# Race, Exile and Belonging in Life Writings of Black South African Women

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## Declaration

I declare that this research report is my unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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Phozisa Mkele

26 October 2021

## Dedication

In loving memory of my late aunt Ntombentsha Mkele and
my best friend, the late Rethabile Morake.
*…the untold stories waiting to be written.*

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# Abstract

Black South African women's contributions to autobiographies and auto-fictional texts is the focus of this research. The study offers an exploration of representations of exile and home and the feelings of unbelonging, outlined across three generational timeframes. Pamela Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* (2014), Sisonke Msimang's *Always Another Country* (2017), and Zinzi Clemmons' auto-fictional narrative, *What We Lose* (2017) extend the conversation about race, spirituality, gender representation, nation building, the disillusionment complicated by a nostalgia for home and the guilt that oftentimes burdens second-generation returnees.

For this analysis, textual research was conducted on the three autobiographical texts. The study provides insights into the narrative styles adopted by Black South African women autobiographers. The autobiographical writing process addresses intersectional and monolithic representations of Black women embedded in patriarchal norms and structural racisms.

A key finding from the study is that the thread binding the life writings of Nomvete, Clemmons and Msimang is anchored in national solidarity, communal identity, and the yearning to belong. Further, the respective writers' explorations of displacement in public and private spaces forms part of the larger story of home and unbelonging. Lastly, the study demonstrates how the use of auto-fiction to create textual identities through visual genres such as photography, diary entries, song lyrics and blogs furthers the textual scope for Black women's autobiographical reflections.

# Introduction

This study examines the exile life writings of three South African women: Pamela Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* (2012), Sisonke Msimang's *Always Another Country: A Memoir of Home and Exile* (2017) and Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose* (2017). The research evaluates how these three Black female writers use the personal to speak to the political within the categories of race, nation, age and gender, while assessing the comments on history and the political from their perspective. How do Black female writers use personal narratives to critique stereotypes about Black women identities?

Are there themes that Black South African female autobiographers from exile share or desire to address? What are the patterns of self-writing among these writers? How do these three authors explore similar themes in communicating their personal narrative? What role does memory or retrospective accounts of the past serve in Black South African women's life writing? These are some of the questions the study explores. In addition, the research study interrogates how Black female writers like Zinzi Clemmons blend auto-fiction into the autobiography. What does auto-fiction achieve in Black female self-narratives, and how does it differ from the conventional autobiographical frame?

An important part of this research report is to investigate the impact of exile on experiences of home, belonging, and unbelonging in the narratives of Black South African women from three different generations. Most Black women's life writing can be described as generally reflective and meditative in nature. With that in mind, this study examines how the three autobiographers use their stories to normalise writing on what may be considered the mundane or everyday life activities, redefining what is political as a broader more inclusive category. Through reflection on their own experiences, Black women autobiographers articulate their resistance to different manifestations of patriarchy. The analysis studies how this is accomplished.

During the apartheid era, Black women were persistently minored under the law. Autobiographies authored by Black South African women can be read as a mechanism to declass stories previously wrapped under the confines of the private. The Black female autobiography presents the emergence of the minored as owners of their own cultural production, aiding the assembly of new textual identities through the deconstruction of prior stereotypes. The three autobiographical texts discussed here allow us to examine how

autobiographical writing functions as an active site and agent opposing the textual erasure and oppression of Black women. In the subsections that follow, I offer a review of major strands of scholarly debates relevant to the study.

Scholarship on autobiography portrays women as innovators in the field. As early as the 18th century, women have told their stories in an expansive context, beyond the limits of the private space. Women overtly and through veiled language techniques, refused to defer to European male subjectivities and writing practices. Sidonie Smith and Julian Watson (1998) describe the process of autobiographical narration as a method to self-knowledge. Women use autobiographical writing as a method of self-exploration and self-discovery.

The autobiography, autofiction and biography are the prototypes of female inventiveness - catalysts for making the private public. Contemporary autobiographical and biographical trends posit writing techniques that evade the forms of closure that were popularised by romantic plots. New literary forms of postmodern culture are dedicated to writing beyond an expected conclusion, subverting historically European and male literary conventions. The idea of the elusive conclusion is useful in reading how the three women at the centre of this study craft their respective life stories as open-ended works in progress.

The appropriation of reality is an important idea referenced in scholarly debates on women's autobiographical practices. In this instance, the writer is influenced by the autobiographical writing process but also persuaded to shape the narrative to a point of self-creation. Bell *et al* (1990) asserts that autobiographers have a keen sense to replace painful memories with more pleasant and even flattering perceptions of self because the ego reconstructs its own past to suitable memories based on the extent autobiographer's self-knowledge.

At the same time, through the discourse of trauma revealed in language, the author can signify estrangement, violence, or injury. Exile compels Black female authors to write about painful memories in ways that are meaningful. This entails the balancing act of depicting self in ways that transcend a flattering one-dimensional tone (Eaton, 2019). I draw on this thinking in exploring how the three writers navigate traumatic experiences within their autobiographical narratives.

According to Judith Coullie (1994), it is difficult to make a distinction between the real author and the writer whose name appears in the text because of the existence of some autobiographies that are scripted by ghost writers. The reader can identify the discrepancy

between the narrator and the author, as either intrusive or distant, depending on the textual design. The narrator decides on the nature of the relationship with the reader. The categorisation of the narrator, protagonist and author is read according to an expressive-realist theoretical model. There is a vacillation between the person and the persona, which communicates past selves in third person narrative. Coullie's ideas are useful in identifying how the three primary texts differentiate the narrators from the writers, and to what end.

Smith and Watson (1998) reference autobiographical projects which consist of visual and performance art including video, installation, written word, visual diary, photography, song lyrics and film in their research. The work of the artist challenges the legitimacy of the art as representative of real life in autobiographical narratives while pushing the boundaries on gender norms and the tradition of masculine energy as a depiction of historical practice. This line of thinking is useful in my reading of Clemmons and Msimang's use of pictographic images and family photographs, and the value produced by adding family photos to life writing.

The use of photographic imagery, diary entries, and song lyrics, contributes to the visual and performance art of the autobiographical project necessary for self-actualization. This research builds on existing literature of Black woman autobiographers, showcasing Black South African women's engagement with the genre. The pioneers of autobiographical literature within a Southern African context include Noni Jabavu, Sindiwe Mangona and Bessie Head. Noni Jabavu is widely recognised as the first Black South African woman to publish an autobiography.

American author Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) and Noni Jabavu's *Drawn in Colour* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963) are life writing projects belonging to two equally significant Black women autobiographers of African American and South African descent. Hurston and Neale consider the self in the past, and self in the present; the self in the public and the self from a subjective experience.

Alice Deck (1990), suggests that both these autobiographers act as cultural mediators. Deck's study inspires interest in the role the private self plays in creating uniquely Black female experiences in predominantly white spaces and ideas of self-identification. Both authors wrote their autobiographies when they had left the Black communities of their upbringing;

their life writings were partly a response to the curiosity of their white readers who wanted to know more about their transition.

Jabavu's two life writings quote Xhosa proverbs, songs and terminologies while Hurston uses African American idioms in her text and a collection of folk expressions. Jabavu makes a similar attempt to use the language of Black people when communicating with her predominantly Caucasian readership at the time. She appears as a sojourner moving through Africa through the lens of her Western experience.

Sindiwe Magona on the other hand opts for a different approach in her life writing, catering more for a primarily black public. Magona's *To My Children's Children* (1990) was banned by the apartheid government under the Suppression Act of Communism because it was viewed as a threat to the apartheid government. The state intended to silence Black female writers; but the surveillance had the opposite effect, fuelling the urgency among Black women to tell their stories. Magona's autobiography confronts her existential crisis as a Black woman living in apartheid South Africa.

For many aspiring writers, exile allowed them the freedom to write. In her interview with Barbara Boswell (2017) Sindiwe Magona states that she was only able to tap into her creative freedom when she moved to the United States at the age of 40 to pursue a post-graduate degree. Living abroad afforded Magona the opportunity to exercise her authority as a writer. Only when she physically vacated her homeland was she able to see herself as an author. Yet she also expresses feeling a sense of virtual homelessness due to her inability to rent or own a home in the United States (Rapafa, 2017).

Bessie Head also belongs in this canon of early Black South African autobiographical writers. *A Question of Power* (1973), was an auto-fictional text she wrote to interrogate themes of racism, gender representation and nationalistic agenda. The autobiography shares similar tensions as those expressed in Clemmons' auto-fictional novel based on a Coloured persona navigating race and unbelonging in South Africa and abroad. Born of a Scottish mother and Zulu father in 1937, Head is separated from her biological mother at birth and is raised by a Coloured family before she is shipped off to a Durban mission orphanage.

Head's writing explores life in exile after she decides to leave her husband and son in pursuit of an activism job. The novel is categorised as an auto-fictional contribution, with the protagonist Elizabeth's life mirroring Head's. The ostracization and marginalisation

experienced by the character because of her biracial identity strongly mirrors the author's own lived experience. The fictionalised account of Head's life centres the trauma of Coloured women stemming from patriarchal influences in South Africa in the form of physical, psychological and sexual violence. More poignantly, Head points to the double orphanage she experiences from birth and from exile and the fight against what she terms as a double colonization (Head, 1973).

The structural and personal racism experienced by Black people is therefore unavoidable in the autobiographical construction of American and African writers alike. Critical race theory cements this ideology of autobiography as repository for Black thought, traditions and practices (Bassey, 2016). In this regard, Alexandra Hartman (2018) identifies complementary scholarship in embodiment theory, which recognises harmful perceptions associated with Blackness fixated on monolithic construction of subjectivity. Black bodies are registered as deviant, monstrous and fit for racial aggression for the purpose of elevating whiteness.

Benouda Lebdai (2015) recognises how African writers are viewed and ultimately disadvantaged simply because of their Blackness. The quest for identity through the autobiographical process involves dismembering these racial stereotypes burdening Black writers. Standpoint theory is one of the responses to these racial limitations, essentially recognising human identity within a socio-cultural context aimed at dismantling Western subjectivities (Collins, 2016).

In addition to racial prejudice, Black women writers use the autobiography to process their intersectional positioning as far as age, capabilities, sex and nationality are concerned. Here, Black women seek to redress injustices through the stimulation of new knowledge and practices. Black feminist theorists such as Ashley Patterson, Valerie Kinloch, Tanya Burkhand, Ryann Randall, and Arianna Howard understand that the creation of oppositional knowledge to confront predominant norms is an important part of including Black women at the fore of cultural production (Collins, 2016).

The consensus from standpoint theorists suggests raising critical consciousness to enable oppressed people to contest racist ideologies. As an example, Black women have individual experiences, but as a collective, they can pinpoint trends with leanings and connections to oppressive structures. Through group organising, Black women can adjust their knowledge in systemically oppressive environments, increasing their chances of survival. Feminist

standpoint theory makes available a vantage point for a critique of male supremacy and patriarchal ideals.

Because of oppressive structure most Black women found themselves at the bottom of the food chain, unable to make strides up the social hierarchy because they remain unequal to men, or they do not fit in the upper echelons of high class female sisterhood. These universalistic categories often fail to distinguish the qualities of marginalised identities. Betty Friedman's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) expands on the feminist theory based on the universal principle that white American women represent all global women. The grievance of Black feminists is that white women do not represent the marginalised interests or a universal feminist agenda, instead they push their own agenda. White women take over the public discourse with limited understanding of how Black women are affected; projecting their own agendas in the movement. Through group collaborations, Black women can influence oppressive environments for their benefit. Black feminists argue that white women are not the monolith gender representation of all females. Through public discourse, Black women are able to own their distinct narratives free from whiteness (Hoskin, 2017).

The study read from a Black feminist lens assess how Nomvete, Clemmons and Msimang circumvent co-option of their Black feminist agenda in the retelling of their life stories outside of white performative activisms. Gender blindness influences the exclusion of women from theoretical practices. The marginalisation of women happens both intentionally and unintentionally, and contributes to the invisibilization of women, particularly Black women.

Henritte Dahan-Kalev (2003) argues that the active discrimination ascribed to women in public spaces is not because of gender blindness but a class struggle. Women from lower class positions are not only below men in higher social standing but also women that are in the upper-class system. The study, therefore, assesses how these three women writers adopt a feminist agenda in retelling exilic life stories free from the dictates of the Second Wave Feminism. These arguments provide a useful launchpad for the exploration of how Nomvete, Msimang and Clemons engage with the recurrent intersections of nationalist, racist and patriarchal marginalisation in their respective life stories.

Early post-colonial Black South African autobiographies have demonstrated a preoccupation with the re-imaging of cultural memory as far as the project to represent the past and provide an authentic display of the present, while making room for the emergence of new realities

branded by distinctions of the colonizer and colonized, the individual and the community as well as national and transnational realities.

Kgomotso Masemola (2017) suggests that disparities within the autobiography do not automatically produce un-belonging but should be a process of awakening using cultural memory as re-usable images to steady society's self-image. In the event of exile, memories of repression are juxtaposed with feelings of anguish brought on by an escape to a host country. Masemola questions why Black South African roots are represented as nomadic.

The spotlight on some post-colonial Black South African autobiographies more often than not start and return to the nationalist project. Black authors highlight the West's attempts to confine Black literature into a monolithic sameness which is largely stereotypical. Motifs of nationality, exile and cultural affiliations accent the variance in Black subjects. The re-telling of these narratives in Negritudist, Black Atlantic, revisionist, Afrocentric and other typologies of transnational culture is a form of preserving cultural memory. From the early to mid-1800s, for instance, slave narratives shifted from trauma witnessing of their tragedy and pain to emotional testimonials with feeling and voice, as the work of figures like Joanne Braxton (2010) demonstrates. Here, research on Black women's autobiographies begins with an investigation into fugitive and slave narratives of emancipation.

Braxton (2010) notes how Harriet Tubman's *Incident's in a Slave Girl* (1861) delineates the narrator's voice through a subversion of the oppressor's language in the letters as a means to finding liberation first for self, second to community and finally to a cruel and antagonistic world. Tubman critiques the world around her while searching for liberation in the face of racism, patriarchy, and marginalization as a Black woman.

Critics cite a prevailing practice in autobiographical slave narratives such as that of Harriet in relation to agency as a power dynamic in autobiographical scripts. For Black men, the ego is centralised through the portrayal of strength and power as an integral part of public life. However, for women like Tubman, it is the complete opposite. Self-recognition is what fosters self-discovery and finding power in powerless situations. Black American female autobiographies presented in the 19$^{th}$ century centre family and community over ego. Protecting the community and reducing risk to family is the main priority.

Measured risks were taken because women were loyal and concerned with the safety of others and this was clearly documented in their autobiographical writings. Through spiritual

narratives, Black women were able to represent the worlds of the uneducated slave girls to missionaries and preachers, challenging gender oppression in an endeavour to carve out new identities based on adopted spiritual beliefs, biblical teachings and senses of self.

Many more generations of Black women in the United States found the courage to script their life stories thereafter. Ida B. Wells a Black American woman; drafted her autobiography between 1928 and 1934. She died mid-sentence, while in the processing of making a diary entry. Wells' autobiography was later posthumously re-written for publication in 1970 by her daughter and various editors, for a collection of autobiographical documents. Braxton (2010) refers to Wells' autobiographical assemblage as a corrective legacy, rebuking oppressive racist systems. A journalist by profession and an anti-lynching activist, Wells lived to amplify the voices of Black people as a resistance to the silencing of the Black movement. The recovery of Wells' work almost four decades after it was written signifies what Braxton (2010) references as a gaining of lost ground in Black women's autobiography.

The work of Black autobiographies involves the re-imagination of cultural memory as a representation of the past and a projection of future moments through the emergence of new realities. Autobiography is a place of re-awakening using cultural memory as a device with re-usable images to maintain society's self-image. The example of exile life writing displays how memories of repression are paralleled by sentiments of anguish and loss driven by loneliness experienced by the writer in the host country.

Black South African men present similar agitations as those of Black women within the context of life writing on exile. Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959) features a range of common tropes in Black South African autobiographies. Like Magona, Mphahlele, laments the difficulty of writing in apartheid South Africa. He wrote his autobiography in Nigeria at the age of 37 because it was only after he went into exile that he was able to find his creative voice. Exile provided Mphahlele with an opportunity to re-discover what he had lost in apartheid South Africa. Mphahlele admits his autobiography was a device to address questions about his identity when he was exiled in Nigeria (Masemola, 2017).

For both Mphahlele and Magona, home is tied to ancestral relations. The ancestral connection was not made by Mphahlele until he departed his homeland, which thrust him into the discovery of a protest register directed at the apartheid government. Clemmons, Msimang and Nomvete use similar stylistic strategy in their autobiographies to critique the realities of home and exile. There is an almost journalistic reportage tone present in the autobiographical

writings of Mphahlele and Msimang, in their documentation of the Black nationalist agenda. Clemmons also uses a blog to present a similar news reportage style in her work, as I demonstrate later in this study.

Women occupy the world as colonized, infantilized regressive people with white men in the forefront of national progress. The struggles of Black women are further diminished because nationalism is bred from masculinized memory and nationhood is constructed on male identity and male power. Black women fighting alongside their male counterparts have not been guaranteed inclusion as equal inhabitants within the nationalist project (McClintock, 1993).

Black women are portrayed as a primitive category, whereas men by contrast are depicted as progressive mediators of national modernity. Oftentimes, they are assumed not to meet the criteria of national survival, ultimately becoming silenced for the elevation of patriarchal practices (McClintock, 1993).

Black feminist theories respond to the invisibility of women as active participants in nation building, by assessing the connections between class, race and ethnicity, which privilege white feminism. With this in mind, it is clear there are different narratives that represent varying genders, class, race, ethnicities of nationhood and there is not a singular or universal blueprint of national identities. Therefore, how do Nomvete, Clemmons and Msimang re-imagine masculinised memory, considering how African nationalism has historically been constructed from male identity positionalities? This is a question that drives the discussion in later chapters of this study.

Anne McClintock (1993) demonstrates that women are assimilated symbolically in the national project with no visible or tangible agency. The role of women was traditionally viewed as metaphorical whereas men were able to take on more dynamic responsibilities and attain recognition for these. Contrary to these gender framings, the study illustrates how women are not just transmitters of culture, reproductive agents or replicators through marriage, but fundamentally active agents contributing to the national cause. The portrayals of family within the autobiographical texts discussed here reject notions of women as mere passive recipients or non-participants in the national project. Instead, the autobiographical narratives allow mothers and female family members to be recognised as fundamental contributors to African nationalism.

Even so, it is not uncommon for women to be used in the nationalist project only to be discarded when the state reaches its goal. Because women are considered symbolic carriers of the nation, Black female autobiographies are important producers of meaning. The dynamics involved in autobiographical writing highlight a transition from nationalist movement to a gender representation actively resisting gender dimensions based on masculine concepts.

The question of how to theorise patriarchal oppression in concurrence with class exploitation is relevant in this research study because it provides insights into how the man rules with authority over the family using the woman's virtue as a tool to propagate male agendas. Carol Pateman (1998) hypothesizes that women should not be seen simply as passive figures in the determination of gender relations, arguing that not all women are oppressed the same way or in the same extent even within the same societies.

Leigh Gilmore (1999) alludes to codes of masculinity entwined in the autobiographical representation of a man in his role as poet, scholar or hero resulting in the autobiographical effect. The representative man is at the core of autobiographical production. The gendered visualisation of autobiographical writing impacts the creation and reception of women's self-representational narratives. Historically, dominant mainstream self-reflective autobiographies omitted women intentionally because masculine identity was the default and most highly recognisable autobiographical form. I will draw on these theories in thinking about gender formations in these three women's autobiographies.

Jan Stats and Peter Burke (2000) argue that people who affiliate with a particular group share a strong connection. The disadvantage of this type of a collective is the negative social stereotyping. The outcome is the individual seeking validation begins to perform in ways that will be acceptable to the group and maintain consistency. Understanding how Black women use the autobiography as a catalyst for the study of specific social identities and collective thinking is important for this analysis. Do the primary texts function as a gauge for role identity of Black women? What are the implications or restrictions involved in persuasive self-representation?

For Kerstin Shands *et al* (2015) the category of gender and the nation provides an understanding of how Black women have been historically conscientized. Winnie Madikizela Mandela touches on these nationalistic sensibilities in her autobiography *Part of My Soul Left with Him* (1984). The autobiographical narrative references Madikizela Mandela's father's teachings about her ancestral lineage, the colonizers, and the history of Black people. The

autobiographical narrative paints a picture of Madikizela Mandela's poor upbringing and early politicisation. The autobiography functions as a device intent on distancing Madikizela Mandela from the myth that her political consciousness was a direct result of her relationship with Nelson Mandela. Madikizela Mandela documents the start of her activism with the poor women of Soweto. Her first arrest was during a demonstration against pass laws. At the time, she already had a career as a social worker from which she was fired because of her politics. The autobiography covers her diary entries during her imprisonment in Brandfort, detailing doctor's visits, meals, mental deterioration, her anxieties about her daughter at home and of course the letters she sent to Mandela during this period.

Ellen Kuzwayo, a fellow comrade to Madikizela Mandela, takes a different path in her autobiography. Kuzwayo selects what she considers successful Black female professionals to profile alongside her own personal story in her autobiography, *Call Me Woman* (1985). Unfortunately, her story becomes minimised and de-personalised because she focuses on a global story of gender representation within the nation building project. The approach Msimang elects to use in the telling of the gender and nation story, as I discuss in chapter two, resembles aspects of Kuzwayo's writing, making the earlier life inscriptions an interesting point of reference for this research. Marriage, abuse and prison feature prominently as sub-themes of feminised representations in Kuzwayo's autobiography. Estrangement and unbelonging is also clearly inscribed in the text. Kuzwayo's decision to use pictures in her autobiography as a connector to her family and other Black professional women in her autobiography demonstrates a trait commonly exhibited in Black women's autobiographies (Coullie, 1994).

David McCooey and Maria Takolander argue that life writing as a practice is concerned with "self and other, memory and others, past self and present self" (2017: 277). The exploration of life writing is useful in understanding the restrictions involved in accurate self-representation. Feminist post-colonial writing has shifted from autobiography consisting of literary texts to include testimony, auto-ethnography, digital life writing life, graphic and audio-visual life writing forms. Contemporary life writing is largely defined as experimental because it is measured on the new traditions of reading historical standards of the genre.

Victorian biographies and autobiographies were constructed with the same principles as nineteenth century novels, which is why it is often presumed that contemporary biographical works deploy narrative strategies of fiction in the earlier era. Feminist critics have raised

concern with the outdated model of subjectivity in Victorian biographies, detecting a gender bias which has become adapted as ideological work, and raising concerns of contamination in the genre.

Autobiography offers an inherent assurance that the name on the book cover is also the narrator of the text relaying truthful facts about the life story. The pact aligns with Dorrit Cohn's (1989) theory of referential and fictional text suggesting the text should be read in a particular key of either historical fact or fiction. Other scholars do not subscribe to this type of classification.

Certain publishing houses may supress genre designation in experimental life writing because of overt or covert agendas. The life narrator engages the personal story within a confined moment in time. The autobiographical subject is in dialogue with herself using personal tools to access memories from the past while interacting with the current state of the present. Autobiographical writing is a performative enactment of self or the "I" which is neither stagnant nor unified because of the constant and unavoidable discourse associated with cultural meaning. Memory is an enactment of the past that can be accessed through a recall of experiences that occurred over time. According to Daniel Schater (2007) memory is in our bodies because memory has history. Experience is how a person becomes a subject with social identities, which become material, economic and cultural.

