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„Relationality in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*"

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Introduction

> [M]emory and self are constructed through specific forms of social interactions and/or cultural frameworks that lead to the formation of an autobiographical narrative. Taken together, the chapters weave a coherent story about how each of us creates a life narrative embedded in sociocultural frameworks that define what is appropriate to remember, how to remember it, and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past. (Fivush and Haden vii)

These acts of remembering and thus constructing an idea of a 'self' through close interactions with others and within a sociocultural context are the topics of the thesis at hand. Psychological research has shown that the manner in which each person constructs a life narrative is not only influenced by his or her social interactions with significant others, but also by "the larger cultural frameworks" (Fivush and Haden viii) that are available to the individual.

Since the 1980s, theorists of autobiography have become more and more interested in this conceptualisation of the self as relational, i.e. as "interdependent," rather than "single, autonomous […] and isolated" from others (Tridgell 481). After all, as Anne Rüggemeier puts it: What would be left of a life story without the stories of others? (1, my translation) Many contemporary auto/biographies include not only the story of the autobiographical I, but they also prominently feature the life stories of parents, children, "*proximate other*[s]" (Eakin 86) or larger groups and networks of people (Rüggemeier 2). Yet despite the incorporation of these textual others, "the story of the self is not ancillary to the story of the other" (Eakin 58). On the contrary, it highlights the ways in which people are connected to and influenced by others, and how they try to create meaning from experiences with others.

Furthermore, whenever we talk or write about our lives, we are situated "in our interaction with and relation to cultural constructs such as language, religion, ideology, a shared narrative of history or destiny, adherence or resistance to specific values" (Coullie 5). Therefore, the way we think about ourselves "is very much the product of a given society" (Coullie 5). For example, when a parent speaks to a child, the parent also speaks with "the voice of the culture" in which he or she grew up, and thus the child learns about the values in a given society, or, in other words, "society speak[s] through the parent" (Nelson 20). In this way, we acquire an understanding of our selves

that is always related to our immediate environment as well as our cultural, historical end social contexts.

Finally, an auto/biographical narrative – whether this narrative is mediated orally, in writing, in comics, or in any other manner – is always addressed to an audience. This is directly linked to the following question: *Why are we, as readers or listeners, interested in the life story of another individual?* According to Roy Pascal, one of the earliest theorists of autobiography, reading the life story of other people fascinates us because autobiographies, biographies and memoirs "satisfy a legitimate curiosity" (1), for example, the desire to know about someone else's beliefs, prejudices, passions, emotions and secrets. This satisfaction of our curiosity is achieved by reading the life story of another individual, which means we are invited to enter "the private life of some-one else" (Pascal 1) who might be completely different from us. These stories provide an insight into the consciousness of others, "[e]ven if what they tell us is not factually true, or only partly true" (Pascal 1). We tend to identify and sympathize with the main character or hero of a story, but in contrast to a novel, there is an added element of intimacy when we read an auto/biography or memoir, which is why these stories become so captivating for many readers.

Nancy K. Miller notes in 2002 that life writing has become "the most popular […] literary genre of our contemporary culture" (1). In fact, in his article "Confessing for Voyeurs; The Age of The Literary Memoir Is Now," written for the *New York Times* in 1996, James Atlas emphasizes that "the triumph of memoir is now established fact. Consider the evidence: nearly two dozen memoirs are being published this spring, with more to come, supplementing the 200 titles […] published last year." Like Pascal, Miller attributes this popularity to the intimate connection that is formed between the writers of autobiographical texts and their readers, not only through identification but also through disidentification. This bond that is created – this "heightened process of identification" (Miller 3) – is what draws readers to this genre in large numbers.

Atlas is more critical in his *New York Times* article and calls this current popularity "a phenomenon pervasive in our culture -- people confessing in public to an audience of voyeurs. […] We live in a time when the very notion of privacy, of a zone beyond the reach of public probing, has become an alien concept." However, at the same time he acknowledges that an "urgency to get at the facts," i.e. to read stories that feel authentic to readers, "has a long tradition" and reflects a human "longing to

discover who we are." In return, there is also the autobiographer's "wish to be encountered" (Miller 3) and discovered by his or her readers in a certain way.

Exploring this interconnectedness, or relationality, of the autobiographical self in contemporary life writing is the focus of this diploma thesis. The primary literature that will be analysed and compared for this purpose is, unsurprisingly, related: *Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* (1986) by Mark Mathabane, and *Miriam's Song* (2000) by Miriam and Mark Mathabane. Mark Mathabane, born in 1960 in Alexandra, details in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song* what it was like to grow up in a "black ghetto of Johannesburg" (*KB* ix) during the apartheid years. In *Kaffir Boy,* Mathabane gives an account of his own experiences, while *Miriam's Song* provides the reader with an insight into his sister's life story 'as told to' Mark by her.

In the first chapters, a brief summary of the history of South Africa is provided since an understanding of pre-colonial society and tribal hierarchies as well as the realities of apartheid are necessary for the interpretation and analysis of both life stories. Furthermore, theoretical concepts from the fields of narrative theory and autobiography studies are presented and subsequently applied in the analysis of both texts. This includes an examination of the structure of both texts with regard to 'turning points' in the subjects' lives, as well as an analysis of their narrative voice(s) by drawing upon the concept of focalization.

In the final chapters, the main themes of *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song* are explored. However, it has to be pointed out that all of the themes in both narratives are related in one way or another, which is why there will be some overlaps. For example, tribalism is related to politics, history and family relations. Family relations, in turn, are related to education, religion and gender norms. Gender norms, in turn, are related to tribalism, history, cultural beliefs and education. Education, in turn, is related to politics, history, religion, family relations… and thus the list goes on. In short, examining these themes in isolation is an impossible task. Therefore, they perfectly exemplify what it means to tell a relational story of one's life.

Part I: South Africa and Apartheid – Historical Background

I.1. Indigenous Africans

Indigenous South Africans had been developing unique cultural traditions and social structures long before the colonial era. Even though "colonialism, capitalism, and apartheid have assaulted, abused, and modified" (Thompson 2) these traditions, they have never been eradicated. Indigenous South Africans were hunter-gatherers, but of course the individual groups were different from one another as each group had adapted to their unique environments. The nuclear family was at the heart of the community, and "several families usually formed bands numbering between twenty and eighty people. These bands were not closed, reproducing entities. People identified with members of other bands who spoke the same language and lived in neighboring territories in the same general environment" (7).

Labour was divided between men and women – women were gatherers and responsible for raising the children, whereas men were responsible for hunting and skinning animals. In areas where rainfall made the soils fertile, indigenous groups developed farming methods, grew crops, and herded sheep and cattle. They lived in "semipermanent villages […] and their political organizations were stronger and more complex" (Thompson 10) than those of hunter-gatherer groups. The farming groups were open to others and in close contact with the various hunter-gatherers. They "interacted, cooperating and copulating as well as competing and combatting, exchanging ideas and practices as well as rejecting them" (11). Farming and herding changed the traditional way of life – "[p]rivate property, previously associated with such small, portable possessions as clothing […] and weapons […], now included sheep and cattle. Gaps developed between rich and poor as some people acquired large numbers of livestock while others owned none at all" (13).

The various groups formed clans who considered themselves as descending from a common ancestor, "but several clans were often joined in loosely associated chiefdoms that Europeans have called tribes" (Thompson 14). The clans were led by hereditary chiefs and long-distance trade networks linked the chiefdoms. The farmers had an interest in increasing their livestock because it directly affected their wealth and

therefore their prestige (20). Moreover, they had "an intimate knowledge of the medicinal effects of the plants in their vicinities and used them to mitigate the impact of illness" (21). With regard to social structures, the chiefdoms "had a keen sense of kinship solidarity and obligations, extending far beyond the nuclear family" 22). These societies were dominated by married men who controlled the livestock and the agricultural produce, and therefore they had economic power over the women. The women's tasks were predominantly raising the children, weeding and harvesting, fetching water and preparing the food. Marriages were not only social but also economic events. *Lobola* was the bride price that needed to be paid before a marriage could be arranged: "Complex negotiations between the kin of the bride and the kin of the bridegroom preceded a marriage. It was accompanied by a series of exchanges of property between the two groups, including the transfer of cattle from the bridegroom's kin to the kin of the bride" (23).

The structure of the societies was hierarchical as "men controlled women, elders controlled youths […] [and] chiefs controlled commoners" (Thompson 23), and this social structure was reinforced by the education system. Adolescent boys were initiated into adulthood by the chiefs and their advisors through various rites-of-passage rituals and ceremonies. During these ceremonies "the teachers instilled respect for the elders, for chiefly authority and for established religious beliefs and rituals" (27). Moreover, the chiefs held regular meetings in which they settled disputes, listened to complaints and oversaw other affairs of 'their' people. For this service, the chiefs were paid in livestock and they were generally the wealthiest and most powerful people of the clan (24).

As for religion, supernatural explanations and a belief in ancestral spirits was common. These spirits

> had powers over the material world. *Dingaka*, religious specialists, established communication with the ancestral spirits and invoked their support. In personal crises—illnesses, bereavements, domestic conflicts, material losses—individuals would sacrifice sheep or cattle to their ancestors. Alternatively, they might assume that a person had caused their calamity. Hence the concept of witchcraft. Evil was personified in myths of witchcraft: certain persons were believed to have innate powers which they used directly, or through familiars—hyenas, baboons, or the fabulous *tikoloshe* and lightning bird—to injure their neighbours; and other evilly disposed persons were thought to use poison. The beliefs were rooted in nightmares and the awareness of anger, lust, and envy in man. These realities were interpreted in material form—envy became a baboon sent by a poor man to suck dry the cows of his rich and stingy

neighbour, and lust a demon lover. Hence the "smelling out" and torture of supposed witches and sorcerers. (Thompson 27)

The traditional ways of life of the African chiefdoms and hunter-gatherer communities changed dramatically in the seventeenth century and thereafter due to the arrival of white settlers from Europe.

I.2. The Beginnings of Colonisation in South Africa (1652)

Dutch colonisation of the Cape of Good Hope began in the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1652 the Dutch East India Company managed to establish the first permanent European settlements at the Cape. In the following century, immigrants from other European countries followed, for example, from Germany and France. These early settlers, almost exclusively men, intermingled and frequently procreated with women of the indigenous South African peoples, so the first mixed communities started to develop. The Dutch East India Company intended to control the different racial groups and drew up a limited legal framework for resolving arguments and conflicts. In doing so, a racial hierarchy was established since "individual rights were linked to racial designations" (Clark and Worger 12). At the top of the hierarchy were employees of the East India Company, "followed by settlers, the 'mixed' racial groups, and with slaves at the bottom. Despite their limited commercial intentions, the Dutch had precipitated the development of a new, racialised society at the Cape" (12).

In the nineteenth century, the British Empire expanded its colonies globally and also entered into southern Africa. Due to the natural environment at the Cape, the European farmers headed east and expanded their farmlands into lands of African farmers. The Dutch settlers did not want to accept the British rule and began to leave British territory. This Great Trek took them north and subsequently, they established independent states in these areas. A result of these migration waves was the development of distinct population groups: the Afrikaners or Boers (Dutch), the British, the Coloureds, and the various indigenous peoples (Clark and Worger 12-13).

The division between the groups widened when gold and diamonds were discovered in the second half of the nineteenth century. The mineral industry grew and the prospect of wealth attracted more and more European immigrants, so that "the white population expanded eightfold, while hundreds of thousands of Africans sought

work each year in the newly developed mines and cities of industrialising areas" (Clark and Worger 14). The mining industry depended on cheap African labour and the white invaders made sure that the workers could not negotiate better wages by passing a large number of discriminatory laws (15).

I.3. The South African War (1899-1902)

The South African War between the Boers and the British took place between 1899 and 1902. The British wanted to take control of the areas where gold had been discovered. These areas were located predominantly in the independent Boer states and the British used their military power to conquer them. Thousands of soldiers and civilians died on both sides and Dutch and African farmers were forcibly removed from their lands by the British. The British won the war in 1902, and the formerly independent Boer republics became colonies of the British Empire. Still, they were granted some degree of self-government in spite of their colony status (Clark and Worger 15-16). The situation of black Africans and Coloureds did not improve under British rule as segregationist policies were continued in order to ensure white dominance. Voting rights were restricted to white males and new laws were introduced that "affected the rights of Africans to own land, to live or travel where they chose, and to enjoy job security" (21). The laws were often brutally enforced and "shaped South African society in fundamental ways that still affect the country into the twenty-first century" (22).

One crucial piece of legislation was the Natives' Land Act of 1913 which limited "African ownership of land to designated areas comprising 7 per cent of the country's total land area" (Clark and Worger 22). As the majority of these areas were infertile and unsustainable, Africans had no choice but to work in mines, factories and on white farms in order to support themselves and their families. In urban areas segregation was ensured by the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. Africans were permitted to live in designated urban areas, so-called 'townships,' under the condition that they were employed and that they would return to the rural areas after their contracts ended. If they were caught living in the townships while being unemployed, they were either imprisoned or deported to rural areas (23). Africans responded to discrimination by forming their own political bodies – most importantly the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912. The founders of the ANC called for "respect for the concept of equality

for all, irrespective of colour" and "believed that they could best achieve their aims by dialogue with the British" (24). However, the initial, moderate petitions of the ANC did not affect the segregationist policies of the government, which formed the basis for a 'formal' policy of apartheid. Black opposition against discriminatory laws became more organized and more influential after the First World War. Various groups were formed that demanded higher wages for black workers, voting rights and more land for Africans, as well as freedom of movement. Strikes and protests followed throughout the 1920s and 1930s and "stymie[d] the full success of segregation legislation" (27) for many years.

