

> She advised me to write it down and send it to the magazine. A few weeks later my essay, *Six Weeks in Hell*, was published. It was later shortlisted for an award. It was the first thing in years that I had done that I was proud of. I got a job as a journalist at the magazine a year later. There I became a writer and features editor. In 2004 a publisher happened to come across my article amongst a pile of magazines in a dentist's waiting room. In 2005 my first book, *Smacked*, was published.

After *Smacked*, Ferguson left the world of magazines, earned a post graduate degree in publishing and established MF Books. *The Kelly Khumalo Story* was the first book published under the imprint. Ferguson went on to become a best-selling author of *Hooked* (2010), *Oscar An Accident Waiting to Happen* (2014), *Crashed* (2015), and *Being Chris Hani's Daughter* (2017) – all but *Hooked* published under MF Books. The genesis of the Kelly Khumalo text is that in 2010, at a low and a tumultuous time in Khumalo's personal life, her manager Setlaelo pitched 'the Khumalo story' to Ferguson. Ferguson was initially meant to write only a

[38] Ferguson, Melinda. "Twenty years clean of Smack, Jack and Crack." *Daily Maverick*, 3 Sep. 2019, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-09-03-twenty-years-clean-of-smack-jack-and-crack/

magazine feature about Khumalo. Ferguson recalls that Setlaelo said, "My client – a very famous singer – she's just come out of a bad relationship – she wants to talk to you about her drug addiction" (4). So began the relationship that would result in *The Kelly Khumalo Story* two years later.

The writer makes a meaningful contribution to collaborative life writing projects, their role is critical because,

> writers know how to catch the reader's eye; to tell an anecdote in an interesting way, and make it mean something; to clarify what the oral story generally leaves implicit, in particular through descriptions and portraits; especially, to be always specific, precise, and concrete; to give the narrative as a whole a progression and a rhythm; to find the tone appropriate to the reader one has in mind, and so on. (Lejeune 228)

The fact that Ferguson wrote the story does not automatically make her the author because, according to Lejeune, "a life (that is, a written and published story of a life) is always the product of a transaction between different postures, and the determination of the 'author' … is an ideological problem, linked to reading contracts, to the possible positions of identification with 'persons,' and to relations of class" (197). He cites a dispute between two people around this issue of authorship. On the one hand is one Francois Maspero's view that "a life has only one author … the one who had lived this life which was sufficiently unhappy or exemplary for it to be presented to the public, and who had taken responsibility for narrating it in front of the tape-recorder" (185). The counter argument is presented by Annie Mignard, whose view is that writers should be credited as authors because of their role "in leading the questioning and in organizing the responses in the form of a narrative" (ibid). In some instances, both the subject and the writer are credited as authors, not so in this case; the author signatures on the cover indicate that *The Kelly Khumalo Story* is by Melinda Ferguson with Sarah Setlaelo. It is worth noting that Setlaelo's name is significantly in smaller font than Ferguson's and it does not feature at all on the spine of the book. This reveals that Ferguson is the main author. It is the power dynamics between the three women which determined authorship.

In writing, according Lejeune "'authority' is always on the side of the one who has the power" (197). To be sure, "ideally, every editorial step should be collaborative, with consultation and negotiation of each decision and detail. The likelihood of such an intensive collaboration,

however, is slim" (Sands 47), especially when there is an imbalance of power. In this collaboration, Khumalo "the autobiographic subject … reclaim[s] memory and experience through oral accounts" while Ferguson "is the agent of literacy" (Parvathy and Balakrishnan 5). Ferguson brought to the table her writing skills, publishing house, reputation, and with it access to literary platforms with considerable reach which Khumalo did not have direct access to. Khumalo falls under the category of those described by Lejeune (1989) as 'subjects who do not write'; they provide the raw material for others to 'prepare' it for trade in literary markets. As such, power in storytelling is often revealed through and "depends on the ability of some and the inability of others to control the linguistic resources needed to construct narratives…" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 125). While it can be argued that Khumalo was not powerless because she, not Ferguson, had the celebrity capital, it should be borne in mind that at the time of writing, Khumalo was essentially down and out – thus not in any position to negotiate.

There is an abundance of literature on unequal subject-writer power dynamics. Many of these focus on collaborators who exploit their subjects. For example, Sands notes that "personal narratives solicited from Native American men and women by non-Indian collectors who then structure, edit, introduce, interpret, and publish these autobiographies have been a particularly problematical subject in Native American studies" (39). She says,

> Just whose life is this, anyway? is a reasonable question for the scholar of Native American composite autobiography to ask. It is, in fact, the most essential question to ask of a genre of American Indian literature that is actually more process than product. It is the question that provides entree into the complex relationships of oral and written discourses and into the degrees of white and Native authorship that rise out of the omissions, manipulations, and cross-cultural negotiations encoded in the text of any collaborative inscription of a Native American life. (Sands 39)

Y-Dang Troeung, examines "collaborative texts that illustrate everything from blatant manipulation and distortion … to a more contentious relationship, with interviewer openly vying with respondent for authorial recognition" (231). It is due to the myriad of possible scenarios and the implications thereof that Sands encourages literary scholars "to follow the lead of ethnographers and go into the field in order to experience first-hand the complexities of bi-cultural inscription … perhaps then we will be able to answer more fully and usefully the more fruitful question, 'How was this life inscribed?'" (54). The subject-writer power dynamic

is of interest because, "the writer [especially if they also assume the role of the author] fully controls the form that content must assume, and thus he or she controls a signifying overlay shaping and reconstituting content" (Sanders 446). For this reason, the author's interests and agenda must be taken into consideration in our analysis of texts.

The value of exploring the writer's agenda is that it may provide some insight into the lens through which the subject is approached**.** Incidentally, Ferguson was initially not interested in Khumalo and her story. "Why the hell would I want to write a story about Kelly Khumalo?" (3) was her response to Setlaelo. She delivered what she describes as a "soliloquy from hell on Kelly Khumalo (5) saying, "Kelly Khumalo? Are you for real? Nobody wants to read about Kelly! She's a total has-been, an embarrassment really … with her, it's all been about scandal and chaos and drama… a shopping list of disaster" (ibid). She eventually acceded to Setlaelo's request to meet, on the condition that Khumalo attend a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting (accompanied by Ferguson). After deciding that she was a suitable subject (serious about getting clean), Ferguson agreed to write the feature article and subsequently, the book. Ferguson admits that she agreed to meet Khumalo only because she remembered that years ago, as part of her rehabilitation, she had made a "silent promise to reach out to other addicts who still suffered from the same affliction that had all but killed me" (6). Ferguson reveals that her meeting with Khumalo was based on a "pay-it-forward-mantra – what [she], as a white girl living in SA, [understood] about the concept of ubuntu" (6). She admits that what drew her to Khumalo's story "was the idea of a story of darkness, of intense and absolute annihilation … and then the incredible promise of the light" (xi). This is significant to me because it suggests that there was a particular angle and story she was in pursuit of. "How did this beautiful, talented girl become so young, black and wasted? And was there redemption waiting in the wings" (xi) are the questions Ferguson wanted to answer. In her writing, she sought to uncover, "What did a once successful, now fallen kwaito star have to share with the world that would make any difference in people's lives, that would make the reader want to turn the page?" (xi). Her concerns, as writer and publisher, were that, "the someone you are writing about needs to be gripping enough to hold the attention of a reader" (ibid). It appears then, that Ferguson decided to write a conversion narrative as we see in the acknowledgments page that she dedicates the text to "every addict who is trying to find their way back home, clean; it's truly a trip worth taking" (xiii).

It is plausible that Ferguson and Setlaelo's interests influenced the selection and organisation of facts as well as the overall packaging of *The Kelly Khumalo Story*. On the cover page Khumalo is presented in 'superstar mode', with sparkly eyeshadow, big earrings, glossy lips and a revealing outfit. She is portrayed as a glamorous, albeit flawed, celebrity. The packaging confirms my suspicion that Khumalo's celebrity capital was an essential component of the product. Setlaelo and Ferguson may have genuinely cared for her, but it is also apparent that we are witnessing a commodification of the Khumalo brand for trade in the literary market. Her potential value as a commodity was first realised by Setlaelo's description of the first time she encountered the singer: "Kelly was the real deal, the full package. Without even trying, she ticked all the boxes" (34). Unpacking this, Setlaelo says,

> in my assessment, not only did Kelly have the perfect body, she also had a pretty face. Instinctively, I know how to tell when someone is scientifically beautiful, based on the shape of their nose, distance between their eyes, the arch of their eyebrows and the fullness of their lips … Beautiful artists are more marketable and therefore they tend to become more popular than those who are not. Kelly fit the bill perfectly. (35)

Setlaelo spotted Khumalo's potential commercial value long before she became a star. In 2003 Khumalo entered a televised singing competition where Setlaelo worked as a stylist. Ferguson states that, "although Sarah knew it would break Kelly's heart if she did not take the crown home, she secretly prayed that Kelly not win the contest, [so] she … would have a chance of signing Kelly up to her management company" (38). Khumalo did not win and was subsequently signed to Setlaelo's company. It is not hard to see what Ferguson and Setlaelo stood to profit if their ventures with Khumalo succeeded. This assessment leads me to believe the decision to produce *The Kelly Khumalo Story* was greatly influenced by the potential return on investment the two women stood to draw from its sales.

Since the power dynamics and author signature favour Ferguson, narrative authority lies with her. Throughout the text, Khumalo's words and recollections are preceded by Ferguson's. Khumalo is allowed 'to speak' after Ferguson has framed or contextualised her words which follow in direct quotes. For example, Ferguson will first say something like, "Kelly decided then and there to say goodbye to that which she had loved the most, the thing that had hurt her …" followed by Khumalo, "Backstage, I decided I would give up on music" (44).

Indeed, Ferguson's responsibility and "the challenge" as she described it was in, "threading it all together – the many interviews with Kelly and all the different players, the reams of research, the huge amount of invaluable source material … cutting it down and then mixing it all up in a huge word bowl and finding sanity and order on the pages" (xii). In the process of creating sanity and order, she asserts her narrative authority. With her knowledge and involvement in the world of features and publishing she has certain criteria for stories. This is the imposition of master narratives.