Smith and Watson (1998) suppose the autobiographical subject knows themselves as a subject based on particular experiences attached to social status and identity. Through embodiment, the body becomes the site for autobiographical awareness because life narration happens and multiplies there based on the subject's experiences. Agency on the other hand is the production of autobiographical scripts with specific subjectivities and how the narrator is able to manoeuvre cultural subjects to relay particular stories using oppositional consciousness. What emerges are cultural sites of marginality displaying contradictions that exist in heterogeneous dialogues of identity.

Since life writing is a self-reflexive process, the experimentational slant in life writing is measured against new writing conventions in a post-modern era. Cohn (1989) proposes that auto-fictional writing is not bound by factual accuracies, because a story can be manipulated to achieve fictive narrative goals. This study interrogates where the auto-biographical ends

and the auto-fictional begins using Philippe Lejeune's conceptualisation of the autobiographical pact. The autobiographical pact confirms the contract between the author, narrator, autobiographical subject and the reading audience.

The pact implies an agreement that the narrative voice belongs to the author documenting her story. The author is therefore expected to share historical facts using real names, to demonstrate the authenticity of the auto-biographical process. The pact aligns with the referential theory because it suggests each narrative should be read from an autobiographical or auto-fictional lens. The *autobiography as defacement*, elucidates elements tied to the confessional pact as described by theorist Paul de Man as a way of understanding the connection between life writing and identity. Life writing involves more than writing about past events; it is about displaying an inner consciousness (Cohn, 1989).

Patterns of distinction in the research is the material location of the authors when scripting their autobiographical texts. What we can see in our case, is a trend amongst all three authors' choosing to write their autobiographies outside of South Africa. For one, Msimang started drafting her autobiography after a year's sabbatical at Yale University in the United States in 2013. The choice to write from a personal perspective and not entirely from an activist slant enabled her to recall her childhood memories and nostalgia for a home she never knew but hoped to return to one day (Msimang, 2018).

Nomvete is also assumed to have written about her journey to self-discovery when she left South Africa after a failed marriage, which left her emotionally and financially destitute in 2006. The decision to return to her sister in Britain is important because that is where she was able to find safety and solace to process her trauma and write. Clemmons also begins writing her auto-fictional novel as an escape when her mother is diagnosed with terminal cancer. The writing process begins at her parents' home in Philadelphia as journal entries, which Clemmons modifies into an alter-ego in her auto-fictional text.

Although the authors write away from their homeland, there is a clear intention to promote their books in South Africa, demonstrating the importance of returning with their autobiographies and openly dialoguing about their journeys with local audiences. The life stories give each of the authors an opportunity to have their voices heard.

Autobiographical literature possesses heroic qualities of an exile's life to find triumph over estrangement or a sense of homelessness. Whereas expatriates live in a foreign land

voluntarily, an exile as defined by Said is any person unable to return to their home country through banishment. The stigma associated with exile is the supposition of a dire life as a foreigner.

Edward Said (1999) reflects on exile as the tension between human existence and place or the habitation between self and home known by an undefeatable sadness. Critics of exile narratives mark narcissism and egocentrism as hindrances to the writing project, produced by feelings of isolation, terror and loneliness. Fetishization of exile is likely to occur in these instances because of remoteness from familiar influences. The loss of critical perspective and haste to affiliate with national organisations or parties is a common trap exiles face. Contrary to exile, nationalism nurtures self-awareness in exiles through communal reconstruction of history, language and ethnicity. Home is accessible from subtle writing.

Isabel Macedo and Rosa Cabecinhas (2014:55) define home as "familiar spaces" and the "symbolic home as connected to memories of exile and nostalgia." The feelings of home draw the emotion behind the collective and individual memory. An individual is able to recall memories based on the social context. Memory work cannot take place without the context of the public that occupies that society. The individual in a group setting is induced to remember private and personal memories. Old memories are essential in the crafting of autobiographical works by using the past to make sense of the present. The reproduction of memory is what preserves collective identity. Home is a place of no return where even if it is possible to go to the specific geographical location, another definition explains home as the lived experience of locality, sights and sounds and smells.

Language works in tandem with memory because memory is accessed linguistically. Life narratives locate the author within the context of family or larger society. Therefore, it is not surprising that autobiographical writers use memory to reference their experience with their family or the greater collective and connection is found through past and present memories.

Autobiographical memory of a colonial past is one of the studies undertaken by scholars which questions the distancing of the writer from her own perspective and the deliberate attempt to include the perspective of others and co-exist with multiple perceptions and conflicting memories.  The "other" is referenced as a potential collaborator. In using memory to remember a colonial past, material culture is the most common prompt. This type of memory is embodied physically but also psychologically (Macedo and Cabecinhas 2014).

The conceptual metaphor theory studies patterns of thinking using embodied metaphors as a means of relating with the reader's experience. In essence, embodiment theory presumes the way an individual's mind works is tied to their experience of the external world. Individuals make sense of the world using embodied experiences and metaphor through a projection of tangible things onto abstract things, therefore the mind is the body. Anne Holm (2019) specifies that the brain fits into two categories; settled or a racing mind. There are varying patterns of interpretative engagement with text. Second generation cognitive approaches of an individual mental state relates to the four "E's"; namely embodied, embedded, enacted and engaged states of being.

Holm (2019) takes it a step further through a presentation of metaphorical expressions portraying displacement theories. Embodied metaphors are known for taking on bodily experiences onto non-figurative realms keeping the body as the centre of focus. How do the three primary text use metaphorical language of this nature for the activation of memories of the past while creating new forms of expression? This question is explored in the chapters that follow.

Edward Said (1999) among others, makes the inference that the life of the exiled is destined to a fugitive state because of what is remembered. Autobiographical writing within the context of home and exile follows similar story-telling patterns of estrangement, loss and feelings of abandonment. Along similar lines, the terror management theory postulates that individuals have a fear of death and prefer to think about anxiety-inducing thoughts intellectually. To manage the terror, individuals establish cultural worldviews within the safety of autobiographical production, which creates the impression that death is avoidable if the author follows textual cultural worldviews (Simon *et al* 1997).

The above discussion maps the scholarly and theoretical debates with which this study is in conversation; and hopes to build on, through its reading of the three women's autobiographical texts.

Apart from the current introduction and a concluding chapter, this research report is divided into three analysis chapters, each exploring one of the three texts. Chapter one analyses Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat* followed by an examination of Msimang's *Always Another Country* in chapter two, and in the last chapter, Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose.* The study examines the connection between Nomvete's story and the larger narrative of home and unbelonging. How does Nomvete use her autobiography to track her journey home? Is

Nomvete's autobiography a useful study of the identity complex of Black women in exile and also with the collective; and if so, what can be drawn as common practices forming group identities from this perspective?

The chapter opens with an exploration of Nomvete's identity as it relates to a physical and spiritual location. Nomvete's journey and search for a spiritual home is the cornerstone of her autobiography; how she manoeuvres from religion to religion demonstrates the extent she connects home with spirituality. The double blade of returnee experiences further exacerbates Nomvete's longing for acceptance in a home that is unfamiliar but a place she so desperately wants to find acceptance professionally and personally. The chapter assesses how Nomvete works through her trauma of displacement caused by this unbelonging and finally returns to a newfound self.

Chapter two studies Msimang's *Always Another Country* as an autobiographical narrative that performs extensive labour in unbundling feminised representation of gender, through an arrangement that, does not study Black masculinities exclusively as the pillar of the nationalist project but takes a more collaborative approach, which involves Black women's narratives in the nationalist movement. Msimang's use of symbolic maternal depictions in her autobiography forms part of the close study of this research based on her mother and paternal aunt Gogo Lindi.

This chapter also explores the influence of black-middle class privilege and the accompanying guilt returnees must contend with in post-apartheid South Africa, professionally and in the context of interracial relationships. Msimang's refection on nostalgia and disillusionment as a second-generation returnee is also rich in insights into post-apartheid experiences for returnees.

The last chapter turns to Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose* as an auto-fictional meditation on themes related to identity and Black women's personal and socio-political perspectives on race. Clemmons' fictionalised reflections on race as a Black woman of South African descent born of a Coloured mother creates interesting points of analyses explored in this chapter. Since life writing is self-reflexive in nature, experimenting with auto-fiction as a form tracing the blur between fact and fiction is a fundamental insight in this chapter.

The research, therefore, assesses Black female writers' use of the autobiographical practices, for the retelling of their own exilic life narratives embedded in South African history from the

authors’ perspective split into three generational timeframes. These offer unique contributions as individual and collective bodies of work.

## Chapter 1: Loss, Spirituality and Belonging in Pamela Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum*

Focusing on cultural and spiritual dislocation, the analysis in this chapter follows Black women's use of autobiographies as a resource for dissecting themes of displacement due to exile. The analysis draws on Pamela Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* (2014) through a close reading of the incongruences between the expectations and realities of return/returnee experiences of exiled Black women. The chapter further reads autobiographical storytelling as a healing device that is useful in connecting the gaps caused by a spiritual, emotional and physical dislodging of roots among exilic writers.

Born in exile in Ethiopia to activist parents in 1964, as the youngest of four children, Nompumelelo Pamela Nomvete belonged to a family banished from their home country of South Africa. Nomvete's family first settled in Zambia before moving to Ethiopia. Subsequently, Nomvete was sent to boarding school in the United Kingdom. Thereafter, she graduated from the Welsh College of Music and Drama. Nomvete always had a yearning to return home to South Africa to explore her identity. She was able to return in 1994, in time to cast her vote during the country's first democratic elections. The plan was to live in Johannesburg for two years before returning to London.

Nomvete worked at the Windybrow Theatre prior to scoring her first breakout role as Ntsiki Lukhele in the hit soap opera, *Generations*. The role catapulted Nomvete to celebrity status during her six-year tenure with the show. Ntsiki Lukhele's character was ground-breaking, and the soap opera's portrayal of middle-class Black women in the media was considered pioneering. Nomvete's dreadlocks were a talking point because most women on television wore synthetic wigs on air at the time. Nomvete also spoke with a thick British accent which was largely uncommon in Black South African television programmes of that era.

Nomvete's career spans over 30 years, including appearances in both the small screen and film screens. The most notable roles Nomvete portrayed include Thandi in *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) a lead role for which she won a FESPACO Best Actress Award (2005). Prior to that, she had been nominated and won Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Nothing but the Truth* (2002). Nomvete also won the NAFCA Best Actress Award for the leading role in the film *Kingmakers Diaspora* (2015). She also appeared in *Sometime in April* (2005) shot in Rwanda alongside Idris Elba, *Julius Caesar, A Raisin in the Sun* where she received Regional

Vita award for Best Actress, and *The Good Woman of Sharkvill*e (2002). She later wrote and directed a stage production known as *Ngiyadansa* (2015) starring South African poet Lebo Mashile.

In her autobiography, Nomvete writes of two significant relationships before her marriage in 2002, to her late husband Collins Marimbe. The two relationships mentioned were with her peers in the arts academy, one with a famous Generations co-star and the other with a business partner and friend who was in a relationship with another woman at the time. Nomvete had a secret relationship with her producer beau and fell pregnant. The relationship deteriorated and ended after her miscarriage. Nomvete was introduced to her now ex-husband Marimbe, thereafter, at an industry party. The marriage ended in divorce in 2007 after years of emotional abuse, leaving Nomvete physically and emotionally destitute.

**Cultural and Spiritual Dislocation**

In her autobiography, Nomvete laments her inability to speak, understand or write in her home language. Nomvete fits into what Xuemei Li (2007) defines as bilingual status because although English is not her mother tongue, the language carries a symbolic resource with inherent political and cultural meaning for her as a Black woman autobiographer. Language is connected to power for writers assembling identities in exile. Not only is language a means of identity production, it provides access to collective social identity. Cultural identity is a safety net for individuals in exile desperate to belong. There is an unrelenting longing to be reflected within the group. Li (2007) explains that the phenomena of souls in exile chasing an elusive dream is well-founded because maintaining identity from the first language does not guarantee acceptance upon return to exiles' home countries. A reconstruction must take place where a second self evolves in the second language to find acceptance in the new home country — in Nomvete's case, her home in South Africa. The emergence of the second self is reliant on the returnee's ability to re-integrate and successfully re-enter their home country. Returnees can locate a second self only when they are able to reconcile their idealised version of home, with what has been lost in personal identity, and the disappointment once the exiled returns home. Nomvete's second self eludes her upon return to South Africa. She is unable to possess it despite her longing for an identity linked to her home language. She has no access to that part of herself because of what exile has taken from her life.

*Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* is written in what can be considered a foreign language because it is not Nomvete's language of birth, but it is the only language she knows; creating an expectation for Nomvete to claim multiple identities because of her exilic status. As a writer, she has to write in her adopted language — English — as a survival strategy to access symbolic resources in both the new context of exile, and old world of origin, South Africa. Nomvete's inability to write in her mother tongue puts her in an "awkward in betweeness," having no history while feeling the weight of cultural homelessness (Li, 2007:271).

A balanced self emerges upon the journey to self-discovery in the writing process. Oftentimes, writers in exile are immersed in a "doubleness of identities and doubleness of writing styles" (Li, 2007:267). This doubleness is a constant source of turmoil and unbelonging. Therefore, a new identity is formed through the recollection of past memories actuated by the new language, which in this case is English. Bilingual writers — in the sense of writers born into one language community, but socialised to speak a second one — use nostalgia to merge the past with the present in an attempt to recreate home by combining the new exilic culture with the first culture.

Teresa Piacenti (2008) hypothesizes that the categorisation and identification process of self or others is based on establishing meaning in interactions. Since the process of identification is in constant flux, the process of becoming and being is fluid. Exiles are othered relationally based on their gender, ethnicity, sex, social status etc, because they are considered a threat to national identity in both the country of their origin and the host country. Exiles must contend with feelings of unwantedness in both the new foreign land and their original home country, thereby inhabiting a double social-pariah status. The exile is oftentimes confronted by an identity crisis triggered by dislocation and displacement in the host country. The dislocation makes it difficult to connect with a collective family support system because of dispersal. New connections have to be cultivated because of the barrier to traditional social connections, and this leaves the exiled vulnerable. Living in exile makes Black female autobiographers susceptible to a loss of identity. To remedy the situation, the writer in exile may exercise their agency through social and political activism that gains expression in their life writing.

Nomvete uses *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* to think through physical and oftentimes spiritual experiences of loss and her desperate need to belong. Her sense of physical dislocation as a returning exile deepens her spiritual displacement as a writer. The autobiography is divided into four sections titled as follows: Young and Free, The Return to

South Africa, Slave at Work, Slave at Home and Once in Exile Always in Exile. The sections appear to be apportioned according to momentous fragments in her life story, beginning with her birth in exile and childhood memories, her return to South Africa and marriage, and the closing chapters dedicated to her physical and spiritual destitution, prompting a full circle exploration of her decision to return to the UK.

Nomvete's father, Bax Dale Nomvete, was one of the first few Black South Africans to be accepted at the University of Cape Town in the early 1950s. He excelled in his studies and was later offered a scholarship to Manchester University just after the birth of Nomvete's eldest sister. Nomvete's mother, Corah Sibongile Kumalo was the daughter of Chief Walter Kumalo of Ladysmith. It was Nomvete's maternal grandmother who convinced her daughter to follow her husband to the United Kingdom (UK). While in university, Nomvete's father gave many talks on the atrocities Black people had to endure in South Africa, triggering the apartheid government into declaring the Nomvetes' as exiled. Nomvete's eldest sister had not yet followed her parents to the UK. The apartheid regime threatened Nomvete's father, harassing him to stop his truth campaign about South Africa. Thereafter, the South African government destroyed Nomvete's sister's birth certificate. What ensued was a five-year battle to get their child out of the country with the assistance of the Conservative government in the UK. The Nomvetes petitioned to have their daughter released on humanitarian grounds, and eventually, she was re-united with her parents. In her autobiography, Nomvete laments the irony of the whole situation, where a British government that has no regard for Black Africans in their country was at the forefront of her sister's release from South Africa.

Though born in exile, with no connection to her country except through her family, Nomvete identified as South African. She writes about the discomfort of calling herself South African when she had not been there, nor could she speak the language. She felt more confident to name herself as an African because that was more familiar territory, given her upbringing in multi-cultural environments, both in Africa and the United States, prior to the move to the UK. Nomvete's father's career was a primary factor in the family's moves to different countries: he was the Director of the Economic Commission for the African division of the United Nations in Addis Abba when Nomvete was born, lectured on Economics at Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts in the late 1960s, and lived in Zambia in the 1970s.

Much like Sisonke Msimang, whom I discuss in the next chapter, Nomvete travelled and lived in various countries. When her family moved to Zambia, she was exposed to a variety

of freedom fighters such as Chris Hani who visited her home frequently. Nomvete's father had a vision for a united Africa, even prior to the formation of the European Union. He created the Preferential Trade Area which produced the first Southern African traveller's cheques in the 1970s. The objective was for citizens to travel from Zambia to Zimbabwe with one currency. She reports that this was met with great resistance from the West, to the extent that there were threats to his life. His dream of a united Africa was ultimately undermined.

Growing up in exile, Nomvete, like Msimang some years later, had enormous admiration for her father. The paternal influence on both these two Black women writers is heavily shaped by their fathers' economic and political positions; and the impact of what they were able to achieve despite the obstacles of spiritual and physical dislocations sparked by exile.

In her autobiography, Nomvete reflects on her spiritual displacement and her journey towards spiritual healing. Initially, church was not a place Nomvete frequented as a child because her paternal grandmother was kicked out of the rectory when her husband (Nomvete's paternal grandfather) died. Nomvete's spiritual dislocation can be traced back to her parents' relationship with religion. Growing up, Nomvete's mother was a staunch Christian; her father was spiritual but was alienated by the church when his father died. Nomvete's father was very bitter toward the church for kicking his mother to the kerb in the family's moment of need because the family was left vulnerable and equally dislocated.

The position of the presiding cleric had to be occupied by Nomvete's father who was 25 years old at the time of his father passing. He was enlisted to take over his father's position in the church, even as the same church simultaneously kicked out his mother. It is not surprising therefore for Nomvete to inherit a similar resentment for the church. The hypocrisy and expectation of the church that Nomvete's father ought to remain loyal to the office of the priesthood while his mother was left destitute prompted a long-standing bitterness stretching across generations among the Nomvetes.

After her upbringing in a Christian household in Ethiopia, Nomvete writes about her first religious confrontation in an all-white, girls' school, when her parents enrol her in Cheltenham Ladies College in the UK. The decision to take Nomvete and her sister to a private school in a developed country was fostered by her parents' desire for a world-class education for their children. Also, Nomvete's father had access to opportunities that would otherwise not have been unavailable to other Black families because of his directorship position in the UN. Following her enrolment at Cheltenham Ladies College, Nomvete only

saw her parents once a year for the next four years of schooling. In her autobiography, Nomvete recognises her privilege and the sacrifice her parents made in affording her better life choices. She does not perceive her parents' choices to send her to a boarding school abroad as abonnement but does see the situation as an enormous contributor to her sense of dislocation.

As one of only four Black girls in the school, Nomvete writes about a standout racist occasion which took place in church during a mandatory Sunday service. The preacher made derogatory utterances about Black people, commenting: "I was watching TV last night and there they were. These black people, they are so destructive that even the devil has abandoned them" (Nomvete, 2014: 15). The preacher's offensive comments about African people was the beginning of Nomvete's awakening to racism overseas, which further deepened her dislocation. Although she was still a teenager, Nomvete knew how her Black body appeared in a foreign country, as she comments: "there we were, thrown into the heart of the British establishment" (2014:13).

In subsequent years, Nomvete begins an aggressive search for her spiritual home. The return to South Africa functions as the impetus necessary for the resolution of a spiritual un-belonging she had lived with for years. Nomvete's journey leads her to fundamental spiritual exchanges with prominent figures such as Zindzi Mandela and traditional healer Credo Mutwa. Finding her mother's spiritual home in Zimbabwe when Nomvete is on the brink of a divorce becomes an expected, emotionally charged, and necessary expedition in finding her spiritual roots. The autobiography links the return to Christianity to Nomvete's desperation to survive when she is confronted with physical and spiritual destitution after her divorce, similar to what her grandmother experienced when her husband died.

Nomvete opens up about her search for spiritual belonging very early on in the autobiography. Former President Nelson Mandela's daughter Zindzi Mandela introduces Nomvete to spiritual leader Credo Mutwa. Because of her admiration for Mandela, she feels affirmed by Mandela's endorsement of her South African identity when he calls her a "child of Africa" (Nomvete, 2014:82). She does not hesitate to follow through with a visit to Mutawa's compound. Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa is widely known as an author of African mythology, Zulu tradition and folklore, including a graphic novel titled *Tree of Life Trilogy* and *Indaba my Children*. Mutwa's prophetic gift is remembered for prominent predictions

including the death of Chris Hani, the expulsion of former president Thabo Mbeki from the ANC and the demolition of the World Trade Centre.

Nomvete describes Mutwa as a “shaman, traditional healer, sangoma…he is the spirit of Africa… with a wealth of African history and a deep sense of the African character” (2014: 82). He referred to himself as *sanusi* (Zulu diviner). Mutwa used prophetic sculptures to communicate his premonitions about the AIDS pandemic and owned a hospice clinic with his wife Virginia. At the time of Nomvete’s visit, Mutwa lived in a desolate part of the Cradle of Humankind just outside of Johannesburg.

In her writing, Nomvete jubilantly remembers Mutwa addressing her by her television character’s name Ntsiki. Nomvete describes her encounter with Mutwa as otherworldly. The trip to the Cradle of Humankind was marred by the presence of her charlatan husband, Marimbe. Nomvete’s first spiritual dislocation is tied to her physical exile from South Africa. Now that she had found her way back to her physical home, the moment of spiritual reconnection with the help of Mutwa almost escapes her because of her deceitful husband.

Nomvete’s veneration for Mutwa conjures feelings of shame and disappointment at the neglect of what she considers African heritage. She depicts Mutwa’s home as unkempt, and strongly believes he has been forgotten by the people of South Africa. Mutwa could be better honoured in Nomvete’s view; her writing ascribes the neglect of Mutwa as a direct derivative of the dilapidation of nationhood and African heritage in the country.

The meeting begins on an immediately poignant mark when Mutwa starts reading the bones and reveals Nomvete’s prophetic gift as a *sangoma*. The calling, according to Mutwa, is a generational gift transferred from her grandmother and mother. Although Nomvete’s mother is a Christian, and not a practising sangoma, Mutwa insists that Nomvete should seek her mother’s blessing through the laying of hands on her red and white cloth. Mutwa’s instructions are followed by a prophetic message over Nomvete’s life. The spiritual exchange with Mutwa is charged with hope, allowing Nomvete to catch a glimpse of her spiritual home through the encounter. In her book, she extends her gratitude to Mutwa for revealing a significant piece of her history tied to her African identity that was otherwise unknown to her. The meeting with Mutwa is a moment of triumph in the midst of a sustained search for a spiritual and cultural home. She closes the reflection with a special appreciation for a profound spiritual encounter with her shaman, intoning: “thank you so much for the spirit of Africa Credo Mutwa” (Nomvete, 2014:84).

Through the process of self-revelation, the reader is guided through the writer's feelings of relief, joy, learning and hope for a deep connection with her spiritual home. Mutwa has provided Nomvete with a new portal through which she can access her home. He gives her a transcendent means of entry via the supernatural to retrieve her most basic desire for belonging: "it was after that day that I decided somewhere deep in the core of my being that I was going to continue to search for my spiritual identity" (Nomvete, 2014: 84).

The search for a spiritual home is not a once off event in the autobiography. The pages of Nomvete's story display occasions of hopeful anticipation and devastating disappointments as the autobiography manoeuvres through each of Nomvete's spiritual encounters. Nomvete selects an instance during the breakdown of her marriage to illustrate the depth and breadth of her spiritual search. At the height of Nomvete's marital woes, her husband convinces her that they should seek marital counsel from a *sangoma*; at a time when Nomvete has resigned from the soap opera *Generations* and can no longer afford therapy. Nomvete realises the *sangoma* is a counterfeit, nothing like Mutwa. However, the contrived encounter does manage to lead Nomvete to her maternal ancestors in Zimbabwe.