I.4. Apartheid Laws after 1948

The National Party was formed in 1914 to represent the interests of Afrikaners "who felt […] discriminated against by the English-only policies of the government" (Clark and Worger 28). Moreover, there was still a lingering feeling of resentment against the British because of the South African War. Over the years the National Party became more and more popular with white voters, in particular with Afrikaners. The party finally made it into parliament in 1924 in a coalition with the Labour Party. This coalition continued the segregationist policies that had already been in place and passed new laws that consolidated the status quo (28-30). In addition, the Second World War had an enormous impact on the country since during this time

> South Africa underwent a huge economic and social transformation […]. Factories expanded to fill the wartime need for many goods, […] drawing workers into the cities from all over the country. As Africans and whites alike were employed in the new factories, the racial lines between workers became a source of great contention and South Africa experienced serious labour strikes and industrial action. By the end of the war, manufacturing had become the country's most productive economic sector. Nearly half of the population was living in the cities, and competition for jobs between African and white workers worried the white electorate. (Clark and Worger 38)

Almost one million South Africans moved to the cities during the Second World War. This influx created new problems since the urban areas could not provide sufficient shelter for its new residents. Therefore, the squatter camps and townships in the urban areas expanded tremendously. These settlements soon began to be perceived as an increasing threat, and consequently "led to demands from white voters for stronger

laws and tougher action" (Clark and Worger 42). The National Party played on the fears of white voters and promised solutions. Ultimately, the party won a parliamentary majority in the 1948 elections. Soon after this victory, its leaders began passing laws in order to consolidate white supremacy:

> At the heart of the apartheid system were four ideas. First, the population of South Africa comprised four "racial groups"—White, Coloured, Indian, and African—each with its own inherent culture. Second, Whites […] were entitled to have absolute control over the state. Third, white interests should prevail over black interests […]. Fourth, the white racial group formed a single nation, with Afrikaans- and English-speaking components, while Africans belonged to several […] distinct nations—a formula that made the white nation the largest in the country. (Thompson 190)

As a result, laws based on race regulated the private and public aspects of South African life and any transgressions were considered punishable acts. Those not classified as white were stripped of their most basic human rights and denied many opportunities. In order to implement this system, the Population Registration Act (1950) was passed and subsequently, Africans were required to provide identity cards – their passes – at all times. These passes included information about a person's marital status, race, employment, taxes, addresses and a photograph. Failing to provide a pass was a criminal offence and could lead to being arrested and imprisoned (Clark and Worger 48-49).

Another important piece of legislation was the Group Areas Act (1950) which regulated property rights and determined where each racial group could legally reside. This also meant that occupants could be forcibly removed from an area if the government declared it fit for occupation by another group (Clark and Worger 49-51). The Group Areas Act was amended in 1957 in order to keep blacks out of white urban areas and resettle them in homelands, even though government experts determined that these reserves "would never, even under the best of conditions, be able to support more than two-thirds of the African population" (64). However, these warnings were ignored by the regime and millions of black residents were removed from white areas and forced to resettle in the following decades (70). This led to overcrowding and deforestation in the homelands as well as infertile soils that could not sustain the number of people living there. Poverty rates were high in these areas and the African leaders that were installed in the homelands were financially dependent on funding from the South African government. Therefore, black migration to urban areas

continued and the number of Africans living permanently in the cities doubled in the 1980s (72-74).

I.5. The Fall of Apartheid

The migrant workers were the backbone of South Africa's economy. For a long time, employers relied on the fact that workers could be easily replaced if they started causing any trouble, for example, by demanding higher wages. However, as technological advances led to an industry that become more and more specialized, replacing black labourers became more difficult and more expensive because of the job training that was required. Even though they had no organizations that represented their interests, such as unions, black workers slowly became more powerful and worker discontent grew. In the 1970s, a series of strikes halted production in many different industrial workplaces, leading to increases in wages and the formation of unions (Clark and Worger 75-79). By the end of the 1970s, it became obvious that

> neither the implementation of apartheid nor police intimidation was successful in halting continuing resistance and unrest within South Africa. […] African workers, students and parents [were] ready to risk their lives to challenge the state. Moreover, […] the world outside South Africa had become increasingly aware that apartheid was an inhumane system and anomalous in a world in which the last white-ruled colonial regimes of Angola, Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia had all fallen. (86)

The ANC and other political organizations also became more active and started campaigns in order to bring an end to apartheid. Guns and guerrilla fighters were smuggled into the country and mass protests were organized. The goal was the start of a "people's war" (Clark and Worger 88), which was met with brutal opposition and state-sanctioned violence by the government and its armed forces. Violence on both sides escalated in the 1980s and international criticism became more outspoken. As a consequence, the government had to act, and a new constitution was implemented in 1984. However, this constitution "was clearly intended to allow whites to retain overall control" (91), which is why violence and protests continued throughout the country:

> Students boycotted their classes. Police increasingly moved into the African townships, arresting and shooting protesters. […] In September, the government banned all meetings and political discussions inside the country in an attempt to stop the violence. By the beginning of 1985, [president] Botha was so desperate to end the unrest that he offered to release Nelson Mandela from

prison if he renounced violence. When Mandela refused the offer, the government was faced with a choice: endure continuing unrest or consider meaningful change. (Clark and Worger 93)

Negotiations with ANC leaders and Nelson Mandela began in 1989 after years of mass shootings, bombings and state emergencies. Pieter W. Botha resigned in that year because of health reasons, and Frederik W. de Klerk took over as president. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and black political parties and resistance organizations, which had been banned for decades, were legalized (Clark and Worger 109-111).

However, the violence that had been gripping the country did not abate after Mandela's release since the National Party under de Klerk's leadership was opposed to Mandela's vision of majority rule: "'simplistic majority rule on the basis of one man, one vote,' de Klerk argued, was 'not suitable for a country such as South Africa because it leads to domination and even suppression of minorities'" (Clark and Worger 112). It has to be pointed out that by "minorities" de Klerk meant South Africa's white population. Therefore, the armed struggle of black militant groups continued. In turn, security forces and right-wing organizations orchestrated bombings and shootings of black political leaders and civilians. Although the main apartheid laws – the Natives' Land Act, the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act – were repealed in 1991, the government remained in full control because there was still no intent to install majority rule (113-114).

Things changed in 1992 after a number of gruesome massacres led the ANC and Mandela to call for a national strike. Moreover, marches of thousands of people were organized by the ANC, which finally brought de Klerk to the negotiation table. These negotiations would take another two years, while the violence on both sides continued during this time. After a long and brutal struggle, the first democratic elections were held in 1994. The ANC won the national election and Nelson Mandela became the first black president of the new South Africa (Clark and Worger 115-119).

Part II: Theoretical Framework

Since the main focus of this diploma thesis is on the analysis of two auto/biographical accounts of brother and sister, it is necessary to establish a framework which is subsequently applied in the discussion of the primary literature. Therefore, theoretical concepts from the fields of autobiography studies and narrative theory are presented in the following chapters.

II.1. What is Auto/biography?

Auto/biographies and memoirs have been written and published for centuries, and it has been established that Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (*c.* AD 398–400) is "thought of as the origin of modern Western autobiography, both in the sense of marking a historical beginning and of setting up a model for other, later texts" (L. Anderson 18), even though the term "autobiography" was only invented much later. Linda Anderson points out that "[t]he term 'autobiography' is commonly thought to have been coined by the nineteenth-century poet Robert Southey in 1809 […]; however, there is evidence of slightly earlier usage, at the end of the eighteenth century in a review attributed to William Taylor" (7). Robert Folkenflik's research has shown that the term "appeared in the late eighteenth century in several forms, in isolated instances in the seventies, eighties, and nineties in both England and Germany with no sign that one use influenced another" (qtd. in Smith and Watson [2001] 2). Before "autobiography" was coined, writers of self-referential writing used other terms to refer to their works, for example "memoir," "confessions" or "essays of myself" (Smith and Watson [2001] 2).

Autobiography as a "distinct literary genre" has been "recognized since the late eighteenth century," and has since been critically discussed, especially the controversies inherent to this genre, for example, "authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction" (L. Anderson 1-2). Many literary critics of the twentieth century have attempted to define autobiography, with Pascal noting in 1960:

> There is an autobiographical form, and indeed a convention, which one recognises and distinguishes from other literary modes; writers know roughly what they expect to do if they write autobiographies, and critics are in no great

difficulty to define their subject-matter when they write about autobiographies. At the same time, there is sufficient confusion and uncertainty to make it worth while to see if a more precise and coherent definition may not be discovered. (2-3)

By distinguishing autobiography from other literary forms with an autobiographical content, such as diaries, letters and memoirs, he suggests the following definition: autobiography proper "involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its centre of interest is the self, not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that, in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape" (9). However, he also explains that reconstructing one's life "is an impossible task" (9) due to the sheer number of experiences a person makes every single day, which is why he adds that

autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story. It establishes certain stages in an individual life, makes links between them, and defines, implicitly or explicitly, a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world […]. This coherence implies that the writer takes a particular standpoint, the standpoint of the moment at which he reviews his life, and interprets his life from it. The standpoint […] enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order. Autobiography means therefore discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of emphases, choice of expression. Everything depends on the standpoint chosen. (9-10)

This interplay of past and present can also be found in later definitions, most famously in that of Philippe Lejeune which he proposed in the 1970s: autobiography is a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (qtd. in L. Anderson 2). Moreover, according to Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," the underlying condition of autobiography is that there is "identity between the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*" (qtd. in L. Anderson 2). Similarly, Jerome Bruner defines autobiography as consisting of a "narrator, in the here and now, [who] takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name" ("Self-Making" 27). This protagonist is brought "from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness," which is achieved by "a theory of growth or at least of transformation" ("Self-Making" 27-28).

Jens Brockmeier, by drawing on Lejeune, sums up the three elements that define autobiography as a genre in the following way:

> First, the autobiographical view is taken from a retrospective vantage point; second, it focuses on the individual life; and third, it is concerned with one's own existence, that is, it refers to an empirically lived […] life course". According to Lejeune, both the teller or writer and the listener or reader of an autobiography subscribe, as it were, to a contract by which they agree on these three essentials. They make what Lejeune calls an "autobiographical pact." This understanding of autobiography has, in one way or another, long held a prominent place in Western culture. (254)

Sally Cline calls this pact "tricky" because of the "fictive nature of the self" (65) that is represented in autobiography: "The nature of autobiographical truth is in some sense a special sort of fiction: the self and truth are not factual realities which the autobiographer can rediscover but are being created by the autobiographer" (65-66). However, autobiography is generally not considered "fiction" because of the underlying assumption of readers that autobiographers "base their life stories on recollected facts and emotions" and that they tell the "truth as they remember it, us[e] memory as accurately as possible," and provide "facts as they were" (66), whereas novelists and fiction writers are not limited in this respect.

The autobiographical pact thus constitutes an implicit understanding between readers and writers of autobiography: "it affirms the author's *identity* with the work's narrator and protagonist. […] [B]y definition, a memoir or autobiography purport to represent its author and the extra-textual world more or less directly, in a way that fiction, no matter how historical or autobiographical, does not claim to do" (Couser, *Memoir* 81). However, since writers of autobiography or memoir always have to rely on their memory in order to re-create their life story, there has to be "some wiggle room regarding facts," and readers have to accept that "memoir [and autobiography] is inevitably, to a degree, fictive" (81).

For this reason, readers also have to keep in mind that autobiographical narratives "cannot be reduced to or understood […] as historical record," since the "facts" contained in autobiographical texts only offer a subjective "truth" that has been created by the author (Smith and Watson [2001] 10). Historians, in contrast to autobiographers, have to be objective and truthful when they write about the past, and can only achieve this by consulting multiple sources of evidence and reviewing them critically.

II.2. What is Memoir?

In what way is memoir different from autobiography? The distinction between the two genres is not always clear-cut because

> [t]here is no autobiography that is not in some respect a memoir, and no memoir that is without autobiographical information; both are based on personal experience, chronological, and reflective. But there is a general difference in the direction of the author's attention. In the autobiography proper, attention is focused on the self, in the memoir […] on others. (Pascal 5-6)

In a similar vein, Cline also emphasizes the importance of this distinction, i.e. the focus on the self and the focus on the other: memoir "is a first person account of one aspect, experience, place or period in someone's life. Whereas the autobiographer focuses on the self, the memoirist focuses on others" (90).

G. Thomas Couser begins his monograph *Memoir: An Introduction* by first establishing what memoir is *not*. A memoir is neither a novel nor any other kind of fictional record, and, therefore, a memoir "depicts the lives of real, not imagined, individuals" (15). However, due to the fact that the genre has developed alongside the novel in the West, he adds that modern memoirs "often incorporate invented or enhanced material" and "often use novelistic techniques" (15). According to him, the most important difference between novel and memoir is that while both are mimetic, only "memoir presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans' experience. Fiction does not; it creates its own lifelike reality. And that makes all the difference" (15).

The terms "autobiography" and "memoir" have often been (and still are) treated as synonymous and used interchangeably by many critics, publishers, authors, and in dictionaries. "Memoir" in particular has been used to refer to "very different kinds of life writing over the last couple of centuries" and it has generally been considered "inferior to […] autobiography," though this attitude has changed over time so that "today, ironically, memoir is the term of art, the prestige term" (Couser, *Memoir* 18).

What memoir and autobiography have in common is that both are "based primarily on memory, a notoriously unreliable and highly selective faculty" (Couser, *Memoir* 19). However, this helps to distinguish autobiography and memoir from biography. Biography can be written "about anyone who has ever existed," whereas "memoir can only concern someone known to, and remembered by, the author" (19).

For this reason, "a memoir will necessarily be very different from a formal biography. It will be, or resemble, a reminiscence, consisting of personal recollections" (19). Couser proposes to think of written narratives that are titled memoir "as situated on a continuum: At one end of the continuum are those that focus on their authors, at the other, those that focus on someone else" (20). In doing so,

> narratives at both extremes of the continuum may be called memoir, even though the former are variants of *auto*biography and the latter of *bio*graphy. The point of thinking of them as arranged on a continuum is that, although there is an important conceptual distinction between writing about yourself and writing about another person, memoirs do not always do just one *or* the other. Indeed, in practice, it is difficult to do one *without* doing the other. (20)

Another way of distinguishing between autobiography and memoir is to consider the content, i.e. the scope of the written text. The focus of a text can be on the entire life of a person, or it can be on one or more distinct dimensions of a person's life, for example, the familial, professional, religious or romantic dimension. The former kind of text is considered autobiography, which is "more comprehensive," whereas the latter should be thought of as memoir, which is "more limited" in scope (Couser, *Memoir* 23). For example, life narratives of addiction and recovery are examples of memoirs because of their narrow focus. Couser summarizes his distinction between autobiography and memoir in the following way:

> [Memoirs] are nonfictional life narratives. They may focus either on the author, on someone else, or on the relation between them. They may try to narrate an entire life course or merely one of its temporal chapters, and they may attempt to include more or fewer of the dimensions of the author's life. *Autobiographies* are generally more comprehensive—in chronology and otherwise; *memoirs* are generally more focused and selective. (23-24)

Contemporary memoirs vary greatly in content and focus, and only a few examples shall be mentioned here. One type of memoir is the family and childhood memoir, in which (troubled) parent-child relationships are depicted and explored. Another type are so-called misery memoirs, which are very popular with female readers.[1] In a misery memoir, typically a protagonist overcomes abuse or (childhood) traumata, for example, the experience of growing up with a drug-addicted or neglectful parent. In writing and reading such misery memoirs, writers and readers often attempt to come to terms with a traumatic experience. Similarly, there are memoirs that focus on the prolonged illness

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[1] Cline reports an estimated female readership of eighty to ninety per cent. (93)

of a protagonist and how he or she, along with family members, learns to deal with the disease, such as mental illness, disability or cancer (Cline 90-97).