There are "certain master narratives and character types in the telling of (at least Western) autobiographies - e.g., the narrative of growth and transformation, the narrative of redemption; the romantic hero, the martyr, etc." (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 149). From the start of *The Kelly Khumalo Story*, it is clear that Ferguson was forging a conversion narrative. The story begins with vivid descriptions of Khumalo's humble beginnings, and includes several images of her very modest rural and township homes. This locates Khumalo in a specific socio-economic context which Ferguson describes as, "… real, abject poverty of a *Les Misérables* magnitude" (242). She was born poor, which makes her achievements in the music industry a miracle and her downfall, a tragedy.

The imposition required a number of interventions and strategies including what has been described as "re-contextualization, i.e., the creation of a new context of interpretation of aspects of the story that is being told" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 133). The two scholars explain re-contextualisation and entextualisation as follows:

> Re-contextualization … allows one party to point to elements of form or content that are required for a narrative to be acceptable in the context at hand, and/or to revisit its significance within it. Among re-contextualization processes, one that has attracted particular attention is entextualization… Entextualization involves lifting a piece of discourse out of its context of production and inserting it into new contexts in which it receives a new interpretation. This discursive process can be seen as lying at the heart of negotiations over story content, format and interpretation. (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 133)

Ferguson focuses and drives the story towards her desired ending with a particular effect in mind: "within this tradition, the individual is seen as being assigned certain subject positions by pre-existing structures variously called master narratives, dominant discourses, cultural

texts or in Foucauldian terms, 'culturally available subject positions' that are postulated a priori of specific interactions" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 162).

It is in these processes that we come face to face with the challenges of power dynamics in collaborative authorship arrangements:

> narrative inequality lies in, among other things: the ability or inability [of participants] … to use storytelling as a resource; their possessing (or not) the tools to shape their narratives as acceptable textual genres in the social contexts in which their telling occur; their having (or not) the power to interrupt, redirect and to re-contextualize a story; being able or unable to draw on a privileged social position or on restricted fields of knowledge to legitimize their constructions and interpretations of reality. (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 153)

One of the signs that one has achieved their objectives will be in the reception by the market and industry gatekeepers. The Khumalo book was a bestseller. In addition, it appears to have struck the right notes in Ferguson's circles. The cover features a blurb from one Marianne Thamm who endorses it as, "a book all South Africans should read". Thamm is a journalist and the Associate Editor at *Daily Maverick.* She is a white woman, born in 1961, and not the kind of person that Khumalo's target audience would have heard of. Thamm's endorsement resonates with those who write, as opposed to those who do not. Apparently, her endorsement is for Ferguson's work more than it is for Khumalo's story. In the back blurb, Thamm states that, "beyond the sensation, sex and drugs, Ferguson has pieced together an engaging story of the talented Kelly Khumalo's tumultuous life…", a clear call to the (white dominated) literary marketplace and industry to give it a chance.

In addition to, or some would say, *because* of her role as writer-author-publisher, Ferguson is very invested and involved in the story she is telling. Her involvement is sometimes conveyed as empathy. She writes: "on my own journey I remember the doubters and haters well. The looks, the whispers, the gossips, the turnings away. Kelly reminds me so much of me" (220). Ferguson reveals that it was occasionally a challenge to maintain some distance between herself, the subject and the topic because she felt "responsible for Kelly. Completely, totally and absolutely" (228). Her involvement plays out in frequent insertions of herself into the story - judging Khumalo, helping her, motivating her and rooting for her etc. Ferguson's emotional

involvement was to the extent that when Khumalo was spotted drunk in public after months of sobriety, Ferguson (who was intent on writing a happy ending) got very angry,

> I had this amazing ending all worked out. I planned for the book to come out, perfectly timed to celebrate her one-year clean and sober birthday. I had it all mapped out in my head … it was all going to be how Kelly's become the poster child for recovery. Oozing hope and strength, I wanted everyone to be moved and amazed by her miraculous recovery (228 – 229).

This revelation confirms that Ferguson had a conversion narrative in mind, one which Khumalo almost ruined by drinking alcohol when she was supposed to be on the road to sobriety. Ferguson took Khumalo's slip up very seriously, explaining that,

> Even though it's not cocaine she's used, in terms of my bigger plan, this drinking bout has kind of messed it all up. I hate having my plans derailed. I feel like grabbing her and shaking her, shouting, 'How could you? What about the book? The plan? The story? You've let me, yourself, down; you've changed the trajectory. What about everything we spoke of, we planned, we agreed on … You've fucked up my ending! (229)

It can appear to the reader that Ferguson was working through her own issues and re-writing her own past through Khumalo's story which would explain her anger at the relapse. Ferguson confesses that she had to remind herself that "this is not my story. Kelly's story is not mine to control or mould or force. The outcome is not predetermined, the road is open, anything can happen. It is her journey and I'm just the watcher, the bystander. The one who is writing it down" (229). My sense is that this reminder came too late because she is very present in the narrative. There are no less than nine images of Ferguson contained in the text– a remarkable number of pictures for somebody who should not be the focus.

Despite the ups and downs, Ferguson steers the narrative towards the resolution she was driving towards. By the last page, Khumalo has evolved from a troubled star to a redeemed powerhouse with a promising future. As such, Ferguson has crafted a conversion narrative centred around Khumalo's battle with substances. Through being denied her rightful status as co-author, Khumalo was not afforded the space to frame her own narrative, resulting in a text with a limited interpretation and portrayal of her story. This is in stark contrast to her representation

in the reality show, *Life with Kelly Khumalo*, wherein she showcases her life as a mother, daughter, entrepreneur, influencer and friend – not just a superstar who overcame drug addiction. It is worth considering that, in the end, "the justice of the portrayal has to do with whether the text represents its subject the way the subject would like to be represented, with whether that portrayal is in the subject's best interests, with the extent to which the subject has determined it" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 338).

In straight forward biographies, it is appropriate for the writer to "assume the status of full-fledged author, with the social prestige and the financial advantages that this entails" (Lejeune 196). However, I want to insist that *The Kelly Khumalo Story* is not a straight forward biography; it was a collaborative effort for which Khumalo ought to have been acknowledged as a contributing author.[39] It is Khumalo who subjected herself to scrutiny and rehab to get the story written. She granted unfettered access to her family, home and deepest secrets. She is the one who narrated her life. I am sympathetic to the view that "who owns the story is … very closely connected with who owns the experience reported in the story" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 147) and in this case, that would be Khumalo.

The narrative presents what Lejeune (190) would term "a plurality of points of view" including Khumalo on her life, and that of Ferguson and Setlaelo on Khumalo, but in spite of this, authorship is attributed only to Melinda Ferguson and Sarah Setlaelo. The two of them irrefutably (albeit unequally) wield the power of the pen (and institutions) over Khumalo who did not complete high school. It seems exploitative that Khumalo participated so actively and gave so much yet the text is not classified as an as-told-to narrative or auto/biography. It is packaged as a biography but, "when writing about others but recognising the subjectivity of the biographer, auto/biography is more appropriate" (Brennan and Letherby in Parsons and Chappell 5). *The Kelly Khumalo Story* is an example of auto/biography, "not simply [as] a shorthand representation of autobiography and/or biography…" (Stanley in Parsons and Chappell 3) but a genre which "crosses, as well as tests, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary boundaries" (Parsons and Chappell 5). This approach "disputes the conventional genre distinction between biography and autobiography" (Parsons and Chappell 3) and treats "the forward slash in auto/biography [as] deliberate" (ibid).

[39] Due to her public fall from grace at the time of the book's release, Khumalo did not have sufficient celebrity capital to commission or authorise a biography; she was down and out.

In conclusion, I am persuaded by the notion that "any attempt to make sense of the lives of others will be connected with the vantage point from which a researcher [or author] views the world. This makes any interpretation both a provisional, incomplete act" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 152-153). For reasons outlined above, my view is that the apparent exclusion of Khumalo from the authoring process somewhat compromises the integrity of the project which should be a call to biographers who rely extensively on subjects for their primary data (celebrities or otherwise), to consider involving them in the writing process. The failure to do this brings to mind a genre one would describe as a co-opted memoir.

5.3 Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng

In this section I consider *Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit: The Somizi Mhlongo Story* (2017) the product of a collaboration between Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng. Mhlongo, also known as SomGaga, is a South African celebrity whose career in the local entertainment scene spans four decades.[40] He has been on theatre stages and television productions since the 80s and, as of 2024, is still in the limelight. He is the star of his own reality show, *Living the Dream with Somizi* (2016 – 2019), a dance workout DVD called *Grind! With Somizi* (2017) and is the host of a cooking show called *Dinner at Somizi's* (2020). With 4.2 million followers on Instagram and 2.8 million on X (previously Twitter), he is undoubtedly one of the country's top influencers. *GQ Magazine* South Africa described him as "one of our culture's most popular stars"[41] and, according to News24[42], he is "one of the country's biggest, brightest, and boldest entertainers." His co-author is Lesley Mofokeng, a respected South African entertainment editor and pop-culture commentator.

In terms of the power dynamic in the author-subject relationship, equity is determined by several factors amongst them education, capital, writing conditions, influence over the style, content as well as "whose name goes on the cover, how finances should be distributed, even the question of who will speak at the book launch" (Lindemann, "As-told-to Life Writing" 11). The Mhlongo-Mofokeng collaboration did not demand of "the writer to accede to the strategic

[40] A name which in all likelihood was inspired by Lady Gaga, a global queer celebrity icon
[41] Kumona, Molife. "The power of Somizi." *GQ South Africa*, 15 May 2018, www.gq.co.za/culture/entertainment/the-power-of-somizi-16564725.
[42]Morkel, Graye. "From child star to superstar: Somizi Mhlongo's 30-year career in showbiz starting at age 13." News24, 05 May 2020
www.news24.com/channel/the-juice/news/from-child-star-to-superstar-somizi-mhlongos-30-year-career-in-showbiz-starting-at-age-13-20200504

place reserved for the 'author': the signature" (Lejeune 195). I am not aware of any violations regarding the distribution of the proceeds, because these do not "manifest in the text and are less easy for critics to detect" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 339). At first glance, it would appear that the collaboration is a meeting of two evenly balanced brands: Mhlongo an entertainment "triple threat" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 60) for his prowess as a dancer, actor and choreographer and Mofokeng, a renowned celebrity writer with an established track record in entertainment journalism writing for the *Sunday Times*, *City Press* and *Sowetan* newspapers. In 2020, the Recording Industry of South African appointed Mofokeng as its spokesperson for the South African Music Awards. Mofokeng has established himself as an influential and reputable journalist in entertainment circles which is why he was approached to write Mhlongo's story.