The *sangoma's* reading of the bones direct her to what becomes a homecoming journey to Bulawayo. The trek to her mother's homeland is laboured because Nomvete's life is on a downward spiral with no acting roles in the horizon. Adding to her anguish is her marriage, which is on the precipice of implosion because of her husband's drug addiction and his live-in mistress in her marital home. Although Nomvete's spiritual trek to her maternal family's spiritual home in Bulawayo is tarnished by the presence of her husband, she is vindicated by the awareness of the presence of her ancestors within her midst.

On what she terms the mountains that speak, Nomvete discovers her mother was a descendant of Mzilikazi, King Shaka's nemesis who broke away to Zimbabwe. The name Bulawayo is derived from Nguniland once occupied by the Kumalos during the nineteenth century. Nomvete's mother's maiden name was Kumalo. The newfound knowledge of her family history ignites a yearning within Nomvete for a dialogue with her ancestor. But the journey to Zimbabwe and the actual arrival in Bulawayo is not without obstacles, including fraudulent spiritual guides and more unanswered questions.

Nomvete's husband was from Harare, rivals to Nomvete's people, the Ndebele. A week before the trip to Zimbabwe, Nomvete has a dream as she sleeps in her red and white cloth. The dream could be interpreted as a premonition readying Nomvete for her spiritual voyage.

In the dream, Nomvete remembers being in the middle of no-where, somewhere in Africa, surrounded by arid land. Nomvete was not alone in the dream; there was a young man and a young woman; the three of them sat on a mountain with their feet dangling in the air. When she looks up the sky is filled with a bright light followed by cows and sheep with bells falling to the ground around her but her accomplices next to her could not see what was happening. The young man begins to make his way down the mountain and does not heed Nomvete's warning of wild dogs. Moments later they hear his screams and the young woman left behind with Nomvete is indifferent to the young man's fate and exclaims that it was his fault for listening to the warning.

Nomvete's dream unknowingly leads her directly to a compound where her guide resides. At first, she does not recognise the place because the trip happens at night and continues into the early hours of the morning. When Farai (pseudonym for Marimbe in the book) and Nomvete begin to worry about their whereabouts, they are greeted by two wild dogs. Nomvete instructs the driver to follow the dogs, which lead them to a kraal where they are welcomed in by the gatekeeper and invited to spend the night in the yard in their car. In the morning when Nomvete is able to find her bearings she laments, "as I focused I was overwhelmed by a sensation that I can only describe as recognition. This place was familiar to me" (Nomvete, 2014:111). Once Nomvete's confusion lifts she sees cattle with bells on their necks in the kraal, similar to the ones in her dream. These observations evoke a hopefulness in Nomvete about her ancestors and her spirituality in her maternal homeland.

Unfortunately, she is introduced to a fraudulent gatekeeper when she requests a guide to take her to the sacred mountains to commune with her ancestors. The gatekeeper is unwilling to leave the bar and keeps Nomvete and her entourage waiting the whole day. When he does become available after much persistence, he returns drunk and takes Nomvete's money for the trip to the mountain and advises her to return the following year as this is not the right time of the year for the mountains to speak. Nomvete breaks and curses the gatekeeper with the wrath of her ancestors. She describes what follows as "unearthly, it was as though I was transported into some fantasy world that was unfamiliar yet familiar" (Nomvete, 2014:113). She writes that she sees three people glide into the hut where she was with Farai: a beautiful dark-skinned woman with short silver hair and the second looked like the gatekeeper's wife and the third was the young man who led them to the gatekeeper's hut.

Nomvete explains how the three spiritual figures sat close to her encircling her protectively. They began to speak to her and apologised for what had happened to her during her trip to the mountains, promising to instruct the gatekeeper to return her money because he was unfit to take her to the mountain. The silver-haired woman tells Nomvete to return early the following day. The gatekeeper returns Nomvete's money and this moment exposes the gatekeeper as belonging to a generation of fraudsters. According to the locals, the ancestors refused to commune with anyone of European descent. Because this fundamental law was broken, the ancestors refused to speak.

Nomvete's visit to the mountains give the community enough ammunition to take the fraudulent gatekeeper to trial by the community leaders. When she finally summits the mountain, Nomvete leaves more confused than when she began her spiritual voyage because she has no answers from her ancestors. She feels more confused possibly because she was looking for her ancestors to grant her instructions about her life, even though she knew what she needed to do, starting with divorcing her husband. The spiritual exploration in Bulawayo does not fulfil her initial quest for clarity about her spiritual and familial roots, but it becomes an important intervention contributing to the reversal of many years of duplicitous acts on sacred land. These forms of duplicity are partly responsible for the silencing of Nomvete's and other ancestral voices on the mountain.

Because she leaves the mountains dissatisfied, the search for a spiritual anchor does not cease. The closing chapters of the autobiography examine Nomvete's spiritual unrest when she is introduced to a charismatic church through fellow actress Chi Chi Letswalo. The introduction to a cult-like charismatic church in a warehouse building in Johannesburg seems to metaphorically mirror the chaos in Nomvete's own life; and the church functions as an additional escape from reality. This period marks a strong shift in Nomvete's spiritual focus. At this point, her narrative is no longer preoccupied with the uncovering of African spirituality and speaking to ancestors after the disappointment of the silence of the mountains that speak. Now, Nomvete is focused on learning how to pray in tongues under the guidance of a preacher, Brother Brown. Nonetheless, reflecting back on her spiritual journey in her autobiography, Nomvete recognises a common thread in what her spiritual mentors were attempting to teach her: "all these great spiritual seers were advising me to find my spiritual voice" (Nomvete, 2014:136). To her, this voice was inside her all along, but she was too afraid to activate it because she was hungry for affirmation from strangers.

By her own account, she had all but lost touch with reality at this stage. Nomvete's marriage to Farai had collapsed, she was destitute and had lost everything. Her new relationships with some of the women in the church displayed some of the toxicities prevalent in church. Nomvete craved anonymity, she never fully accepted her celebrity status. At a time when she was destitute the church offered Nomvete the perfect opportunity to hide in plain sight. The revelation of her prophetic gift and descent from a family of healers, as prophesied by Credo Mutwa appears again in her reflections on her time in the church cult. The majority of her spiritual exchanges after her awakening encounter with Mutwa appear to prey on her vulnerability, ignorance and desperation.

The last chapters of her autobiography narrate some of Nomvete's most outlandish behaviour anchored in a desperate attempt at locating a sense of spiritual identity. Nomvete writes about an occasion when she was living in a garage, when she received a message from God informing her that he would dismantle the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) if the organisation continued broadcasting negative and harmful images to the youth. The message delivered while Nomvete was praying in tongues. She narrates how she received specific instructions to "go to the SABC and pray in its corridors, spread the blood of Christ along its contaminated walls" (Nomvete, 2014:149). Nomvete recalls getting past security and performing this ritual with two church congregants.

She arranges a meeting with one of the SABC's top female executives to deliver a personal message from God. Nomvete believes the meeting was God ordained because she had attempted numerous times before to meet with the same executive to pitch her business proposal but was unsuccessful. Before sharing her message from God, Nomvete draws on her prophetic gift to attest to her credibility; because she was able to share personal information about the executive that she would not have had access to outside of divine power. The executive was able to confirm the details of Nomvete's prophecy and received Nomvete's warning without hesitation. This part of Nomvete's spiritual journey is startling to her, and it is equally startling for the reader. At the meeting, Nomvete reveals God's disappointment with the management of the SABC, especially the negative content that was adversely affecting the youth. Nomvete explains that God's wrath would fall on the executive if she did nothing. Jobs would be lost and the corrupt would be exposed thereby dismantling the SABC. The instruction was to replace the corrupt structures in the SABC with new leadership serious about serving the youth. Nomvete writes that after she delivered her message from God, the

executive was on her knees begging for the Lord's forgiveness in her corner office. Similar, to her dreams and her experience in Zimbabwe, Nomvete's spiritual gift is endorsed on numerous occasions in the narrative. She seems to point to a confirmation of the legitimacy of her prophetic gift no matter how misguided in execution it seems to be at times.

Nomvete's undeniable spiritual gift seems to be at risk of dilution because of her physical dislocation. She feels spiritually disjointed because she is not confident about her belonging in South Africa. The repeated relocation from religion to religion is a symptom of a person tying personal identity to an elusive spiritual awakening. Nomvete seems to be awaiting a big moment of revelation. There is a disconnect between home and spirit created by an unfilled emptiness caused by a wandering soul born in exile. Nomvete knows her purpose and place in the world but struggles to fit in.

The eventual spiritual migration and final stop at Buddhism brings her to a renewed sense of self. There is safety in Buddhism because it is presented by her sister when they reconnect after a protracted estrangement during Nomvete's destitute years. Buddhism reconnects her to her family after South Africa's rejection. In the end, Nomvete believes she is "walking in an Enlightened state" (Nomvete, 2014: 197). However, the pull of her African heritage does not cease, because she claims she "dreams the dreams of sangomas, the seekers of truth on the fiery continent of Africa, every single waking and sleeping moment of [her] life" (Nomvete, 2014: 200) despite adopting Buddhist culture.

**Ambivalence of Return: Double blade of returnee experiences.**

Writers who are uprooted from their home country remember a different reality from the present reality unfolding in their home country. The requirement for the exiled is to occupy a geographical location different from the place of origin. The spatial and temporal removal from one's country of origin and inability to return is a fundamental feature of all three primary texts in this study. Edward Said defines exile as an "unhealable rift forced…between the self and its true home" (2001:173). Michael Siedel terms an exile "as someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another" (1986: ix). Elsewhere, Hamid Naficy elaborates that exile "consists of multiple and variegated exiles, big and small, external and internal, fixed and voluntary" (1999:9).

The terminology of exile is not confined to political banishment with no resourceful means of making it home. The stigma is slowly lifting with expatriates choosing to voluntarily live in foreign countries. The exiled is forced to leave, the expatriate chooses to be a resident in an alien country. In reference to exilic and diasporic literature, this distinction becomes important because exilic autobiographies in particular traverse feelings of homesickness and nostalgia for the old home country, whereas writers of the diaspora are sometimes enchanted with the homing process in the host country. There is often an absence of the deep longing for home for writers in the diaspora accompanied by a measured balance of the past and the present home.

According to Mohammed Naigub (2011) the absence of home is the first failure for the exiled because it signals the start of a rift in identity. The vacancy created by the absence of home becomes a problem for those who are lost in foreign lands searching for home. Home has a particular meaning for the exiled; it brings with it an un-ending quest to recreate belonging; and an inability to do so aids feelings of estrangement when a place called home cannot be forged. Individuals who have not experienced this type of hostility often take home for granted. Prior to migration, the idea of belonging to a community is taken for granted. Narratives of exile throw the question of belonging into sharp relief both for those in exile and those who remained at home.

Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* is composed of contrasting temporal and spatial environments. Like many other exilic writers, Nomvete taps into the nostalgia and memory of home. The loss of home is a persistent motif throughout her autobiographical writing, unlike diasporic autobiographies which may be invested in the new homing process.

Home is often considered a place of safety, intimacy and familiarity. In addition, it is a place of belonging and community. When home becomes a place that is physically unavailable, writers like Nomvete utilise memory to retrieve and commemorate home. Memory becomes a default response when home is inaccessible. Therefore, we can see how the absence of home triggers Black women autobiographers to recall their home country as they retell their life narratives. Repetition is a principal detail of turning a foreign place into home. The purpose of Black women writing about their experience of exile is to find a connection from unfamiliar to familiar through a process of creating a home in a strange territory. The memory of home is often romanticised in comparison to the new country of residency.

Secondly, nostalgia is induced by the idealization of home being a place fixed in time and space left behind.

Once home is sentimentalised, it becomes difficult for the new foreign residence to be fully accepted, further actuating feelings of loss, abandonment and un-belonging. Naigub's (2011) observation that exilic culture remembers home from a biased perspective is correct because it is rarely an accurate depiction of a home left behind or how events of the past transpired; usually it is tainted by longing and fantasy. Exile autobiographies are impaired by two motifs: the separation from home country and the romanticization of a lost home.

Autobiographical memories take on the narrator's character. Writers collate the life events and experiences similar to how they recreate a story. Over time, the memory of an individual is altered to suit a composition for a particular event: "thus in some sense autobiographical memories become fictionalised and re-organised to fit the demands of storytelling" (Randvansky *et al* 2005:796). Autobiographical memories carry all the fundamentals of a story worth telling. Not only do autobiographical memories possess a narrative character, but to a certain degree, vicarious autobiographical memories surface in the narrative, giving the reader the impression that they have lived the experience. The reader experiencing the events first-hand directly from the narrator's description, can empathize with the narrator. It is during the reading process that the audience begins to form opinions about the characters; some characters are liked more than others because of their relatability, suggesting autographical memories serve the authors writing them and their audiences.

Part of the intrinsic value of the autobiographical process is accessing cues available for aiding in the retrieval of memory. According to Randvansky *et al* (2005), using the situation model to decipher how mental representations of specific events and episodes are organised is helpful in the preservation of autobiographical memory. The model is bound by a spatial-temporal framework known as events models. The situation model consists of multiple models termed episode models. The information usually unfolds in consecutive order based on the connection and importance of each event to another. Consequently, this study can be applied to autobiographical memory and additionally linked to the informal structure of events memories. There are four criteria:

> One event must precede a second event in time. Second, the first event must be operating at the time the second one begins. Third, the first event must occur in order for the second to follow. Finally, the fourth criterion is that the first event's

> occurrence is sufficient to cause the second event to occur (Randvansky *et al* 2005:798).

The study investigates how autobiographical memory is composed, utilised, stored and retrieved in the long term. The proposition of autobiographical memory structured in chronological order based on Anderson and Conway's theory (1993) suggests the first event memory must appear in earlier parts of the autobiographical storyline, concluding with the last one. The most important event episode should appear in the foreground, less significant detail must filter to the background. The process of recall by the writer happens either organically or prompted through constrained recall exercises.

Nomvete spells out the double blade of the return/returnee experiences in the early pages of her autobiography, by using specific memories to highlight significant life events. Born in an upwardly mobile Black middle-class family, Nomvete documents her father's upward trajectory as a director of the United Nations Economic Commission. She comes from a fairly well-connected family; her exilic memories reference notable South African freedom fighters as regular visitors in her home in Zambia and Ethiopia. Although Nomvete never formed personal relationships with any of the stalwarts, her access to privilege is undeniable.

An inference can be made to Nomvete's sudden success in the entertainment industry to her exilic privilege. Although she was not connected to industry heavy-weights, and got her acting jobs on merit, her acting career was catapulted by her class position in exile, making it possible to build lucrative professional networks. When Nomvete arrived in Johannesburg in April 1994, the intent was to vote in South Africa's first democratic elections and return to London after two years. Those plans were postponed when she discovered her deep desire to connect with her homeland and her career began to rise. Nomvete credits her speedy rise to career fame to her international upbringing. The friendships and business acquaintances Nomvete formed when she returned to South Africa were partly in recognition of the professional networks and platforms she was exposed to in exile.

Nomvete holds an Acting and Performance Art qualification from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in the United Kingdom. When she ventured into the performance industry in 1994, this set her apart from South African actresses, more so among those who did not have any formal training. She does not mention her acting qualifications or her time

in college in her autobiography[1]. The chapters jump from pre-school, to high school and straight into her return from exile. *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum* displays the duality of fame and fortune and the loss of self because celebrity status.

Nomvete's most critically acclaimed role as Ntsiki Lukhele from the soap opera *Generations* is what shot her star to the top almost instantly. She found out about the role from a romantic partner who was already part of the cast of the soap opera. The two were working together at the Windybrow Theatre. A lead actor playing the role of Archie Moroka in the soap opera, he introduced Nomvete to the producers of the show. She auditioned for the role of Ntsiki Lukhele and was offered the part. Initially, this was intended to be a short recurring role but Nomvete's talent was so impressive, the writers and producers decided to reframe the storyline, turning the role into a permanent lead role on the show. Nomvete's character — Ntsiki Lukhele — was a figure South African viewers loved to hate. The show was almost a mirror of her own life as a successful young Black woman climbing the corporate ladder in the new South Africa.

She writes that fans often conflated the TV character with her as a person. Nomvete's fans violated her privacy by camping outside her apartment, peering inside her windows or knocking on her door to request autographs. At the height of her career, Nomvete was unable to take other acting jobs because *Generations* took over her entire life. At the same time, she became typecast and was unable to exercise her creative freedom.

Nomvete continued working on the soap opera for six years as one of the high earners, able to purchase a top of the range car and a house in one of Johannesburg's plush northern suburbs. The wage gap between the high-income earners on the set of *Generations* was a point of major discomfort for Nomvete. She writes about projecting her exilic guilt often knowingly and unknowingly on set. The discrepancies in earning power hit her hard, and like Sisonke Msimang (in the next chapter), she found herself overcompensating by speaking up on behalf of the underrepresented. The *Generations* production crew was the most underpaid. Nomvete describes her shock at how one of the senior make-up artists on the show was unable to make ends meet. When Nomvete advised her make-up artist to ask for a loan of a R1000 for building renovations to extend her two-room house, the loan was declined by the show's producers. Nomvete describes the careless manner staff were treated on the *Generations* set.

[1] Nomvete provides a short biography about her educational background on her official website. https://www.pamelanomvete.com/biography

The soapie had the highest ratings at the time but her make-up artist's wages could not cover a simple building project, nor could she secure a small loan from the production company.

Nomvete's autobiography also describes a fellow actress who used to live in the production's dressing room because she had no home. Some of her co-stars were on the covers of magazines, but they were living below the breadline. Nomvete's guilt fuelled her to advocate for the rights of her ill-treated colleagues. The culture on set was toxic and distinctly unprofessional. Because of her exilic background, her colleagues turned to her to raise their grievances because they believed management valued her more as she was a 'foreigner' with a British accent.  The assumption was that management would listen when she spoke:

> The more I tried to speak up, the more I felt beaten down. The weapon that was used against me was that I was a foreigner and therefore and 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 (2014:45).

Nomvete's efforts did not yield results because the production company managing the operations of the television programme did not consider any of her requests for wage increments for her low-earning colleagues. None of her complaints were taken seriously.

According to Nomvete the producers of *Generations* were reckless in the management of the talent. They often hosted wild soirees, providing free alcohol which guaranteed high attendance because people wanted to drown their sorrows. These parties left the talent highly inebriated and unable to perform their acting duties the following day. Although Nomvete attended the wild parties and admits to driving home drunk on numerous occasions, she never allowed her lifestyle to interfere with the execution of her work. She reports that she never drank during working hours. Nomvete credits her British professional training for her work ethic:

> A great deal of snobbery was seeping through because my thoughts were that this would never be allowed to happen in England. I did feel that the management was basically incompetent… This is where England had done a great job. Here we were, children of exile, adopting some of the superiority born of being products of the British system (Nomvete, 2014:48).

Nomvete's simultaneous sense of alienation and professional superiority is a common state for many returnees in the corporate environment. She oscillates between coveting the approval of her peers and loathing the lack of professional competence among the very colleagues she is defending. The duality of living as an outsider in her home country — her desperate need for affirmation from her community while absolutely loathing the lack of work ethic among her people — is not unique to her.

Nomvete's overcompensation as a response to her exilic class and cultural privilege is displayed in her public and private life. The decision to hire her husband as her manager is another demonstration of her ambivalence towards her exilic privilege. Nomvete's keen awareness of her husband's charm is described in grand detail in the autobiography. The events leading up to her marriage and unhealthy tie to her in-laws display her desperate desire for acceptance: "I was losing focus and consequently lost ability to be discerning" (Nomvete, 2016:26). Nomvete understood inviting her husband to be her manager was a bad idea but she was too deep in the dysfunction to make any discerning decision about her career or personal life.

She thought giving her husband a piece of her professional career would not only appease her guilt for her profound success, but also make her husband feel included in a world he was so desperate to belong in. Hiring Farai as her manager was obviously a mistake because he did not have the professional expertise for the job. Worse, it gave him an opportunity to entrench himself further in Nomvete's life and take control over her while securing fame for himself. Nomvete writes of her husband's control issues. He decided what she ought to wear, and coerced her to attend industry parties, because he wanted to network with celebrities.

Nomvete's desperation to shrink her success cost her professionally. Farai did not secure any acting jobs for her during his time as her manager but Nomvete continued paying him. Meantime, he sabotaged any potential roles and became infamous for being difficult to the point where Nomvete was overlooked for acting roles, despite her talent and high profile. In her desperation to make a home for herself away from the prying eyes of the public and dysfunctional workplace, Nomvete formed a cataclysmic alliance with her husband and his family. Ostracised at work and in her own home, she had no peace.

The emotional abuse, brutally delivered by her in-laws as a way of manipulating her already fragile returnee-guilt and sense of dislocation, alienated her further and diminished any hopes of belonging. Nomvete writes about her mother-in law and her husband labelling her as un-

African. This was a brilliant strategy of control and manipulation as they knew her insecurities about her Africanness, as an African born and raised in exile, and unable to speak her mother-tongue. Although Farai did not contribute financially, he was entitled and expected his wife to take care of him, his demanding mother, terminally ill relative, and wandering aunts and uncles from Zimbabwe, all of whom were lodging indefinitely in Nomvete's house.

Nomvete writes that she was confused and did not enforce boundaries in her house because she did not want to be viewed as insensitive. The same cannot be said for her mother in-law — whom she calls "The Puppeteer"— who worked tirelessly to control every aspect of her relationship with her son, from Nomvete's cooking to the couple's sex life. Throughout the course of the relationship, Nomvete was aware of the Sapiens' masterplan to use her as meal ticket (Sapiens is her pseudonym of her husband's family). She was a funnel to an affluent lifestyle the family had become accustomed to in Zimbabwe prior to the death of the patriarch of the family, but she felt powerless to do anything about it.

The continued abuse Nomvete endured from her husband was anchored in his desire to extort her hard-earned money and her self-worth was lost in the process. As she narrates,

> He needed me to boost his self-esteem and support him and his family financially. In return I needed him to boost my own self-esteem, by being needy and feed my desire to feel indispensable and therefore in control of my life (2014:103).

The autobiography explains in great detail the depth of the dysfunctional co-dependency in this marriage. Farai played on Nomvete's insecurities about her African identity, using African tradition to justify his adulterous behaviour as acceptable, by claiming to be polygamous. It can be deduced that Farai's motive for inviting his concubines to move into Nomvete's home was anchored in him devaluing Nomvete's femininity as a Black African woman born in exile. Again, Nomvete's 'foreigner' status as a returnee is weaponised because of her unwillingness to embrace her husband's desire to take on a second wife. The second wife eventually moves in to Nomvete's house without her consent, and without following any of the traditional protocol that governs polygamous marriage. Nomvete simply submits to the circumstances and surrenders to living uncomfortably in her own home; troubled by feelings of un-belonging and privilege.

Nomvete experiences a personal exile from her spirit and her own home because of her husband's violations. She begins to isolate from her friends and family because of the emotional abuse by the Sapiens. The breakdown and eventual end of her marriage is what leads Nomvete to freedom. The breaking point for Nomvete is when her husband physically assaults her sister when they are all on vacation by lifting her off the ground and slamming her back on the wall while high on a cocaine binge. The incident occurs in the presence of Farai's friends and family, who do not come to Nomvete's sister's aid; instead they chose to be passive viewers of the abuse. The sense of always being exiled even though physically present in one's homeland is something Nomvete must contend with in her life. This homelessness forms her double blade experience as a returnee whose professional training and cultural capital accumulated in exile propels her career; but this upward mobility is mirrored by a downward slide into insecurity and rootlessness, on the back of the earlier-discussed spiritual dislocation.