II.3. The peculiar case of as-told-to life writing

Auto/biographical narratives told to a professional writer by an autobiographical subject have increasingly been produced since the 1940s because of new inventions that made it possible to record a person's oral account, that is, the reel-to-reel tape recorder and the portable cassette recorder. However, despite this rise of as-told-to life writing in the past, literary critics and scholars have only paid little attention to it. (Lindemann 523-524). Sandra Lindemann identifies three reasons for this: "the lack of a universally agreed upon name for this kind of life writing; the focus by literary scholars on its autobiographical aspects at the expense of its biographical aspects; and the inability of existing theoretical models to accommodate the complete range of as-told-to life writing forms" (524).

As-told-to life writing is produced on the basis of a series of interviews with the autobiographical subject. Numerous umbrella terms have been used to refer to these kinds of narratives, for example, "collaborative life writing" or "dictated autobiography," yet so far, "[n]o universally accepted name exists for this kind of life writing" (Lindemann 524). During its production process, the relationship between the writer and the subject can be a very close one, for instance, if the writer and the subject are related, or distant and merely professional, i.e. the writer does not know his/her interview partner personally prior to the project. This relationship is critical because, in many cases, it determines the "degree of writerly intervention" (526) in these kinds of texts. This means that as-told-to life writing can be read either as biography or as autobiography, depending on "the structural location of the narrator" (526). For example, if the text is written in the first person, it is more likely to be perceived as autobiography, whereas the use of a third person narrator tips the scales towards biography, even though "identification of the narrator is not simply a matter of grammatical person" (527). Lindemann expands Couser's tripartite model[2] and positions as-told-to life writing on a continuum between autobiography and biography by

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[2] Lindemann refers to Couser's model proposed in "Making, Taking, and Faking Lives: The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing": "On one side is solo autobiography, in which the writer, the narrator, and the

extending the central point in both directions to form a continuum capable of accommodating an infinite number of life writing variations, written in any combination of first, second or third grammatical person. Autobiography and biography as described by Couser remain at the poles, but in between is as-told-to life writing (rather than as-told-to autobiography). Here the subject is one person and the writer is another person, as Couser describes, *but the narrator may be either the subject or the writer*. Indeed, the narrator may even *alternate* between the two. (527-528; emphasis added).

She further clarifies that "the location of specific instances on this continuum can only ever be approximate" since "the location of the narrator is an outcome of decisions made during the [production] process" (528) between writer and subject and such decisions are always made in practice.

These decisions made in practice also reflect the authority of either the writer or the subject during the production process of as-told-to life writing. There may be a powerful subject, for example, a celebrity or politician, who is in control of what is written about him or her by the writer(s) of the text, thus placing such texts closer to autobiography on the continuum. On the other hand, there may be autobiographical subjects who are only little known or even unknown in public. In such cases, it is often the writer, or even the publisher, who has more authority over the product, yet there is also a middle ground in which both partners may share authority relatively equally (Lindemann 527-529). Moreover, authority in the partnership may also change or alternate during the production process due to the long time it takes to finish such a piece of work: "over this time, authority may be asserted or conceded" (531), which is why "writers and subjects may become engaged in a contest for authority over textual content" (532).

This struggle for authority can become very difficult and depends on the "strength of the personalities involved and the dynamics of the relationship between them" (Lindemann 532). Lindemann emphasizes the importance of finding a satisfactory compromise or "middle line" (532) between writer and subject as early as possible. Looking at the copyright of these kinds of life writing may be an indicator of

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subject (or protagonist) of the narrative are all the same person; at least, they share the same name. On the other side is biography, in which the writer and narrator are one person, while the subject is someone else. In the middle, combining features of the adjacent forms—and thus challenging the common-sense distinction between them—is as-told-to autobiography, in which the writer is one person, but the narrator and subject are someone else. (Couser, "Making" 334)

who had authority over such a project, though this might not always be the case (Lindemann 533).

II.4. What is Relationality?

In autobiographical theory, the concept of relationality has gained importance since the 1980s. Simply put, relationality implies that "one's story is bound up with that of another" and can therefore help us consider the "different kinds of textual others […] through which an 'I' narrates the formation or modification of self-consciousness" (Smith and Watson [2010] 86). These significant others may be family members, spouses, close friends, neighbours or even historical figures whose lives are interwoven with or connected to the autobiographical I, so that "the line between autobiography and biography" (Smith and Watson [2010] 87) might become blurred.

The term was first suggested by feminist critics "to characterize the model of selfhood in women's autobiographical writing […] as interdependent and identified with a community" (Smith and Watson [2010] 278), in contrast to Georges Gusdorf's earlier model of "a single, autonomous self […] separate and isolated from other people" (Tridgell 481). Couser notes with regard to gender that "[b]ecause most early parenting is done by women, defining oneself in terms of relatedness to another may be more typical of females," whereas "[d]efining oneself in distinction to others may be more typical of males" (*Memoir* 20). Today, the relational qualities of life writing are not only recognized and emphasized in auto/biographical texts written by female authors, but increasingly by male authors as well. The focus of such texts may be on the protagonist of the story, on one or more significant other(s) or alternate between them (Couser, *Memoir* 21). Paul John Eakin refers to these significant others as "*proximate other*[s]" in life writing where "the self's story [is] viewed through the lens of its relation with some key other person" (86). He further argues that "the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origin" and that "the self is defined by—and lives in terms of—its relations with others" (43). This plurality of the first person of auto/biography is also stressed by Judith Coullie:

> Using self-representation to question and define our notions of self, we relate earlier to later selves, thereby constituting personal identity; we also relate ourselves to others, thereby constituting collective identities. Moreover, in

addressing others through our auto/biographical accounts we enter the public sphere and situate ourselves in relation to an audience. (1)

Self-interpretation is guided by the question '*Who am I?*' and by "relating earlier and later selves to each other [and to current selves] we seek to make sense of our experiences [...] in the hope of gaining some clarity about what our present identities and needs may be" (Coullie 1). By relating ourselves to others,

> we associate ourselves with them or distance ourselves from them. Through auto/biographical accounts we establish and cement relations to significant others, friends, colleagues, citizens, and comrades and disassociate ourselves from strangers, adversaries, opponents, and enemies. In this manner we construct social realities that open up or close off certain forms of collective existence. (Coullie 2)

This also means that we place "ourselves in existing status hierarchies" and that "[b]y implication our auto/biographical accounts either entrench or challenge these hierarchies, sometimes also offering alternative ones" (Coullie 2). Finally, by addressing an audience through auto/biography, communicative relations in public spheres are established by crossing the boundaries between the private and the public. In this way, auto/biographical accounts are used to "hold up to public scrutiny the values informing our lives and those of other protagonists" (Coullie 2). This audience may be in the presence of the narrator, for example when a life story is told orally to someone else, or it is constructed by the narrator as an implied addressee, i.e. an implied reader or narratee.

Anne Rüggemeier offers her own definition of relational autobiography and, following Eakin, emphasizes the importance of putting oneself in relation to the stories of others: "gerade das In-Beziehung-Setzen des Autobiographen zu den Geschichten der Anderen [macht] diese Form der Autobiographie [aus]. Relationale Autobiographien sind also Selbstzeugnisse, in denen der thematische Fokus zumindest auf den ersten Blick auf der Geschichte eines Anderen liegt" (60). By focusing on this relational aspect, a life story becomes less of a linear reconstruction of one's life, but emphasizes interpersonal negotiation processes: "Das Ziel der Erzählung ist weniger eine dem autobiographischen Wahrheitsanspruch entsprechende lineare Rekonstruktion der Lebensgeschichte, sondern vielmehr die Hervorhebung der interpersonalen Aushandlungsprozesse" (60).

She further points out that autobiographical narration never takes place in isolation, but is always placed within socio-cultural contexts. On the one hand, these

contexts or cultural scripts influence our way of thinking about ourselves, but on the other hand, they also enable us to distance ourselves from them (61). Through a personal story, access is gained to a "*cultural master narrative* concerning what the expected, and unexpected, events are in a life course" (McClean et al. 631). These master narratives are "culturally shared stories that provide frameworks within which individuals can locate and story their own experiences" (McClean et al. 633). Although these narratives are "culturally specific" (633), they share the following underlying principles:

> *ubiquity* […]—they must be known by the majority; *utility*—they must serve the purpose of defining the acceptable, valued frameworks for defining the self; *invisibility*—they are often internalized through unconscious processes so that many are unaware that they are conforming to cultural expectations in defining themselves; *rigidity*—they hold structural power in society and are difficult to change; and *compulsory* nature—those whose personal narratives do not align with these master narratives are telling stories that are less valued and less 'good,' and are in a more marginalized position in society. (McClean et al. 633)

Relational autobiographies in particular, by incorporating the stories of others and extending the scope beyond the individual life, have given a voice to marginalized groups and communities (Rüggemeier 61). According to Rüggemeier, relational autobiography is dialogically constituted and she identifies five forms of dialogism which are central to these kinds of life writing.

First, there are narratives in which the autobiographical I tells his or her life story in relation to the biography of his or her parents, so a dialogue emerges in which both subjects interact and complement each other. By interweaving stories of one's parents, different perspectives emerge and a relational concept of the self emerges (64).

Second, the autobiographical I is presented within the context of a larger collective or group, and frequently tension is created in which the I is torn between belonging and dissociation (64-65). This is very similar to "autoethnography" as defined by Christian Moser. He considers autoethnography "a relational form of life writing" because in autoethnography, the "subject is defined in relation to a significant other, who comprises a collectivity – a culture, society or an ethnic group" (Moser 232). This significant other may be another culture or the subject's own culture – "where the subject describes her [or his] native social or ethnic setting and negotiates the terms of her [or his] group membership" (Moser 232).

Third, the autobiographical I is relational in that it is plural, i.e. experiences made by an I are woven together in a narrative and meaning is created by the act of narrating these experiences (Rüggemeier 65). Cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner has studied the act of remembering and how people create meaning when talking about what he calls "the Remembered Self." He points out that the "Self is not an entity that one can simply remember, but is, rather, a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes" (Bruner, "Remembered Self" 41). Among these mental processes is "selective memory retrieval" (41), which is guided by the "'need' to emphasize *agency*," in other words, memories are selected so that they reflect "our intentional states – our wishes, desires, beliefs and expectancies" (41). This is contrasted with the concept of "*victimicy*" (41). This means that if the construction of a self-concept is not possible according to one's own agentive acts, it is constructed "by attributing it to the agency of *another*" (41). Therefore, a "victim Self" is created "by reference to memories of how we responded to the agency of somebody else who had the power to impose his or her will upon us directly, or indirectly by controlling the circumstances in which we are compelled to live" (41).

Furthermore, he also stresses to importance of narrative in order to create a coherent concept of the self. His research has shown that when people talk about themselves, they usually do so by telling stories which include

> the usual elements of narrative […]: there is an *agent* engaged in *action* deploying certain *instruments* for achieving a *goal* in a particular *scene,* and somehow things have gone awry between these elements to produce *trouble.* The stories they tell, moreover, are genre-like: One encounters the hero tale, the *Bildungsroman,* the tale of the victim, the love story, and so on. (43)

But these stories are never consistent and depend on the interlocutor, i.e. the addressee of the story, and the roles one assumes in everyday life. The importance of the addressee of an oral story or written text is also part of Rüggemeier's definition of relational autobiography. Readers construct the narrating I from the text in front of them by filling in possible gaps and interpreting what they have read (Rüggemeier 66). The reader is indispensable in this process, which is also emphasized by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Whether a narratee is addressed directly in a text or indirectly, a narrator "cannot tell her [or his] story without imagining a reader" (Smith and Watson [2010] 89).

Finally, relational autobiographies, and therefore the autobiographical I, are embedded within a cultural context and cultural codes which predetermine – to some

extent – the form and content of the written work. Conventional autobiographies have been thought of as presenting a single, autonomous self and linear timelines, while relational autobiographies present a plural self which is embedded in a global context (Rüggemeier 67-68).

II.5. The Autobiographical I

The distinction between the experiencing I and the narrating I is important because the narrating I is the one that is "available to readers" (Smith and Watson [2001] 59). The narrating I, on the one hand, provides a retrospective account, chooses which parts, events and existents to include and creates the discourse. The experiencing I, on the other hand, is "the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating 'I' chooses to constitute through recollection for the reader" (Smith and Watson [2001] 60). We need to remember that even if there is a young version of a narrting I in the story, for example a child protagonist, this child is "not doing the remembering or narrating of the story. Nor is that narrated [experiencing] 'I' directly experiencing the past at the time of the writing" (61). Instead, it is always the narrating I that "tries to reproduce the sense of what [an] experience might have been like" by using various linguistic and literary devices, such as "simplistic vocabulary" or "sensory description" (61).

    Kaffir Boy is an auto/biographical account written by Mark Mathabane about his own life, whereas *Miriam's Song* falls into the category of as-told-to life writing: Mark is the author of Miriam's life story. Lindemann observes that "[t]he identity of the narrator is a fascinating problematic for scholars of as-told-to life writing. [He, she or it] most often corresponds with grammatical person, but this is not always the case. It is therefore not always readily apparent from a reading of the text" (527). However, she further points out that sometimes the narrator of these kinds of texts can be recognized, for example, by the writer's distinctive writing style or by the subject's unique voice. The narrator may also alternate between the subject and the writer throughout the text (527-528). Focalization can be a helpful tool when trying to recognize the narrator of not only as-told-to life writing, but of narratives in general.

II.6. Focalization

Events and elements in narratives are always presented in "a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle" (Bal 145). Storytelling, even if there is an attempt to be objective, is always to some extent subjective. Bal refers to this subjective angle as "vision" or "focalization" (45), i.e. "the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived" (145-146). The term focalization is used to make a clear distinction between the "vision through which the elements are presented and […] the identity of the voice that is verbalizing this vision. To put it more simply: […] a distinction between those who see and those who speak" (Bal 146).[3]

Focalization is a powerful means to manipulate the way the story is told and, consequently, the way it is perceived (Bal 147). The focalizer is the subject of the focalization – it is the agent or "point from which the elements are viewed" (149), and this point can be inside a character (internal focalizer) or outside of it (a disembodied narrative voice or external focalizer). Focalization is not necessarily static – it can alternate and lie with different characters in a story, which gives readers different perspectives of the same events or facts (152). The object of focalization is what the focalizer perceives, for example, landscapes, characters, animals or events. "[T]he image we receive of the object is determined by the focalizor [sic]. Conversely, the image a focalizor presents of an object says something about the focalizor itself" (153).

If characters are focalized, they can be represented or perceived by the focalizer in different ways. On the one hand, a focalizer may only 'see' external actions or features of a character, while the thoughts or emotions of the focalized character remain impenetrable. On the other hand, a focalizer may present focalized objects or characters as transparent, giving readers access to thoughts and feelings, as if the focalizer could read their mind (Rimmon-Kenan 78).