While the two parties were held in high esteem in their respective industries, the power dynamic, in terms of access and influence, does seem to have favoured Mhlongo. Firstly, compared to his other works like *Bitch, Please! I'm Khanyi Mbau* (Mofokeng's first celebrity auto/biography writing project), *Dominoes* required a different information-gathering process. Mofokeng recalls that "with Khanyi we spent a lot of time in her house … we had that old-style conversation"[43] (*Sowetan*). He had less access to Mhlongo and says "with [him] we used a lot of technology – voice notes. We didn't spend a lot of time seated and talking, because of his hectic schedule." Mofokeng's contact time with the subject was very limited and he had to rely on the anecdotes supplied by telephone. Secondly, Mofokeng suggested the title *Whuu Shem* [a phrase associated with Mhlongo, drawn from his comments to participants on the TV show *Idols* South Africa] but Mhlongo disagreed because "it was too playful" (*Sowetan*). Thirdly, the scope was determined by Mhlongo; there were topics Mofokeng wished to pursue but could not. It would be interesting to know what those topics are but Mofokeng signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). Finally, Mofokeng admits that he had no say or influence regarding the design, layout, or release of the book. Once his part was done, he had to wait for the final product with the rest of the country. Beyond association and building his profile, whatever other agenda Mofokeng may have had could not be advanced. At 112 pages, *Dominoes* is surprisingly small and a reflection of its narrow focus; Mhlongo indicated to fans

[43] Tjiya , Emmanuel. "How Somizi Mhlongo's book 'Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit' came to life." *Sowetan Live*, 26 June 2017, How Somizi Mhlongo's book 'Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit' came to life (sowetanlive.co.za).

and in interviews that he would release a longer deluxe version, but this has not happened to date.

It would seem that the text's contents, authorial voice and narrative discourse were primarily determined by Mhlongo, reducing Mofokeng's role to that of transcriber and editor. Narrative discourse according to Brady Wagoner (47) is, "the how or way of narration, the order, mood, voice, distance, style, in which the events are accounted for in the narrative". Sentences such as "ngiyaphahla, I get on my knees, light impepho and speak to my ancestors" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 97), illustrate that even though Mofokeng is credited as a writer, the narrative's register is recognisably Mhlongo's. This is commendable considering that too few South Africans with Mhlongo's socio-economic background will ever get the opportunity to become published authors. Due to his considerable celebrity capital and with the help of Mofokeng, Mhlongo successfully accessed the literary marketplace and *Dominoes* became a South African bestseller. For a high school dropout from Soweto to earn the title of author, of an English text no less, is an achievement. He has accomplished something beyond the reach of many of his peers because 'the book world' is generally regarded as the domain of the well-read, something Mhlongo is not - referring to himself as a "serial school dropout" (46). The language in the text is accessible and its diction characterized by easy-to-read, simple sentences. Mofokeng does not 'fix' Mhlongo's English, instead, he lets it reflect his educational background. Mhlongo reveals in an interview that he gave Mofokeng strict instructions not to use fancy English[44] and so Mofokeng took care not to "impose" himself on the text, allowing Mhlongo to sound like himself. Consequently, this is a book I was able to lend to my mother's domestic helper to read. *Dominoes* contains many examples of what sociolinguistics describe as Black South African English (BSAE), characterised by code-switching, the mixing of English and vernacular languages in the same conversation (Kachru in De Klerk). While BSAE can disguise a "lack of mastery of standard English" (Shields-Brodber in De Klerk 317), it is in fact spoken and written by those who are fluent in English and those who are not. Mhlongo's text includes colloquial phrases such as *ngiyaphapha* (26) and *tjatjarag (25).* Amongst South Africans, one can observe "striking differences in competence among BSAE speakers, ranging from complete fluency (with English a `second first language') to minimal levels of proficiency, limited to a few very rudimentary (sometimes pidgin) formulaic phrases" (De Klerk 313). An

[44] "Rise up and walk." *YouTube*, uploaded by Afternoon Express, 7 Aug. 2017, /www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQkfthHlG_I.

example of BSAE is the word shem[45] derived from the word shame. It is part of township lingo - common amongst the youth and the elderly alike. On his television job as an *Idols* judge, Mhlongo used the expression *whuu shem* as feedback to contestants who "did an exceptional job" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 91). The phrase was soon taken up by audiences, going viral. As Mhlongo tells it, "Wuuu Shem took the country by storm … everywhere I went it was hashtag "Wuuu Shem." The phrase took on a life of its own, an old township slang word … had made it into South Africa's living rooms and was now associated with class, success, and being sassy" (91).

In the celebrity terrain, "writing a memoir is necessarily an act of self-canonisation, extending, reinforcing, reframing and capitalising" (Yelin, "I am the Centre of Fame" 123). Mhlongo reveals that he first thought of writing his life story in 2012 (five years before it materialised), "when everything crumbled and came crashing down. At that time, I wanted to write about having it all and losing it all. This type of riches-to-rags story is often perceived as some kind of cliché, until it strikes close to home" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 8). He got the idea to tell his life story at a point when he was down and out - physically unwell and financially broke. By the time Mofokeng came on board, Mhlongo already had firm ideas on the kind of story he wanted to tell. It is not unusual for financially stretched well-known people to resort to selling their life stories to raise funds and the practice is certainly not new. According to Sean Grass, Charles Dickens' autobiographical novel *Great Expectations* "was partly shaped … by the economic needs of its author, who was more beset by financial worries in 1860 than he had been for many years" (80). Grass notes that *Great Expectations* was produced "amid a growing culture of celebrity, a maturing literary market, and the broad social concussions caused by England's transformation into a modern industrial state, [and that] autobiography's commercial rise embodied the emerging relations between the Victorian subject and the capitalist market ... [which] made the commodification of identity an explicit and unsettling feature of the age" (Grass 17). There are some striking resonances between the preceding quote and my observations around Mhlongo's autobiography – it was also produced during South Africa's rapidly growing celebrity (and influencer) culture, a local literary boom, and a society in transformation. Grass' appraisal of *Great Expectations,* is that it "is no portrait of the artist, or at least it does not [adequately] celebrate the artist's arrival to productivity, celebrity, and economic and emotional fulfilment. It offers instead … [an] account of self-narration in which

[45] It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain its social and cultural meaning, if it has been documented.

commodity and identity are inextricably tangled" (80). Similarly, Mhlongo's selection of stories seems to focus on those which support his brand. I identify Mhlongo as a brand in the sense that he is "a clearly defined personality and reputation who professionally labels, manages and promotes [himself] to consumers through this unique image" (Kowalczyk 7). A distinctive brand "allows the celebrity to stand out in the crowded entertainment industry" (ibid). Mhlongo's brand's value or brand equity is built off his achievements, perceived authenticity, associations and personality – all of which are incorporated into *Dominoes*. While celebrity autobiographers often "claim to offer access to their … authentic selves through 'intimate' revelations and self-disclosure of personal truth" (Yelin, "I am the Centre of Fame" 121), this is not always the case. *Dominoes* gives readers the Mhlongo they are familiar with from his previous work and social media posts. Chapter titles like "Taking on the world stage," "Sex, drugs and Rock 'n Roll," "Life through the lens," "The downfall of Somizi Mhlongo," "Second chances" and "Four decades in the limelight," indicate the centrality of the discourse of celebrity. The story is told in chronological order — obscurity to fame, and from rags to riches. In media interviews, Mhlongo makes it clear that *Dominoes* is not a 'tell all', indeed, it contains no major surprises, deviations or revelations. When I consider the author-subject dynamic in this collaboration, I am reminded that in some partnerships the writer's role is "analogous to that of the defence attorney, who may know more than he divulges and whose ethical obligation is to put the best possible face on his client's behaviour without outright deception" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 341).

Mhlongo's story starts in the seventies, when he is a young boy growing up in Soweto, to the eighties when he enters show business to the twenty first century when his fame grew exponentially. The stories told in *Dominoes* reflect "a constant alertness to the intersecting cultural fields that [Mhlongo] traverses, relating key events, places and people specifically in terms of the various cultural fields they represent and the various capitals afforded and negotiated as a result" (Yelin, "I am the Centre of Fame" 125). He liberally shares anecdotes involving his network of influencers (actors, politicians, football players, fashion designers, singers etc.). He recounts his glory days, reminding readers that he has choreographed for major cultural events like Miss South Africa, the Metro FM Music Awards, the Duku Duku Awards, the South African Music Awards, the Channel O Music Video Awards as well as the FIFA 2010 World Cup. He positions himself as the authority on all things celebrity, "situating [himself] in a hierarchy of cultural value in relation to those [he] judges as falling short" (Bourdieu in Yelin, "I am the Centre of Fame" 124). He says for example, "Babes Wodumo

can be a star for the longest time, but if not managed properly, that child will be history" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 110) or "Kelly Khumalo … was lucky enough to have people like myself who took her under our wings" (ibid). According to Hannah Yelin, "this model of enmeshed interconnection speaks valuably, … to the intertextual, multiplatform construction of celebrity identity in which a memoir is just one story among many that compete in the tissue of shifting threads that comprise the overarching star image" ("I am the Centre of Fame" 125). Through *Dominoes,* Mhlongo asserts his identity as a fully-fledged celebrity, saying, "I feel like I'm the biggest star in the country. Like, I'm among the best, top 10, top 5" (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 100). Furthermore, he cements his position as a gay icon and role model. This is done through the assumption of a bold and unapologetic stance on his homosexuality. He does not disclose any difficulty or angst about coming out because he believes that everybody could see from a young age that he "wasn't into girls" (28); he played netball at the age of twelve with "like-minded boys" who behaved like him (Mhlongo and Mofokeng 28).