**Dancing to the beat of the drum**

The narrative tone of Nomvete's autobiography marks a more upbeat tone when revisiting career and professional memories in the concluding chapters. There is a sense of hope, joy and satisfaction in the recollection of professional and career memories. Nomvete's safe space is clearly her acting career, although she may still be working through the burden that comes with fame. She starts to find contentment in her career when she understands her fears of becoming disposable are irrational. Fulfilling her purpose through interdependence rather than dysfunctional co-dependency in her professional and personal life becomes priority. Nomvete does not doubt her skill or abilities on set. What she learns through the writing process, in reflecting on her life story, is how her lack of self-esteem in her personal life has made her passive in the professional environment. In hindsight, Nomvete acknowledges that *Generations* catapulted her to instant fame and fortune, causing her to lose her bearings. However, acting has always been her home.

Her subsequent lead role as Thandeka in the film *Zulu Love Letter* is the first display of the actress taking authority over her life, embracing spiritual guide Mutwa's instruction to dance to the beat of her own drum. Although Nomvete auditions for *Zulu Love Letter,* the producers decide to look for a British actress to play the lead role. It is not until Nomvete confronts the producers of the film that she is considered for the role. The endorsement and relationship

with the British acting academy further helps her cause, confirming the double blade of return/returnee experience of privilege that comes with exile.

Nomvete's relationship with Marianne Jean-Baptiste (the British actress chosen by the producers for the role) helps her secure the role. When the producer of *Zulu Love Letter* decided to go to the UK to look for an actress to play the role of Thandeka, Jean-Baptiste enquires whether they had auditioned any South African actresses for the role and the producer mentions Nomvete. Jean-Baptiste endorses Nomvete as the perfect actress for the role, stating she is one of the actress's Black artists in the UK looked up to and admired. The irony of this story is that Nomvete was perceived as a foreigner in her homeland, but not foreign enough to be cast for a South African film yet managed to secure the role because of her UK relationships.

Nomvete often conflates her professional and personal battles because of her unhealthy dynamic with her husband. She writes about various instances when she fought to have him alongside her during shoots, red carpet events and award shows. She comments on missing an opportunity to receive an award at the FESPACO Film Festival for her performance in *Zulu Love Letter* because the producers would not pay for Farai's plane ticket to accompany her to the ceremony. She continues to feel betrayed on her next acting job when the producers of *Sometimes in April* refuse to accommodate her husband's stay for the film she was shooting in Rwanda.

Through the self-reflection embedded in the writing process, she acknowledges her battles for Farai were misplaced. When she leaves for the UK, the distance from her chaotic life in South Africa enables her to make the right decisions about her life. The opportunity to obtain acting jobs outside her home country allowed her distance to reconnect with her craft and find herself again without the distractions of her toxic husband and his family. Her career was her saving grace. Once Nomvete was able to break free from her husband, she was able to reconnect with her sister and produce more meaningful art. Nomvete's sister wrote two plays, one of which was based on Nomvete's abuse. The performance of her real-life drama pushed her into new awareness of self. Although the success of the two plays was short-lived due to lack of funding, the experience propelled Nomvete's metamorphosis. The "emotional and material destitution" at the hands of the Sapiens brought her full circle. She went from having it all, to having nothing and eventually learning to start over (Nomvete, 2014:198).

The timely introduction to South African struggle stalwart Winnie Madikizela - Mandela in the early 1990s when she had arrived from exile also helped her in the process of reconnecting to self. Nomvete documents her awe, and acknowledges the privilege of meeting both Nelson Mandela and Madikizela - Mandela in a space of a few short months. The conversation with Madikizela - Mandela re-ignited Nomvete's purpose and passion for the performance arts. Madikizela - Mandela places a huge responsibility on her to lead the industry to success, naming Nomvete as "one of the ones" to make a difference. Nomvete attests her meeting with the Mother of the Nation led her to find her way "back to the daylight" of her life (Nomvete, 2014:118). The work she had begun at *Generations* fighting on behalf of her colleagues was not in vain; her gift was visible to the elders and therefore worth pursuing. Learning to assert herself on set was another win which was not only for her, but something Nomvete considered an important part of modelling professionalism for the next generation to replicate.

We can suggest writing her autobiography facilitated the process through which Nomvete learnt how to dance to the beat of her own drum and ultimately reconnect to her spiritual home within herself. The emotional torment and material destitution she experienced after losing her spirituality, career and husband allowed her to reconnect with what is important. Nomvete no longer fears fame and fortune because she is aware that her gift and purpose are not in competition with each other, but rather work interdependently.

The search for a heightened "enlightened state" of self is a continuous journey for Nomvete. She writes that she is now content in the spiritual path she has chosen, which is Buddhism (Nomvete, 2014:200). Nomvete now has dual citizenship in the UK and South Africa; she often returns to South Africa for acting and production jobs. In 2015, she launched the Sibongile Dax Dale incubation programme, named after her parents, with business partner Nicholas Beveney. The programme organised the Rise Up and Walk International Youth Festival at the Joburg Theatre.

Nomvete's second major return to South Africa's television screens was in 2017 for the role of Governor Deborah Banda in the second season of *Lockdown* which airs on Mzansi Magic. The series is now in its fifth season. Nomvete discovered the series from fellow co-star Lorcia Cooper upon seeing the graphics of the show on Instagram. Nomvete sent Cooper a direct message on Instagram expressing interest in the show. Cooper passed the message to

the series' producer and director Mandla N who did not hesitate adding Nomvete to the cast. According to Nomvete, her life experiences prepared her for the role.

Nomvete has also appeared in various short films and theatre productions such as *The Ancestors* (2019). She also worked as director in the Market Theatre productions *Venus vs Modernity: The Story of Saartjie Baartman, The Convert at the Young Vic Theatre, London* (2018) and *Meet me at Dawn* (2018) at the Market Theatre. This last play featured an all women cast comprising of a retired teacher, a writer, an estate agent and an unemployed young woman. The play was commissioned by the Centre of Excellence in Food Security at the University of the Western Cape.

Nomvete also appeared in *The Agent* (2020) an SABC 1 series shot in Mauritius. She made news headlines in 2018 during the production shoot when she spoke out against the ill-treatment of actors, payment delays, times and attitudes. Nomvete is quoted in the News 24 article as saying, "The minute you complain you are labelled a diva but actors need to take ownership of their craft and not be apologetic about it," she adds, "I was evicted in one of the apartments I was living in while shooting the show, then I was in a hotel then I had to move into a house with a man I did not know – that is when I had to put my foot down" (Nomvete, 2018).

Nomvete explains that since returning to acting in 2016, the only company that has paid her on time is Mzansi Magic; all the other production companies have been late in payment. Nomvete emphasizes the need for dialogue between actors and the production companies placing emphasis on the respect for the craft and the talent. In the article published in *Drum* Magazine (2016), she states that acting is not a hobby but a career. This incident is reminiscent of the Nomvete that used to fight for the rights of her co-stars on the set of *Generations*. Nomvete clearly found her voice and has not lost it since, "I shall dance to the beat of the drum… I shall dance it to my deathbed" (Nomvete, 2014:200).

Cultural and spiritual dislocation are interrogated in different facets in the next two chapters, examining Msimang and Clemmons' portraits of individual feelings of loss, abandonment, guilt and difficulty re-integrating as returnees. Though the three authors in this study belong to three different generations, the exilic experience for them as Black women from South Africa has been anchored in a similar nostalgic idealism and the accompanying disillusionment most returnees must contend with in their journey of self-discovery and homecoming, both to the physical home, and to themselves. The path to self-discovery is a

process of self-actualization that these three women have not fully accomplished but offer a glimpse of its continuing evolution in their autobiographical portraits. In the next chapter, I turn to Sisonke Msimang's portrait of gendered experiences of nationhood through the lens of her autobiography of exile.

## Chapter 2: Gendered Experiences of Nationhood in Sisonke Msimang's *Always Another Country*

This chapter interprets autobiography as a device for exploring gendered experiences of nationhood for Black South African women displaced by exile, through an analysis of Sisonke Msimang's *Always Another Country* (2017). Msimang is a South African writer and social justice activist. Msimang writes a column on the *Daily Maverick,* in addition to occasionally writing for *The Guardian, New York Times, The Washington Post, Bloomberg*, and Al Jazeera, with a focus on race, politics, gender and democracy.

Msimang has held fellowships at Yale University, the Aspen Institute, Bellagio Centre, and WISER Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand. She holds a Master's Degree in Political Science from the University of Cape Town and Bachelors in Politics and Communication Studies from the Macalester College in the United States. Msimang's career spans multiple continents, having worked for the United Nations, civil society and other philanthropic organisations such as the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa as Executive Director.

Born in Swaziland to a Swati mother and a Zulu father, Msimang was raised in exile, living in Zambia, Kenya and Canada, while her college years were spent in the US. She returned to South Africa in 1994. Msimang's current home base is in between Perth, Australia where she lives with her husband and two children and South Africa were her father and extended family live.

In a Ted Talk lecture on storytelling, Msimang explains why she writes: "stories are the antidote to bias, which makes us fall in love, heal rifts; stories make it easier to talk about the deaths of people in society who don't matter, they make us care" (Msimang, 2016). Msimang qualifies the preceding statement by stating that mainstream narratives about the Black experience are not always popular. Stories do not always make the world a better place according to Msimang, because they create the illusion of solidarity sometimes without leading to social justice. People are also drawn to likeable characters, therefore if audiences don't like certain stories with specific characters they will not care or see any moral obligation to think about what shapes the lives of these characters. Msimang insists that it is the messages we do not want to hear that we need to hear the most because "too often we are invested in the personal narrative and we do not look at the global picture" (Msimang, 2016).

Msimang's recommendations involve looking at stories as intellectual work and actively participating in storytelling as a prelude to social justice in the real world, because justice is what makes the world a better place.

In her Radio 702 interview with presenter Eusebius McKaiser, Msimang acknowledges that she is writing for an audience but tries not to focus on a narrative laden with dystopia because in her view it does not move Africa forward. Msimang's iterations about writing for an audience is based on her desire to have intimate conversations with Africans, stories that do not only centre big men like presidents, stalwarts or any of the Black nationalist on the continent. Instead, she wants to expand the repositories of stories. It is in the spirit of Msimang's understanding of storytelling and its potential that her autobiography, *Always Another Country,* is not intended to be a story just about Msimang's life. By her own admission, she has not achieved or lived long enough to write a singular story; but her autobiography is designed to affirm other Black women. Msimang considers herself as an Africanist writer telling African stories, using her platform to share stories she believes are worth telling because every life is worth examining (Msimang, 2017).

Black feminist autobiographies like Msimang's *Always Another Country* represent examples of contemporary life writing not solely focusing on Black masculinities. Increasingly, autobiographical narratives retelling South Africa's history from an inclusive Black female lens are becoming popular. [2]

Men often write their lives primarily within the bounds of the public sphere, framing the private domestic space as a source of support from Black women. Stylistically, Black male autobiographies rely on the trope of supportive Black female characters within the narrative to elevate their stature, while integrating recurring motifs outlining friendship and heroism attached to Black liberation. For example, Susan Anderson (1970), reads Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History* as career-driven exile life writing with few enduring personal relationships. The isolated exilic lifestyle stifles the opportunity for healthy familial relationships because of the distance between those at home and abroad. According to Anderson (1970), Mphahlele references his wife and children as almost a financial burden and strain in his autobiography; while Modisane references his

[2] Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1973), Ellen Kuzwayo's, *Call Me Woman* (1985) and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's *Part of my Soul Left with Him* (1984), more recently, Haji Mohamed Dawjee's *Sorry not Sorry* (2018) and Redi Tlhabi's, *Khwezi* (2017), are examples of Black South African autobiographies centring Black women.

daughter who left home while he was in exile as an expression of the free South Africa he hopes for in his writing. Anderson underscores the ways in which Black South African exile autobiographies express a deep impotence at the inability or powerlessness to change the government. This powerlessness is communicated as concern for the next generation, while the struggles of women and children are consolidated with the greater nationalist project.

Black female autobiographies respond to this oversight by bringing Black female subjectivities into the domain of politics through a reflection on the personal, while drawing connections to the grander public and national narrative. Black women use their voices to build community and enact participation within the political economy, "democratising everyday life," through the retelling of their life stories (Koyana, 2001:64).

Autobiographies offer Black women an opportunity to insert themselves into history. For Black women, life writing is an admission into the reading publics' eye, showcasing the author's writing process, a practice of un-silencing and unmuting within a social and cultural framework which acknowledges her inconspicuousness. According to Carole Boyce Davies, there are three levels of narrative self that Black women in exile could categorise themselves in, namely; "the self as described as synonymous with power struggle, the self presented in dialogue with the family and/other social cultural history and lastly, the self-identified at the resistance to patriarchal or racial order" (Davies, 2018: 278).

The autobiographical self of Black women in exile explores power struggles in different phases. At each level of the autobiographical process, the self is constantly evolving. From a collective viewpoint, each stage is considered a canonical construction of female consciousness. The emphasis on the singular story is as important as the collective narrative, depending on historical data, personal and political outlines. The internal story belongs to the woman and forms part of the external narrative or South African story. Davies (2018) deduces that the self is in unrelenting discourse with culture, society and others.

Essentially, Black South African women's autobiography is a deliberate gesture of movements to a form of self-actualization, moving from silence in the private sphere to voice in a public arena, in a constant state of evolution but never arriving. Msimang masters this technique, manoeuvring through all three narrative selves traversing internal conflicts, remarking on her own family structure and the resistance of patriarchy and colonial order seamlessly.

Black women use spatiality as a “social product” to anchor home and family while demonstrating their interconnectedness to the political economy (Koyana, 2001:64).

Women’s autobiographies often place great emphasis on the communal experience whereas men tend to write from a selfish perspective with hurried short reference to the wife and children. The work of Black women autobiographers is to display the interconnectedness of the political struggle and familial identities and the interpellation of the domestic environment within the community. The appeal of Black autobiographies lies in their political awareness. Alice Deck’s (1990) assertions are correct in this regard. Black women’s autobiographies find their magnetism in their understanding of persecution and ability to access coping mechanisms in situations of shared trauma and triumph: “The voice in Black autobiographies is not always a consciously political voice, and not every Black is a soldier in a long historic march toward Canaan” (1990:237). The intention of Black female autobiographers is to showcase everyday life experiences from an empathetic perspective which is relatable.

**Feminised Gender Representations**

Msimang’s autobiography begins with a chronological documenting of her life in exile, starting with her early childhood years in Zambia, Kenya and Canada. The chapters shift from chronological reporting of life events after Msimang’s childhood years, to a back and forth from the personal to the political, and other times a merge of both. The back and forth from past to present is accelerated once all the main characters have been introduced and fleshed out in order for the reading public to follow the flow.

Msimang’s autobiography offers multiple portraits of gender representations against the backdrop of nationalism, in her life writing. She narrates her experience of sexual assault by her family’s domestic helper, as a young child living in exile in Zambia. Msimang is also meticulous in telling the stories of the forgotten and minoritised experiences of Black women in exile. She dedicates a chapter to her paternal aunt, affectionately known as Gogo Lindi, and in her tender recollection of her aunt’s political activism in the ANC, Msimang self-reflexively confronts her own behaviour which has been complicit in the erasure and downplaying of her own mother’s politics. Msimang’s recognition of ordinary women in her life brings forth an awakening. She recognises how her adoration of her father almost eclipses

her mother's contribution, because she views her mother as the embodiment of the domestic and not a political freedom fighter making headlines like her father. Furthermore, the political narrative expands outside the home. Msimang connects the story of the new South Africa to Black masculine tropes, without alienating feminised representations of Black women. The autobiography is more inclusive of feminised representation of Black women in exile.

In the chapter titled "Gogo Lindi," Msimang takes the opportunity to share a reprised life narrative of what society would consider an ordinary woman in her family. Msimang remembers her paternal aunt as a forty-something-year-old, highly educated divorcee working in the teaching profession, with a strong affinity for political activism. Gogo Lindi is not a public figure nor is she considered a high-ranking political official. She is important to Msimang's story because she makes it possible for Msimang to dream and aspire to a similar fate. In her writing, Msimang acknowledges her father as her first hero, but Gogo Lindi has a spirit of a rebel which is highly attractive to Msimang. She is a strong Black woman in exile living an unorthodox life without apology. The presence of Gogo Lindi makes a teenage Msimang feel seen and heard in an otherwise busy household. Gogo Lindi offers Msimang maternal affection, support and a safe space to freely express herself without her parents' judgement or any pressure to compete with her siblings for her attention.

Msimang recounts the Pan-Africanist games she played with her aunt as a young girl. During her visits at Msimang's Lusaka home, Gogo Lindi would broadcast "her stories" to South Africa from Radio Freedom and was also appointed "the head of culture and arts for ANC in exile" (2017:44). Msimang builds Gogo Lindi's character to fit the strong Black woman character profile. The retelling of her story from personal perspectives with fine details of her personality and refusal to inhabit conventional domestic roles is remarkable in a context where the face of the ANC in exile, particularly in Zambia, is largely associated with male nationalist figures similar to Mavuso Msimang and Dax Nomvete. At times Gogo Lindi's mood swings are depicted as positive attributes tied to her ability to wield her agency, by refusing to cook and wanting to be served or choosing to live as a single woman. She represents the qualities Msimang yearns to possess and aspires to obtain.

Msimang's autobiography turns the ordinary into extra-ordinary using her gender as a point of consciousness. Msimang's choice of Gogo Lindi's life specifically is a celebration of women as active agents and contributors to the struggle in exile and as returnees. She uses her autobiography to shift the trope of Black masculinities in exile as the only voices worth

writing and reading about in public life; to a more gender-conscious tone based on collaborative considerations.

Gogo Lindi becomes a catalyst of Msimang's gender consciousness. The process of writing and reflection offers Msimang an awakening to her mother's political location. Msimang's father is a central political figure in her home; he lived and worked as a guerrilla fighter in South Africa's liberation movement within the African National Congress (ANC). The family's voyages from country to country — a central trope gestured at in the title, *Always Another Country* — is a consequence of his political deployments. Although her parents were both professional middle-class citizens, Msimang's mother's career is overshadowed by her father. As a young girl, Msimang respects the power and poise her mother carries as a young woman living in exile but is unaware or cannot comprehend the possibility of her mother having access to public life without the connection to her father. An accountant by profession, Msimang's mother has had corporate jobs in Zambia, Kenya, Canada and top jobs in South Africa as a returnee; but it is the adult Msimang that recognises her blind spots on her mother's subjectivity, on hindsight.

The Msimang household's first home away from South Africa was in Lusaka, Zambia. Msimang's mother experiences criticism and judgement from the Zambian women in the community for choosing to work outside the home. The neighbours gossip about her family. "Mummy" was the breadwinner and "Baba" was a botany and entomology student in the University of Zambia. Msimang's father was judged for spending his days lugging his children along, collecting insects, while his wife worked a corporate job. Msimang's mother attended French classes and tennis matches when she was not at work. The local housewives grumbled with jealousy at the Msimang family dynamic, unable to comprehend the couple's lifestyle, more so a woman working outside the home.

Msimang becomes a casualty to her own prejudice, her adoration for her father causes her to overlook her mother's political ambitions. Her gender awareness is triggered by an allegory her mother relays to her about an incident that took place in Canada where she was defending her integrity against a white racist supervisor publicly accusing her of an error she did not commit, when she worked as a bookkeeper. Msimang was young at the time of the incident; her mother shares the story with her when she is in college and has become more politicised and gender conscious.

After hearing about this incident, Msimang no longer sees her mother from a domesticated lens. As a child, she did not know about her mother's politics but through maturation, observation and the writing process, she becomes conscious about the question of gender and nationhood in her own life. Msimang's narrative about her mother's experience in Zambia provides a new perspective of exile experiences which has not been examined in this context. Black women are judged for pursuing careers outside the home. Independence is seen as a threat to the family structure. From these examples, we notice that women are celebrated when their ambitions do not eclipse those of their men. The micro-aggressions women endure in public life are often trivialised because they are gendered and not seen as big victories in the fight for freedom.

In the chapter titled "Freedom", Msimang paints a picture of South Africa transitioning from apartheid to a democratic nation. The language used to describe the first democratic election is hopeful, excited, but mixed with anxiety about the day. Msimang uses a collective standpoint in her script to deliver her emotions of hope and freedom she expects the day to bring. The description of the monumental moment nestled in the mundane ordinaries is a form used regularly in the autobiography. Msimang uses her writing style as a means of connecting her individual story to the greater political moment.

The symbolic use of "us" and "we" in the chapter on the transition to freedom displays the use of nation-building narrative and communal identity, in this chapter. She goes on to write: "we are majestic, glistening into the future, we wind and we wend and we dance ourselves to exhaustion, when the votes are counted and the results are announced, we will finally be free" (2017:173). The decision to use a communal expression for a historical moment in South Africa's history confirms Black women's political consciousness and ability to use their voices to insert themselves into history.

Msimang writes about the day as though she is in South Africa despite the physical distance, miles away from home. She uses her autobiography to break spatial and temporal confinements to fulfil her desire of voting for the first time in her homeland. Although Msimang's experience of casting her vote for the first time does not carry the same excitement present back home, she still manages to find joy in voting for the first time in university. Far from home, Msimang is able relive the experience in South Africa through her younger sister, Zeng's, vantage point, when she calls her from the US to gauge the mood of the moment.

Msimang's retelling of the story of the dawn of democracy is carefully connected to her father who represents a form of heroic masculinity. The contribution Msimang's father made to the liberation of the country is celebrated as a collective effort, through her excited declaration: "we did it, we are free" (2017: 175). It is worth point out that Msimang often frames her parents' work in the struggle as her own contribution or achievement. This might be read as part of the process of women's consciousness in navigating self and community within the sphere of Black nationalist masculinities in her autobiography.

*Always Another Country* does not passively consume the dictates of the nationalist project. The autobiography participates in widening the "scope of the political debate beyond imperatives of resistance to those of a political transition and deeper transformation of a society" (Koyana, 2001: 66). Msimang reflects backwards through the retelling of her life story, which is useful for understanding gendered experience of nationhood within the genre of Black female autobiography living in exile.

Gender is created and segmented through race and linked to an individual's personal identity and social status. Ancient slave history corroborates the experiences of Black women as oppressed and gendered; the disparities of inequality continue throughout the centuries and are displayed in modern societies. Shireen Hassim's *Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: The ANC in Exile and the Question of Women* (2004) explores the location of women in the ANC structures in exile. Hassim's findings reveal rampant abuse and violence against women and children in the ANC throughout the entire period of exile. The ANC women's movement established structures to monitor the violence, but the abuse persisted. Women in the ANC structures reported attacks from men; however, incidents of date rape steadily increased. The rape stats increased because the perpetrators were the same people in power in the organisation.

The party propagated sexist beliefs about marriage, and prohibited ANC women from marrying foreigners or men outside the organisation, claiming that this was counterproductive to the struggle. However, men were permitted to marry foreigners, revealing the party's patriarchal bias while claiming marriages with non-South African women would strengthen the South African struggle. The ANC administered corporal punishment to women who breached these laws, beating them on their backsides to coerce obedience from women.

Msimang's personal trauma of sexual assault signifies the pervasiveness of gender-based violence within the exile community. The haunting narration of her sexual violation at a

neighbour's yard by the gardener ironically named Praisegod resonates with similar narratives of sexual violence in Black female autobiographies and those that occurred in exile. Msimang draws an extremely graphic picture of the sexual assault on her adolescent body in the gardener's backroom. The molestation she names in the chapter "10 Kulunga Road" addresses sexist and classist undercurrents. The reader is given a sense that the child narrator knew a crime had occurred and took a decision not to report the incident for fear of stigmatisation, victim-blaming and othering. Although the young Msimang did not have the ability to voice the sexual violation at the time, she understood the gravity of the situation. Writing about the sexual assault in her autobiography becomes a form of the social justice work that Msimang is passionate about.