First-person narration is obviously the most common form of narration when it comes to life writing. With regard to focalization, the narrator in these personal accounts "has at least two possibilities at his disposal. He has his own, subjective point of view, and he can also, because of the duality of the subject, adopt the point of view of the hero, his earlier incarnation" (Edmiston 730).

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[3] Gérard Genette first introduced the distinction between narration and focalization in "Discours du récit" (1972).

Spatial, temporal and psychological distance are particularly important when it comes to first-person narration and focalization. In general, an external focalizer is located "at a point far above the object(s) of his perception" (Rimmon-Kenan 79), i.e. this narrator adopts a bird's-eye view from which the story is told, whereas an internal focalizer is restricted in space to what the character sees, hears or experiences. With regard to time, the distinction is similar: "an external focalizer has at his disposal all the temporal dimensions of the story (past, present and future), whereas an internal focalizer is limited to the 'present' of the characters" (Rimmon-Kenan 80), which means an internal focalizer does not "divulge [any] retrospective understanding" (81). Finally, there is the psychological element, which includes knowledge or memory and the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity. This means an external focalizer, in contrast to an internal focalizer, "knows everything about the represented world" (Rimmon-Kenan 81), yet this focalizer may choose to withhold information to create a certain effect, for example suspense or a twist. Likewise, facts, events and characters can be focalized objectively (usually, but not necessarily in external focalization) or subjectively (internal focalization), depending on the perception of the focalizer. To sum up, a first-person narrator

> can limit himself to the perceptions of his younger self (internal). He is not, however, restricted to those perceptions, and he enjoys certain spatial and cognitive advantages resulting from his temporal distance. He therefore often says more than his younger self knew at the moment of experience […]. Finally, toward other characters his perceptions should logically be those of a spectator (external), although here again his temporal distance allows for a certain psychological privilege. (Edmiston 732)

Dorrit Cohn focuses on different retrospective techniques of narration in her monograph *Transparent Minds*. She has coined the terms "dissonant self-narration" and "consonant self-narration" to distinguish between two types of first-person narration. Dissonant narrators are distant from their younger selves and "stress the cognitive privilege of the narrating over the experiencing self" (Cohn 151), often adding information that was learned later in life and interpreting actions and beliefs of the younger self. On the other hand, consonant narrators do not provide any subsequent knowledge, so the gap between the narrating self and the experiencing self is much smaller (153-161). However, consonant self-narration is quite rare as "[n]arrators usually like to maintain their distance from the past they are recounting and therefore avoid total consonance. […] Moreover, in autobiographical novels the time of reflection

is more often the present than the past, so the dominant consciousness usually belongs to the narrating rather than the experiencing self" (Edmiston 733). To what extent narration might be dissonant or consonant can vary, because a narrator "may choose at times to identify with the experiencing self. When consonance occurs, its characteristics are interrogatives directed to an unknown future, which have long since been answered; effacement of all marks of the present-past polarity; and focus on the experiencing self" (733).

The distinction between external and internal focalization in first-person narratives is not always clear-cut and there might be some ambiguity. The vantage point from which the story is told can be helpful when trying to distinguish between external and internal focalization. If the focus is placed on the experiencing I, which is part of the story, the experiencing I as a character becomes the internal focalizer and is limited to the perceptions of this experiencing self at the time of the events. Subsequent knowledge or corrective statements are generally not provided in such passages. Moreover, an internal focalizer can only make assumptions with regard to the thoughts and feelings of other characters, typically by making of use of modal verbs ('It seemed to me,' etc.). The reader follows the character and his or her perceptions as the events unfold (Edmiston 739).

If the focus placed on the narrating I and the vantage point lies outside of the story world in the present tense, the narrating I becomes the focalizer. Subsequent knowledge and interpretations are often provided because this external focalizer is not as limited as an internal focalizer with regard to time and space. This focalizer can make readers aware of facts that he/she learned only later, even when he/she was not present in a certain situation. For example, the narrating I may say 'I found out later that…' to comment on or correct beliefs or actions of his/her younger self or other characters. In addition, "on the psychological plane, his subsequent knowledge of the characters allows him to reconstruct their thoughts and to present them more or less as narrative facts—something we all do when we tell a story" (Edmiston 740). This reconstruction can either be achieved by relating only "firsthand observations," or by "reconstruct[ing] the state of mind of those involved and the motives that governed their actions, even though these are unobservable. The technique of presenting characters from the narrator's present vantage point […] is especially conducive to psychological reconstruction or supposition" (Edmiston 740). Finally, zero focalization is also possible. This means some passages may not be focalized, in other words,

"unrestricted to the perception of even the retrospective FPN [first-person narrator], who then resembles an omniscient narrator" (Edmiston 741). Information, whether it is psychological or spatial, is provided which "neither hero nor narrator could logically possess" (742).

Part III: Analysis of *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*

III.1. Focalization in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*

The self-narration in *Kaffir Boy* is predominantly dissonant, in other words, there is marked distance between the narrating I and the younger, experiencing self. There is a disembodied narrating I that focalizes the events, landscapes, characters, etc. of the story from a temporal and spatial distance. He often stresses his cognitive privilege over the experiencing self, which means he often says more than his younger self knew at the moment of experience by including metanarrative comments, as in this example: "As I closed the curtains to ease her agony, while trying hard to mask my own sadness, I consoled her […]. *Little was I aware that that first bleak Christmas was a portent for many similar ones to come*" (*KB* 40; emphasis added).

However, this external focalization is not static throughout the narrative. At times, the narration becomes consonant, in particular when the protagonist is young. Consonance therefore occurs mainly in "The Road to Alexandra," the first part of *Kaffir Boy*. In some passages of these early chapters, the narrator tries to reconstruct the experiences of the child vividly. An example is the following: "Suddenly, as I stood leaning against the table, from outside came a series of dreadful noises. Sirens blared, voices screamed and shouted, wood cracked and windows shattered, children bawled, dogs barked and footsteps pounded. I was bewildered; I had never heard such a racket before. I was instantly seized by a feeling of terror" (*KB* 7). Here, the focalizer is limited in space (inside the shack) and sensory description is used to capture what he perceives outside. Through internal focalization, a realistic effect and shock are achieved, and suspense is created as the reader is able to follow the child protagonist closely. As the story progresses and the experiencing self gets older, the narration becomes more and more dissonant.

Dissonance might also be the reason why Mark Mathabane, which is the name that is given as the author of *Kaffir Boy* on the book's cover, refers to his experiencing self as "Johannes" throughout the story. Apparently, "[h]e adopted [the name] after the 1976 riots in order to elude the authorities who were hunting down students who'd taken part in the student rebellion" (*MS* 246). But why did he continue to use the name

"Mark" in the USA even many years after his escape from South Africa? And why does he not refer to himself as "Mark" in *Kaffir Boy,* but instead opts for "Johannes"? In this context, it is worth recalling William F. Edmiston's assessment that in autobiographical narratives "the time of reflection is more often the present than the past, so the *dominant consciousness* usually belongs to the *narrating* rather than the experiencing self" (733; emphasis added). Therefore, by using the name "Johannes," the narrator may want to emphasize a certain degree of detachment from his past self. After all, "[w]hat one *is* influences one's memory, and the *way* one attempts to reconstruct, one's past; but by the same token what one *was* – one's past – has influenced the direction one's life has taken, and therefore has affected the perspective one now takes in autobiographical reconstruction" (Forguson 144).

This perspective or "standpoint" (Pascal 9) is chosen by the autobiographical subject at the time of writing. Therefore, it may be assumed that the narrator's current standpoint is that "Johannes" was his *former* self. A self that could not act autonomously because it was severely constrained by the social structures that apartheid had created. A self that could not speak out against the injustices in South Africa. A self that was seen as a *Kaffir* without any rights or dignity. But now, as a writer in the USA, he is "Mark" Mathabane, a free man who can think and act according to his own will. Or, in his words: "Being in America has afforded me the rare opportunity of gaining a proper perspective on my African heritage, […] of understanding what it means to be regarded as a human being […] and, most important, of using the pen to fight against injustice and racism in my native land" (*KB* xi-xii). By *writing* his life story, he is able to educate not only the international community, but also "the white man of South Africa [who] claims to the rest of the world that he knows what is good for black people" (*KB* 3), yet "go[es] through a lifetime without seeing firsthand the inhuman conditions under which blacks have to survive" (*KB* 3). "Johannes" had to live through these inhuman conditions and, as a character in the story, can therefore make them 'see' what it meant to grow up under apartheid, whereas "Mark" is the narrator who has gained a new perspective on his past.

Determining the narrative point of view in *Miriam's Song* is at times quite difficult because of the as-told-to production process. It can be said that the narrator in *Miriam's Song* is the subject, Miriam Mathabane, for most of the narrative, yet there are some

passages where writer Mark Mathabane becomes the narrator, or rather, the external focalizer. Some of these passages are easily identifiable, for example, when historical and political events or other background information is provided for the reader. These passages are written in the past tense while the rest of the memoir is written in the present tense. One example is the following:

> Pass laws—part of the influx control system—determined which blacks could stay in "white" South Africa (the land designated for whites) and for how long, and which couldn't. To stay in "white" South Africa, a black person had to fulfill three conditions under Section 10 of the Pass Laws and Black Urban Areas Act of 1945: birth, continuous employment for ten years for the same employer, or continuous residence in a township like Alexandra for more than fifteen years. (*MS* 43)

However, there are also parts within the story where it is unclear who the focalizer is:

> There is an insistent knock on the door. It's Papa. He bellows that we should open the door or he'll break it down. He's drunk. Mama and I abruptly end the lesson. We remove the books from the table and hide them. I'm afraid that Papa, if he finds out I was teaching Mama to read, will burn my books […]. I open the door. Papa staggers in and demands his dinner. As I watch him eat, I wonder if he's ever had any dreams like Mama. *Why didn't he go to school? What was his childhood like? Why is he such an angry and bitter person? Will he ever change? Why do I love him in spite of the bad things he does?* (*MS* 111; emphasis added)

If one is not familiar with *Kaffir Boy*, it might be easy to say that here Miriam – the experiencing self – is the internal focalizer and that the narration is consonant, i.e. the gap between the narrating self and the narrated self is small. The internal focalizer is restricted in space and time and she perceives the actions of Papa as they unfold: the knock on the door, his bellowing, his staggering, etc. But then there are the rhetorical questions which complicate the matter. These questions are remarkably similar to those frequently posed in *Kaffir Boy*. Therefore, I wonder who is speaking here? Miriam as an internal focalizer? Miriam as an external focalizer who, even as an adult, has still found no answers to these questions? Or is it the narrative voice of Mark Mathabane as an external focalizer who is still trying to come to terms with his father and their relationship? Or is it even Mark Mathabane as an *internal* focalizer? A writer who so vividly remembers his childhood that he puts an invisible, former self inside the shack and perceives his father once again? To me it seems that there are all four of these focalizers present at the same time, and these focalizers merge into one collaborative narrative voice of brother and sister who lived through the same experiences.

Also compare the following two examples from *Kaffir Boy* (1) and *Miriam's Song* (2):

> (1) Even as he wasted away, trying desperately to but in vain to establish order to the chaos of his life, he failed to realise, even in the slightest, that his chaos was partly of his own creation, of his continued *clinging to values* which had long outlived their usefulness. (*KB* 208; emphasis added)
> (2) Papa is a complex man. I know he loves us in his own way. I also know that he's afraid, especially of change. That's why he *clings to the past*. (*MS* 138; emphasis added)

In (1) there is clearly an external focalizer and the narration is dissonant. The external focalizer is located at a point above the focalized object and is not limited in space or time. His cognitive privilege is foregrounded as he retrospectively interprets and evaluates the actions and beliefs of his father. In (2) the situation is again more complicated. At first glance it looks like an external focalizer – the narrating I of Miriam who retrospectively focalizes her father (despite the use of the present tense). However, by comparing both passages side by side it seems like the narrative voice of Mark as an external focalizer is again intruding and providing an evaluative interpretation, which is indicated by the choice of the phrasal verb "cling to."

At other times it is unclear who is speaking because of the abrupt changes in style. Throughout the narrative, there is an abundance of short sentences strung together, for example: "My hair starts looking like porcupine quills. Then on top of pimples I develop dandruff. I'm utterly wretched. My schoolwork suffers. […] My hair starts changing color. It curls into all sorts of funny shapes by itself" (*MS* 156). Therefore, some of the longer sentences – combined with a more elaborate vocabulary and formal register – stand out, such as:

> I find this praise somewhat *disconcerting*, mainly because the traits for which I'm praised are *submissiveness*, obedience, and hard work. Of all the seven siblings I'm the one who *submits* most readily *to* whatever rules my parents have laid out for us. […] As for obedience, everything my teachers, parents, and other adults ask me to do, I do without as much as a murmur, even when I have some misgivings. I have an *inordinate* respect for authority and desire to please. (*MS* 159; emphasis added)

In this example, it is not apparent if the external focalizer in this case is (adult) Miriam who analyses her younger self somewhat critically, or if it is another external focalizer (Mark) who is subtly criticising Miriam's submissiveness in retrospect. Indeed, as Lindemann notes, "[t]he identity of the narrator is a fascinating problematic" (527) when it comes to as-told-to life writing. Her conception of as-told-to life writing on a continuum between autobiography and biography, depending on the position of the narrator and

the authority of either the writer or the subject of the finished product, is helpful when trying to categorize *Miriam's Song*. Since most of the narrative is written in Miriam's voice and focalized from her perspective, it is located closer to autobiography on the continuum, despite the occasional intrusions of the writer's narrative voice.

III.2. The Structure of *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*

Kaffir Boy consists of a dedication page, a short preface and an epigraph which make up the front matter, and the main narrative. The story is divided into three main parts: "The Road to Alexandra" focuses on Johannes's life from age five until he is enrolled in primary school when he is seven years old. The second part, "Passport to Knowledge," is mainly about his struggles in primary school and his academic achievements as a student. Finally, "Passport to Freedom" deals with the obstacles he faces while trying to earn a tennis scholarship to attend college in the USA. The story ends in 1978 when he is able to leave South Africa thanks to the help of professional tennis player Stan Smith and his wife Marjory.

  Miriam's Song is comprised of a glossary, a preface and fifty-three short chapters. The story begins in 1975 when Miriam is six years old and attends her first year in primary school, chronicles her life growing up in Alexandra in the 1980s, one of the most violent decades in apartheid South Africa, and ends in 1993 when a now 23-year-old Miriam joins her brother Johannes and her extended family in the USA.