Scholars have found that in some collaborative writing, "the subject, being famous, is likely to be a personality so powerful that he or she can exercise a will that imperils the author's integrity, to exclude material damaging to him, or include trivial episodes which vainglorify him. The resulting work is the amalgam of the subject's ego with the writer's honesty, sensitivity, and artistry as the interpretative medium" (Strickland 67). This is evident in *Dominoes* where Mhlongo retained full control of his narrative authority by dictating the style, themes and content while leveraging Mofokeng's reputation.

5.4 Robert Marawa and Mandy Wiener

Gqimm Shelele: *The Robert Marawa Story* (2022) is an 'as told to' text written by Mandy Wiener. Who are they and why are they together? Whose story is it? If you run an internet search of who Marawa is, you will learn that,

> Robert Marawa is a decorated sportscaster, a sought-after MC, facilitator, event host and keynote speaker. He has won almost all major radio and TV journalism awards in South Africa for his excellent work on football, the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games, the All-Africa Games and has

> hosted numerous popular, mainstream functions, both locally and internationally.[46]

Wiener, according to the profile on her personal website mandywiener.com, is described as:

> one of the country's best known and most credible journalists and authors. She is the current host of the Midday Report on 702 and Cape Talk and is a regular columnist for News24. She has published numerous best-selling books and is a prominent social media commentator. For the past two decades Mandy has worked as a multi award-winning reporter specialising in investigative journalism and legal matters. Covering stories such as the trial of former national police commissioner Jackie Selebi and the murder of Brett Kebble, she earned a reputation for her work in exposing South Africa's criminal underworld. These included exposes on Czech fugitive Radovan Krejcir, Teazers boss Lolly Jackson and other mysterious murders.

Wiener has authored or co-authored five books to date. They are, *Killing Kebble*, "a gritty, fast-paced chronicle of how one death blew the lid off Johannesburg's shadowy underworld"; *The Whistleblowers,* which contains "Raw and evocative accounts of South Africa's whistleblowers, told in their own voices and from their own perspectives"; *My Second Initiation,* a memoir which "traces Pikoli's journey from his graduation to manhood, to his experience in the corridors of government"; *Behind the Door* "a compelling narrative that unpacks the true facts of the Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp story"; *Ministry of Crime*, which "examines the nexus between organised crime figures, corrupt police officials and powerful politicians."

The writing of *The Robert Marawa Story* was initiated by Wiener. We know this because it says in the acknowledgements, "this book was several years in the making. After Mandy slid into Robert's DMs in 2017 with an attempt to convince him to tell his story in a book, it took a few more years before he finally agreed the time was right" (275). The significance of Wiener initiating the project should not be lost on us. As a hard-hitting journalist, Wiener has a nose for relevance. She has the ability to identify and write stories which put a human face to current

[46] "Marawa Sports Worldwide." *Times Live*, https://iono.fm/c/6904.

affairs. If you consider the writing projects Wiener has lent her name to recently, you will note that all her subjects are newsmakers. It is worth noting that Wiener as an established brand decided to associate herself with Marawa specifically. As far his career and claim to fame is concerned, Marawa is just one of a handful of sports casters; his peers include the likes of Thomas Mlambo, Walter Mokoena, and Carol Manana, to name a few. They are also black and brilliant but they are nowhere as controversial as Marawa. This is what sets him apart and arguably, what made him an ideal subject for Wiener. It would appear that Wiener saw a story of public interest and an opportunity to tell it herself. This is important to note because Wiener's brand is associated with the discourse of news; she writes books that inform, interrogate or sway public opinion. Marawa could have selected any other writer, but it appears that Wiener's reputation as a credible journalist appealed to him.

In terms of the author-subject power dynamic, it seems to be a well-balanced and collaborative effort. In the acknowledgments, 'they' write, "we would like to thank each other for the trust and enthusiasm that have underpinned this project" (275). They were equally invested in the project, noting that they spent a considerable amount of time together at a Johannesburg hotel working on the text (275). Their relationship appears to be professional, partners brought together by a project. In other writing partnerships, "the inherent imbalance between the partners may be complicated by a political imbalance between them; often, collaborations involve partners whose relation is hierarchized by some difference – in race, culture, gender, class, age or (in the case of illness or disability) somatic condition" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 336). However, this does not appear to be the case between Marawa and Wiener. It is not a situation where the "author occupies the privileged position, with access to platforms for articulation, while the other narrator has limited or no ability, occasion or opportunity for speaking publicly" (Danielewicz 275).

Weiner's presence in the story is largely veiled but discernible, which is often the case with as told-to-narratives. Consider this,

> Certainly, we ask that the writer remain faithful to the tone of the model in his oral performances, but it is especially a question of adapting what the model has said to the laws of the genre and to the demand of the public to which it is directed, by having recourse to narrative and descriptive methods that might be quite different from his own. In so doing, the interviewer-writer does not impose his point of view or his personal style;

> he opens himself rather to a double exercise of pastiche, effecting a coming-and-going between this nebula or this rough draft that is the image of life floating in the memory and spoken word of the model, and the narrative forms that are currently on the market. (Lejeune 189)

The Robert Marawa Story is written in the first person to create the illusion that Marawa is speaking. For example, there are several references to a place which a non-Nguni person would refer to as Nkandla, but written as "eNkandla" (15, 7, 8, 14, 15, 87, 99) which is how a Zulu speaker would refer to it. In this sense, Wiener has attempted to adopt Marawa's turn of phrase in the written version. There are however a few cultural mistranslations which reveal the extent of Wieners's role. For example, we have Marawa saying "we would do the ukusinda" (9). Here, the translation from Zulu to English has resulted in a rather clumsy sentence structure. Ukusinda is the act of using moist cow dung to line the earthen floor or wall of a hut; the phrase does not require the addition of "the" in front of it. Such phrases disrupt our suspension of disbelief; reminding us that this is not Marawa speaking but Wiener. A ghostwriter intervenes in the telling of the story, "but he must next erase his intervention and take over the relationship with the reader as if he were the model" (Lejeune 190). Even though she is not a ghost writer in this context, Wiener performs the same role. She plays a key role in "condensing, summarizing, eliminating the inferior parts, choosing the lines of relevance, establishing an order, a progression. But also choosing a mode of enunciation, a tone, a certain type of relationship with the reader" (Lejeune 189).

The Robert Marawa Story is written in chronological order from childhood to the present day. Readers are given his background story, his early years, his family, his education, dating history, etc. He was raised in a fairly well-to-do family and was able to afford the best basic education (he did not complete his university studies because he got a television job and decided to quit rather than miss the opportunity). The first third of the memoir details his obsession with football from a young age. His background is interesting and well narrated, but one does get the sense that it is exactly that – background information. What the childhood background does is to signal that he will follow a football related calling, making his current career somewhat inevitable. His journey and childhood passion build up to a climax in a chapter titled "Congratulations and welcome to TopSport!" In this chapter he auditions and beats other hopefuls for an opportunity to host a televised soccer show. He recalls, "the producer asked if

football was a real passion of mine and I said that's the reason I'm here. It always has been" (Wiener 99). When he got this opportunity, he quit his university studies in law.

From the onset of his career, Marawa concerned himself with issues of transformation. Once he made it onto television, he recognised in himself, "a role model for a black child from the township, from the farms, from anywhere else in South Africa" (116). He noticed that there was

> very little use of vernac in studio. Everything was in English. I have no idea why, but it was strange for me because, the way I looked at it, football was being consumed largely by black South Africans. We were often speaking above people's heads. We weren't connecting with them because we were speaking English … I made a conscious decision to start adding in isiZulu. (110)

He is proud of the shows where they threw in "a bit of tsosti/kasi-type vibe that people associate with football growing up in townships and locations around the country" (142). During his tenure at a show called *SoccerZone*, he popularised the isiZulu "catchphrase that has come to define [his] broadcasting: sesiyavala, sithi gqimm'shelel" which means, "we are now ending it; we will be back" (110). He moved stations, joining SuperSport where he says "everything … was in English and we had to change that" (161). His popularity and fame grew.

It was not long before his shows' content went beyond the playing field to "holding people accountable in the management of sport" (132). In his view, he "was accountable to the listener, to the viewer, to the audience" (198). With the adoption of this stance, he says

> I felt myself move from being a football fan to being more aware of the administrative blunders. I wasn't just promoting the game, I was more aware of the complete disregard of the people who make football happen: the fans, the spectators of the game, the lovers of football. My role had moved from being a fan to creating enemies within the different pockets of administration and leadership within football. (201)

It is a story of institution building and the breaking down of institutions. It critiques administrators and leaders. In 2011, Marawa criticised the inaugural Carling Black Label Cup

and called it "a gimmick" on the grounds that it was "unfair" to take what was previously a tournament for charity, the Iwisa Spectacular, (later the Telkom Spectacular), and turn it into a "commercial entity" (198). Initially, the cup was characterised by the participation of any four teams who got the most votes from the public. The money raised through votes and ticket sales was donated to charity. In contrast, with the new format,

> the Carling Black Label Cup was centered around the Soweto Derby between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates, offering their supporters the experience of having a big say in arguably the biggest game that local football has to offer. Innovations such as the selection of starting line-ups, captains, substitutions, formations, as well as the inclusion of Champions coaches, all formed part of the amazing experience on match-day.[47]

The new competition was open to only two teams, Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates; all the fans at home could influence was the selection of players on the day. Marawa's on-air remarks disparaging the lucrative Carling Black Label Cup ruffled the feathers of Irvin Khoza (aka the Chairman), one of the most powerful men in local football. Marawa refused to apologise for his remarks.