Msimang expounds on writing about difficult situations such as her sexual violation as a young child living in exile in an interview with 702 radio presenter Eusebius Mckaiser. For Msimang, writing trauma is approached from a position of craft and control which takes the power of the pain and discomfort from a particular experience because the event has happened and it is now over. The focus is more on the execution of the storytelling process rather than the actual lived experience. Msimang says true success is surviving and finding the ability to write the story (Msimang, 2017). She uses this writing practice not only in her autobiography but also as a feminist columnist exploring topics on gender-based violence.

**Black Middle-Class Guilt in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

In another interview with Eusebius McKaiser during the promotion of her autobiography, Msimang acknowledges that the family's class position in exile was informed by her father's position in the ANC. She recognises her father's influence in her life and the access to opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to her had her father not held a top position in the African National Congress (ANC) in exile.

Born in Pietermaritzburg and raised among missionaries, her father speaks of his upbringing in a YouTube interview with online magazine *Briefly*. Msimang's father remembers his upbringing as humble but not as modest as other African households in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal. Mavuso Msimang recalls his great grandfather as one of the first Black families to purchase land in the 1890s. Education was highly valued and Mavuso Msimang not only matriculated at a catholic school in Vryheid, the Inkamama High School in 1960, but successfully graduated at the University of Zambia with a degree in Entomology/Biology and

went on to obtain an MBA at the University of San Diego, California. Mavuso Msimang joined the United Nations as a volunteer, before taking up prestigious positions at CARE International in Kenya and Ethiopia, as country director. He was also head of the Emergency World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in Ottawa, Canada.

In her interview with McKaiser, Msimang goes as far as to say educated comrades in exile saw themselves differently because of their class position. She categorises the ANC as a deeply classist organisation. Although members of the party did not have money during the apartheid era, they saw themselves in a certain way because they were educated. There was an understanding in exile that those with education would lead in the new free South Africa (Msimang, 2017).

Studies on the subject of re-entry and re-adjustment of South African exiles display the idealised conceptions of home. Exiles are not and should not be categorised as a homogenous group. Experiences of people living in exile vary, and class determines the opportunities available in the host country and also upon the return home. In the study conducted by Melissa Steyn and Terri Grant (2006), at the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, during the period 1992 -1995, oral interviews were undertaken with ANC returnees and emergent themes were extracted. The sample featured returnees that were educated or migrated in the 1960s and 1970s to 30 countries including African countries like (Zambia, Tanzania, Angola) Europe, the Soviet Union and Scandinavia. The research revealed strains related to re-integration when returnees came back home. The results were similar within the inter-class and intergenerational sample which consisted of a cross section of interviews from different ages.

In reading Steyn and Grant's (2006) research, the recommendations of family institutional relief programmes based on community development to support returnees because of job scarcity in the mid-nineties ranked as a high priority. The quantitative analysis displays commonalities when it comes to the returnees' reintegration in their home countries. The general consensus among returnees is the appreciation of global exposure and an expansive worldview that comes with living in exile, despite the difficulties and alienation experienced when coming back home. The personal growth gained in exile is viewed as a valuable trait in the nation-building project.

Home and the memory thereof become idealised personally and within the larger context or community of the exiled. The reality and experience is often far removed from what was

imagined. Home is often met with feelings of disappointment and disillusionment because some returnees are accustomed to living in developed countries, while South Africa compares unfavourably to the first world host nations. Returnees are also met with restrictive political and social codes entrenched in apartheid. Returning, particularly for Black women with defined gender role representations was a difficult adjustment; especially in terms of fitting in with their families. The disparities in lifestyles made it difficult for returnees with a strong social conscience to live with the blatant inequalities in their home country.

There is also the realization among returnees that home was not waiting for them the same way the exiled had wistfully imagined it. The interviewees in Steyn's research assumed returning home would be a cure-all for their feelings of un-belonging and alienation; a fantasy that further deepened the disillusionment. For returnees like Msimang, the same "resolutions that had driven them to exile re-emerge upon re-entry" (Steyn and Grant 2000:374). Returnees experience feelings of self-doubt about their own capabilities to function in a home that is essentially foreign. There is also a personal conflict about the privilege of exile and the internal contradictions to the returnee displayed in local inequalities. Steyn and Grant's research also highlights the discrepancy between the highly politicised and those that remained home. The research revealed alienation of exiled activists from the ANC that they were once wholly loyal to when they left South Africa. Returnees spoke of feeling betrayed because of the political negotiation that did not bring a complete revolution.

Although South African exiles abroad received status, there is a sense that they were not allocated significant roles, feelings of being excluded and redundant surfaced and easily hardened into loss of confidence in, and feelings of bitterness towards those who are in leadership particularly in circumstances when unemployment is so widespread. Difficulties with finding a job were often experienced as personal indifference on the part of the organisation (Steyn and Grant 2006:376).

Reconnecting with locals and the people also proved to be a challenge highlighted in the research. Most of the interviewees alluded to feelings of estrangement and unfamiliarity with the people of South Africa. Some described feeling like tourists in their home country, with strong sensations of dissociation and dislocation. Interviewees mentioned feeling unsettled and a desire to move. South Africa is not considered as the final stop for returnees. Family integration and other social settings were extremely strenuous and laboured; they were

associated with contradictory feelings. For the returnees, family is substituted with other compatible returnees who understand their plight and context driving nomadic lives.

The feelings of guilt and privilege of returnees also stem from a sense of dislocation more so because of the disconnection from their own history. The displacement results in returnees over-compensating in an endeavour to build an elusive closeness or community with family, friends, colleagues, other neighbouring networks, hired help and strangers. Because of returnees' absence during major family events and the inevitable detachment that comes with exilic culture, they confront multiple losses of home. First is the original loss of home, followed by the second layer of loss embedded in a realization of displacement in their home country when they return; forcing many returnees to leave again because they are unable to fit in socially, politically and personally. There is usually a desire to return to familiar surroundings where one experienced community in the host country during exile. Steyn and Grant's study found that returnees have a sojourner spirit. Although they may desire to return to their host countries where friends and comrades reside, the visits to host countries are often short-lived.

There is what Steyn and Grant describe as the "active split" between the returnees and those who stayed behind during the apartheid era. The subtle rivalry further marginalises the returnees because they are not fully accepted in certain sectors of societies because reconnecting with locals proved difficult. Returnees mention feelings of dissociation; even after they have settled, they feel that home is not really home. There is a lingering feeling that one is still going to move to another country. Exiles are drawn to a nomadic lifestyle because they cannot find a firm fit or have one idea of home.

The gap between the haves and the have nots is further exacerbated between returnees and those who stayed behind. Returnees are often morally conflicted and may feel obliged to advance the fight for social justice for the people. The decision to return home or even stay is informed by these moral obligations. Success is not only defined by fulfilling the political solution but rather finding a resolution that will serve the wider South African society. The social struggle is equated to a personal purpose. Freedom for the people in the form of education, healthcare, housing and the fulfilment of basic service delivery is the definition of a successful return for the once exiled.

There is also the guilt of the returnees who were sustained by the ANC in exile. The difficult economic challenges and massive unemployment is compounded by the guilt of either not

finding a job or relying on the family or similarly finding placement in executive positions the average South African would never have access to because of the lack of political connections. Returnees either see themselves as a burden with feelings of failure or as sell outs within the political context and strive to do good works to ease their consciences. Adjustment and re-integration is an unfamiliar experience in their home country which leaves returnees with no choice but to re-emigrate because of disappointment of the idealised expectations of home.

David Kettler and Benite (2006) caution against reductionist scholarship which attempts to link all experiences of displacement to exilic culture. For the intellectual exile, a newfound ethical awareness is often accompanied by feelings of guilt and privilege. According to Kettler and Benite (2006), intellectual exiles are more preoccupied with the exploration of the legitimacy of their own displacement rather than survival. The nomadic intellect is more concerned with rootlessness and detachment within a cosmopolitan framework. There is an ever-present bait of money and middle-class comfort activated by a sense of moral supremacy produced from living in exile. Some of the moral superiority of returnees makes them see leaving their countries of birth as a sacrifice.

However, those who have been left behind may take an oppositional view of exiles' departure as a betrayal (Kettler and Benite 2006). Therefore, exile should be examined as a condition of both alienation (as depicted in Nomvete's autobiography) and privilege. There are returnees who suffer guilt because they feel they were not faithful to the cause or never stayed true to the political purpose. Returnees find the ideas, beliefs and values of those who remained behind questionable because of the change with the end of apartheid, followed by feelings of outrage toward family and friends for their concessions. According to this school of thought, the discomfort of exile far outweighs the benefits provided once returnees come home. Kettler and Benite cites Franciso Ayala's (1971) work, which suggests that exiles faced nationalistic attitudes in the host countries restricting their freedom of experience without access to resources, causing them to live detached, isolated cosmopolitan lives anchored in severe detachment.

Edward Said's *Representation of the Intellectual* (1994) addresses the notion of the integrity of the intellectual exile lured by the perks of privilege. In the end, returnees have an opportunity to self-reflect and find self-awareness. Said (1994), reflects on what are termed 'bad' exiles as those returnees who fall prey to the trappings of luxury, pursue capitalist

interest and neglect the nationalist project by indulging wounds of dislocation; in comparison to 'good' exiles or returnees who successfully work through their issues free from "nationalism, dogmatism, exceptionalism and narcissism and self-pity" (cited in Kettler and Benite 2006:29). Scholars like Kettler and Benite are not fully in favour of Said's view and consider it simplistic, but do acknowledge Said's theory of exile as "the unhealable rift forced between human beings and native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said, 2000:173).

Kettler and Benite (2006) argue against perpetuating binaries which do not accommodate real-life exiles who have lost economic support systems politically from the party or physically because of their move. Exile, under these circumstances, cannot be viewed as devoid of individualism and self-interest on the part of the returnees because the desire for recognition always exists, which is largely accessed in the course of the career. The ideal intellectual is not a saint without any flaws. In similar vein, returnees are often hopelessly idealistic, but should not be labelled bad exiles for desiring political prominence, or for making concessions for the sake of survival.

*Always Another Country* depicts Msimang in a constant state of war with her guilt. The autobiography draws attention to her privilege in early chapters when her bicycle is stolen by a poor young boy her age. When the family moves to Nairobi from Canada, Msimang's sister is also confronted with feelings of dislocation and un-belonging in high school; and she does not fit in with her white or her Black peers in her new high school when the family returns to South African at the dawn of democracy. Msimang also acknowledges her education abroad as a key contributing factor to her securing top executive positions. Her guilt is prominently expressed in the chapters reflecting on her return to South Africa. The active split and subtle rivalry mentioned in Steyn and Grant's (2006) research is apparent in Msimang's narrative of her return experience.

In the narrative, Msimang starts her journey of consciousness when she reflects on the theft of her new bicycle in Nairobi. As a young girl living in exile in a new country, Msimang does not possess any form of social consciousness. She brandishes her new Canadian bicycle without considering her new social surrounding or the plight of children in the neighbourhood. Only when she is confronted by the guilt of her wealth does she recognise her class position within the context of African poverty.

She perceives her privilege as inherently fastened to her middle-class privilege displayed in her "Canadian accent and Canadian bike" (Msimang, 2017:111). The reflective narrative describes the thief as thin with holes in his clothes indicating the young boy's lack of social and economic capital. Msimang uses the comparisons of her financial privilege and the ease with which she inhabits a new country as insulated from the harsh realities of poverty experienced by her peers in Nairobi.

The narrating self, as an adult, thinking back to the narrated self (the young girl), recognises the inherent benefits her social position wields. Because of her class privilege, she is able to assemble a mob to defend her honour. The young boy is unable to protect himself in the manner in which Msimang does because he belongs on the opposite end of the social spectrum. His class position automatically places him in a precarious position and although young, the boy occupies space differently. The community sees him as a threat, and he is aware of his social-pariah status but remains unrepentant for his criminal behaviour:

> He was an exploited urchin, a fully human little monster waiting to grow into something harder to control or even harder to kill than the cockroach we insisted he was. He was Kenyans' future desperate and poor and needlessly nourished. (Msimang, 2017: 112)

Msimang's observation is pointing to the greed and corruption of those in power. What she may be indicating is the imbalance of power. Those who do not have access to the benefits of privilege will not wait for their human rights to be acknowledged, the poor will simply revolt like this young boy is doing and steal from the rich.

Msimang's contention with middle class guilt continues throughout various chapters of her autobiography. As a new Black returnee from exile, Msimang finds South Africa in a volatile state. Her younger sister Zeng, does not fit in with her peers in her new school. Zeng is labelled a coconut — a term usually used in the South African context to explain or brand Black affluence negatively as directly akin to whiteness — because of her accent. She does not fit in with the learners from the township who brand her as arrogant and stuck up for her inability to speak vernacular languages. The white learners also do not understand her; this causes Zeng to descend into further isolation.

The tensions are not limited to Zeng's socialisation in school. Msimang and her sister experience numerous racist encounters with white South Africans in the new South Africa.

One incident noted in the autobiography takes place at the grocery store. The altercation deteriorates to an extent where both Msimang and her white aggressor ram their trolleys into each other. Msimang finds reconciling the tensions in the country with her own personal desire to maintain a non-racial society constantly challenged. The new South Africa is laden with triggers but her university years in America have taught her to be unafraid to hurt white people's feelings. Msimang is unapologetic about her feelings toward racist white South Africans, providing a new reference point of how Black women resolve gendered experiences of nationhood.

In a more recent reflection published a few years after her autobiography, Msimang talks about her financial privilege in the Governing Intimacies webinar series, *Women Writing* (2020). Msimang mentions that she was different from other exile returnees because her father was a Fort Hare University graduate by the time the family went into exile in Zambia. Although she was born stateless, her father, a descendant of elite Zulu Christians, was both oppressed and benefitted from colonialism. Because of her parents' position, she benefitted from cross-generational Black wealth creation. Msimang's father was appointed in high profile positions in exile. When the family returned to South Africa, both of Msimang's parents were appointed in senior executive roles. Because of her family's financial privilege, Msimang was able to obtain an American university degree which gave her leverage in the South Africa job market, multiplying her chances of employability while conjointly aggravating a festering middle-class guilt.

Msimang recognizes that her returnee status bestows upon her an unspoken exemption in corporate South Africa. Finding employment requires minimal exertion on her part. She has the right look of a local but her international accent and American degree elevate her above her peers. Her first job for an Australian Aid funding project involves working at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, putting her in a good position for accelerated career growth. It is also through her work with the Australian High Commission that she meets her Australian husband, Simon.

Msimang does not shy away from acknowledging the opportunities her middle-class background affords her, but she does attest to her "brilliant mind" keeping her in top professional positions.  As her career progressed, she managed to obtain a CEO position in Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa. It is during this time that Msimang's career path ultimately changes direction. She is a young, upcoming Black professional who is granted a

fellowship to Yale University for a year. The transition to live outside the country fulfils her desire to leave South Africa without fully committing to a new home in a new country. South Africa is not living up to expectations. However, Msimang's naivete and idealistic worldview ultimately cost her a powerful job at the foundation. The staff misinterprets her plans to downscale and retrench staff as malicious. She acknowledges her error of judgement, and even though she is forced to resign, she knows she will recover quickly from the setback because of her qualifications, networks and privilege, which will soften the blow and help her secure new opportunities.

The exilic guilt continues to mutate even domestically in Msimang's interactions with her new-born baby's nanny Nikki. The nanny's social status determined by the apartheid system keeps her locked in her underprivileged class position. Msimang sees Nikki's distressful social status as an opportunity to over-compensate for her financial privilege, neglecting to define the necessary boundaries between employer and employee. Her remorse about her affluence causes her to invite Nikki's teenage sister Dipuo to live in her home. She attempts to appease her guilt by giving Nikki the impression that she believes in the teenager's dreams of one day achieving her goal of becoming a psychologist or a nurse; so, she offers to pay for Dipuo's bridging course.

Providing a home for Nikki and Dipuo placates Msimang's restlessness and guilt. However, her attempts at providing a safe environment for the two sisters are futile when Nikki is held at gun point with Msimang's 18-month-old daughter in the posh northern suburb of Johannesburg where they now live. Simon, Msimang's husband, is also accosted in a parking lot during that period. Msimang's privilege cannot cushion her nanny, daughter or husband from the widening gap of wealth inequality in post-apartheid South Africa; instead, it deepens the wedge.

Her goodwill is further short-lived when Nikki's negligence puts her daughter's life in harm's way, causing her daughter "S" to suffer a burn wound. The disappointment in Nikki's lies, manipulation and abuse of Msimang's kindness is inherently tied to the disappointment she feels towards South Africa's failing state. Msimang and her husband take a decision to fire Nikki and hire an older nanny. Employing a foreign national whom Msimang decides to pay more is her way of easing her exilic guilt. To a certain extent Msimang recognises a subtle rivalry between herself as a returnee and Nikki who remained and is without similar privileges and access to opportunities to elevate her life. The pattern of guilt that haunts

Msimang in the face of the two young Black women's economic precarity indexes a broader reality of the gendered economic exclusion of Black women in the South African national economy; where they continue to bear the brunt of poverty.

In addition to privilege, race relations play a significant role in Msimang's relationship with her husband. The relationship suffers major strain in the early years of its inception. Msimang's politics almost cost her the relationship, as she is conflicted about Simon because he is white:

> I want him to be black and he is not and this is the South Africa where white people have done some fucked up shit to black people and he can never be angry enough about it to satisfy me (2017:220).

South Africa at the start of their relationship is at the dawn of democracy. The liberation movement had overthrown white supremacy, but Msimang's ideology did not suit her personal reality. The relationship had to end because Msimang considered herself a radical Black woman, and could not reconcile her personal choices with the history of country. She believed she was selling out the revolution by choosing to be with a white man. Msimang had a fixation on absolutes. She believed she was a failure for falling in love with a white man after her parents had fought hard in exile to end apartheid. The idea that she could possibly be betraying the revolution by dating a white man deepened her guilt. She translated her feelings for Simon as a weakness and found herself disappointed for falling in love with a white man - the enemy. Initially she finds herself embarrassed to introduce her new beau to her father for fear he will not accept him. She opts to permanently disengage from the relationship instead of confronting her radical values, but that idea is short-lived and unsustainable.

She resolves her complicated value system through consultation with her younger sister and her mother. The women in her life convince her to address her hypocrisy for wanting to terminate her relationship simply because Simon is white. Msimang's mother puts her at ease by endorsing the relationship: "He is different from you as he is and still you love him and so will I. If you love him then I will love him too" (Msimang, 2017: 222).

Simon's race further threatens her political position when the couple decide to have children. The birth of her daughter "S" divulges more of Msimang's prejudice. The concern about strangers judging her choice to have biracial children plague her mind. When baby "S" is

born, Msimang is shocked at how white her skin colour appears. Her prejudice illustrates the dichotomies within her consciousness: “she is pale against my mud” (2017:257). Msimang particularises her experience to display the manner her own preconceptions affect her marriage. She is embarrassed by her statements but learns to work through her own theories of race within the confines of her interracial relationship. The decision to be less combative in her engagement with Simon’s whiteness and understanding that some of her questions will never be resolved eases her guilt. She starts to accept her choices as those affixed in love instead of viewing herself as a sell-out to the revolution.

**Nostalgia and Disillusionment**

Black female autobiographies anchored in exilic narratives are inclined to eternalize the sentiment of a permanent home which functions as a remedy for homesickness. By definition, nostalgia is a yearning for a past moment in time, reminiscent of a particular memory, or extreme longing for home.  Svetlana Boym (2011:1) references seventeenth century studies conducted by Doctor John Hofer to describe nostalgia as a “sad mood originating from the desire to return home to one’s native land”. Hofer’s work situates the theory of nostalgia in medicine, not politics:

> Nostalgia is said to produce erroneous representation that caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present. Longing for the native land became their single-minded obsession. [They] acquired an indifference to everything, confusing past and present, real and imaginary events (cited in Boym, 2001:1).

Boym adds that the afflicted hear and see family members in their dreams through a process of “associated magic” followed by borderline paranoia, heaviness of heart, sorrow and discontent. Exile writers fit the profile Boym describes as “utopian dreamers who had high hopes for humanity” (2001:2). Nostalgia is a “democratic disease” prompted by individual anxieties steeped in nationalism. The definition has since evolved in the eighteenth century and takes a more historical approach:

> Modern nostalgia is a mourning of a mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values… a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual… encountering silence, he looks for memorable signs, desperately misreading them (Boym, 2001:6).

Theorists such as Reinhart Kosselleck review nostalgia within the context of personal and interpersonal loss. The "space of experience" provides an opportunity for the adaptation of the past and present to be recalled in memory. The "horizon of expectation" facilitates an assimilation of future events made accessible in the present moment, revealing the unknown in real time.

Exile autobiographies are preoccupied with the past; to an extent, the author is suspended in inertia. Assmaa Mohamed Naigub (2011) draws a connection to home through memory. Home is the place where memory can be extracted, therefore without memory there is no place to call home. There is no place to return to without memory. The recollection process facilitated by writing affords the author a chance to return to a lost home. The supposition is that a home constructed from memory is not a representation of reality. The work of memory is to offer an alternative version of home rather than a duplicate. As a deduction, home is not simply a dwelling of physical existence but a place of remembrance. Msimang is continuously in a state of nostalgia in her writing. Nostalgia confuses the real for the illusionary, producing a counterfeit portrayal home.

Exilic culture relies on triumphant ideologies to overcome, allowing the author to find peace over feelings of homesickness by drawing on nostalgic practices. The practice of retrieving positive memories to transcend traumatic memories is one of the ways nostalgia facilitates memory work in the autobiographical writing process. Boym further elucidates the use of nostalgia in exilic narrative:

> Restorative nostalgia stresses nostos (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on algia (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately. These distinctions are not absolute binaries, and one can surely make a more refined mapping of the grey areas on the outskirts of imaginary homelands (2007:13).

Thus inferring, restorative nostalgia is premised on the past, motivated by national identity transmitted through generations' collective loss of home; whereas reflective nostalgia is contained in the individual experience and the movement to adaptability and is more forward looking. Naigub (2011) postulates that restorative nostalgia endorses political nationalism, conversely, reflective nostalgia is premised on cultural intimacy. Principally, both types of nostalgia share a common position although the narrative outcome is varied. Because home is

no longer a fixed place and no longer desirable, the author must reconcile the past with the present by making the journey back narratively, using memory as a reference.

De Sas Kropiwnicki and Zosa Olenka (2014:2) studies the unique experiences of second generation South African exile returnees in relation to the "myth of homecoming" based on the parents' narration of their memories. The dawn of democracy, combined with the press coverage of the political developments in South Africa, created unrealistic expectations of homecoming. The exiles' return was not simply a return to a geopolitical perception of home, it was also a return to an imagined home. The dislocation caused by the estrangement from home required a process of acclimatisation. Many returning exiles were confronted with their perceptions of home and the transition from a mythologizing of the past in relation to the present when returning home for the first time. Home became strange and threatening for some returnees.

The release of Nelson Mandela was loaded with great expectations for those living in exile. In the documentary, *Born into Struggle* (2018) Rehad Desai [3]captures his experience as a second-generation exile marred by a longing and nostalgia for home. Because his father (Barney Desai a prominent political figure) was exiled in 1964 to the United Kingdom. Both his parents became heavy drinkers and one of his brother's became a drug addict because of the frustrations of living in exile unable to return to home. There was an expectation that the political situation would suddenly shift in a substantive way. However, this was not the case, instead the family broke apart. The romantic view of a democratic South Africa did not materialise. Even upon their return Desai laments how his father was short-changed for a couple of prominent positions because of opposition politics, which possibly accelerated his death.