A) Kaffir Boy and Miriam's Song as a Quest

It can be said the structure of both narratives follows the *quest* plot. The quest, as Christopher Booker emphasizes, is "one of the most instantly recognisable" (69) storylines in literature. The structure of the quest is very simple, yet also very successful in terms of creating suspense and keeping readers interested in the characters' development. In a quest, there is always a goal to be achieved – a *goal* which needs to be reached in order for the story to be resolved. First, there is the *call*, in other words, the reason why the quest begins. On the way to reaching the ultimate

goal, i.e. the *journey*, the protagonist faces obstacles and ordeals, but is also helped by other characters who bring him or her closer to the goal. Then there is the *arrival* and *frustration* stage in which the protagonist comes very close to what he or she desires, but there are still final obstacles to overcome. Finally, the life-transforming goal is achieved and the story is resolved, often with a positive outlook on an indefinite future (Booker 69-83).

Johannes's ultimate *goal* is the "Passport to Freedom," i.e. to be able to leave South Africa and reach the 'promised land' that is the USA. His *journey* takes him from his home in Alexandra to primary and secondary school where he metaphorically obtains his "Passport to Knowledge," though there are many obstacles in the way. There is never enough money in order to excel at school, teachers frequently punish him, police raids terrify him, and the living conditions at home remain dismal. However, there are also *helpers* whom he meets along the way (the Smith family, his tennis coach Scaramouche, a German benefactor called Wilfred Horn, etc.). *Arrival* and *frustration* follow – he receives an acceptance letter from Limestone College in the USA and is thrilled about the news, yet in order to leave the country, he must obtain an official passport from the authorities. This is his final obstacle and the story is resolved when he makes his way to the airport.

Miriam's quest is very similar to that of her brother. She too wants to leave the country in order to become a nurse in the USA. Like Johannes, she has to deal with poverty, hardship, and violence as a child and as a teenager. As she gets older and the struggle for liberation becomes more and more violent, she is forced to stay away from school for extended periods of time and is directly thrust into the liberation struggle as an adolescent. On top of that, she is raped and becomes a teenage mother in her final year of school – her *arrival* and *frustration* stage. She almost drops out of school which makes it seem as if she may not achieve her life-changing goal. However, she has *helpers* along the way, such as her sisters, her mother, her female peers, her brother, and Oprah Winfrey. Due to her dedication to studying, and because she receives a scholarship from Oprah Winfrey with the help of her now-famous brother, she is able to ultimately achieve her *goal* and join her siblings in the USA.

B) Crucial Changes: Turning Points in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*

From a psychological point of view, the structure of both autobiographies also follows what Bruner refers to as "turning points" ("Remembered Self" 42). In his studies of spontaneous autobiographical accounts that people tell about themselves, he has noticed that "there is a strong tendency to segregate the 'periods of life' […] and make each schematically consistent in its own terms" ("Remembered Self" 42). These turning points refer to crucial changes in a person's life and "though they may be linked to things happening 'outside,' [they] are finally attributed to a happening 'inside' – a new belief, new courage, moral disgust, 'having had enough.' They are thickly agentive" ("Remembered Self" 50). Moreover, he emphasizes how these turning points are narrative constructions that help individuals to achieve personal meaning. Turning points are

> clear instances of narrative construction that have the function of helping the teller clarify his or her Self-concept. They are prototype narrative episodes whose construction results in increasing the realism and drama of the Self. In that sense, the narrative construction, whenever it actually happened, is as important as what is reported to have actually happened in the turning point episode. Turning points, in a word, construct emblems of narrative clarity in the teller's history of Self. Narrative, we know, imposes a particular structure on the "reality" that it depicts. […] [Turning points] serve as generative "gists" for the life as a whole, and in this sense they are as much tropes as literal accounts of "what happened." (50)

Ansgar Nünning et al. have explored turning points and linked the concept to narrative theory and literary studies in *Turning Points: Concepts and Narratives of Change in Literature and Other Media*. Interestingly, as Nünning notes in his introductory comments on the subject matter, "narrative theory has accorded very little attention to such a genuinely narratological phenomenon" despite the fact that "turning points have been one of the constitutive elements of the 'rhetoric of fiction' […] since the beginnings of the novel" (31).

He has identified some of the key features of turning points in narratives. Briefly summarized, these features are: (1) Turning points are always constructed retrospectively by a narrator with the benefit of hind-sight. (2) Naturally, they are always subjective and depend on the narrator's point of view and how much significance is attributed to certain moments. (3) They comprise the capacity to avert alternative courses of events. Usually, they involve a conscious decision that steers the life course

in a particular direction and rules out other possibilities. (4) They are irrevocable and have far-reaching implications for the individual. (5) They are singular and cannot be repeated (33-42).

In retrospective first-person narrative, the narrating I selects the events that make up the story – events that are worth telling, exceptional or noteworthy – and structures them in such way that some sort of meaningful order is established. In *Kaffir Boy*, the structure clearly follows the turning points of the experiencing I. Central moments are foregrounded at the end of each of the three larger parts and mark a transition, thus driving the plot forward.

At the close of "The Road to Alexandra," the narrator highlights the significance of receiving his birth certificate from the Alexandra clinic. "I simply grumbled, little realising that my entire future had actually depended on that one piece of paper […]. I had, though I hardly knew it then, cleared the first, and most difficult, hurdle toward eventually enrolling at school" (*KB* 119). His life course changes at this particular moment. An alternative direction is ruled out and he does not become a member of the notorious street gangs of Alexandra, but instead embarks on a different, life-changing path. The narrator draws attention to the importance of this event in hindsight ("I hardly knew it then"), thus marking the first turning point and raising the reader's expectations.

The conclusion of Part Two, "Passport to Knowledge," is structured around another turning point in his life. He meets Scaramouche, his future tennis coach, while playing tennis against a wall. This chance encounter becomes a turning point because only with the help of Scaramouche does he become better at his play. He deviates "from the canonical, i.e. from what is regarded as normal […] in the culture's ways of worldmaking" (Nünning 40-41). Tennis was regarded as a white man's sport under apartheid and his intention to excel at it is a deviance from cultural norms. He begins to dream of the possibilities that being a tennis player might hold, in particular of possibly earning the same level of respect as his role model Arthur Ashe (*KB* 210-211).

Finally, at the ending of Part III, "Passport to Freedom," we arrive at the most crucial turning point in Johannes's life. The narrator looks back from a temporal, spatial and psychological distance and reflects on his life, his experiences, his family, his beliefs and values. "I told [my brother] to be brave, to believe in himself, to set goals, to have faith, to strive doggedly to realise those goals. I told him never to let the white man define his manhood. I told him to be a fighter, to be resilient, to have patience, to

have hope, to take care of our ailing mother, our sisters and our father" (*KB* 350). The narrator also foregrounds a "thickly agentive" (Bruner, "Remembered Self" 50) decision that is a characteristic of turning points: "As the car left the yard […], I turned my head for a last look at my family, […] waving sadly in the pale morning mist. *I wanted to tell the man to turn back, but I didn't*. I followed my destiny" (*KB* 350; emphasis added). Again, the narrator draws attention to the importance of the event and how his conscious decision influenced the events of the future – in this case the beginning of a new life in the USA.

The individual chapters in *Miriam's Song* vary in length but are generally quite short. The narrative is chronologically structured, detailing Miriam's life from childhood to early adulthood. Since most of the text is written in the present tense, the chapters sometimes resemble diary entries that loosely hang together, for example: "I'm so hungry I feel dizzy. Teacher Nyoko is busy writing math problems on the blackboard. We are having one of our weekly math quizzes" (*MS* 114).

The turning points in *Miriam's Song* are not as easily discernible as in *Kaffir Boy* because of the difference in focalization. While *Kaffir Boy* is focalized from an external, clearly retrospective point of view, most of *Miriam's Song* is focalized from an internal point of view. Therefore, the benefit of hind-sight and reflection is often missing. Still, if we look closely at the structure, significant turning points can be detected. One of these is the outbreak of violence in the townships in the 1980s. "I can't believe what I've done. Against my will, I've become a Comrade" (*MS* 184). Here, Bruner's clarification is helpful in establishing the turning point. An event occurs outside (the student protest) but there is also "a happening 'inside'" ("Remebered Self" 50), i.e. her beliefs change and she has had enough: "I also know that I belong with the Comrades. They are my sisters and brothers, even though as a Christian and a nonviolent person, I don't like many of the things they're doing. […] But deep in my heart I know they are trying to make things better, […] to fight for the liberation of everyone" (*MS* 190). Becoming a Comrade is also irrevocable and has far-reaching consequences for her life, which is also drives to plot towards the next turning point – Sabelo.

Sabelo is a fellow Comrade whom she meets at one of the night vigils. One night, amidst rioting and gunshots in Alexandra, Miriam has to spend the night at Sabelo's house. He takes advantage of the situation and rapes her. The consequences of that night are significant. First of all, Miriam blames herself for what happened; she

feels guilty and even "considers it a punishment from God" (*MS* 222). It constitutes a turning point for multiple reasons. Not only is it a "deviation from what is expected and considered to be the norm" (Nünning 42) within the cultural context, but it is also foregrounded because of how it affects her emotionally. Secondly, she becomes pregnant as a consequence of the event, so the turning point serves as a transition into a new direction of her life.

Her final turning point is again connected to Sabelo. She keeps dating him because he is the father of her child. Due to poverty, domestic violence and a patriarchal corset, she cannot simply turn her back on her abuser. On the day before her final exams, he beats her violently and locks her up in his house, which is why she has to repeat her final year in school. This is when she becomes even more determined to finish school against all odds in order to leave him for good. "I *know* I can never be free from him while I live in South Africa. Because he's a man and able to intimidate me, I *know* he'll always force me to remain in the relationship […]. I *know* that if I have a career of my own, I won't be dependent on any man" (*MS* 297; emphasis added). Again, the turning point is clearly marked by the repetition of the mental verb "know," which emphasizes understanding and decision-making, and it is constructed by the narrating I with the benefit of hind-sight.

III.3. Tribalism, Politics and the Implied Reader

Multiple passages in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song* indicate a formation of self-consciousness not only in relation to the cultural context within which the stories take place, but also in relation to significant others who populate the texts. The parents' voices are included in the narratives as constructed dialogues, frequently quoted in direct speech, or free indirect discourse which makes their presence felt when reading the texts. Mother and father play a prominent role in both narratives, and their portrayal in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song* will be examined closely in the following chapters.

Johannes's most important proximate others, his parents, are introduced very early in *Kaffir Bo*y. In the first chapter, which serves as a short exposition, the narrator provides details about the neighbourhood of Alexandra, the living conditions there, some historical and political information as well as his parents' background. Both of his

parents originally come from rural areas – the tribal reserves or so-called 'homelands.' His father belongs to the tribe of the Vendas, and his mother belongs to the Tsongas. Both met and married in Alexandra in the 1950s and thereafter moved into a shack in the township.

By introducing the tribal affiliations at the very beginning of the narrative, the narrator puts emphasis on this theme which recurs throughout the story. Father Jackson Mathabane's views and tribal customs greatly influence the life of the Mathabane family as he "ruled the house strictly according to tribal law, tolerating no deviance, particularly from his children" (*KB* 32). Due to his tribal upbringing in the Venda homeland, he places great importance on tradition and the performance of rituals. He firmly believes in ancestral spirits, voodoo and superstitions. Moreover, he rules the family with an iron fist. The relationship between father and son is severely strained because of this, and Johannes slowly dissociates from his father's views as he gets older and becomes politically active.

This shift becomes obvious in the structure of the narrative, i.e. by how the narrator's perception of the father changes as the protagonist matures. In the first part of the narrative, Jackson is focalized and embodied as an utterly terrifying figure. For example, the child focalizer frequently puts emphasis on his "fearsome features": "A short, gaunt figure, with a smooth, tight, black-as-coal skin, large prominent jaws, thin, uneven lips whose sole function seemed to be the production of sneers, a broad nose with slightly flaring nostrils, small, bloodshot eyes which never cried, small, close-set ears, and a wide, prominent forehead—such were my father's fearsome features" (*KB* 31). Moreover, Jackson is a choleric man who regularly beats his wife and his children. His violent outbursts are still vividly remembered by the external focalizer as they are narrated frequently and in great detail. For example:

> One day I intentionally broke one of these [tribal] laws: I talked while eating. "That's never done in my house," my father screamed at me as he rose from the table where he had been sitting alone, presiding over our meal. […] "You don't have two mouths to afford you such luxury!" he fumed, advancing threateningly toward me, a cold sneer on his thin-lipped, cankerous mouth. He seemed ten feet tall. Terrified, I deserted the *pap 'n vleis* and fled to Mother. "Bring him back here, woman!" my father called through the door as he unbuckled his rawhide belt. "He needs to be taught how to eat properly!" […] He tore me away from my mother and lashed me. She tried to intervene, but my father shoved her aside and promised her the same. (*KB* 32-33)

The words used by the narrator (screamed; fumed; threateningly; terrified) highlight the boy's feelings of terror and his overall perception of his father as a threat.

As the protagonist gets older, the narration becomes more dissonant, in particular when the father is focalized – it is the narrative voice of a defiant adolescent: "His tough talk no longer frightened me, and he knew it" (*KB* 206). Parallel constructions of opposites are used to draw attention to the narrator's view that he progressing while his father is stagnating: "I was set in my ways, he in his. He disparaged education, I extolled it; he burned my books at every opportunity, I bought more; he abused my mother, I tried to help her; he believed all that the white man said about him, I did not; he lived for the moment, I for the future, uncertain as it was" (*KB* 207). The narrator is critical of his father's seeming unwillingness to accept reality, i.e. his firm belief that black life would one day revert to the past "when black people had lived in peace and contentment before the coming of the white man" (*KB* 207). In his view, Jackson Mathabane "wallow[s] in a bottomless hole of unreality" (*KB* 208) and holds on to an idealized past and outdated values which are no longer useful. This portrayal of the father figure in particular and tribal traditions in general requires further exploration against the backdrop of the cultural and political context in an effort to understand the evaluative comments and often harsh judgement of the narrator.

Leroy Vail has studied the origins and persistence of tribalism, which today is more frequently referred to as "ethnicity" as the "less judgmental" (1) term, in his monograph *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. He sets out by explaining that in the middle of the twentieth century, many observers, for example development theorists, political leaders, journalists and students of African affairs, believed that tribalism and "parochial ethnic loyalties were merely cultural ghosts lingering on into the present" and "were destined to disappear in the face of the social, economic and political changes that were at work" (1) in most of the Southern African countries during the 1950s and 1960s. It was believed that modernization, access to education, increased industrialization and economic growth would lead to "a new, nationoriented consciousness" (1) among the citizens of these countries and that cultural divisions would therefore become less and less important over time. However, ethnicity continued to be significant for "ordinary Africans living in post-colonial states" because "African nationalist movements […] were simply unable to provide them with compelling intellectual, social, and political visions" (1) after the attainment of independence from colonial powers. Therefore, ethnicity's "source and appeal needed

reasonable explanations, and interpretations of it have ranged widely, reflecting its multidimensional nature" (2).