South Africa's broadcasting industry is regulated by the Broadcasting Act of 1999 which recognises three broadcasting service categories, namely public broadcasting, commercial broadcasting and community broadcasting. Section 10 (d) of the Act states that, as the public broadcaster, the SABC has a responsibility to "provide significant news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance and independence from government, commercial and other interests". The South African model of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) largely follows the principles of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In 1936, the BBC's first Director General, Lord Reith, established the BBC "as a model for a publicly funded independent broadcaster whose mission was to educate, inform and entertain the whole nation, whilst remaining free from political interference and commercial pressures" (Ngwenya 12). The SABC operates along the same lines but its funding model also incorporates commercial advertising. With its national footprint, the SABC "provides an important forum for public

[47] "Carling Knockout & Carling Cup." Carling Cup | carlingblacklabelCarling Cup | carlingblacklabel

debate and opinion formation in South African society. Hence, the SABC is a key institution in the on-going democratisation of the South African political system" (Ngwenya 37). Unfortunately, the SABC, as an institution, is in a state of decline. It has an unstable revenue income and according to its annual reports, has incurred financial losses every year since 2009 (except for 2012, 2014 and 2021). In the 2022/23 financial year, it reported a record breaking R1.13 billion loss, citing amongst the reasons, "growth in audience ratings that did not meet expectations" (SABC Annual Report x). It also faces stiff competition from commercial and subscription-based channels.

For the SABC to fulfil its mandate around the delivery of sports events of national interest, it has to secure broadcasting rights with various sporting federations (SABC Annual Report 44 in Rootman, Tait and Nyembezi 4). In 2007, the SABC failed to reach an agreement with the Premier Soccer League (PSL) and lost the licensing rights to Multichoice (due to exorbitant and unaffordable prices according to the SABC). The loss of PSL broadcasting rights meant that, for five years (the duration of the contract), millions of South Africans without cable television would not be able to view the games. When this became public, there were denials from the SABC and a lack of clarification about what had transpired. The SABC said, "there was no way there could be a deal because a public broadcaster had to broadcast football" (167). Marawa says, "as a broadcaster, I needed answers for football fans. There was shock, disbelief, confusion and we had to clear it up. People knew the only place to get the real story was on my show" (167). Marawa led the charge and invited the SABC CEO, the PSL Chairman and a representative from Multichoice to speak on his radio show at the SABC. His justification is that, "the listener needed to have a balanced view. It was a crucial time in our football and broadcasting history. It was the first time the SABC was losing the rights to local football and it had to be documented" (168). This did not go down well with his bosses, and they ordered him to cut the interview while it was on air, but he continued with it:

> I said on air, because I believed the listeners should know, there had been pressure off air to end the interview … I was just carrying the news for the people as objectively as I could because that was my duty. How do you run a credible show if you are going to misinform people in the process? The credibility around the sports show was such that people relied on it for objectivity, honesty and engagement (168).

Marawa was suspended from the SABC for continuing with the interview despite orders to cut it. The ANC Youth League and the United Democratic Movement (UDM) released statements condemning his suspension. His suspension drew the interest of freedom struggle stalwart, Winnie Mandela who asked him, "My son, what are they doing to you" (170)? This attracted media attention and he became a newsmaker in his own right. In his diagnosis of his tumultuous relationship with the SABC he reflects:

> the real underlying problem at the SABC was that an independent voice did not suit them. It was not something they had banked on. It was all very good and well when Robert was doing shows and praising this one and highlighting that one. But the minute I started to question decisions taken or question authority as to why they were taking those decisions, then it was a case of 'How dare you?', 'Who are you to question what we are putting out there?' An outspoken, independent voice that challenged authority on behalf of the public simply did not suit the public broadcaster, so I had to go (205).

His narrative adds to the myriad of voices critical of the management of the SABC. He comments,

> One thing I started to realise at the SABC was that anything that works, that people love, then they would want to do something to stop it … because people internally have the power to do whatever they feel like they can do just to upset the applecart. It's why the SABC in its entirety ended up the way it is. (203)

Marawa expresses his belief that "there was a cabal within the SABC and its main aim was never about the restoration or resurrection of the broadcaster. Their mission was to rubber stamp their own authority and to gain control and get rid of certain individuals" (205). Blessed Ngwenya investigated the "internal formal and informal norms, structures and processes that have shaped the conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC in post-apartheid South Africa" (Ngwenya 21). He found that the informal processes, characterised by "interactions and hierarchies, as well as the organisational pressures and tensions, within the SABC" have a bearing on the notion of independence in the organisation (Ngwenya 2015: 21). As such, "journalists and producers generated meanings of 'independence' that focused on the SABC's

internal experiences, such as censorship, deference to authority and factionalism" (Ngwenya 26). Marawa's narrative is providing the evidence that indeed, the SABC is often its own worst enemy. Marawa has since severed all ties with the public broadcaster.

He is critical of the support lent to sport by government, saying, "if I look at current presidents and how little they actually care about sport, that is problematic for me because sport is such a unifier … A unifier in a country that has been left desolate like South Africa was important" (139). This is a political view.

Care has been taken to portray Marawa in a positive manner and endow his narrated self with qualities such as humility, integrity and diligence. The anecdotes contained in the narrative serve to anchor the portrayal. For example, to illustrate that Marawa is not easily swayed and cannot be bought; we learn that Marawa once turned down an offer from Patrice Motsepe, currently the richest black man in South Africa, to be the CEO of his newly acquired football club Mamelodi Sundowns. It is common knowledge that this club offers some of the most lucrative contracts in the PSL. Marawa says he considered the offer, knowing that taking up the position would earn him "money that I had never experienced in my life" (144). In the end he declined the offer on the grounds that "money wasn't the beginning and end of everything in life" (143). He did not want to be in administration, his calling was to hold administrators accountable.

He is held up for scrutiny and presented as a self-driven and inspirational role model. It is not only in his role as a broadcaster that he is represented as an upstanding and patriotic servant; even in his personal life, we are told stories which suggest that he is a devoted son, a present father, a supportive sibling etc. After the reading, one is left wondering about the real Marawa. While plenty of personal information is shared, *The Robert Marawa Story* is not a tell-all. Indeed, Marawa himself says, "I've always believed in the element of intrigue where people are wondering: who is this person?" (122). The personal stories are kept to a minimum.

In typical Wiener fashion, the tone of the narrative is rather formal, written in the style of an investigative piece which provides a first-hand account on the problems at the SABC and at SAFA. Marawa's journey and life story is moulded into the recognisable discourse of news which provides answers to the question of who, why, when, where and how. It is certainly not a text that can be described as deeply personal, funny, long winded, unfair, rude, boastful, chauvinistic, racist, sexist, dismissive, provocative – it is professional. It is pacy, clinical,

focused, sharp, informative, factual, balanced, subjective, unapologetic, proper, measured, strategic, confrontational, honest, intimate, political, speculative, analytical and confident.

In 2023, Wiener wrote an opinion piece on the subject of women's football in South Africa prompted by the women's team (Banyana Banyana) qualifying for the knockout stage at the Soccer World Cup. In her piece, titled "Seize the moment for women's sport. The time for promises is over," Wiener makes a case for more resource allocation for the female team. One of the sources she cited was Marawa. In her opinion piece she reports on what Marawa told her around the professionalisation of women's football,

> South Africa still does not have a professional league so when you look at all these nations that are doing so well, they play in professional leagues around the world. We don't and maybe that's a wakeup call. Instead of politicians and people in football administration going to the airport to want to become a front they need to fight the cause of the women's game because we can't keep saying 'Go Banyana, go Banyana' but you are not fighting or trying to get sponsorship to get a professional league.

Their continued rapport around the issue of accountability and development indicates that theirs was a fruitful and mutually beneficial collaboration. *The Robert Marawa Story* reflects Marawa and Wiener's characteristics as brave and patriotic broadcasters. They are both relentless truth seekers who expose information (corruption, erosion and decay) in the interest of the public. Their comments on public institutions reveal similar values when it comes issues of good governance (accountability, transparency etc.). Since the story was produced in an equitable manner, the benefits accrue to both author and subject. He gets his professional memoir and she gets to write about the underworlds of SABC and SAFA - to expose the institutional rot at both institutions. Between Marawa and Wiener, they have produced a newsworthy read which, like a whistle blower's report, does not shy away from mentioning people's names.

5.5 Thembi Mtshali-Jones and Sindiwe Magona

In the text *Theatre Road: My Story* (2019), the subject is Thembi Mtshali-Jones, a veteran South African singer and actress who has starred in acclaimed theatre productions, television soapies such as *Sgudi Snaysi* and *Ipi Tombi* (sic). During the course of her career, she toured

with South African cultural icons such as Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba. The writer of *Theatre Road* is Sindiwe Magona, "a prolific writer of children's books, biography, poetry, short stories, plays and novels [as well as] a translator and highly regarded public speaker" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 205).

The memoir is an 'as-told-to' type of collaborative life writing project. This categorisation is announced on the cover which proclaims, "Thembi Mtshali-Jones *Theatre Road: My Story* as told to Sindiwe Magona." The authorship is shared; both names appear on the front, spine and inside of the text.

Because it is an 'as told to' piece of writing, I will start by exploring the dynamics of the author-subject relationship. In the case of Magona and Mtshali-Jones, they are collaborators as well as friends. This is clearly stated and conveyed in how they speak of and address each other, for example, in her acknowledgements Mtshali-Jones says, "to Dr Sindiwe Magona, mngane wami, my friend. Thank you for helping, pushing and forcing me to put this book together. It's taken some years. But I do believe everything happens at the right time. You are so special" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 202). Their collaboration is based on what seems to be a harmonious and balanced power dynamic between subject and author. Consider these reflections by Magona:

> Way back in 2011, Thembi and I started on her biography. We did this with great gusto, much excitement and no timeline. This book is making history in my career as an author, or co-author in this case, for taking almost a decade to complete. None other has taken as long. But then, I have not worked with someone as busy, as in demand. (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 197)

This revelation suggests an equal partnership as far as the writing process is concerned. As an experienced writer with easy access to the subject's private life, Magona could have completed the project without Mtshali-Jones but she chose to wait, delaying the project's finalisation for almost ten years. Incidentally, its completion was necessitated by a request from the City of Durban who hosted Mtshali-Jones' 70th birthday celebration; Magona reveals that "one of the items on the city's wish list for the occasion is a book on the life of the celebrant" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 197). The occasion forced them to finally wrap up and release it. *Theatre Road: My Story* represents the kind of collaborative life writing which "result[s] from

partnerships that are voluntary, amicable, and mutually beneficial" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 335). I will return to this point later.