Second generation exiles like Desai and Msimang were ostracised, unable speak the local languages, a deficit that deepened their alienation. Desai's reflection in the documentary shows how he longed for his father's attention and tried to emulate him by joining politics in his early teens. Later he would repeat the same cycle abandoning his young family in the UK to pursue politics in South Africa.

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[3] Rehad Desai *Born into Struggle* (2018) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJn-_7yYGI8

Msimang writes about her experience of returning home to South Africa fluctuating between the memory of an imagined home and the myth of homecoming. A failing state, fraud and corruption, maladministration and inequitable distribution of wealth caused a sense of despondency among returnees. The autobiography situates Msimang's romanticised version of freedom as a returnee. What follows is an overwhelming feeling of disillusionment when freedom does not live up to expectations. Msimang's first visit to her paternal family in a village in Pietermaritzburg at the age of sixteen was a moment of awakening, realizing what she and her family lost as a result of exile. Msimang deliberates on her loss, coming to terms with the separation and her own dislocation as well as the myths associated with her homecoming. As a second-generation exile, she feels ostracised and estranged in her own home. She finds herself contending with feelings of jealousy toward her much younger aunts and uncles who were left behind and were able to share a life with her grandparents. She feels displaced and disposable, an unnecessary appendage in her grandfather's already full life. Her grandfather was a polygamous man with many children; this causes Msimang to feel threatened by her young cousins and socially excluded.

Reliving the story of her father fleeing to exile through her grandfather's eyes brings an air of triumphant ideology synonymous with exile narrative. The first visit home is a moment of reconciling the imagined home and the reality. Msimang must integrate her idealised impression of home based on her parents' memories of home and the actual home she arrives at. Listening to her grandfather tell the story of her father's disappearance only to be presented with a picture confirming he is alive a decade later, displays realities second generation exiles had to process in post-apartheid South Africa.

Autobiography as a genre uses a reflective process to draw out Msimang's disillusionment with the ruling party. She admits to idolizing the ANC as a child of exile. As a second-generation returnee, she planned to be an "agent of change" and hold the liberation movement accountable by using her activism and writing to comment on social issues (Kropiwnicki, and Olenka 2014:88). Once a place of refuge and her political home, Msimang grows disillusioned with the leadership and policies of the ANC. Like many returnees, her obligation is no longer to the ANC but to her parents who fought in the struggle.

In democratic South Africa under the governance of the ruling party, Former President Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism was followed by the sharp plummet of the ANC. The Marikana Massacre followed thereafter. These tragic political events break Msimang's trust in the

party. In her writing, she expresses deep outrage at what she terms the Mbeki years and the cost of his AIDS denialism. During this period, Msimang worked at the United Nations' sexual reproductive health unit as an AIDS activist.

Msimang's childhood memory of the ANC is one of adoration; but as an adult, she comes to reckon with the egotistical nature of the ruling party, lamenting: "no matter how courageous Africans have been, once in charge they succumb to corruption and paranoia" (Msimang, 2017: 234). The failing state and the lives lost to reckless decisions made by the ruling party trigger a shift in Msimang. She allows her ANC membership to lapse and no longer attends meetings. The lack of accountability of the ANC and the decline of the state thrusts her into what she considers a godless existence.

The Marikana Massacre further divorces Msimang from the nation state, prompting a political awakening. In a chapter titled "Freedom," Msimang recognises that there is nothing special about being a child of exile. She recognizes her own problematic thinking in this area as a catalyst for breeding entitlement and cronyisms. Msimang's awareness of a sobering betrayal by the ANC marks her first step to leaving the country.

When her mother passes on, Msimang's profound feelings of loss make her lose interest in continuing to live in South Africa. The death of her mother is juxtaposed with the failing state in the autobiography. The disillusionment with the ruling party and the death of her mother motivate her to leave the country. The pain of living in South Africa far outweighs the pain of living in her home country without her mother. Her mother's death helps Msimang realise that her home is not limited to a geo-political space in time but rather, it is tied to her mother, father and sisters. She credits her parents with this new revelation. Msimang's love affair with South Africa is unshakable but she decides that it must be managed at a distance. Like Nomvete, the disillusionment that follows return compels her to maintain a measured distance from her homeland.

What can be surmised from this reading of *Always Another Country* is the articulation of gendered experiences of nationhood of Black women in exile. Msimang's autobiography is intentional about offering attentive representations of Black women in the nation project, both in the ANC in exile and in post-apartheid South Africa. The autobiography finds a balance in the depiction of the personal and political story, which Msimang generously shares with those close to her including her mother, father, aunts and uncles in exile and even invited strangers such as her nanny Nikki and her sister Dipuo.

The interconnected family ties to the political is a prominent feature in Msimang's writing that weaves all the chapters in the autobiography together. In the autobiography, the motifs of gender consciousness are delivered as sub-themes of Gender-Based Violence, racism, inter-racial relationships, privilege, the role of women in public life as political figures or corporate executives, intra-gender frictions, and the power struggles Black women are confronted with daily. For Msimang, the singular story is just as important as the collective story, which provides important historical data that informs the personal.

Black female autobiographies in exile often share a nostalgia of home paired with disillusionment once the returnees come back home. For Msimang, the guilt of her privileged position in the midst of steep inequalities further alienates her from her idealised expectations of home. Once she realises that home has not been anticipating her return in the same way she has, the idolisation of home unravels. Returnees often feel excluded, without status in their home country. The active split and animosity between the exiled and those that were left behind becomes prominent. Also, the breach in access to opportunities isolates the returnees further and creates bitterness between the two sets of parties. Msimang tries to overcompensate in these types of scenarios and fails dismally.

The conflict of Msimang's class position is further exacerbated by her relationship and subsequent marriage to a white man once she returns home from exile. Black women in exile are often plagued with feelings of guilt for their socialisation and judge themselves harshly for prioritising their happiness over what is considered the expected standards of the revolution; which, in the ANC's case, were framed in heteropatriarchal ways that limited women's personal desires, while indulging men's. The violence experienced in exile, the difficulty in re-integration with home, and the self-serving attitudes of the ruling party's political leaders make the moral obligation to the struggle unfulfilling for returnees.

Msimang, much like other Black women in exile, uses her writing as a form of social justice activism to outline the inequalities and give a voice to sectors which are marginalised. Because nomadic intellects like Msimang are never fully settled in their home country for the reasons discussed in this chapter, they have no option but to leave and find homes in different parts of the world. Black women's autobiographies nonetheless offer a glimpse of the self-actualization that mitigates the silencing of the marginalised.

In the next chapter, I turn to another second-generation Black South African woman's experimental use of auto-fiction to reflect on the intricacies of displacement and identity, through a reading of Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose.*

## Chapter 3: Writing Awkwardly about Race: Auto-fictional Insights in Zinzi Clemmons' *What we Lose*

Auto-fiction offers an opportunity to read fiction differently and experiment with perspective. The strain of autobiography and the obstacles attached to factual representation of life experiences is absent in auto-fictional narratives because there is a merge of fictional imagination and factual events. This chapter offers a reading of Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose* (2017) as an auto-fictional contributor to Black women's writing on race. The chapter maps Clemmons' uses of auto-fictional strategies to index Black South African women's experiences of exile and nomadic existence across two generations.

Clemmons' personal and professional life mirrors that of her main character, Thandi in *What We Lose*. She is born to an African American father and a Coloured South African mother. Similar to her protagonist, Clemmons is a creative writer and blogger by profession, married to a white American man of Iranian and Italian descent. Clemmons' narrative choices in her auto-fiction are closely connected to people, places and historical moments in her personal life in South Africa and America. Through her protagonist, Clemmons narrates the trauma of Thandi's mother's diagnosis of terminal cancer, which mirrors Clemmons' own mother, who died under similar circumstances. During her time as her mother's primary caregiver, Clemmons began keeping a diary of her mother's experience of dealing with the dying process.[4]

The character and the author are the same age, with roots in Johannesburg and Philadelphia. Thandi lives in upmarket suburban Philadelphia; her parents fit a similar profile to Clemmons' parents, who also happen to be Black professionals. Clemmons' father is an engineer and her mother worked as a school teacher. Thandi's father is a maths college professor in the novel and her mother is a professional nurse. Thandi, like Clemmons, studied at an Ivy League University in the United States. Clemmons has an undergraduate degree from Brown University and a Masters in Fine Arts from Columbia University. While at Columbia, Clemmons launched an online magazine which highlighted identity issues, similar to Thandi's blog articles in the novel which follow a similar socio-political reporting style.

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[4] Clemmons mentions her mother's terminal illness and how she coped with the trauma as her primary caregiver in an interview with online magazine NPR published in 2017. https://n.pr/38fYfIA

James Baldwin and Teju Cole are two prominent predecessors to Clemmons in Black auto-fictional writing, whose work can be used as a point of departure in my discussion in this chapter. Baldwin's novel, *Go Tell it to the Mountain* (1953), is loosely based on his life and religious experiences as a young boy. Growing up, Baldwin, like his fictional protagonist, Johnny, had an abusive stepfather who used his power to suppress his identity. Baldwin uses a fictional character named John Grimes, a fourteen-year-old boy, to depict his own internal anguish.  The religious turmoil and shame suffered by the protagonist in his auto-fictional narration mirrors Baldwin's own earlier life.

Brent Nelson Lamons (2006) suggests that the novel exposes the past and how each of the characters interact with their individual histories. Baldwin uses fiction to exemplify his own past social experiences. The narrative is a way for Baldwin to tap into how he feels about particular topics, using the novel's protagonist as a go-between, similar to the way Clemmons uses her fictional character, Thandi. Clemmons taps into her most painful memories of her mother's death to address the trauma associated with grief and loss.

Baldwin maintains a certain degree of distance between himself and the novel's protagonist. Clemmons adopts a similar technique evident in naming  character Thandi; while using an introspective, first person writing style similar to Baldwin's to explore her experiences of confusions relating to racial, class, and national identity as well as the trauma of losing her mother.

Clemmons' stylistic choices also recall similar choices in Teju Cole's *Open City,* when she writes about cities in the United States and South Africa. Karen Ferreira-Meyers *et al* (2016) notes that authors writing about cities are prone to focus on specifics i.e. festivals, historic events, monuments or buildings. There are thematic shifts the reader must follow with no stated rationale. Cole's *Open City* correlates self and place prompted by traumatic memories. The protagonist, Julius, interprets history as displayed in the city through its people, based on their economic and cultural motives. The narrative disassociates from real life events, but Cole uses Julius' character in an auto-fictional mode that blurs genres within the narrative.

*Open City* marks the protagonist Julius as other because he is an immigrant in America and Europe, where he has spent some time. Both Cole and Julius leave Nigeria under unexplained circumstances to attend university in the States. The protagonist and Cole acquire a level of privilege which comes with attaining citizenship in America, providing them with opportunities to travel the city without any encumbrance, similar to Thandi and Clemmons.

Away from home, Julius feels a sense of un-belonging and estrangement when he is in Harlem. The narrative uses time lapses to place emphasis on the unknown and put into question missing elements in the narrative. Julius' memories of Nigeria are accessed through childhood memories. In her case, Clemmons accesses memories of South Africa as a college student in her writing in between grappling with feelings of un-belonging, with obvious time lapses from childhood to adulthood.

More positively, Clemmons is able to connect with the larger political story through her commentary in Thandi's fictional and the author's real-life blog narrations about South Africa. Clemmons' real-life blog posts are housed on her official website[5]. The essays are accompanied by interviews and short stories. The blog's latest posts include essays on reading Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, among others. Preceding essays are dated January 2017, with no articles for the rest of that year or in 2018, which could be a result of the release of her first novel during this period. Clemmons' blog essays such as "Young Black Writers: After Michael Brown" (2015), published on the *Literary Hub* e-zine and "Ta-Nehisi Coates Has Given #BlackLivesMatter its Foundational Text" (2015), also on the *Literary Hub,* speak to US race politics, whereas she uses true-life South African political events relating to apartheid and xenophobia in her auto-fictional novel.

Similarly, *Open City* uses Julius' subjective experiences to connect the individual to a larger historical narrative based on lived events. Auto-fictional writers use counterfactual history to distance self from the narrative, with the aim of manipulating the evidence, since auto-fictional narratives are based on alternative life narratives while also functioning as devices to blur the difference between fact and fiction. Experimental life writing evokes the concept of an alternative life. In this regard, "counterfactual history" is practised by novelists and historians to "dramatize certain hypotheses about history" using similar conventions to Clemmons and her predecessors (Franzen, 2019:9). This chapter reads Clemmons' auto-fictional account with keen focus on how the auto-fictional mode facilitates an exploration of a Black South African woman's experiences in exile as nomadic intellectuals.

[5] Zinzi Clemmons website http://www.zinziclemmons.com/about

**Form and Auto-fiction**

Auto-fiction is an opportunity for the narrator to self-create and explore other experiences "granting leverage (and distance) to critically reflect, and re-imagine" (McDonald, 2016:2). Multiple truths exist in the life of an auto-fictional writer, including the fulfilment of different functions such as a heightened state of reality, imaginings and hypothesis for meaning. Auto-fiction provides the opportunity for self-examination and reflection, divulging personal and political biases that exist covertly in the writer, although the political position may be overtly depicted in the writing.

Folasade Hunsu (2015) argues that women put fiction into use to tell their lived history and circumvent self-effacement because there is an opportunity to document experiences, express agency and confirm the authenticity of their stories. The relationship between authorial experiences and fiction is not concealed in these instances; instead, it provides a space for self-reflection under the guise of fiction. Black female-authored narratives therefore become validated through this process of authentication via a fictive imagination. European women do not suffer the same urgency as Black women writers, particularly those in exile, because they depict socio-political realities with characters that have been ordained with power to speak from the narrator's viewpoint. Black women have more to prove than their white counterparts because of historical minoring and effacement triggered by European and Black masculinities. White women have more proximity to power. Through auto-fiction, the Black woman narrator can use otherness to reveal personal turmoil and the ability to rise above the chaos in a way white female writers' cannot.

Jordan (2012) affirms that auto-fiction uses experimentation, rehearsal and adventure as modes of narrative expression. There is a process of self-situating and finding one's voice in a specific socio-cultural heritage. Auto-fiction is not written at the end of a life; rather, it focuses on fragments of life not necessarily in chronological order. The facts are true, the author uses bias to portray a self that is based on their reality without the restrictions of the autobiographical pact.

According to Shirley Fraser (2015) founding theorist of auto-fiction, Paul De Man's defacement strategy categorises the autobiography as a mode of reading rather than a genre. The author or writer of the autobiography absorbs his or her identity within the narrative, creating the opportunity for fiction to exist in the writing as a referent. Fraser goes on to

reflect on other theorists such as Sheringham, who understand auto-fiction to mean "a masquerade of the truth in which truth and falsity, authentic recollection and patent fantasy cease to exist" (2015:17). The product of this process is the emergence of an auto-fictional persona. The differentiating factor between the autobiographical persona and the auto-fictional persona occurs when the author transfers his or her identity to a fictionalised version of existence. Fraser's (2015) reference of Phillipe Lejueune's auto-fictional pact between author and reader unfolds when the character is established as possessing a similar name to the author.

Serge Doubrovsky's theoretical contribution to the art of auto-fiction is referenced often in the study of auto-fiction. Doubrovsky's *Fils* places counter emphasis on Lejuene's *Le pact autobiographique* (autobiographical pact), particularly the categorisation method of auto-fiction and autobiography. For Doubrovsky, auto-fiction is grounded on the author using real life events to tell a story based on fragmented facts and referential aspects re-organised to suit a fictional story. The Doubrovsky approach provides the writer with a wide expanse to write about any stage of life; their work does not discount the text's ability to be created, renowned or restored from various episodes of the author's life, debunking the myth of writing in chronological order (cited in Fraser, 2015).

According to this theory, narrative can be amended and fragmented. The challenge with this type of writing however is that the reader may not be able to follow the storyline of the writer because the text is disruptive and disjointed. Fraser argues in favour of auto-fiction as a "chronological disruption as well as fragmentation to create destabilising texts within an already unstable genre," including multi-media text and through the use of language (2015:20). The truth is based on the author's subjective intellection rather than factual truth. Doubrovsky's pact resonates with the idea of a fluid truth separate from impartial facts also referred to as the "state of ambiguity [at the] intersection of referential and fictional pacts" (Fraser, 2015:20).

Fraser (2015) also references Vincent Colonna's definition of auto-fiction which divides auto-fiction into four categories: fantastical auto-fiction, biographical auto-fiction, mirror image auto-fiction and authorial auto-fiction. Colonna's definition differs from Lejuene's and Doubrovsky's characterisation because the narrative is not over-reliant on the main character or protagonist for it to be considered auto-fiction. For example, mirror image auto-fiction relies on a reflection of the author's personality, whereas authorial auto-fiction is assembled

on third person narrative. Mirror image auto-fiction is a valuable mechanism providing assurances for self-revelation during the writing process. The authorial form does not require the presence of the protagonist but instead works on the influences of the narrator within the text. A critical component in the auto-fictional process is the reader. It is vital for the reading audience to understand the two modes of narration — both autobiographical and fictional — when they approach the work.

Therefore, both the auto in auto-fiction and the concept of a truth pact in autobiography assume the reliability of the author's construction of their personal histories. Given that this construction requires the use of memory, it is inherently subjective. Memory gives a differing prominence to events based on their emotional impact on the individual; and the person has a choice on what to remember and what to forget (Lake, 2019:12). Auto-fiction differs from autobiography because it offers memory as fragmented and the discrepancies are exposed in the nuances delivered by the narrator. Through the art of surrealism, auto-fiction connects unlikely components using truth and realism to merge fiction and autobiography. Theorist Roland Barthes suggests that "a modern writer is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing" (cited in Lake, 2019:14).

The distinction between an autobiographical novel and auto-fiction is further distilled by Fraser as separate entities that use "para-textual indicators as distinguishing markers but differ in the use of the type of pact (fictional or autobiographical)" (2015:27). For auto-fiction to work, there must be doubt in the text. Judith Butler's concept of performativity contributes to the doubt because each auto-fictional act is sustained through repetition, whether oral or written. Therefore auto-fiction should be read as the text's ability to perform the auto-fictional persona and "a place of non-conformity" (Fraser, 2015:40). Auto-fiction is a phenomenon of learned fabrication.

Auto-fiction uses double motifs to induce formal symbolism of the author. Through the power of invention, the writer is able to connect with the reader by using historical or geographical facts in the story to confirm the fictional nature of the story. The effect of this type of fictional writing is that it creates the impression that storytellers are not simply repositories of objective truths, but there exist fragmented perceptions of self, based on the memory of the past which they may not have been directly experienced (Ferreira-Meyer,

2016:32). The auto-fictional accounts are able to endure the fictional effect only if the reader buys into the storyline.

According to Cecilia Hunt (2000), auto-fictional writing draws on personal memories and life experiences without venturing too far from authentic lived experiences. Authors in auto-fictional genres write either about themselves or opt to create characters close to real people they know, using latent emotions to invoke specific places or times in their lives. Authors of auto-fictional narratives write about themselves in different ways, usually placing themselves as narrators in fantasy or historical moments or dramatized events relayed through dialogue or plot based on the themes expressed in their writing. Black women writers use auto-fiction to induce the "feeling and tone in their writing from the surface to felt interior" (Hunt, 2000:19). The imagination triggers the narrative in its quest to capture the truth of the past. Black women use their auto-fictional writings to rearrange real people into fiction with emotional depth.

Sally Denshire (2016) considers auto-ethnography to be a theory with close ties to auto-fiction because of the use of alternative methods and forms of writing. There exists a complex relationship between true or social science and the imagined narrative. Much like auto-fiction, the process of delivering auto-ethnographic accounts is anchored in the experience of the writer. The endeavour of scripting both self and others is part of the larger story, and the genre remains a contentious and contested area of study. Auto-ethnography contains elements of auto-fiction because the writing of self is depersonalised and the inscription takes social and cultural consideration in the writing process. The fusion of self and culture are duplicated in auto-fictional writing in depersonalised and disembodied methods.

Self is therefore presented as decentred and destabilized. Denshire (2016) calls this genre a fictive tradition because the writing is in third person to create distance and room for the development of a fictional storyline based on the memory of lived experience. Supressed painful memories usually find an outlet in this category of writing. In addition to memory suppression, there is post-memory distinguished by a generational distance connection. The second generational memory involves events centring historical developments or memories centring the author's parents' past experience based on half understood fragments of reality known as versionality. The process of versionality is the discord between fact and fiction repeated in the narrative, leading to a fictionalization intent on exposing the author's true emotions about memories of events. Fictional memory may reference the present or the desire

to remember, and through this process, the writer confronts fears fixed of remembering. There is no distinction between the real and imagined memories (Denshire, 2016).

For scholars such as Hunt (2000), auto-fictional narratives can be understood as life maps designed for the purpose of identifying themes from the writer's life, while emphasizing significant moments in time such as early childhood memories, marriage, school or divorce. Elsewhere, feminist theorist Helene Cixous articulates the disposition of self which makes the possession of another character possible (cited in Hunt, 2000). There is an essential temporary loss of self that must occur to expose the chaos that exist within the inner self of the writer. Hunt (2000:41) refers to Bollas' 'subject objects' where the locale of the 'true self' has not been thought of.

Turning to *What We Lose* then, it is evident some of Clemmons' auto-fictional events are based on real life experiences. Throughout the narrative, she attempts to highlight racism, crime rates, xenophobia, and rape culture in South Africa. As the author, Clemmons uses a fictionalised persona and fictional imagination to tell her life story. She starts by setting the scene of her fictional character's middle-class life in Philadelphia, which is contrasted with Johannesburg, where her family owns a posh vacation home in one of the city's upmarket suburbs. The holiday home has a full-time domestic worker tending to household chores and the family's needs. The disparity of the very rich and poor is expressively illustrated in the novel: "tin roofs of the township clustered closely together," not far from Thandi's neighbour's mansion (Clemmons, 2017:18). The protagonist's family lives in a Sandton suburb, a place where houses are heavily guarded with the best security money can buy in post-apartheid South Africa. The city's poorest township is situated not far from Thandi's upper-middle-class home, displaying the country's disparity between the haves and the have-nots.

Clemmons uses an anecdote on gun violence to demonstrate the extent of crime and violence in South Africa. One of her references drawn from historical events, is celebrity sportsman Oscar Pistorius, born and raised not far from Thandi's vacation home. The inclusion of the story of Pistorius' conviction for the murder of his then girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp in a globally publicised case, draws connections between guns and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa. Thandi's family members are presented as sharing Pistorius' reported paranoia; as her "most hot-headed cousin sleeps with a loaded pistol under his pillow," demonstrating the manner in which real-life mirrors the fictional world (Clemmons, 2017:19). The story

transitions and weaves between known historical events infused with fictionalised versions of the narrative to form part of Thandi's worldview. It's a constant migration from the political to personal; a pattern the novel follows to the end.

The entire auto-fictional novel is premised on this type of ambiguity. The evidence in the narrative boldly shifts from real to altered states of reality for the purposes of the storyline. Thandi's mother, similar to the author's mother, is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Thandi expresses her mother's feelings of guilt regarding her access to premier healthcare which neither her peers nor her family members would be able to afford. The privilege that comes with a middle-class lifestyle is something Thandi and her parents are aware of, but are never comfortable discussing with each other, even in the privacy of their own space. Thandi's affluent status occupies a prominent place in both the narrator's and the author's consciousness. Black women autobiographers in exile use the chronicles of their lives to situate the personal within the larger political milieu to articulate their own subjective truths and the impact thereof, generationally.