One of these explanations is "the old assumption that Africans are by nature 'tribal' people and that 'tribalism' is little more than an irrelevant anachronism […] deriving from the distant past of rural Africa. It should have evaporated with the passage of time, but, inexplicably, […] it continues to refuse to obey the laws of social and political change" (Vail 2-3). Vail has rejected this explanation due to its lack of "analytical power" as well as the fact that ethnic consciousness is "very much a new phenomenon, an ideological construct, usually of the twentieth century, and not an anachronistic cultural artifact from the past" (3). Even though there were various indigenous South African chiefdoms, cattle herders, as well as hunter-gatherer groups in pre-colonial times, these particular groups were never closed entities. Outsiders were not precluded but instead welcomed into the groups by the tribal chiefs or the communities as a whole (Thompson 26-27).

Another explanation for the persistence of tribalism is that "ethnicity is primarily the result of a history of 'divide-and-rule' tactics which colonial governments cannily employed" (Vail 3). This is especially true in a South African context, since the apartheid regime and its Bantustan policies stressed "the uniqueness of 'tribal' culture," and therefore promoted "political divisions among the country's African population" (3). Colonial administrators implemented systems of indirect rule by establishing traditional African authorities, such as tribal chiefs, to act as intermediaries between the ruled and the colonial administration in rural areas and tribal reserves (12-13). Tribal chiefs and leaders were used to ensure the "continuation [of] discrete 'tribal' groups and prevent the emergence of 'detribalized' Africans […]. This, in turn, would slow the emergence of any potentially dangerous territory-wide political consciousness that might develop" (13).

Another interpretation emerged from urban sociology and the study of mining areas of Central Africa. In search of employment, members of different cultural groups, originally from isolated rural areas, now came together and interacted in urban spaces, thus forming "stereotypes of themselves and others, and these stereotypes effectively highlighted and strengthened culturally defined distinctions amongst peoples" (Vail 4). Employers often used "ethnic differences" (4) to their advantage, for example, by preferring one ethnic group over another and thus causing competition between the various groups. Vail emphasizes that "ethnic stereotypes were indeed largely produced

in work situations and in urban settings" and "created opposing notions of 'them' and 'us'" (4). The migrant labour system was certainly a key factor that contributed to the strengthening of ethnicity among the workers. Cheap labour was required in most capitalist enterprises within South Africa, and "unskilled workers would oscillate from the rural villages to work sites and then back to the villages," which meant that "their wives and children would remain permanently behind in the rural areas, while the men would dwell in bachelor dormitories at the work sites for the duration of their contracts" (9). This system benefitted employers because, as it kept the working class from unionizing, they could pay low wages. African workers did not have a choice but to participate in the migrant labour system in order to earn money for themselves and their extended families. Therefore,

> rural areas […] necessarily remained of central concern for the migrants. On the one hand, they could not remain at home to supervise life in the village […]. On the other hand, they could not abandon their rural homes. Laws prevented the relocation of families to work sites and strictly regulated the length of contracts a worker could assume. Thus, it was in the rural areas that the workers' *long-term interests* necessarily lay, for they would *eventually return* there when their working life was over. Even while absent for decades from the rural areas, then, the workers' concerns typically remained sharply focused on what was occurring at home. (Vail 9; emphasis added)

For migrant workers, a tribal chief acted as "a proxy who protected [their] interests," i.e. the chiefs were in charge of overseeing "both women and land in the absence of the men" (Vail 15). Therefore, "ethnicity appealed strongly to ordinary African men […] because it aided them in bringing a measure of control to the difficult situations in which they found themselves in their day-to-day life" (14). This limited measure of control over their long-term interests in their rural homelands is the reason why

> African men welcomed the new ethnic ideologies which involved augmenting powers of chiefs in a situation of rapid social decay. […] Men came to think of themselves as belonging to particular ethnic groups […] because the ethnic apparatus of the rural area—the chiefs, 'traditional' courts, petty bourgeois intellectuals, and the systematized 'traditional' values of the 'tribe' as embodied in the ethnic ideology—all worked to preserve the very substantial interests which these men had in their home areas. Without ethnicity—or tribalism—the migrants would have been less able to exercise the control that was necessary for them to assure the continuation of their positions in rural societies and their ultimate retirement in their home areas. (Vail 15)

Psychology offers another explanation for the strong appeal of ethnic consciousness. This theory argues that Africans were severely affected by the political and socio-economic shifts that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> [P]re-colonial hierarchies and elements of order in social life were undermined by the growth of capitalist relations and the impact of colonialism, thereby depriving people of social and psychological security. As a result, in a hostile world they have instead sought security through the invocation of a lost past of firm values as a way of recreating a life in which they can achieve emotional and, even, perhaps, physical safety. Ethnic identity provides a comforting sense of brotherhood in a world tending towards social atomization and rootlessness. Ethnic leaders represent and embody the unity of the cultural group. In this view, ethnicity is a kind of romantic rejection of the present. (Vail 5-6)

The psychological approach explains the "emotional appeal" of ethnicity as people are categorized according to "inevitable, largely unselfconscious ascription: people belong to tribe X because they are born in tribe X and are, regardless of personal choice, characterized by the cultural traits of tribe X. Thus one is a member of a 'tribe' not by choice, but by destiny, and one thus partakes of a set of 'proper' customs" (6).

All of these interpretations are helpful when it comes to understanding Jackson Mathabane. He was born and raised in the Venda homeland, however, he has to move to the city at an early age to find a job. There he starts a family with a woman from another tribe. Despite his relocation, he is still connected in thought and spirit to his chief – his proxy in his homeland – and therefore places great importance on tribal values, traditions and rituals. He is clearly portrayed as the patriarch of the family who does not allow any insubordination from his wife or his children. He tries to form his children "in his image" (*MS* 138) by insisting that they speak his mother tongue, Venda, in the household instead of Shangaan. In his home, he is a strong, proud man who can exert power and is to be respected. Yet outside his home, he has only little control over his life as he is not able to reside where he wants, is dependent on his employers and apartheid bureaucrats and is therefore "trying desperately […] to establish order to the chaos in his life" (*KB* 207).

It is interesting to note that tribalism and the character of Jackson Mathabane are presented considerably more negatively and critically in *Kaffir Boy* than in *Miriam's Song*. In order to interpret this difference in tone, it might be helpful to consider two of Rüggemeier's criteria of relational autobiography, that is, the embeddedness of the texts within their cultural contexts and the implied reader.

The critique of tribalism and the father's tribal heritage in *Kaffir Boy* can be explained by considering the political message of Mathabane's autobiography. *Kaffir Boy* was published in the USA in 1986 when apartheid was still in place, and it would take another eight years until the formation of a democratic South Africa. Therefore,

raising awareness and strengthening international resistance against the regime was of great importance at that time. This is emphasized by the author in the preface: "South Africa has entered its darkest hour, and all its sons and daughters have a responsibility, a duty, to see to it that truth and justice triumph. I hope to do my part" (*KB* xii). It was only in 1986 that the US Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act which "mandated a variety of sanctions designed to force the dismantling of apartheid" (Schraeder 189-190). It took a long time for US policymakers to arrive at this legislation since "[t]he history of the relationship between the US and South Africa's apartheid regime [was] a long and intimate one that involved economic and military partnerships" (McCoy, "America's Role"). One of the main reasons behind the close ties between the US and South African government was the Cold War, and South Africa's government was seen by the US as "a natural ally in the global struggle against communist expansionism led by the Soviet Union" (Schraeder 195) due to "the Afrikaner government's fervent anti-communism and strong support of the US in its ideological competition with the Soviet Union" (194).

Pressures for change in US foreign policy toward South Africa began in the late 1950s, and Peter J. Schraeder has identified two major developments that contributed to this movement. First, the US civil rights movement "ensured greater official attention to the issue of race in both US domestic and international policies" (196). Second, a growing number of African countries achieved independence from colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s, which caused concern among American diplomats that "the US risked alienating the majority of black African states if it maintained close ties with the Afrikaner government" (196).

As a student, Johannes takes part in rallies and marches organized by the resistance movement that began in 1976 in Soweto and quickly spread to other townships across the country (*KB* 259-271). The resistance movement was informed by Black Consciousness, an association which had grown out of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) in the 1970s and was spearheaded by Steve Biko (Hadfield 1). "Black Consciousness began to be defined as 'an attitude of mind' or 'way of life' of black people who believed in their potential and value as black people and saw the need for black people to work together for a holistic liberation" (3). One of the most important goals of Black Consciousness was to redefine "black as a new positive definition that included all people of color discriminated against by the color of their skin. This was a new approach to grouping people divided […] into Coloureds (mixed-

race people), Indians, and various black African ethnic groups" and made it possible to achieve "black unity," which in turn "presented a stronger front against apartheid" (Hadfield 4). Tribalism, on the other hand, played into the divide-and-rule tactics of the apartheid government and did not contribute black unity. The division among the ethnic groups is foregrounded in a passage when young Johannes overhears a group of middle-aged men talk about migrant workers from the tribal reserves:

> "Those, my boy, are not men. Those are leeches from the tribal reserves. They're coming here to work in the mines." At his saying that, everyone around the fire broke out laughing—a sort of sardonic laughter intended to convey deep-rooted rancor and hatred. […] "There goes that vermin, again," a man with a hideous scar on his left cheek remarked, making an obscene gesture at the passing trucks. […] The way he denounced the blanketed people, and the way the rest of the men around the fire supported what he was saying, made it seem that, somehow, their inability to find work, to earn a living, to have self-respect and dignity, to be real men in the eyes of their wives; in short, the disintegration of their lives, was blamable on the convoys coming into the township. Somehow, in their anger and hatred, I could see traces of my father's anger and hatred. (*KB* 110-111)

The political message, inspired by Black Consciousness and relayed by the narrator is clear: "As black fought against black" (*KB* 263), neither unity nor liberation can ever be achieved.

The rejection of tribalism is also about the rejection of authority of the older generation. After all, the resistance movement was predominantly a students' movement and "[a]s emerging young adults unencumbered by the fear of older generations, these activists looked for a way to fundamentally change their society" (Hadfield 2). As Apollo Amoko puts it:

> In the African context, autobiographies […] seem to enact, at least in some measure, the rebellion of the youth against both pre-colonial and colonial tradition. Many autobiographies depict a young protagonist rejecting or outgrowing the law of the father; whether the father is understood figuratively as the custodian of tradition or literally as a biological entity in a particular patriarchal setting. […] Mphahlele, Modisane,[4] and Mathabane variously record [in their autobiographies] how their respective fathers became violent drunks while pathetically trying to retain the semblance of control within their households, despite being emasculated by the oppression they suffered as blacks in a racist polity. Even as they empathize with their fathers' humiliations, sufferings, and deaths under apartheid, the three writers come resolutely to distance themselves from the traditional values these men stood for. The future of South Africa lies in the hands of the young, not their diseased and dying fathers. (201)

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[4] The autobiographies referenced here are *Blame Me on History* by Bloke Modisane (1963) and *Down Second Avenue* by E'skia Mphahlele (1959).

Indeed, references to the future are often made by the narrator and there is always an emphasis on how Johannes and, by implication the younger generation, is going to become "somebody" (*KB* 207) within South African society, whereas his father and the older generation will remain "nobody" (*KB* 207) if they continue to acquiesce to the racist apartheid regime. The resistance movement and its leaders

> felt that in general, black people had accepted their own inferiority in society. [...] "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed," Biko argued. Thus, Black Consciousness activists worked to change the black mindset, to look inward to build black capacity to realize their own liberation. Biko wrote that colonialism, missionaries, and apartheid had made the black man "a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity." (Hadfield 3)

The narrator is highly critical of this notion of black inferiority. The effects of this mindset are illustrated in *Kaffir Boy* repeatedly. His father is humiliated and put down by police, bureaucrats and employers on a daily basis. One day, when he cannot escape in time during a raid and is interrogated by a policeman, his speech, posture and attitude change drastically:

> "Hurry up, old man! Come out of there!" the policeman in the bedroom said impatiently. […] "I'm coming, *nkosi* [lord]," my father whimpered. […] He was standing, naked and head bowed, in the middle of the bedroom. […] My father became speechless. He parted his parched lips and tried to say something, but no sound came. He lowered his bony head and buried it in the palms of his gnarled hands; and at that moment he seemed to age a thousand years, a pitiful sight. The policeman playfully prodded my father's penis with a truncheon. (*KB* 21)

Here, Jackson is no longer the powerful, frightening patriarch, but reduced to "a pitiful sight" (*KB* 22). Biko's words that the black man has become "a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, […] an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity" are captured by the narrator. "My father forced a fake smile. […] It was a begging smile, a passive acceptance of the policeman's authority. […] He seemed uncharacteristically powerless and contrite, a far cry from the tough, resolute and absolute ruler of the house I knew him to be, the father whose words were law" (*KB* 22). In fact, as Mathabane writes in the preface:

> Kaffir Boy is also about how, in order to escape from the clutches of apartheid, *I had to reject the tribal traditions of my ancestors*. […] [A]partheid had long adulterated my heritage and traditions, twisted them into tools of oppression and indoctrination. I saw at a young age that apartheid was using tribalism to deny

me equal rights, to separate me from my black brothers and sisters, to justify segregation and perpetuate white power and privilege, to render me subservient, docile and, therefore, exploitable. I instinctively understood that in order to forge my own identity, to achieve according to my aspirations and dreams, to see myself the equal of any man, black or white, I had to reject this brand of tribalism, and that in the rejection I ran the risk of losing my heritage. I took the plunge. (*KB* xi; emphasis added)

By rejecting his tribal heritage, the relationship with his father becomes distant and sometimes even resentful, and Johannes experiences a growing sense of alienation from his father as he gets older. On the other hand, this rejection is necessary within the political context and the mindset of the student activist. Segregation according to skin colour is imposed on him by the government, and segregation according to tribal affiliation is to a certain extent self-ascribed by many black Africans, particularly the older generation. In order to bring about political change, this division has to be overcome and a united front established. Johannes and his siblings are "learning other ways of life, modern ways" and "embraced Western culture" (*KB* 32). Yet by going against his parents' will and shedding his "tribal cloth" (*KB* 32), he also knows that this would lead to a rift. Opposition to his heritage "would no doubt cast me, in the eyes of my father, as a tribal infidel" (*KB* 103). But traditions and tribalism offer no alternative future and no agency. "I was told by my father that I had no free will, no control whatsoever over my destiny, that each minute detail about my life, my existence— before, now and to come—were all contained in a big scroll […] over which my ancestors pondered day and night" (*KB* 102). Liberation can only be achieved is this belief of predetermination is rejected; if he – and all blacks suffering under apartheid – take control of their lives. In short, if "the mind of the oppressed" is fundamentally changed and ultimately liberated.