Theatre Road explores Mtshali-Jones' childhood, upbringing, experiences during apartheid, career breakthroughs, life abroad and life in the democratic South Africa. It is mostly written in the first person meaning that "the narrating 'I' is an agent taking action" (Danielewicz 270) in the narration of the story. It is the narrator's voice which "determines how the narrative is shaped, situated and received by readers" (Danielewicz 270). Having familiarised myself with Magona and Mtshali-Jones' histories, works and interviews – it is not easy (if possible) to determine whose language and voice is prominent or more pronounced in the narration. I attribute this to Magona's writing skills as well as the "intimate knowledge and relations between the writer and the other whose voice [is] represented" (Danielewicz 272). On the surface, there are many similarities between subject and writer. They are both mature black women. They are both activists. They are both passionate about family and women's empowerment. As such, in my analysis, both the narrator and subject's voice come through in *Theatre Road*. According to Jane Danielewicz, "more than any other feature, voice is the one rhetorical choice that determines how an autobiography will be read" (272). She says, "agency is enabled by voice in the text. Voice signifies presence" (Danielewicz 277). The parts written in the first person could be a combination, or Magona writing as the subject or direct transcripts of words spoken by Mtshali-Jones.

Magona is experienced in the art of storytelling and is the author of nine books, across literary genres, from autobiography and short stories to children's books and poetry. To enable me to answer the question of 'whose story is this?' it is essential that I also bear in mind the author's footprint – her style, background, career, interests and tendencies, for easier detection of overlaps. I could simply say that it is Mtshali-Jones' story because she is the subject who did the 'as telling to' and in oral storytelling, the development of the story is controlled by the narrating subject who takes responsibility for the "remembering and telling of the life story… she then recalls, selects, gives narrative form and performance and linguistic style to her experiences" (Sands 47). However, with written texts, the responsibility or narrative authority is shared with the writer and editor. Oftentimes, "autobiographies are performances staged by the author" (Danielewicz 270). According to Dianne Shober, "in the changing milieu of our South African socio-political landscape, Sindiwe Magona has become not only a recorder of history, but a creator of it" (1). Shober says that in Magona's writing, she reveals "the truth

experienced by people impaled by apartheid, crafting literary bridges of reconciliation and thereby crossing racial, economic, linguistic, and geographical divides through her powerful life narratives" (ibid).

Similarly, Ngwenya describes Magona's autobiographical writing (*To my Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*) as a "compelling narrative of a black woman's struggle for self-reliance and dignity in a socio-cultural environment fraught with numerous obstacles to personal fulfilment" ("The Historical Dimension of South African Autobiography" 131). He notes that in it, she "explores the convergence of class, race and gender in the creation and legitimation of certain social roles and subject positions within the South African social formation" (Ngwenya, *The Historical Dimension of South African Autobiography* 135). Magona approaches autobiographical writing as "part of a historically and formally changing discourse of self-representation … a political site on which human agency is negotiated within and against institutions on the grounds of truth" (Gilmore in Ngwenya, *The Historical Dimension of South African Autobiography* 132). Magona's approach to writing reflects her personal politics shaped by her experiences under apartheid. She is passionate and serious about writing for and about black women:

> A lot was being written about us but not written by us. We may not be for example, a professor of anthropology or history, but there is value in those like me writing about our experiences, who did not study Apartheid but lived it. That is why my first book is entitled *To my Children's Children*. This is my legacy to the next generation. This is my way of telling them 'this is who we are from our point of view'. I remember an old idiom that says 'the story of the hunt is never complete, until the lion tells its tale'. I am a black woman and I am writing from a black woman's perspective. The gatekeepers to publication are white people. Yet if a white person writes about black people, who will pick up the errors? Sometime, even in the best of books about black people, I find myself saying "How can they say that?" (in Salo and Magona 128)

It therefore makes sense why Magona would be interested to write the life story of a black woman, Mtshali-Jones. She resonates with the stories of black South African women and cares about their struggles. Siphokazi Koyana describes Magona as "an individual, a woman in a patriarchal community whose subjection of women she challenges" (68). Magona, according to Koyana, is motivated by a need to "'tell it like it is,' to share the quotidian reality of being

black and a woman in South Africa during the apartheid era" (Koyana 64). She is an advocate of self-representation by black women, and recognises the value of one's story. Magona herself says, "the value in my story is the authenticity of my voice, of me bearing witness" (Salo and Magona 128). Koyana notes that Magona's autobiographies reflect a womanist consciousness and that she writes,

> from within the woman's personal space - home and family. She not only documents how that space is a social product, but also proceeds to demonstrate the interrelationship between that space and other social structures … Magona attempts to reveal the multiple and dynamic interconnections between households and the larger political economy. (Koyana 64)

This is the lens through which she frames her characterisation of female subjects, one she inevitably brings to *Theatre Road*. The story is undoubtedly Mtshali-Jones' in terms of the granular details but the overarching themes are a reflection of Magona's experiences and interpretation of the world. To illustrate this point, I will now consider the key themes in the text, amongst them domestic work, apartheid and women's emancipation.

Domestic work is a recurring theme. Magona and Mtshali-Jones both have intimate knowledge of domestic labour. In her writing, Magona gives "detailed account[s] of her experiences as a domestic worker - work that occurs in a space in which distinctions between private and public are collapsed" (Koyana 66). In a 1999 interview, Magona articulated her views on domestic labour saying, "…the children of domestic workers who never go on holiday, who never go anywhere, who seldom see their mother - what have they got to keep them healthy psychologically? And not run around with boys when they're twelve or thirteen? Nothing" (Meyer 85). The writer's intimate knowledge is evident in the accounts about Mtshali-Jones' mother who was a domestic worker until retirement. Her mother, who birthed six children before the age of thirty, had "a sleep-in job, coming home only on weekends" leaving Mtshali-Jones "to be the big sister and take on the responsibility of looking after the house and the children" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 44). Before entering show business, Mtshali-Jones worked as a domestic worker who was forced to spend minimal time with her daughter. Although she was not a sleep-in, she worked late hours and shares that, "I was expected to serve dinner, wait in the kitchen while they ate and wash dishes before leaving" (Magona and

Mtshali-Jones 82). It would eventually be her break into musical theatre that would enable her to leave domestic work.

Shober also highlights a trend in Magona's works, which is that they "build bridges … for the global community ill-informed of the ordinary African domestic worker, migrant labourer, and school child who breathed the choking dust of oppression" (2). As such, family life is a recurring theme in the text. Magona holds strong views about apartheid and its impact on black lives: "the government of South Africa was waging war against African families. If the father was working it was never for enough wages. So the mother had also to be working; the children were being brought up by who?" (Attwell, Harlow and Attwell 285). Magona makes it a point to educate readers that the breakdown of the black family under apartheid was by design: "the breakdown of Black family was, even way back then, beginning to be recognisably, tangibly manifest" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 56).

The issue of institutionalised segregation is another recurring theme. When she started singing, she was still employed as a domestic worker for the white Edelson family. At her first play, the Edelsons came to watch her from the front row. She "unfortunately could not invite [her] own family. Black people were not allowed in white theatres" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 92). Soon after the show's local run ended, the cast was invited to perform in London. The black members struggled to get travel documents because under apartheid they "were not allowed to have passports" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 99). As a black woman then, "you needed permission from your husband, if you were married, or from your father, if you were not. As a widow you had to have your son's permission" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 93). She eventually got one when her mother forged the father's signature, but upon their return, the passports of all the black members were repossessed by immigration officials, as "those were issued for a single journey only" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 99).

Magona's works are educational and they remind readers that apartheid was inescapable and sought to control almost every aspect of black people's lives from birth. Mtshali-Jones was delivered at the "King Edward VIII Hospital for Non-Europeans Only" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 2). (Incidentally, I was born at the same hospital and was not aware before reading *Theatre Road,* that it was for Non-Europeans only).

Magona addresses South Africans' xenophobia and attributes it to our history. In the narrative, we learn that Mtshali-Jones and colleagues visited Nigeria and soon realised that,

> We were not African. We went around looking at these African cloths and they were just not us. Even the artwork looked spooky, unfamiliar. Us. Them. Now, when I think of it, I feel like a fool. We didn't understand any of what we were seeing. Apartheid stripped us of who were on the African continent. (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 121)

Theatre Road also comments on the spatial dynamics which continue to define South Africa. She indicates that in the early days of democratic South Africa black people started moving to suburbs but "as more black people moved to these places, more and more white people moved away; going further north or east or anywhere – just away from the black cloud they saw approaching" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 166). This phenomenon continues to this day.

Magona also highlights the sacrifices made by families whose fathers, brothers and husbands signed up to be migrant workers in the cities. She recalls an incident concerning Mtshali-Jones' uncle who "when he'd gone to work in the mines, [had] been as robust as a young buck" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 29) but returned as "skin and bones" and "a shadow" of himself (ibid). The system chewed and spat them out, a phenomenon which also still occurs to this day, especially in the mining industry.

As indicated, *Theatre Road* may not be Magona's story but it mirrors her politics. Consider the fact that Shober's extensive engagement with Magona's body of work led her to comment on

> Magona's vast oeuvre, spanning three rich decades of literary realism, her complex, creative tapestry examines motherhood, especially Black motherhood, shortchanged by the confines and geographical separations forced upon families by the apartheid pass system. Furthermore, her works address relational abandonment and infidelity wrought by a government determined to fracture the tribal family and she depicts the anguish of children humiliated and de-motivated by racism's scourge. (Shober 7-8)

Reflecting on her narrative practice in an interview granted to David Attwell, Barbara Harlow and Joan Attwell (292), Magona emphasises, "I am just telling stories! That's all I am doing. I do not come from a background of literature studies… My sense of what I am doing is really from what I feel. I have to feel strongly about something, and therefore I will write about it." She does indeed write about what she feels strongly about; Koyana notes Magona's

"willingness to be open about the abuse that exists in personal relationships between black men and their wives" (Koyana 66). The narrative details an account where Mtshali-Jones was given a severe beating in New York by her boyfriend who was then arrested by the police (called by a neighbour). Soon thereafter, a representative from the African National Congress (ANC) begged her to drop the charges against the perpetrator who stood to lose his refugee status in America if convicted. She recalls, "I started crying, telling him about what Themba had done to me. He said he understood my anger and my hurt and he was not condoning Themba's acts. He also promised that the ANC office would pay for all the medical bills. I dropped the charges" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 143). I suspect that the inclusion of this reference to the ANC, the current ruling party, is deliberate and intended to highlight their complicity in the high levels of violence against women - women who are expected to protect their abusers.