Thandi is a reflective character based on Clemmons' personality. The resemblance between the two is extraordinarily fused in the storyline. Thandi's choice to drop her academic responsibilities for a semester to become the primary caregiver to her terminally ill mother is not far removed from Clemmons' own choices to start writing her auto-fictional novel as a means of distracting herself from the pain of nursing her sick mother; while navigating the dying process exposes the depth of connectedness between the author and protagonist. Clemmons' writing details the day-to-day care activities Thandi finds herself involved in when looking after her mother. The writing moves from mundane activities such as responding to emails from health insurance companies and, restocking the fridge with healthier foods, to family members and friends bringing casseroles for dinner and other anecdotes of death Thandi shares about her mother.

**Photographs, Blogs, Diary entries and Graphics as Auto-fictional Repertoires**

Ferreira-Meyers *et al* (2016) refer to other scholarly revisions of Colonna on auto-fiction as a progression to self-fictionalisation, where the author fantasizes about their own life using illusory characters conceptualised from the imagination. The transition into a literary imagination by the author provides an outlet for the building of a character not far removed

from reality, which should be read in the first person. According to Ferreira-Meyers *et al* (2016), the auto-fictional flow embraces fantasies, illusions, aspirations and cultural imagery like photography, as an inherent part of the narrative. Photographs play an important role in shifting the mood of a text. Phototextual practices are increasingly popular in auto-fictional writing. Denise McDonald (2016) suggests that fictionalizing a particular life story de-mythicizes experiences and provides renewed modes of reflection, enhancing the author's consciousness.

Pictures represent an enduring memory used as an objective narrator. Other techniques used in auto-fiction include dialogue as a way of re-experiencing the past or specific moments in time based on a particular version of the truth, through methods such as voice, language and triple distancing – where the first person becomes the narrator of the story, providing the author with an opportunity to further explore different perspectives of self. This writing style affords the author the opportunity to tell their story from a preferred perspective within a focused identity.

Photographs are not considered fictional artefacts when studied in their original form. However, when the author manipulates photographs for the purpose of assigning a particular story to an image, they can be considered fictional, because a picture is staged for a specific function such as creating a mood to reflect a particular reality (Hunt, 2000). As Ferreira-Meyers *et al* notes, "photographs are not very adept at being fictional because of their built-in feeling of accuracy, and because their tendency to represent is usually described in terms of the truth versus lie rather than fact versus fiction" (Ferreira-Meyers *et al* 2016:3).

What is important to note is that photographs and graphs cannot be referenced as objective truth because the author uses images to convey a particular agenda in the narrative. The "inherent truthfulness of photographs," is a contested area of debate because of the artificial dimension that comes with the editing of images now popularised by photographic culture. The digital enhancement of photographs is used to "allegorize the past" contrived from a process known as "light writing", where the author is able to disclose or disguise self through the photographic narrative (Ferreira-Meyer *et al* 2016:15). Clemmons does not use pictures of herself, but politicised imagery to make the fluid pathway from fiction to fact obvious and draw attention to the fragmentation of Thandi's storyline.

Clemmons' use of photographic imagery in her auto-fictional documentary gives a specific tone and mood to her writings. The decision to use highly political South African imagery in

the early pages of the auto-fictional novel is deliberate. All the pictures woven into the story are depicted in black and white; and they all feature recognisable visual portraits with local and global significance. This is one of the ways Clemmons connects her characters to significant historical and political moments in time. The novel begins with six black and white images followed by an additional six graphics and charts in the later chapters. Clemmons uses graphics, charts and photographs to supplement the narration of Thandi's grief following her mother's death. The mathematical equations signal Thandi's personal reflection whereas the political and pop culture imagery are used to tell globally legible stories of Black women. In this way, the personal narrative is plugged into recognisable collective dynamics and their accompanying implications.

The image of township protest action at the height of xenophobic attacks in 2008 registers the violence and tension in South Africa directed at African foreign nationals. This image appears in one of Thandi's written pieces "Some Observations on Race and Security in South Africa, continued" (Clemmons, 2017: 24). The preceding picture is an iconic photograph taken by Pulitzer Prize winner Kevin Carter in the early nineties of an emaciated Sudanese child stalked by a vulture. Clemmons draws on the South African political context by referencing Carter's best friend Ken Oosterbrook who was killed during the Thokoza massacre in 1994, days after Carter won the Pulitzer; to reflect on issues of race, violence, identity and their transnational reverberations.

Maarit Leskela-Karaki (2008:329) asserts that letters, or in this case hip hop lyrics and diary entries, should also be incorporated in the review of auto-fictional writing: "Letters form a particular space where someone recognizes themselves as narratable and they also become narrated in particular ways. Letters or diary entries are dialogical in their nature, and this dialogue shows the inevitable relatedness of identity." The process of letter writing allows the narrator to understand their life story from the perspective of others because of the continuing relationship between the author and the reading public.

Letters offer multiple avenues for interpreting identity; they tell us about the past. They also provide an opportunity for the author to expose aspects of their self to their audience in a preferred manner. According to Leskela-Karaki (2008) letters are textual aisles used to examine how writers perceive themselves and how they want to be perceived. They make the connection between time, history and self, because the narrator is able to enact self within their own writing through what is imagined and unimaginable. Narrating self provides the

other in an auto-fiction, assisting the author to examine their own narratability from new, unexplored, viewpoints.

*The Guardian* (2017) describes Clemmons' experimental writing as an entry way into a form of stream of consciousness. The reader is transported into Clemmons' most personal thoughts as though they were reading the author's personal diary or private letters to self. Clemmons explains in the article how she was intrigued by the index card method which she used to plot and place ideas in certain parts of the story, using creative spontaneity to tell her story. Clemmons' professional background as a writer and publisher of short stories heavily influences her writing style. She uses letters to explain Thandi's most complex emotions with a common pattern of short succinct paragraphs or one-liners. The use of letter writing in *What We Lose* breaks Thandi's story into compartments, creating a distinction between the blog, political reflections and personal meditations. The letters provide access to Thandi's interiority, allowing the reader access to what would otherwise be hidden. It could also be inferred from the letter-writing technique that Clemmons is able to distance herself from her own emotions, clearly displaying the use of Black female auto-fictional writing as an implement for exilic reflection and migrancy.

Teresa Pepe (2019) postulates that the digitisation of media has created new avenues and repositories for autobiographies to exist. Auto-fictional blogs fuse reality with literary influences for the purposes of connecting the public with the private to the point where they are indistinguishable. Blogs are considered emergent narrative forms. Blogging has contributed to the formation of "counterpublics, forums for alternative literary genres" (Pepe, 2019:75). The emergence of the blogosphere is the result of experimentation of blogging and categorisation as a sub-genre known as auto-fictional blog.

Clemmons uses this style of auto-fictional writing in her blog because it provides a level of creative freedom since they exclude gatekeepers such editors, publishers and critics. Auto-fictional blogs thrive on interactivity, the blurring of the main character, the gambit of multimedia and stylistic features. Internet diaries of this nature make intimate confessional writing accessible to mass readers with the benefit of two-way exchange in the form of feedback from the readers. Authors of digital auto-fiction have ownership and direct control over their work, unlike their counterparts writing within the conventional publisher's framework. The content of the blog is, by its very nature, more interactive, which transforms into a collaborative effort based on the exchange between the reader and the author. Bloggers

also fictionalize their identities by using pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms works to "actualise some of the psychological traits the writer cannot express anywhere else" (Pepe, 2019:80).

Auto-fictional blogs rely on multimedia and sensorial practices to elicit emotion as a form of assurance to the reader that certain historical periods are marked in time and did in fact occur. Clemmons' protagonist uses multiple blog entries to speak on her politics. One of the most prominent blog editions in the auto-fictional novel include, *"Some Observations on Race and Security in South Africa* January 6, 2016 by Mats Utas, a visitor to Durban from the Nordic Africa Institute," which details the escalating crime rate in South Africa and the disparity in crime levels experienced by Black foreign nationals and Indian South Africans. The author explains how an Indian taxi driver interviewee exaggerates his experiences of crime in the city, after only one robbery, compared to the violence experienced by his Nigerian counterparts daily. The use of this anecdote further illustrates the disparities between Black Africans and people of colour; and the varying but immense violence foreign nationals are forced to endure in South Africa. The author's observations of distrust between people of colour, particularly Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans and their interactions with foreigners in their homeland are prominently documented in the novel. Clemmons uses the auto-fictional blog based on real life events to break from the fictive world to detail race relations, socio-political affairs and the personal in varying intensities.

Serena Guarracino's (2014) study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's blog writing style in her novel, *Americanah,* notes a number of thematic and stylistic choices that are equally resonant with in Clemmons' auto-fictional text. The protagonist, Ifemelu uses the blog as a means of flashing forward or backward in the storytelling process. The blog essays are typically followed by "years later" to create a break in the chronology of the story, while offering a double view of the character's life where the reader can see the protagonist in various contexts. The research offered by Guarracino (2014) suggests that literary blogs can conceal and expose certain things about character. The writer is considered to be fulfilling a double role because bloggers are usually more anonymous in comparison to published authors, yet are able to compile content examining their own personal experiences. These are all practical elements present in Ifemelu's and even Thandi's blogging style. The blog posts are presented typographically in both novels. Ifemelu experiments with unmarked chronological entries of

her blog towards the end of the novel. The decision to make certain entries obvious and others less so is a creative choice used to depict the character's instances of self-realization.

All of the pictures in Clemmons' auto-fiction follow a similar pattern of black and white imagery centred on one page, usually complemented by a blog post with a headline in the next page, although not all the blog articles are titled. Clemmons uses an image of a white Hollywood actress paired with the quote, "I see you looking at me. I know how you see me" (Clemmons, 2017:33). The placement of this particular image is an attempt by the author to raise Thandi's discomfort with the prejudices she agonises over as a light-skinned woman. The choice of a photograph of a white woman to convey Thandi's message of distress and feelings of un-belonging indexes the white gaze on Black women's bodies in exile. Black women are subject to constant evaluation and monitoring of how their hair and skin looks, to accommodate whiteness at home and in foreign lands.

Additionally, Winnie Madikizela Mandela takes up a significant portion of the blog section of the auto-fictional novel. Clemmons' real-life mother named her Zinzi after Madikizela Mandela's eldest daughter. The author describes Madikizela Mandela as 'The Mother of Nation' as she is affectionately known by South Africans. Madikizela Mandela is described as closely resembling her own mother:

> She could appear stern sometimes, as my mother could – no nonsense, the kind of woman you wouldn't want to encounter after sneaking home past curfew. But the dissonance between what she represented to the country (her nickname 'Mother of the Nation') and what she is alleged to have done is almost impossible to reconcile (Clemmons, 2017:136).

There is an unspoken kinship between the author and Madikizela Mandela. Clemmons seems at odds in her writing as she attempts to reconcile the charges of murder and disparaging allegations directed at her heroine. Although she does not outrightly clear Madikizela Mandela of the allegations of the murder of Stompie Seipei who belonged to the Mandela Football Club (which she created in the eighties), Clemmons allows the reader to draw their own conclusions. Her efforts to defend Madikizela Mandela's legacy are clear in the considerable analysis and significantly extended reporting dedicated to the blog entry on Madikizela Mandela, in comparison to the other entries.

Graphics and mathematical calculations are key forms of imagery Clemmons uses to illustrate Thandi's grief after the death of her mother. These infographics delineate Thandi's depression and grief. The drawing of Thandi's emotions assists the author and narrator to organise and categorise emotions in a manner that is easily compartmentalised and structured. The author places major emphasis on the spikes and declines in Thandi's grief chart, detailing the range and depth of the protagonist's emotive disposition. Clemmons writes that "at the point of her death, the line circles inwards to itself to infinity, disappearing into infinite fractions. It was so beyond comprehension and feeling that it wasn't able to be captured on a plane of "hurt" or "sadness," or any single emotion (Clemmons, 2017: 112).

Thandi's grief is further aggravated by the fact that her mother is in exile without any extended family to offer her support except her daughter and husband. Her mother's desperate pleas to return home to South Africa during her last days of her terminal illness cannot be fulfilled because her illness has locked her body in physically, producing a symbolic form of exile that has rendered her immobile and unable to return home. Clemmons uses Thandi's story to depict illness as a form of exile. Thandi is also exiled by her mother's illness and becomes aware of a new kind of homelessness during her mother's dying process and after her passing.

Thandi uses her drawings to portray moments of grief and helplessness. Pictures in the auto-fictional novel support and influence the mood of the text and contribute to numerous ways of interpreting the narrative. Through a combination of multimedia texts, the audience can read the text through a "multi-sensorial experience" (Pepe, 2019:80).

Throughout the narrative, Clemmons laments the dying process of exiled bodies in foreign lands. She uses her writing to emphasize the importance of returning home for Black women living in exile. Home is a representation of rest and safety. Thandi's mother's insistence on seeing her father in her last days signals the dislocation of home referenced in Nomvete and Msimang's writing, discussed in the preceding chapters. Thandi is bonded to a home in South Africa by her mother. Although Clemmons' character understands the importance of returning home, Thandi is aware that it is neither physically or emotionally possible for her mother to go to South Africa. Thandi lies to her dying mother, promising to take her home, knowing she will most likely never see her family in South Africa again and will die in a foreign land, exiled by her illness.

**Writing Awkwardly about Race**

Clemmons uses auto-fiction to tell her uniquely Black female story about race in exile. Her decision to construct a fictional persona with similar character traits and life experiences as herself is a common auto-fictional trait used by Black women to write about tremendously haunting life events. Fiction offers distance from real-life events. Clemmons uses Thandi, a fictionalised version of self to tell a specific story about Black a woman who is unable to fit in at home or in exile.

Clemmons, much like other Black women writers, is unwilling to abandon her African identity and dissociate from her South African heritage, even though she is deeply patriotic to her American roots. Traditionally, Black men have always centred their manhood when speaking of race. Black women in contrast perform an oppositional stance in relation to race, gender, sexuality and class. Black female identity constantly finds itself at odds with Black identity; either ignored, silenced, or erased. Clemmons uses her auto-fictional voice anchored in a female identity to redress negative stereotypes not just with regard to her own personal experiences of womanhood but also the experiences of those who have influenced her, and dared her to pursue her own place in the world despite racial bias.

Black women calibrate their personal values according to social norms of the group. The autobiographical process is a creative outlet used by Black women to survey personal values, beliefs and norms. It is commonplace for a writer to use a self-verification method to interpret personal identity. Based on this viewpoint, we are able to locate the individual psyche as the starting point of grasping the effects of institutionalized racism on Black women, more especially those in exile. Protest writing of this nature by Black feminists stems from the lack of representation of marginalised interests, overshadowed by universal feminist agenda constructed from a narrow white viewpoint. At some point in global feminist discourse, white women dominated feminist public discourse, despite their limited understanding of how Black women are affected by the combination of race, class and sexism.

The theorization of Black self-hatred, as defined by bell hooks in her book *Black Looks, Race and Representation* (1992), starts by critiquing whiteness as a supremacist ideology, invested in false depictions of Blackness as dangerous, un-loveable and intimidating. James Cone is one of the Black scholars bell hooks references in her critical evaluation of whiteness. hooks endorses Cone's conviction that an end to racism is a possibility only when all races choose to love and value Blackness. In his first academic contribution, *Black Theology of Liberation*

(1970), Cone admonishes whiteness as complicit in human despair: “White people have learned to over-value whiteness and devalue blackness…central to this process of unlearning white supremacist attitudes and values, is the deconstruction of the category of whiteness” (Cone cited in hooks, 1992:13).

According to Barbara Boswell (2017) Black women’s writing exists outside the bounds of an identity marred by marginality and exclusion. Black female subjectivities must be read beyond the imperialist geographical locations and must be seen as migratory subjectivities; a view that builds on Caribbean scholar Carole-Boyce Davis’s work. Boswell (2017) proposes the activation of Blackness as a response to marginalised, overdetermined and stereotypical representation. Critical race theory functions as a response to the stereotypical representation of Black men and women. According to critical race theorists, racism damages the psyche of Black people, perpetuating fear, trepidation, and hopelessness. Black women writers are therefore compelled to produce a model of self in dissociation of whiteness (Bassey, 2016). A design of new identity becomes uniquely necessary for Black personhood. Structural and personal racism experienced by Black people cannot be disconnected; and these reflections are glaringly evident in the auto-fictional writings of Clemmons, who is deliberately performing anti-racist reversal in her writing.

The autobiographical works of Black women in exile create sites able to withstand confrontational Black radical movements. Autobiography is one of the ways for Black women to affirm and uplift each other without limiting themes to essentialist notions targeted at policing Black womanhood: “More than any genre of writing, the production of honest confessional narratives by black women who are struggling to be self-actualized and to become radical subjects are needed as guides, texts that affirm our fellowship with one another” (hooks, 1992:59). Critical consciousness has enabled oppressed Black people to contest racist ideologies. Where feminine devaluation maintains oppressive classification, Black women use their individual experiences to activate communal identity (Bassey, 2016). In this way Black women learn from each other by sharing vulnerabilities expressed in their life writing, displaying the contradictions and the dualities that make up real life experiences.

Within a South African context, Black South African writers offer dense, complicated and ambiguous identities in their writing. Lynda Spencer’s (2009) commentary on Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007), stages new ways of recognising self-identity in reference to global whiteness as an aspirational identity. Spencer’s reading of the novel interrogates social

conditioning imposed on Black South African women. Clemmons, Msimang and Nomvete all showcase similar experiences in their autobiographical accounts of moments in time where they were miss-named and classified as "coconuts".

Black female bodies are heavily sexualised, gendered and even coloured. Exiled bodies coded Black are immersed in stereotyping, trauma and othering. Black women occupying white spaces, like Thandi, are viewed as problematic because Blackness as a social construct is perceived in opposition to whiteness. For example, Thandi's mother is of a darker complexion and perpetuates the stereotype of fairer skin as superior to darker skin tones, going as far as discouraging Thandi from making friends with dark-skinned girls.

Although Thandi classifies herself as a Black American woman, she is uncomfortable with labelling herself as a Black South African because of the unrelenting apartheid classifications that stigmatise Blackness. The author never references Thandi as Coloured, but her family does within the narration of the story. The protagonist's family does not want to accept an identity affiliated with Blackness. Clemmons outlines a sense of racial superiority and devaluation of Black South Africans by Thandi' s extended family — who identify as Coloured — in contrast to the reverence displayed by her South African relations, for Black American culture:

> To my cousins and me, American blacks were the epitome of American cool. Blacks were the stars of rap videos, big name comedians and actors with their own television shows and world tours…We worshipped them, and my cousins especially, looked to the freedom that these stars represented as aspirational. It was a freedom synonymous with democracy, with political freedom – with America itself. It was rarefied. Powerful. But when I called myself black, my cousins looked at me askance…calling myself black was wrong to them (Clemmons, 2017:26).

Thandi is almost doubtful of the fact that she is Black. She does not know where she fits, because she is not confident that she is Black enough to be accepted as either American or South African. Her racial identity issues can be tied to her mother, who is dark-skinned while her father is light-skinned. Thandi's mother's comment about race demonstrates her prejudice against dark-skinned girls as a dark-skinned woman; an internalised self-loathing possibly linked to an apartheid upbringing. A similar racial prejudice is evident among Thandi's cousins. The exchanges that Thandi has with her cousins reveal that Black South Africans are

viewed as backward and non-progressive, whereas African Americans are admired, seen as cultured and aspirational templates.

Black Americans are perceived as cool, but Black South Africans are seen as ordinary and violent, a racial group her family actively dissociates from. Thandi's family sees themselves as better than Black South Africans because they are Coloured. In addition, Thandi's class status further prevents social proximity to Blackness. Black South Africans represent poverty.

Paradoxically, Thandi's parents place major emphasis on Black solidarity when they themselves have enormous racial bias. Their idealism of a racial utopia anchored in Black unity but devoid of any real everyday practice is contradictory. Textually, the novel does not interrogate Thandi's father's stance on race but focuses on the maternal figure. The reason for this could be because her mother's influence is paired with the inconsistency of her own beliefs, which she actively attempts to pass down, despite resistance from her daughter. Clemmons uses her story to demonstrate how Black women in exile are constantly warring racial stereotypes and systems across generations.

Thandi is conflicted; there is a clear dissonance between how she perceives herself, how her parents raised her and how her extended family classify her racially. In exile, she is raised on her parents' ideals which they failed to implement because of their own prejudice, creating a disconnect between how she sees herself and how the world interacts with her.

Clemmons admits to taking a passive approach to South African race politics, because, until she wrote her novel, she always saw herself as a visitor and has never had to experience racial prejudice in the country. Unlike her husband who lived and worked in South Africa as a poet and translator for some time, she has never been an active citizen that lives and works in South Africa. Writing the novel was an opportunity to interrogate her beliefs.

During her book tour in South Africa, Clemmons reflects on seeing herself as an outsider and also as an American. She speaks of a certain weight that comes with visiting the country as an author. As a young child coming to South Africa, she always had familial ties to the country. Going home was about visiting her grandmother's house, seeing her aunts and uncles; but as a writer, she is viewing the country with a newfound outlook which she bears much responsibility. [6] She concedes that there is a significant amount of anti-Blackness in Coloured culture, which is rooted in apartheid doctrine. According to Clemmons, Coloured culture is

[6] Interview with online magazine JRB Editor 2017

flawed in certain instances because there is a belief and enactment of a superiority complex. Clemmons calls for the disentanglement of colonial influence and more collaboration with Black people as a solution to the existing division between the two races. [7]

These meditations are repeated in Clemmons' novel when Thandi's American friends other her on numerous occasions, because they do not consider her a "real Black," owing to her fair complexion and middle-class status, which exceed their stereotype of what Blackness looks like. In high school, Thandi's white friends claim she is not really a Black person because of her fair skin. The first time it happens, she is stunned and ashamed, and unable to respond or defend her identity. The author further amplifies racial tensions experienced by Thandi when one of her white college friends brands her an affirmative action baby in an attempt to devalue her Black South African identity and minimise her individual accomplishments and those of her family to tokenism:

> I often thought being a light skinned Black woman is like being a well-dressed person who is homeless. You may be able to pass in mainstream society, appearing acceptable to others, even desired. But in reality, you have nowhere to rest, nowhere to feel safe. (Clemmons, 2007:31).

The hostility Thandi experiences exacerbates her desire to belong and to be accepted as Black. The author uses Thandi's mother's insecurities to further complicate the plot through the projection of her own insecurities as a dark-skinned woman. Thandi questions why her mother believes she will not be able to make real lasting friendships with dark-skinned women. Clemmons portrays an unspoken discord between mother and daughter in Thandi's reflective thoughts. Clemmons writes of the uncomfortable stares experienced by Thandi and her mother from white women attempting to decode their relationship, to establish whether they are mother and daughter or whether her mother is the hired help. Thandi's mother has a major influence on her selection of friends. Clemmons shows how Thandi works passionately to have and maintain relationships with dark-skinned women to prove her mother wrong. Aminah, Thandi's best friend from elementary school fits the profile, she has "clear mahogany skin" (Clemmons, 2017:34). Thandi remembers Aminah as one of the prettiest girls in school, well put-together and dating one of the hottest white guys in school.

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Clemmons reflections on South Africa's race relations are taken from her interview with Jennifer Malec for *The Johannesburg Review of Books* published in 2018, https://bit.ly/2WwhdI9

Thandi's mother does not only disapprove of her friends but considers her hair a contentious subject. Thandi's hair had to be chemically straightened from the age of 5; her mother "explicitly and implicitly implied that straight hair was beautiful and the kind that she and I were born with was – kinky, curly that grew out instead of down – was ugly" (Clemmons, 2017:37). Clemmons' narration details the character's hunger for her mother's approval. She complies with the instruction to straighten her hair. Knowing she would have her mother's endorsement, Thandi would endure the pain of visiting the hairdresser and returning home with a burning scalp. Her perception of style and glamour is intrinsically built on her mother's westernised standards of beauty.