In contrast, the narrating I in *Miriam's Song* seems much more sympathetic and shows more compassion for her father. This does not mean that there are no passages in which his authority is not criticized, but overall, the narrating I is less critical of her father's tribal heritage and more lenient towards Jackson. The reader gets a few rare glimpses of his softer and more empathetic side, for instance, when he praises her and calls her "a good girl" (*MS* 27). Tribalism and Venda culture are also referenced throughout the story, but the focus is not on the divisive nature of tribalism. For example, she associates her father's stories of Venda culture with happy memories

because in a way, they humanize her usually stoic father. She remembers that he sometimes "whirls about the kitchen" (*MS* 139) while singing songs and she "desperately wish[es] Papa would be this accessible, this playful, this human every day" (*MS* 140). Moreover, the narrating I questions *why* her father has become who he is and is less judgemental than the narrator of *Kaffir Boy*.

Again, it can be helpful to consider the time and place of publication of the text. *Miriam's Song* was published in 2000, six years after the first democratic elections in South Africa. Miriam left South Africa in 1993 and joined her brother in the USA who, at that time, had already been a well-known author and journalist. At the time of its publication in 1986, *Kaffir Boy* had "generated considerable interest in the United States" (Schaffer and Smith 63). Mark Mathabane had been invited to appear on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to speak about *Kaffir Boy* as well as its sequel, *Kaffir Boy in America* (1989). This media attention and Oprah Winfrey's support had resulted in "increased popular knowledge about the apartheid regime and the struggles of the ANC in the United States. It also increased profits from book sales, profits used to establish scholarship programs and to seed international anti-apartheid activism" (Schaffer and Smith 63). In addition, audiences had become interested in Mark Mathabane and the rest of his family members, most of whom were still living in South Africa at that time. By appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* over the course of several years, the story of his family had become sort of a "mini-sopa opera" (Schaffer and Smith 63).

After the collapse of apartheid, Miriam received a scholarship set up by Winfrey and also appeared on the talk show. By situating the stories of the Mathabane family members within popular media, the narratives became, as it were, "commodified to enlist the 'do-gooder' sympathies of a wide audience" (Schaffer and Smith 64). Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith note that

> Miriam's exodus from oppression […] fed directly into the American myths of progress according to which education provides the means for the committed individual to overcome class, ethnic, gendered, and racial oppressions. The manner of his [Mark Mathabane's] debut on the U.S. stage via the talk show circuit raises important issues about the media of awareness and political advocacy in human rights struggles. As is the nature of the medium, the talk show format directs audience responses affectively toward an empathetic identification with an individual success story of resistance and survival. This emotional appeal reduces the complexities of apartheid politics in South Africa to a personal story of one man or woman's opposition to the State, aimed at garnering the sympathetic attachment of the audience. (64)

It is obvious that the circumstances of the production and the reception of *Miriam's Song* differed greatly from that of *Kaffir Boy*. The liberation struggle was over and the focus of *Miriam's Song* was a different one. Moreover, the publication of *Miriam's Song* also coincided with the so-called memoir boom of the 1990s. "[P]ublishers look for what sells," as Julie Rak has us know (46), and genre plays an important role in this respect. "[G]enre itself creates […] a horizon of expectation used by publishers as they attempt to market, distribute, and ultimately sell books" (Rak 47). After the Second World War and particularly since the end of the Cold War, many life narratives with a focus on human rights violations have been published. Stories of abuse and injustice, told by victims of oppression and violence in many different countries, have become "ways […] of responding to injustice, inequality, and human suffering," which is why "life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims" (Schaffer and Smith 1). These life narratives include, for example, testimonies of sexual slavery of women in Southeast Asia, of political dissidents in China and South America, as well as stories of displacement, of cultural marginalization or coming-out stories of homosexuals (1-2). Such narratives "put a human face to suffering" and spark "the interest of NGOs and the media, building awareness of events at home and in other parts of the world" (3).

Communities or individuals tell their stories, often "narrat[ing] alternative or counter-histories coming from the margins, voiced by other kinds of subjects—the tortured, the displaced and overlooked, the silenced and unacknowledged—among them" (Schaffer and Smith 16-17). Audiences receive and interpret these stories differently, especially in a global market context. A reader or listener may respond to a story of suffering and survival by experiencing strong sensations (excitement, shame, shock, anger, etc.) and some might even take pleasure in learning about another person's pain (6-7). In whatever way these stories may be received by an audience, one fact remains: they sell. "Publishing houses […] convert stories of suffering and survival into commodified experiences for general audiences with diverse desires and also for an increasing number of niche audiences interested in particular kinds of suffering" (23).

Considering the differences in production, circulation and reception of both books, the question why tribalism and Jackson Mathabane do not receive the same, harsh treatment in both texts can tentatively be answered. When *Kaffir Boy* was

published in 1986, raising Western audiences' awareness for the political situation in South Africa was a pressing issue and, given Mark Mathabane's involvement in the Black Consciousness movement as well as his background as a journalist, his message was a clearly political one. In contrast, when *Miriam's Song* was published in 2000, the Mathabane family had already been quite famous in the USA because of the media attention created by Oprah Winfrey's support and her talk show. It can be assumed that the content of *Miriam's Song* was tailored more to the expectations of readers who had become interested in the family. After all, life stories "can be commodified," especially when they are "situated within the popular media like that of The Oprah Winfrey Show" (Schaffer and Smith 64).

III.4. (Bantu) Education and Race Relations

The Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 and resulted in legislated inequality of education under apartheid. Black students were forced to attend separate educational facilities which were run and supervised by the Ministry of Native Affairs. Prior to the Bantu Education Act, it was primarily mission schools that provided schooling for black students in South Africa, however, after state subsidies for mission schools were cut in 1953, most of these schools had to close or were sold to the government (Clark and Worger 52). The ideology behind Bantu Education was simple. Members or the National Party and Hendrik F. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs and the driving force behind Bantu Education, were striving to "mould Africans into compliant citizens and productive workers" by training them "'in accordance with their opportunities in life'" (Clark and Worger 55). In the preface to *Miriam's Song*, Verwoerd's 1953 speech before parliament is partly quoted:

> When I have control of native education, I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them. There is no place for him [the black child] in European society above the level of certain forms of labour. […] What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? […] Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life. […] (*MS* 17-18)

Therefore, the focus was on primary education, rather than secondary or higher education, in order to produce "a semi-skilled, barely literate labour force" (Glaser 160).

Miriam Mathabane points out that "Bantu Education was nothing more than slave education" with the intention to teach blacks "to accept their inferior place" (*MS* 17) within South African society. It also caused a "chronic shortage of teachers" (*MS* 18), resulting in a pupil-teacher ratio of fifty to one by 1960, and curriculums that emphasized tribalism, obedience, rigid discipline and punishment.

Education under apartheid was not compulsory for black children, only for white students. Black schools received substantially less government funding than white schools, and teachers in African schools were often less qualified and received less pay. Moreover, the textbooks that were used in black schools "expressed the government's racial views" (Thompson 197). For example, Ezekiel Mphahlele, a teacher at an African school at that time, condemned the textbooks that were provided by the government:

> a history book with several distortions meant to glorify white colonization, frontier wars, the defeat of African tribes, and white rule; Afrikaans grammar books which abound with examples like: *the Kaffir has stolen a knife*; *that is a lazy Kaffir* […] and a literature that teems with non-white characters who are savages or blundering idiots to be despised and laughed at. (qtd. in Clark and Worger 55-56)

Although it was met with protest, Bantu Education remained in operation for decades. However, it did not produce the subservient and docile worker envisaged by the leaders of the country because the students "saw the naked truth: apartheid held no benefits for them and they were being 'brainwashed' into thinking that they were inferior, lesser human beings" (Clark and Worger 80). Frustration and resistance grew in the 1970s, especially between 1974-76, when Afrikaans – perceived as the language of the oppressor – was to become a medium of instruction in black schools, alongside English and native languages. School boycotts and protests followed and culminated in the Soweto uprising on 16 June 1976, which was brutally repressed by the regime. The police and security forces were sent to stop the protest and killed 176 protesters in Soweto (82-83).

The importance of education is the most prominent theme in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*. Although both narratives highlight the inferiority of Bantu education, Mark and Miriam Mathabane see it as the only way out of South Africa: the "Passport to Knowledge" is the "Passport to Freedom." The driving force when it comes to educating both children is their mother, despite the fact that she never attended school. Or, rather, *because* of this fact. Due to apartheid and patriarchy their mother never had

the chance to go to school. Had it been up to her, she would have done just that and become a teacher (*MS* 56).

> "I want things to be different for you, child. For you and your brother and sisters. I want you to go to school, because I believe that an education is the key you need to open up a new world and a new life for yourself, a world and life different from that of your father's and mine. […] Education will open doors where none seem to exist. It'll make people talk to you, listen to you and help you. […] Above all, it'll make you a somebody in this world." (*KB* 133-134)

In her view, education is the only way to escape poverty, violence and misery. She cannot read or write and therefore cannot find a job. Because of this, she is caught in an endless cycle of abuse and hardship. She also sees how a lack of an education has turned her husband into the man he has become. "'Your father didn't go to school' […] 'that's why he's doing some of the bad things he's doing. Things like drinking, gambling and neglecting his family'" (*KB* 133). In contrast, Jackson firmly believes that school is a waste of time and money and that Bantu education is "simply another white man's tool of keeping the black man down" (*KB* 151). This was certainly true. Black children were not expected become critical thinkers. Instead, "Bantu education emphasizes memorization" (*MS* 297) in an effort to prepare them for their inferior position in economic, political and social life. In order to mould them into compliant citizens, discipline and punishment were the predominant teaching methods, which had devastating effects on generations of children. The schools were badly equipped, the classrooms and schoolyards were crowded, and the teachers used canes to make schoolchildren quiet down. It was a "vicious circle of screaming, beating, screaming, beating" (*KB* 138).

To make matters worse, racial ideas and indoctrination were not restricted to black schools. Clyde Smith, a young white student, perfectly exemplifies this: "'My teachers tell us that Kaffirs can't read, speak or write English like white people because they have smaller brains. […] That's why you can't live or go to school with us, but can only be our servants'" (*KB* 192). By including this short passage, the narrator is able to demonstrate how deeply entrenched ideas about race and white superiority had become in South African society.

But learning also took place outside of school. Both narrators emphasize how much they have learned from the stories told by their parents, especially their mother. Her "love for learning is insatiable" (*MS* 267) and she is a "mesmerizing storyteller" with a "vast knowledge of folklore" (*KB* 78). Stories of ancient African kingdoms,

warriors, tribal chiefs, animals and gods are used to teach the children "about right and wrong, about good and evil" (*KB* 79). Anaphora and parallelism are used to emphasize the importance of these stories as a source of knowledge:

> I learned that virtues are things to be always striven after, embraced and cultivated [...].
> I learned that sagacity and quick wits are necessary in avoiding dangerous situations […].
> I learned that good deeds advance one positively in life […].
> I learned that good always invariably triumphs over evil […]. (*KB* 79-80)

Similarly, Miriam, along with the reader, learns about Venda culture through the stories of her father:

> I'm fascinated by the matriarchal Venda culture, and his descriptions of the Venda homeland, traditions, and legends have me enthralled. […] Under the leadership of great warriors, such as Makhado, the Lion of the North, they fiercely resisted being conquered by the Boers and various black tribes who invaded their land. […] They're deeply superstitious and believe in witches, witchcraft, and water spirits called *ditutwanes* […]. The most sacred places of the Bavendas are the Thathe Vondo Forest, the burial ground of Venda chiefs, and Lake Fundudzi, home of the white python god of fertility. (*MS* 138)

Among indigenous groups in Africa, storytelling "has been one of the most significant ways to preserve the history and culture" (Banks-Wallace 17) of these communities. They are used to strengthen bonds within the family and the community, to teach values and to share "practical information necessary for daily living" (17). In *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*, these stories also educate Western readers about the importance of tribal heritage and traditions. It facilitates our understanding of the, sometimes inexplicable, decisions and actions of the characters.

III.5. Religiosity, Politics and Sexual Violence

For a long time, sociologists have been interested in answering the question why people become religious. Different theories have been used to find an answer to this indeed very difficult question. One of these theories is deprivation theory, which argues that "religious commitment is a result of the compensation that religion provides in situations where individuals meet obstacles in life and search for alternative goals" (Furseth and Repstad 111-112). It is believed that religion provides comfort to those who are deprived, for example economically, socially, or physically. People who

are disadvantaged turn to religion and participate in a religious community to compensate for what is lacking in their lives. They may find hope, inclusion within a community, or personal gratification in their faith. However, this theory has been critiqued by sociologists, particularly in the 1970s, as it does not explain why a large number of people who are deprived do not turn to religion (Furseth and Repstad 113).

Needless to say, the way a person has been raised has a tremendous impact on his or her beliefs systems. Socialization theory assumes that children learn by watching and imitating what others say and do, for instance, parents, friends and teachers. Primary socialization occurs in early childhood, whereas secondary socialization occurs later in life. Studies and statistics have shown that "religious parents have a far greater chance of having religious children than non-religious parents" (Furseth and Repstad 115), yet there are of course always exceptions since, after all, a person's belief system is not static but can change over time.

A further, yet also widely contested explanation is rational choice theory. It maintains that individuals become religious because "it gives them some sort of benefits or rewards," and that people will turn to those religious movements that "will give them the most rewards" (Furseth and Repstad 117). It is inspired by economics and the underlying belief is that social actors will always "choose what maximizes their rewards and minimizes their costs" (117).

An alternative interpretation of individual religiosity argues that religion is a vehicle for finding meaning in one's life. Proponents of this theory contend that individuals try to find meaning and order in life and that this need for meaning is "both intellectual and emotional" (Furseth and Repstad 121). A religious explanation or significance might be attached to "experiences that threaten the meaningful order" (121), for example accidents, suffering or death. Moreover, this theory argues that the need for belonging is another crucial element in the quest for meaning: "If people share a common faith, they will often find it attractive to be with like-minded people, and this sense of belonging will tend to strengthen the credibility of the religious universe" (122). These are only some of the contemporary theories that are trying to answer the question of personal religiosity. In South Africa the history of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, is closely linked to politics, race and economy.