What is also striking is that the narrative is not concerned with celebrity even though the subject wields considerable celebrity capital by virtue of her longevity in the industry. There are no endorsements from famous actors or directors; there is no blurb, foreword or endorsement. It is a two-woman project. The focus of the story is on the person and the testimony of her life. Magona says,

> *Theatre Road: My Story* will surprise many. It has me. What goes into the making of a life, any life, even that of a world-acclaimed celebrity is a mixture of many things, good and not so good; planned and unplanned. The happenstance blew my mind. It reminded me, as I pray it will all those who read it, that we hold a great power in our hands, a power maybe not capable of moving mountains, but definitely of moving the lives of those we meet, know, love, employ, work with, or simply pass along the way, as we to and fro, not realising that we might steer someone's life in a direction they had hitherto never contemplated. (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 198)

As much as apartheid tried to kill the spirit of black people, they persevered. Magona comments that

> there are books written on apartheid, very erudite books by experts. I am not an expert; I am just someone who lived apartheid. Sometimes when you read these books you don't see our ordinary lives. You don't see the

> day-to-day life that we lived. Yes, we suffered under apartheid, but we also had beautiful lives. We had lots of fun. Joy! We had love, as children. We felt precious to our parents and we felt that we were loved. We were cherished, and a lot was expected of us. (Attwell, Harlow and Attwell 285)

She gives examples of these joys, sharing that Mtshali-Jones' grandmother often "told stories [and] encouraged the two girls to create and narrate their own" a memory that makes Magona comment, "any child encouraged to be creative is already a winner in the game of life. Who knows, some of Thembi Mtshali-Jones' masterly renditions could be rooted in these early competitions" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 21). The story is told highlighting these special ordinary moments. Under the bigger shadow of apartheid, they created light and led full lives.

One of the surprises Magona is referring to is the story of how Mtshali-Jones was freed from the shackles of being a maid. As it turns out, one of the Edelson daughters, Charlene, discovered quite by chance that Mtshali-Jones could sing. One day Charlene spotted an advert "looking for singers and dancers for the production of *uMabatha*, the Zulu adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 83) and urged Mtshali-Jones to audition. Charlene convinced her sceptical parents to release the maid early enough to make the auditions, and eventually evening rehearsals when she got a part. Charlene's intervention and ubuntu is acknowledged profusely by Mtshali-Jones who says, "Thank you, Charlene. A million, million thanks to you and all like you! May your race thrive and expand, so that all domestic workers might, God willing, find escape or, at the very least, reprieve" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 90). *Theatre Road* is a testimony that situations can and do turn around.

The narrative contains another fascinating anecdote: In 1992, the world-famous Miriam Makeba was in South Africa and wanted to meet Mtshali-Jones' mother, a meeting which was to take place at her workplace since she was a stay-in domestic worker. She says,

> mother was dutifully taking us to her quarters, the maid's room at the back of the house, the employer who had spotted the car stop outside her gate saw us get out and immediately recognised Miriam, who had been on TV since her arrival. She cried out, 'Margaret, My God! Is that Miriam Makeba?' 'Yes, medem, she is my daughter's friend.' (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 170)

Not only did ‘medem’ invite the trio to have tea in the main house’s living room [something which was never allowed], from that day onwards, she started driving Mtshali-Jones’ mother to KwaMashu [a township] on her days off (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 171) - a complete turnaround in treatment.

In the beginning I indicated that *Theatre Road* is a good example of a text born of equal and mutually beneficial partnerships. As Couser observes,

> It is easy enough to articulate ethical principles that should govern the production of collaborative autobiography. The fundamental one might be a variant of the Golden Rule: do unto your partner as you would have your partner do unto you. Thus, autobiographical collaborations should be egalitarian; neither partner should abuse or exploit the other. Given the subject's stake in the textual product, a corollary principle would be that the subject should always have the right to audit and edit the publication (*The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing* 335).

Writers of as-told-to life writing “are responsible for the way the subject is portrayed in the text” and some (George-Bloomfield and Rowley in Lindemann, “The Contest for Authority” 7) have described it as having a subject’s life in their hands. With this comes conflicting responsibilities. Lindemann is one of the scholars whose work sheds light on some of the issues which emerge in as-told-to life writing where there is a personal relationship between writers and subjects:

> As they are trusted with intimate disclosures and confidences, as they find themselves facilitating subjects’ self-examination and identity construction, writers may begin to assume a responsibility, not only for the textual life of the subject, but also for the subject in real life. This second responsibility includes a concern for the subject’s reputation … [and] the subject’s psychological wellbeing in a more immediate sense. The deeper the writer’s level of emotional involvement with the subject, the more difficult it becomes to balance these dual responsibilities (Lindemann, *The Contest for Authority* 7)

One biographer, Michael King (4 in Lindemann, "The Contest for Authority" 8) explains the concept of "compassionate truth [as] a presentation of evidence and conclusions that fulfil the major objectives of biography, but without the revelation of information that would involve the living subject in unwarranted embarrassment, loss of face, emotional or physical pain, or nervous or psychiatric collapse." While it is entirely plausible that Magona exercised compassionate truth, there is nothing I could find in the public domain to suggest a "possible conflict between the writer's obligation to portray the subject as he or she would wish and the obligation to the historical record" (Couser, "The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing" 340). In other words, I did not discover any scandals or controversies about Mtshali-Jones which were concealed.

In writing Mtshali-Jones' story, Magona has also written her own story and that of many black women who survived apartheid. Magona's writing creates "richly nuanced renditions of women who, like herself, are witty, intelligent, independent and economically viable" (Shober 5) despite their challenges. Similar to her own autobiographies, Magona's narration of Mtshali-Jones' life presents a "conventional chronological narrative mode to depict her gradual development from a state of being a helpless victim of political conditions and repressive cultural values to a condition of an articulate, self-reliant and assertive professional woman." In Ngwenya's assessment, Magona often uses "the theme of physical and intellectual growth as an organising motif" in her writing ("The Historical Dimension of South African Autobiography" 136). According to Ngwenya,

> for Magona, growing up does not merely denote the process of physical development and life-cycle changes this entails but has a deeper connotation of intellectual and emotional maturation linked to an awareness of the interplay between socio-political factors and personal choices, desires and interests. (Ibid)

Magona's writing bears testimony to her belief that, "national or gender transformation is only possible as the individual activates his/her dreams of a new reality and narrates identities of dignity and self-efficacy" (Shober 4-5). As such, Mtshali-Jones is portrayed as a decisive woman with agency who decided to follow her dreams and quit her job as a domestic worker. This is in line with Magona's tendency to depict "female characters who are visible, vibrant and integral members of their communities, and her incisive narratives enable them to vocalise

their desolation and discontent as well as their dreams for personal and social victories" (Shober 2). She achieves this in *Theatre Road* as well.

The story ends with a chapter titled "Home." In 1984, Mtshali-Jones realised that she missed home, "right then, in fabulous Paris, I was misery itself" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 155). After decades of touring places like Israel, Nigeria, Lesotho, Europe, New York and France, she yearned to return to the land of her birth, "globe trotting had become wearisome to my soul, further and further increasing the distance between me and my mine: the physical or geographical distance, the distance of language as well as that of the soul" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 161). Upon her return in 1984 she started a new life back in South Africa. The written story ends in 2019, with Mtshali-Jones as a 70-year-old back in her city of birth, the home she yearned for. She concludes that, "in Durban, I feel an unshakeable sense of belongingness in my very bones… Few could ask for more, and yet, so much good fortune has been heaped on me. I am truly blessed. God, indeed, is trustworthy – Uthembekile!" (Magona and Mtshali-Jones 193). In concluding the narrative in this manner, Magona portrays Mtshali-Jones as a woman who is at home in her skin and in her country, a woman who has defied apartheid and patriarchy – just like her.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I scrutinised texts that were written by one or more authors on behalf of or in collaboration with well-known subjects. Some of these writers were approached by subjects who could not or did not for reasons related to their limited literacy, time or access to literary markets. What emerges in these texts are layered voices which reflect the agenda, history or perspectives of the writers. The extent to which the writer's voice drowns out the subject's is dependent on the power dynamics between them. I was surprised by the possibilities for ventriloquism which collaborative life writing offers the writer using the story of the subject.

What also became clear is that the co-writers are like paratexts. Their reputations shape meaning and influence how the texts are read. The ideas that the writers are associated with are inevitably tied into the story and the reader's interpretations (if they are indeed familiar with them and are able to follow). Some readers are attracted to the writer. The subjects benefit from the association with these well-known scribes; the collaborations lend credibility to their subjects, locating them firmly within very clear frames of references and discourses. So, as I

have demonstrated, the co-authored or as-told-to narratives present layered stories reflecting both subject and writer in varying degrees depending on the power dynamics between the two.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study analysed selected black South African celebrities' autobiographies published in the twenty-first century. It engaged with texts which demonstrate the development and democratisation of life writing in South Africa illustrating the agency, politics and location of black subjects. I focused on sixteen texts about the lives of sixteen celebrity subjects, namely, Andile Gaelesiwe, Ayanda Mangubane Borotho, Bassie Kumalo, Bonang Matheba, Bonnie Henna, Caster Semenya, Kabelo Mabalane, Kelly Khumalo, Lira, Pamela Nomvete, Rosie Motene, Somizi Mhlongo, Robert Marawa, Thembi Mtshali-Jones, Unathi Nkayi and Zoleka Mandela. My study established that each subject adopts a sub-genre which suits their needs and that auto/biography offers possibilities for identity formation, the augmentation of celebrity capital, shaping public discourse and the accommodation of multiple voices. Taking into consideration theories pertaining to celebrity capital, relationality, discourse, encoding/decoding and narratology, I applied rigorous discourse and narrative analysis to the texts to respond to the research questions posed.

The subjects are all at different points in their career and were driven by different reasons to engage in life writing. It can be said that the sub-genre of each text is determined by the motives of the self, agent, writer and/or market etc. As such, they all fulfil different aims and perform a variety of sometimes overlapping functions like rewarding fandom, inspiring, educating, berating, documenting, provoking, acknowledging, promoting, confronting, explaining, declaring, interrogating, etc.