The protagonist's high school boyfriend is also described as having "smooth brown skin;" he made her mother happy and almost completed all of Thandi' s inadequacies (Clemmons, 2017:39). When Thandi breaks it off with Jerome, she is afraid to tell her mother the truth and lies by omission to appease her parents. Clemmons exposes Thandi's need for her mother's approval and demonstrates her influence on how she perceives her Blackness. Thandi's mother wants her daughter to be Black and proud of her roots but not too Black to the point where she appears unkempt with wild hair or socialises with the 'wrong' crowd. There is a balance that Thandi is expected to maintain which keeps her an outsider even in her own family.

In college, Thandi befriends a classmate by the name of Devonne, who "wore her hair in neat dreads" (Clemmons, 2017:42). Devonne is outspoken, recites poetry and possesses all the qualities that Thandi aspires to attain. Their friendship intensifies in its early stages, with the two spending all their free time together. It however comes to an abrupt end over a male interest. The college guys seem to show more attention to Thandi. Devonne decides to sleep with one of the men that showed interest in Thandi out of spite; confirming Thandi's mother's warning not trust or befriend dark-skinned girls because of their ill-intent. Thandi's skin colour is a fundamental and recurring theme influencing all of her relationships, how she perceives the world and how she inhabits certain spaces. Thandi continues dating Black men but ultimately marries a white American man, explaining: "he is interested in my background, in love with my skin but not too in love" (Clemmons, 2017:51), which can be interpreted as her being seen for more than her race.

In conclusion, the auto-fictional genre relies on literary inventions to tell stories of real people. Clemmons' writing praxis confirms that the fictional characters never fully become

fictions because of the reader's awareness of who the author is in real life. Franzen's (2019:6) "pseudo-real elements" are comprehensively detailed in Clemmons' story through Thandi's display of truthfulness in the storyline, with gradual departures into the world of make-believe. Clemmons demonstrates her ability to self-create using a fragmented approach to recover the most poignant moments in her life. Phototextual practices in the auto-fictional novel also provide a way to re-experience historical moments. Clemmons uses graphics as a supplementary mode of enacting self in ways that may not be possible textually. The reflections of this chapter also express how Black women write about race and exile across two generations. Marginality and exclusion are common tropes in Black women's writings, and Clemmons' is no different. Thandi is able to comment on the cultural values and societal norms experienced by Black women in exile. The fictional character allows the author distance to interrogate pre-existing stereotypes aimed at debasing Black women in exile within a fantastical context across two generations, thus giving voice to what was once a minored group.

# Conclusion

This study set out to offer a reading of three Black South African women's autobiographical reflections on exile, across three different generational timelines as representing three different generations of Black South African women. Through a reading of Pamela Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum*, Sisonke Msimang's *Always Another Country: A Memoir of Home and Exile*, and Zinzi Clemmons' *What We Lose*, the study explored the three women's reflections on their experiences of exilic displacement, return, and the ongoing complexities of Black belonging in South Africa. What we have seen in the analysis of texts in this research is how autofiction and autobiographical narratives of Black South African exiles blend their personal narratives with the collective and political narratives of the nation. Black women's autobiographical writing and autofiction exhibits the reflective nature of exilic life writings. Interestingly, the use of autofiction as a fictive feature in such projects of self-reflection displays the interconnectedness between the lived experience and fictitious bearings navigated by the author.

The autobiography and the auto-fictional memoir offers Black women an opportunity to write about the ordinary from a factual or fictive standpoint. It is intent on correcting stereotypes, educating the reading public and meditative on the re-imagination of Black life. The study found that the autobiographical mode does not confine women's narrations to the private nor does it render the stories of Black women in exile as minoritized. Instead, Black women, who tend to be minoritized in nationalist projects broadly, and even more so in the anti-apartheid movement in exile, take authority over the narration of their experiences; and govern their own cultural production. Therefore, the three texts by Nomvete, Msimang and Clemmons can be read as countering the textual erasure and marginalization of Black South African women's experiences of exile.

The preceding analysis in this study points to Nomvete's *Dancing to the Beat of the Drum*, Msimang's *Always Another Country: A Memoir of Home and Exile* and Clemmons' *What We Lose* as personal narratives that grapple with questions of collective interest, through their exploration of gendered representations of Black women's interactions with the categories of race, politics and the nation, with underlying textual iterations of spiritual and physical dislocation. The respective insights into these universal themes uncovers recurring tropes that emerge from the authors' self-discovery, through the use of retrospective or fictive

techniques in retelling childhood memories, college relationships, professional and familial connections.

**Loss, spirituality and belonging**

Displacement was a pivotal component of this study, demonstrating the significant extent of physical, cultural and spiritual dislocation in Black South African exile life writings. The use of the autobiography as a healing device cannot be underestimated. The path to self-discovery for the author is closely linked to the production of narrative strands connected to abandonment, loss, disillusionment and the impossibility of full reintegration upon return. Nomvete and Msimang's autobiographies describe a nostalgic idealism that was brutally crushed when their idealized portraits of home turned out to be non-existent, upon their return. They would return to a home that was not necessarily waiting for them the same way they were waiting for it.

Issues of personal identity are also prominent in the three texts discussed. The "doubleness of identities and doubleness of writing styles" (Li, 2007:267) is a common thread that weaves across all three texts. The state of homelessness in Nomvete's instance is exacerbated by a longing for an identity affixed to a home that is stripped by exile and is neither accessible physically nor through learning about it from afar. Nomvete's meditations demonstrate her discomfort with calling herself South African owing to her almost alien status in her own homeland, because she has never visited the country and is unable to speak any of the indigenous languages. Clemmons shares similar sentiments about her Blackness and her Coloured heritage. She is not comfortable naming herself as a Coloured South African because of the apartheid meanings tied to this racial categorisation, presenting a three-fold dislocation of physical, spiritual and racial displacement for her and her fictional persona, Thandi. For Nomvete, the racism experienced in exile reminds her that she is a foreigner both at home and in her host country. Similarly, Msimang and her siblings must contend with racial labels as returnees, intent on discrediting their Blackness and claim to belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. For Nomvete however, spiritual dislocation becomes the source of all her personal displacement. Her lack of self-worth is tied to her Blackness and unbelonging. The physical and material destitution recounted in the autobiography has its roots in Nomvete's deep spiritual alienation from her home and herself.

Naficy's (1999:9) conceptualisation of "multiple and variegated exiles, big and small, external and internal, fixed and voluntary," strongly resonates with Nomvete's autobiography. The sense of nostalgia and homesickness is incredibly prominent in Nomvete's life writing, often associated with an elusive home. There is a clear pattern when it comes to the use of memory. Nomvete's autobiography travels full circle in healing the emotional trauma of displacement and emotional abuse through a reconnection of memories tied to her purpose.

The connection to the awakening of self or what she refers to as dancing to the beat of the drum is narrated first through Nomvete's career success after her destitution, displaying a trend in the meditations of exilic writers of retrieving memories for the purposes of piecing together a coherent portrait of a life. The second frame of narration revolves around the quest for a heightened state of consciousness and spiritual connection; which eventually culminates in the embrace of Buddhism as a spiritual home. Randvansky *et al*'s (2005) suggestion that autobiographies take on the author's character is resonant in this instance. Nomvete's story follows the author's high and lows, following writing patterns of contemporary women's autobiographical trend of evading closure by opting for open-ended storylines.

Nomvete's autobiographical narrative is also illustrative of the post-colonial trend of celebrities using their fame to publish personal life writings. There is a fascination with celebrity culture in contemporary African contexts; which life writing such as Nomvete's responds to. The reading public was and remains curious about her personal life. Nomvete uses the launchpad of her recognisability as a celebrity to stage a wider conversation about her life in exile, teasing out various ways returnees articulate homeliness and belonging. Like most exilic texts, the language displays a dual protest of the political and the personal. Nomvete's autobiography follows the performative enactment of self because memory is performed in the past tense. The narrated self is therefore understood to be a continuously unfolding figure, presented through the gaze of the narrating self.

The autobiographical frame often holds an implicit expectation of some degree of conquest and survival despite facing challenges; and this is the case in exile life writing too. Nomvete's autobiography aligns with this expectation through its narration of triumph over estrangement and overcoming homelessness by discovering varying ways of belonging and expanding her definition of home. Although her experience of homecoming does not meet her expectations, she is able to redefine herself in the process and undergo a transformative and healing

process. Home is newly defined as multi-faceted and is not limited to roots in South Africa but anchored in the freedom of migrancy to live and work wherever she chooses with the option to always return. Home is also defined as internal healing and finding her spiritual grounding in Buddhism.

On her part, Sisonke Msimang's use of the autobiography as a device for the exploration of gendered experiences in *Always Another Country* is successfully executed because the narration is not solely focused on the author but creates room for the retelling of other women's stories in exile. Msimang's autobiography consciously invites and showcases representations of ordinary, everyday women in exile. The decision by the author to examine close connections in the retelling of Black nationhood as not exclusive to Black masculinities enables a shift of focus to Black women's place in the nation, both at home and in exile. Msimang uses her autobiography to connect her personal life story to the collective national story through a retelling of South Africa's history from a female lens, enabling the representation of women's sensibilities in contemporary cultural production of exile autobiographies.

What we are seeing with post-colonial Black female writers is a migration from the domestic and over reliance of Black women as the supportive trope within the context of Black nationhood narrations; to portrayals of Black women's subjectivities and life stories as a part of the Black liberation story in their own right. The scholarship reviewed in this study underscored men's perceptions of Black women as financial burdens or mere romantic partners within the private space, while being minoritized and almost erased from the public story. Msimang's writing does the necessary work of correcting these stereotypical tropes of Black female roles in nation-building in public discourse. Black female writers use their autobiographies to influence community building, while creating a platform for shared voices and unmuting the formerly silenced to new reading publics. The evolution of Black women from silenced to part owners of the political economy, demonstrates the interconnectedness of nationhood and familial identities through the use of literature as a medium of gender representation commonplace in exilic autobiographies of Black women.

Msimang's retelling of South Africa's political history from the end of the apartheid era to the new democracy, her sexual assault in exile, and the maternal influences in her life showcases the manner in which Black women recognise the use of political narratives domestically and in the public sphere. Gender emerges as point of consciousness-building in

Black women's autobiographies. The language used to describe big political moments is collectivised in her autobiography i.e. "we, us, our" representing the collective stance Black women use in the telling of the public story. Msimang details heroic masculinities, while acknowledging feminine gender representation in her recollections. The writing is neither alienating nor slanted in favour of Black masculinities. Although Msimang is critical of the over-emphasis on the big men in the national story, she does not dwell on the shortcoming of Black masculinities. Instead, she uses her writing as a social justice tool to balance the voices using her own personal story.

There is a prevalence of narrations documenting sexual violence in exile autobiographies and fiction[8]. Msimang's autobiography carefully recounts the sexual abuse she experienced in exile as a deliberate attempt to bear testimony to the voices and experiences of the once marginalised and vulnerable: women and children. Heroines, such Gogo Lindi and Msimang's own mother, are used in the autobiography to sensitise readers to Black women's political location within the nationalist story; and the personal identities and subjectivities of Black women as major players in their own rights, in the nationalist project. Msimang's awakening to gender consciousness is articulated through her own journey of self-discovery and realization. She recognises the prejudice held by her younger self, and her downplaying of her mother's political identity and personal achievements, because of the deep reverence she has for her father. The autobiography explores themes of independence, careers, and autonomy of Black women in exile, which are all connected to the story of national liberation.

Gender consciousness is also connected to race, privilege, and identity in exilic autobiographies. Msimang contends with feelings of guilt prompted by her class position and returnee status in the newly democratic South Africa. The question of re-entry in South Africa and adjustment is a recurring motif in exilic autobiographies. Although returnees' expansive worldview is viewed as an asset in the nation building project, it simultaneously carries the weight of alienation. Black women's autobiographies depict the vast incongruities between the memory of home and the reality of home as experienced by returnees. For Msimang, the challenge to her identity as a child of exile is further complicated by her romantic relationship with a white Australian man. The return to South Africa is met with

[8] Examples of such titles include Redi Tlhabi's *Khwezi* (2017), Shireen Hassim's *Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy*: *The ANC in exile and the Question of Women* (2004), and Zoe Wicomb's novel, *David's Story,* (2000).

resistance and leads to feelings of disillusionment because home does not relieve the feelings of unbelonging nor resolve questions of personal identity. Msimang expresses self-doubt in a home that she considers foreign. Feelings of betrayal by the ruling party further exacerbate the personal and political displacement. Autobiographies of this nature are able to hone in on Black middle-class susceptibilities, giving the reading public an insight into the plight of returnees. Msimang's experiences as a returnee follow a similar trajectory to Nomvete's. Both these authors lament feeling like tourists in their home country. In both autobiographies, the authors describe their insecurities and the deep desire to connect on home ground but not truly belonging.

The detachment that is triggered by feelings of unbelonging is a common motif in the exilic writing of Black South African writers and a clear trend in this analysis. Returnees sustain a sojourner's spirit. The return is short-lived, despite the desire to establish roots at home. Msimang and Nomvete end their autobiographies as residents in foreign countries. The autobiographies themselves are not written in South Africa, because the authors have already resolved the internal conflict of home as exiles. The authors openly admit their adoration for South Africa but concede that it can never be a permanent physical home. Msimang and Nomvete continue to work partly in South Africa as way of staying connected to their homeland and fulfilling their respective purpose tied to South Africa. However, living abroad with their families provides the writers with peace because home is not a monolithic idea. Clemmons also expresses desires to emigrate to South Africa for a few years in her blog. However, it is clear that she will remain a nomadic intellect unlikely to make South Africa a permanent home. A common denominator among all three authors is a striving to do good works at home to ease their exilic guilt.

The autobiographies of Nomvete and Msimang follow a similar pattern, starting with the assumption that the return to South Africa will cure all feelings of homesickness. The journey to self-revelation in these exilic autobiographies follows a similar sentiment aspiring to some form of utopian return. The concluding observations, however, reveal an anti-climactic tone as the life narrations detail the returnees' disappointing experience of home. The mythical return does not live up to expectations. The physical and spiritual home produces great disillusionment, partly because of a preoccupation with an old past world that is gone or never existed.

Home is associated with memory, therefore since there are no memories that can be extracted by the authors, there is no home to speak of, think or write about for Black female autobiographers. The writers in this analysis are in a constant state of nostalgia. The early chapters of their autobiographies are immersed in a realization of a lost home irretrievable through memory or restorative nostalgic practices.

Restorative nostalgia as described by Boym (2017), is premised on a collective loss of home based on national identity, which the authors are unable to recognise. Msimang's writing praxis resonates with Boym's perspectives on nostalgia, because she uses her autobiography to validate political nationalism and cultural intimacy through reflective nostalgia. Memory functions as a reference point where the writer must reconcile the imagined mythologised home with the actual home she returns to. Msimang narrates the high hopes she had for South Africa as a returnee, but those dreams are met with deep disappointment when she realizes her political home no longer shared the same values it had taught her in exile, as rampant greed and corruption quickly engulf the African National Congress (ANC) once it gets into power.

The reflective documentation of disillusionment with the country and the ANC is a recurring theme in exilic autobiographies of Black women. Msimang goes from idolizing the ANC to cancelling her membership with the party, agonising over her loyalties which are no longer with the party but with her parents who fought in the struggle. A failing state, poor leadership and rampant corruption are all visible triggers in Msimang's writing, ultimately forcing her into a recognition that she can no longer live in South Africa. Exilic autobiographies by Black women then, become another way to perform social justice activist work by articulating relevant questions relating to social justice.

On its part, auto-fiction offers new ways of reading life writing. The use of auto-fictional strategies as references to Black female experiences in exile is an important element of the genre. Clemmons' auto-fiction successfully merges the fictional with the factual. The parallels between the author and the novel's protagonist displays the fine line between what is real and what can be imagined. Clemmons' writing style connects real people, places and time in history to a fictive text. Using fictive distance, Clemmons is able to narrate her life story in a manner that is different from Nomvete and Msimang's approach. There is a notable generational gap between the three authors. Clemmons' choice to opt for fictive narrative may also be because, being in her thirties at the time of writing, she has not accumulated as

many life experiences to write a fully-fledged autobiographical text. Opting for auto-fictional narratives provides room for more creativity, socio-political commentary and distance from one's own story retold in fragments.

This study builds on scholarship on auto-fiction as a device for self-creation and re-invention through an exploration of multiple truths. Clemmons locates her identity through an auto-fictional persona transfer, using real life events to tell her story. *What We Lose* is fashioned after Phillipe Lejuene's auto-fictional pact, visible in Clemmons' transfers of her life narrative into a fictionalised version not written in chronological order from birth to death but told in fragments focused on specific life episodes. Clemmons uses inventive methods of storytelling, incorporating features such as blog posts, graphics, photographs and illustration to enhance her story.

Doubrovsky's scholarship on mirror-image is also a central feature in Clemmons' writing technique, offering the writer even more ways to self-recreate (cited in Fraser, 2016). The analysis shows the truth pact as a highly visible hallmark in Clemmons' writing put forward in the reader's consciousness. The depersonalisation through second generation memory, based on historical moments and Clemmons' protagonist's parents past experiences signals the reconfiguring of the autobiographical pact. We see how fictional memory gives different emotional influences to what is remembered by the writer. A distinct feature that sets auto-fiction apart from autobiography is the nuances presented in the delivery of past memories in fictive texts.

Auto-fiction also draws on auto-ethnographical techniques where self is depersonalised. The difference with this type of fictive tradition is the use of versionality, where facts from the author's parents' past experiences are not fully understood but processed by signalling fictionalizing intent of authors. Black female writers expose their true emotions in this instance. However, the research does point to a temporary loss of self by the writer during the incubation of the fictive character (Denshire, 2016). The conceptualisation of Thandi and her fictional world makes it possible for Clemmons to create a new world not far from reality, while using creative license otherwise unavailable in the conventional autobiographical text. Thandi allows Clemmons to recreate her middle-class upbringing in the United States, her familial ties in South Africa, her love for writing and the politics closely associated to her personal identity in her novel without directly speaking in her capacity as the author-narrator.

The merging of the two different worlds is what makes Clemmons' story unique. The protagonist wrestles with identity issues as a Black American and Coloured South African woman. Similar to Msimang, Clemmons' character must also confront her middle-class guilt. Thandi's family living in upmarket Sandton exacerbates her feelings of guilt. Thandi's college friends also weaponize her privilege by calling her an affirmative action baby, alluding to her Blackness as an American but also as a South African benefiting from the bounty of a newly democratic country. The transitions from local South African politics to historical events and the meshing of the daily activities of everyday life in Clemmons' text validates the scholarship of auto-fictional patterns in Black women autobiographies.

Self-fictionalisation in the form of blog write ups, pictures and other forms of illustrations is a clear method used by Clemmons in her writing to embrace the fantastical in her novel. Clemmons uses photo textual practices in her writing to play with mood, give significance to historical moments, to personalise the political and uphold an enduring memory to facilitate objectivity in the text (Ferreira-Meyers *et al*, 2016). Black women writers use triple distancing in their life narrations as a way of re-experiencing the past using various writing techniques available in language, form, voice and time.

Presenting preferred facts gives the author autonomy to tell their story from a favoured perspective. Although photographs are not considered fictional artefacts per se, in the auto-fictional genre, the author is able to manipulate imagery for the purposes of fulfilling a subjective story. Therefore, Clemmons' use of imagery of this nature is biased for the purpose of fulfilling a particular agenda, using political images to tell a personal story of identity. The use of pictures of Winnie Madikizela - Mandela, imagery from South Africa's xenophobic attacks, and illustrations pointing to Thandi's emotional state of grief are all deliberate choices based on showcasing the collective experience of Black women in exile. The geographical and political location of the photographs used in Clemmons' auto-fictional novel are based on historically South African political events.

The depiction of Thandi's maternal home in South Africa is one of the ways Clemmons attempts to work through issues of race and belonging. The novel uses journal entries and letters as a mode of fictive storytelling to showcase perspectives of a second-generation Black woman writer in exile. The journal entries examine Thandi's interiority, pointing to the idea of Black women's autobiographies as platforms of exilic reflection for nomadic

intellects. Auto-fictional blogs also fit a similar profile, fictionalising the author's identities for the principal story centred on the individual.

The multiple blog entries in Clemmons' novel are testament to the third-party voices present in auto-fictional narratives. The utilisation of writing techniques like this one offers both the reader and the writer an opportunity to provide commentary on politically sensitive subjects from a position of seeming objectivity. Clemmons transitions from flashing back and forward in her story to inserting historical moments tied to her personal identity. The decision to give Madikizela Mandela a larger spread in the novel also speaks to the personal becoming political. Clemmons appears to be working through the tainting of Madikizela Mandela's reputation, and although she does not appear to be outrightly defending the 'Mother of the Nation,' she does ask the reader questions, and makes specific inference through omission of certain facts and emphasis on others.

The graphics used in the text outline Thandi's grief as a visual expression of Clemmons' own emotions. The dying process aptly conveys the trauma of Black bodies in exile. The nomadic intellect becomes transposed as a nomadic soul unable to reach home because of the imprisonment of an illness. The study shows how the physical dislocation caused by sickness and disease further alienates Thandi's mother from her homeland because of the restrictions placed on her mobility. The graphic illustrations represent a symbolic haplessness common in Black women writing in their longing for an elusive home significantly linked to experiences of anti-blackness in exile.

What we can conclude is that the auto-biographical persona is a significant contributor to the retelling of history in the lives of Black South African women despite their belonging being contested by patriarchal exclusion and racism. Class too, features as a site of exclusion, but in our case, all three Black women are cushioned from this dimension by their families' affluent status. The study also shows how Black women actively perform anti-racist reversal in their collective life writing. The autobiography is a collective site for self-creation, correcting negative stereotypes about Black women through a process of textual self-actualizations. Life writing over the years has afforded Black women autobiographers the opportunity to contest racial ideologies. Autobiographies give Black women a new way to see and be seen. The writing exhibited in Black female autobiographies does not exist solely to challenge whiteness. The authors of these stories work hard to show the complexities of Black women's life-worlds outside racial categorisation.

We see first and second-generation exiles confront racism. Thandi's mother attempts to transfer apartheid-based prejudices to her daughter but fails. She is unsuccessful in converting Thandi to her brand of racial prejudice because it is largely premised on a Coloured superiority complex, which attempts to devalue any form of Blackness not in proximity to whiteness. Clemmons' life writing has shown how the auto-fictional novel is able to highlight the tensions that exist among the Coloured community and the negative perceptions attached to Black South Africa. Thandi's family idolises Black American culture but refuses to be associated with Black South Africans, viewing them as simple, barbaric, violent and unsophisticated.

Clemmons uses her character to demonstrate how difficult it is for the protagonist to assimilate in both worlds. Thandi is not Black enough for her American and South African counterparts alike and all of these revelations take place while her parents attempt to teach her about the importance of Black solidarity. Clemmons' writing about the prejudice faced by light-skinned women however remains silent on the possible pretty privilege that light-skinned women benefit from in a colourist world. It is however clear that the auto-fictional novel is an important tenet in expanding the possibilities of autobiographical frames of writing.

In sum then, the study demonstrates Black female writers' use of the autobiographical mode to craft nuanced meditations on their own stories and the ways in which exile and the collective historical developments of the South African national story impacted their life trajectories, across different generational timeframes. Although the three stories and their accompanying experiences are distinct from each other, collectively, they pose related questions, while performing important representational and analytic work which may be foundational for generations to come.

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