In Chapter 2, I examined how Kabelo Mabalane, Ayanda Borotho, Rosie Motene and Caster Semenya have used autobiography to reflect on and construct their identities and subjectivities using the conventions of the conversion narrative, autobiographical manifesto, scriptotherapy and testimonio. They employ these recognizable discursive strategies to work through issues pertaining to language, substance abuse, racism and patriarchy. According to Yelin, celebrity memoirs "are an act of self-making in which the authors seek to assert who they are and reclaim control of their identity" (*Celebrity Memoir* 97) and towards this end, the subjects identify, locate and describe themselves against and through notions of gender, lifestyle and race. What emerges in these texts is a marked shift or growth from the first chapter to the last. The protagonists engage in self-creation or reinvention using their words. This, for example, is evident in how Mabalane steers perception of his self from notoriety to a renewed one through a conversion narrative. Similarly, Motene takes charge of her story, to not only own her

'coconut' status and privilege, but also to reveal its burden and the complexities previously unknown to the public. Her journey from whiteness to blackness and the healing in between is laid bare for readers. Borotho uses her text to lead the charge against traditional and often oppressive modes of engaging with and viewing black women in South Africa, especially in their capacities as daughters and wives. Semenya uses her text to challenge gender stereotypes in the sporting fraternity. As the subjects grapple with either addiction, internalised racism, patriarchy or otherism – the autobiographical platform provides a tool to reinvent, reimagine, resist, speak back and claim agency. They assume the voice of the narrating I who, with the benefit of hindsight, provides explanations, creates connections and constructs a revised version of one's self or outlook. Although not the focus of the chapter, what also emerged is that behind some of these texts, there are "constellations of ghostwriters, management and market forces" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 1). This is particularly true in the case of Caster Semenya's narrative where the authorship is attributed solely to the subject when it is obvious in parts (because of certain American phrases and references) that she did not write the text. It was sometimes difficult to suspend my disbelief about the authorship as little effort was put into approximating the subject's authentic voice as South Africans know it from public interviews and social media posts. Having said that, the discrepancies between Semenya's voice within and outside the text have not led me to dispute the veracity of its contents.

In Chapter 3, I argued that celebrity autobiography can lend itself to unlocking different forms of capital for its writer as demonstrated by the memoirs written by Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira. While sharing aspects of their life stories, these texts exhibit signs of marketing material in the ways that they position the subjects as aspirational brands, positive role models, social influencers and entrepreneurs. While some parts of my analysis may appear to accuse Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira of presenting one dimensional or commercialised versions of themselves, the crux of my argument is that their memoirs demonstrate that they are shrewd business people with a clear understanding of harnessing the potential profitability of one's celebrity as an avenue towards resource accumulation and reputation laundering. Their texts are "visibly mediated" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 3) and present carefully curated information about the subjects. It has been said that "to the uncritical eye, autobiography presents as untroubled a reflection of identity as the surface of a mirror can provide" (Brodzki and Schenck 1) but this study has demonstrated that this is not the case. It can be said that to a large extent, Kumalo, Matheba, Nkayi and Lira have approached autobiography as a means to an end. In

how their stories have been written, in what has been included and left out, parallels can be drawn with their autobiographies and that of many politicians. Consider that,

> Politicians fast learn how important it is to project a 'good story' that narrativizes their vision, ethics, expertise, and character. Personal stories are mobilized to animate, iconize, and stabilize political identities. Mobilizing autobiographical discourses to project that good story, politicians deploy experiential histories to present blueprints for action and talking points, fables of origin and performances of credentials, testaments to character and calls to identification, apologies and manifestos, and sound bites for the media. They project outsider stances and normative values, testaments to success and affidavits of self-making. For some politicians, the story accumulates cultural and economic capital, and leverages the aura of political power necessary to secure the confidence of voters… (Smith, *Autobiographical Discourse in the Theatres of Politics* x).

If I had not embarked on this study, I would have been inclined to believe that "life writing, its authors and the stories mediated in them were 'truthful' accounts; that, compared to fiction, these autobiographical works would gain less charge pertaining to their reliability, commodification, voyeurism and sensationalism" (Tembo 2017: 177). However, this study's mapping of the possibilities of auto/biography dispels the notion that "autobiography is a transparency through which we perceive the life, unmediated and undistorted" (Brodzki and Schenck 1). Almost every narrative is contrived, premediated and strategic.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated that the autobiographies of Gaelesiwe, Mandela, Henna and Nomvete lend themselves to commentary on a range of public issues which often get swept under the carpet. A close reading of these texts reveals that the subjects draw from their experiences to present life stories that intervene in public debates around trauma, addiction, cancer, autopathography, depression, exile, abuse and spirituality. The public responses to these narratives especially on depression and cancer have shown that they are relevant.

In Chapter 5, I explored authorial authority in black celebrity life writing as it relates to authorship, authority, the position of the subject in relation to the writer/s. I discussed the significance and implications of choices made with regards to language, voice and narrative strategy. I explored the factors behind the different collaborations and determined that they

influenced the purpose of the narrative. It is also important to note that, with the exception of Khumalo's autobiography, the texts in Chapter 5 present forms of collaborative writing in which the narratives of the autobiographical subject and the author are jointly narrated to varying degrees. This calls for vigilant reading beyond the lens of existing definitions of co-authorship in autobiographies.

The study also highlighted the important role of paratextual elements like cover pages, images and endorsements. It noted that these elements contribute greatly to the encoding of preferred meanings and interpretation. In the case of Chapter 5, it is apparent that some of the co-writers can be considered as paratexts too because their names and association with the projects influence how they are constructed and how they are to be read. In other words, the Marawa story for example would not have achieved its objectives without the involvement of Wiener. Similarly, Mofokeng's reputation proved to be an asset in the promotion and circulation of Mhlongo's memoir.

What I did not anticipate but must report as a general finding is the role of gendering across the narratives. In overt and subtle ways, the various texts in my study reveal how ideologies of gender regulate subjects' self-representations. Across the texts, there appears to be a high degree of gender conformity marked by a notable "failure to defy conventional gender stereotypes" (Bosch, Soeting, and Huisman 297). With the exception of Semenya and Mhlongo, the subjectivities in the narratives are characterised and shaped by socially constructed norms of masculinity and femininity. For instance, in their narrations, Marawa and Mabalane tap into the masculine tropes of 'real men' who protect and provide for their families. The adherence to gender stereotypes is especially discernible in the texts about women. According to Anna Beer (2018), "it seems difficult, if not impossible, for a feminist [auto]biographer to speak outside the ideology s/he seeks to critique. Commercial imperatives… create narratives of women that allow for identification rather than difference" (366). While autobiographical subjects like Borotho seem to test the outer limits of feminist freedom, aesthetically they revert to frames that are a little shadowed by patriarchal logics of proper femininity. This observation is even more pronounced in the texts by Matheba, Nkayi, Kumalo, Lira who capitalise on and promote conventional standards of female beauty. The study confirms Bosch, Soeting, and Huisman argument that "it can be very difficult, if not impossible, for women to remodel their identities as other than caring mothers and wives" (295); and we see this illustrated in the life stories offered by Borotho and Khumalo. Similarly,

Mtshali's story by Magona is underpinned by notions of sisterhood steeped in their shared experiences of motherhood and womanhood. Even in their discussions of societal issues, Henna, Motene and Mandela's reflections on their childhood traumas are framed using societal norms of what mother-daughter relationships are supposed to look like — loving, tender and warm. Indeed, the auto/biographies in my study enforce rather than defy particular notions of masculinity and femininity.

This study was located in a social context where black citizens could previously only write from the margins. According to Christine Roux, during apartheid, most South African life writing was limited to the subcategories of "prison writing, confession, testimonials, protest poetry, and autobiographical novels" (Roux 20). The advent of democracy in 1994, "created a distinctly fertile environment for the subdivided South African autobiography to condense into a powerful new mode of expression that combined confession, testimony, and memory" (Roux 21). We see that in post-apartheid South Africa, "fractures in the old forms open up new spaces for representation … [and] experimentation with self-narrative becomes more possible …" (Smith, *Self, Subject, and Resistance* 18). As more black autobiographical subjects tell their stories, readers bear witness to a "reclamation of the self as the centre of narrative identity" (Mujakachi 214). Amongst the new crop of writers are black celebrities who have made important and meaningful contributions to the field. The ensuing intersection of autobiography and celebrity presents texts which reveal "a struggle between various interests, agents and narratives" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 27). According to Yelin, "these books and the star images of their subjects interact with, redress, seek to reconcile, and implicitly contain a multiplicity of overlapping, interconnecting, and often competing narratives" (*Celebrity Memoir* 146). In other words, as the study illustrates, "the performance of the celebrity [auto/biography] is always in dialogue with, and so constituted of, its paratexts and surrounding materials in a web of conflicting mediation" (Yelin, *Celebrity Memoir* 3).

What the study lacks in depth in some areas, I hope it makes up for in breadth in my exploration of the range of possibilities for identity formation, self-reflection, public commentary and resource accumulation enabled by auto/biography for sixteen black South African celebrities.

As I conclude, I wish to reiterate my earlier observation that autobiography is a narrative that presents a recollection of events considered important or relevant by the subject. The selection and framing of events ought to be read with the knowledge that narrator bias, trauma, background, cultural contexts and motive play a role in the recollection process. In other words,

what is presented as a truthful (non-fictional) account of the self is subjective and discursively produced through social construction. While readers may sometimes spot gaps or distortions in the narration, with the exception of outright fabrications, subjects are protected by the fact that they have authority over the interpretation of their experiences and what they choose to narrate is their truth. The main takeaway from this study is that the autobiographical "subject must be sought … in micropolitical practices, practices of self-representation which illuminate the contradictory, multiple construction of subjectivity at the intersections" (de Lauretis in Martin 82) of not only ideologies of gender, race, and sexuality, but also of commerce and politics. It is my hope that engaging this study will encourage readers of auto/biography to ask questions like, who is behind this project? What are the objectives of telling this story? What is this story trying to amplify or divert attention from? What do the paratextual elements contribute? The possibilities, as I have explored, are endless.

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