Formally, church and state were never separated in the country, and in the twentieth century South Africa "prided itself on being a Christian country" (de Gruchy 393). Christianity played a significant role with regard to apartheid as "Christian

churches and missionaries were instrumental in advocating racial separation and some justified apartheid on scriptural and theological grounds" (Vosloo 401). Christianity in South Africa has its starting point in the middle of the seventeenth century, when the first Dutch colonists began to settle at the Cape. These settlers belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church and for more than one hundred years, it was the dominant denomination in the colony because settlers originating from other European countries (Germany, France) were not allowed to hold their own church services (401-402). The Dutch Reformed Church contributed significantly to the policy of apartheid. In various mission statements and during national congresses held between 1933 and 1954, church representatives repeatedly supported the idea of segregation and used the Bible to justify their claims. One of the arguments was that "God separated things" and "[t]his logic is then applied to creatures which God created according to their kind" (407). For example, in 1954 a representative of the Church announced that:

> God divided humanity into races, languages and nations. Differences are not only willed by God but are perpetuated by Him. Equality between natives, coloureds and Europeans includes a misappreciation of the fact that God, in His Providence, made people into different races and nations. […] Those who are culturally and spiritually advanced have a mission to leadership and protection of the less advanced. […] The natives must be led and formed towards independence so that eventually they will be equal to the Europeans, but each on their own territory and each serving God and their own fatherland. (Huddleston 62-63)

As a result, "a moral and theological dimension to the defence of the doctrine of apartheid" (Vosloo 407) was established and popularized among the Afrikaner population.

Besides the Dutch Reformed Church, the English-speaking churches were established early in the nineteenth century when the first British settlers arrived in South Africa. These churches had white and black members and their various mission schools were responsible for the education of blacks for decades. The opposition of the English-speaking churches to apartheid was hesitant in the first half of the twentieth century. However, after the National Party came to power in 1948, their opposition to racism and segregation increased and many future leaders of the ANC were clergymen educated in English-speaking mission schools (de Gruchy 394).

African indigenous (or independent) churches (AICs) were the third large body of churches and their membership grew extraordinarily after 1948 (de Gruchy 394-395). AICs can be "viewed as both African and Christian since they [were] innovations

that [drew] on the elements of Christianity, African religion, Western culture as well as African culture and tradition" (Masondo 2). For example, AICs "embraced African healing methods and modified them to suite their particular Christian context," and as a consequence, through their appreciation of African religion and culture, they "managed to respond to the existential and spiritual needs of their followers in ways that are not alien to them" (2). The AICs were not formally organized, but instead there was a large number of different independent churches and various denominations.

One of these were the Pentecostal churches or so called "charismatic churches," which were "led by a single charismatic figure or prophet, and more often than not are characterised by a belief in the prosperity gospel" (Soothill 194). Early Pentecostals in Africa interpreted the Bible in their own way, and one of the primary goals of the missionaries was the translation of the Bible into indigenous African languages. The printed word was to become authoritative, and translations of the Bible were significant with regard to "local peoples' enthusiastic discovery of Christianity" (A. Anderson 63). Pentecostals believed in the literal word of the Bible, and "most African Pentecostals […] saw practices or customs in the Bible closely resembling their own, and it seemed to them that the Bible was much more sympathetic to their own various traditions than the missionaries [of other Western denominations] had led them to believe" (A. Anderson 63).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, another key element was incorporated into the teachings of the charismatic churches: the firm belief in the prosperity gospel, in other words, "the belief that true (or 'born-again' Christians) can expect health, wealth and worldly success in this life" (Soothill 195). It "creates an expectation of worldly success and a conviction that true believers will enjoy God's abundance in this life as well as in the next" (196). The belief is that true Christians who work hard, who live according to biblical principles, who firmly believe in the Bible, who give generously to the church, and who develop and exercise their own abilities and spirituality can achieve anything. For this, God will reward them with success, wealth and progress (Frahm-Arp 4-5). Furthermore, "miracles" will happen to those who "make significant personal sacrifices, usually in the form of contributions of money, so that the pastors can pray 'strong prayers' over them to drive out the evil spirits and ancestors who are preventing them from realizing the wealth that God has promised them" (Frahm-Arp 11). Only those who break bonds with their ancestors and become fully devoted to the biblical God will become prosperous (11). Christianity and

religiosity are important themes in *Kaffir Boy* and *Miriam's Song*. The narratives reveal contrasting perceptions and attitudes towards religion against the backdrop of the socio-economic and cultural context of the protagonists, their parents and the wider community.

In *Kaffir Boy*, the narrator tells the story of the missionary work of the evangelists in Alexandra and how his mother becomes a member of a Christian community. Before her conversion to Christianity, she found guidance and hope in the tribal gods and her ancestral spirits. Her husband Jackson also worships the tribal gods and is vehemently opposed to other religions. He threatens to beat up or kill anyone who mentions Jesus or God in his household. Despite these threats, mother Mathabane comes to see Christianity as an alternative way of dealing with hardship, poverty and suffering: "Hers was a Christianity of expediency" (*KB* 77). Repeated sacrifices to tribal gods have not improved their situation. On the other hand, the evangelists in Alexandra preach the prosperity gospel and promise that a firm belief in God will result in wealth and abundance. Her decision to convert to Christianity is clearly a result of rational choice:

> Having apparently failed with witch doctors, she began exploring other options. One option came when, one day, a group calling themselves the Full Gospel Apostles of God came and told her about the miraculous ways through which the Christian God worked, hoping that she would renounce her tribal religion and convert to Christianity. My mother listened; […] at the end of the two-hour revival sermon, she made them the following proposition: if the God they believed in could help her find a job, something tribal gods had thus far been unable to do for her, then she would gladly renounce her tribal religion and start believing in Christianity. Upon hearing that, the Full Gospel Apostles enthusiastically assured her that the moment she began going to church, got us children and herself baptized, God would in no time grant her her request. (*KB* 76-77).

The promise of prosperity and a general curiosity about the 'mysterious' Christian God appeals to many within the impoverished black community. The promise of being able to achieve one's goals through individual action (prayer, hard work) provides a sense of hope and comfort in a society which severely limits personal freedom and regulates almost every aspect of private life. In a way, it allows them to exert some control over their lives, unlike the belief in tribal gods and ancient ancestors who predetermine the courses of their individual lives.

On the other hand, Christianity is perceived as a threat, and the evangelists and other missionaries are seen as "'traitors'" and "'black fools'" who only spread "'the white man's lies'" (*KB* 60). Lies which have for centuries been used "to take land away" (*KB*

60) from their ancestors. It reflects the narrator's critical attitude towards a Christian theology that was used by the Dutch Reformed Church and other white missionaries to justify segregation and racism based on the assumption that God divided humanity into races who were meant to live separately. Moreover, religious icons that were widely distributed were used to present 'white' as good and heavenly, and 'black' as evil and inferior:

> These portraits […] depicted various biblical events, figures and catastrophes, from the creation of the world all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven. Two portraits in particular always had me thinking: one depicting heaven and God; the other, hell and the Devil. The former portrayed God as an old blue-eyed white man with a long white beard, sitting between white, fluffy clouds, flanked by two bearded white men. And all around heaven were groups of angels—all of them white people. The latter portrayed a naked black man, his features distorted to resemble the Devil with a tail, twisted horns like a kudu's, writhing vipers around the horns, big wild red eyes, and a wide mouth spewing flames and smoke. He carried a long fork, which he used to stab, one by one, the black men and women and children on their knees about him, begging that he not roast them in the pit of fire. (*KB* 60-61)

Again, *Kaffir Boy* shows how Christianity, like tribalism and education, had been appropriated by the government and its institutions and turned into tools of oppression. "[I]n claiming that God had given whites the divine right to rule over blacks, that [black] subservience was the most natural and heavenly condition to be in" (*KB* 217), Christianity substantially contributed to segregation. On the other hand, it also shows how religion and Christianity were adopted and reinterpreted by the oppressed and how personal meaning was assigned to certain experiences. Finding a job could become one of God's "miracles" (Frahm-Arp 11) and therefore be seen as a sign of progress and prosperity. By incorporating the stories of proximate others and their opposing attitudes towards the 'white man's religion,' the narrative shows how "[i]n South Africa, religion has been a way of humanising and dehumanising" (Plessis 237) and how this resulted in the country's religious pluralism (238). The census of 2001 revealed that the vast majority of South Africans (79.8 per cent) "identified themselves as part of some form of Christian group" (Plessis 245), yet these Christian groups are diverse and adhere to their distinct forms of Christianity. There are "mainline Christians," Zionist churches, independent, Pentecostal or charismatic churches as well as "other Christians" (245). Besides, as the census showed, the population is made up of followers of Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, "Eastern or other" (245) religions as well as atheists. In *Kaffir Boy*, the narrator educates Western audiences about how

religion and Christianity could be humanising for some during apartheid, such as his mother. Not only was it a way of defying her husband, but she also found inclusion within a community that could give her hope and strength to "face and overcome the trials and tribulations" (*KB* 217) of daily life. On the other hand, the narrative also illustrates the dehumanising effects of Christianity by incorporating the critical voices of others within the wider community.

In *Miriam's Song*, it is obvious that mother and daughter are deeply religious and devoted to God. Clearly, Miriam was socialized in this way by her primary caregiver. She goes to church and attends Sunday Bible study "in order to please Mama" (*MS* 105) and becomes "next to Mama, the most churchgoing member in [her] family" (*MS* 107). Her devotion to Christianity makes her, in her mother's words, "'the apple of [her] eye'" (*MS* 159).

Prayers and songs of worship are frequently reprinted in the text (*MS* 51, 59, 98, 139, 201). Even the title of the book is a reference to a biblical figure, i.e. the sister of Moses who led the Israelites in song and dance at the Crossing of the Red Sea.[5] In this context, the Exodus narrative is more than just a biblical story, but instead serves a political message. The Exodus story, with its themes of freedom from oppression and slavery and the introduction of laws – the Ten Commandments – that apply to everyone equally has "served as a key metaphor for many liberation theologies, particularly for African Americans, who have equated the Black experience in America with the Israelite experience in Egypt" (Sugirtharajah, ch. 19). Similarly, in South Africa and other parts of the world, "[g]roups experiencing oppression of various types have looked to Exodus for strength, hope, and motivation to resist and overcome it" (Langston 4). Many of the chapters *Miriam's Song* deal with the liberation struggle and its devastating effects on the black community. Violence, death and suffering are ubiquitous, in particular during the periods of militant resistance in the 1980s, and the narrating I recalls how she found hope and courage in her belief in God. "Lord, please stop the killings" (*MS* 201), she repeats throughout these times of violence and despair.

But it is not only prayers that help her through her experiences. Together with her family and friends she sings songs in church, at home and in her school choir. Moreover, songs are an integral part of the liberation movement. The protesters used

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[5] *Book of Exodus*: Ex. 15:1-18.

singing, chanting and dancing during their rallies and vigils, and the lyrics of these revolutionary songs are quoted repeatedly throughout the story. In Miriam's words: "It was an act of defiance, a show of strength" (*MS* 188). Singing as a form of protest was not a new phenomenon. In the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, [b]oth old songs and the newly-written 'freedom songs' were sung in all parts of the movement" (Boots 48). Freedom songs, spirituals and chants "validated the nonviolent work undertaken by activists and commemorated the sacrifices of the people who lost their lives in the struggle" (Boots 49). *Miriam's Song* is dedicated to her friends and political Comrades, many of whom were imprisoned, tortured or killed by the regime. Her intention is to capture "the defiant spirit of this generation, whose fearlessness and sacrifices finally brought apartheid to its knees" (*MS*, Foreword) by incorporating the songs of defiance repeatedly throughout the narrative.

Religion also plays an important role in Miriam's life with regard to beliefs about sexuality and virginity. The custom of *lobola* influences the way daughters and women are regarded within their families since daughters are directly linked to the wealth of a family. Before a woman is allowed to marry, the husband-to-be and his elders have to pay a price to the family of the bride. Traditionally, this involved cattle or other livestock, but later also cash or other goods of value were used. As Miriam's mother explains: "'I had no choice. Your granny forced me to marry him. The family needed the money. I was sixteen years old at the time. I didn't want to get married yet.' […] 'Back in my days it didn't matter whether a woman loved a man or not. A girl had to marry the man her parents chose for her'" (*MS* 110).

In many families, it was not only the parents who insisted on *lobola*, but many daughters defended the tradition as well, as Mark Hunter points out: "how else would a woman know that a man was serious about her and would be able to support her? Cash had to be earned, and this required commitment, sacrifice, and dedication to the project of 'building a home'—all signs of a good man" (77). Miriam, too, expects Sabelo to pay *lobola* for her after she finds out that she is pregnant with his child (*MS* 229). The family of the husband could also demand *lobola* back if a wife turned out to be infertile and the family name of the man could not be continued (Dorcas et al. 143-144). Sexuality and virginity are of great importance in this context because it determines the price of the bride. After her rape, Miriam refers to herself as "damaged goods," so she "might as well stick with the man who violated [her]" (*MS* 226).

This notion of feeling "damaged" is also influenced by Christian beliefs about sexuality. Christian missionaries considered women as the "moral guardians of the nuclear family," and many black families had "adopted Western notions of 'respectability,'" which included "preserving the 'purity' of their daughters" (Delius and Glaser 41). Therefore, talking about sex became a taboo subject within the families and the communities. At the same time, however, "children were surrounded by sexual activities" (42) because the shacks were overcrowded and there was only little privacy. Moreover, films were popular in the townships and often had a sexual content. Delius and Glaser emphasize that although "sex was highly visible […] it was rarely spoken about at home" (42). Miriam remembers what it was like growing up in this environment: "I'm confident that I'll be able to resist the pressure to become sexually pregnant early because of my faith in God and my steadfast belief that people should have sex only after they're married. […] I know that in being a virgin I'm pleasing Mama, the most important authority figure in my life" (*MS* 103).

This silence on sexual matters and, consequently, the lack of sex education have severe consequences. They girls learn virtually nothing about contraception: "'Miriam, you need to protect yourself,' Mama says to me one sunny Saturday afternoon […]. That was the extent of my sex education" (*MS* 204). Most parents rely on school teachers to deal with the matter, however, "in line with Western prudery, there was no formal sexual instruction in school" (Delius and Glaser 46). Girls who become pregnant are expelled in most cases or feel utterly humiliated. Therefore, many of them drop out of school and never finish their education (*MS* 228). To avoid teenage pregnancies, schools rely on teaching abstinence and prohibit dating among the students. Those who are suspected or caught dating are physically punished (*MS* 135-136). However, these methods are not particularly successful and teenage pregnancy rates are high. On top of that, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS are another serious problem since "most of its victims are women" and only "few people take it seriously," thinking they are immune to it: "Some of my friends tell stories of their boyfriends scoffing at the idea of wearing condoms or beating them up for suggesting they do" (*MS* 205). Misinformation is widespread: some believe that traditional healers (*sangomas*) can cure AIDS; others believe that only homosexuals or white people can contract the virus; and some even believe that having sex with a virgin can cure them (*MS* 206).

Even though schools failed to provide sex education, they did offer "a relatively protected space for teenage girls. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and most of the 1970s, schools managed to remain gang-free zones" (Delius and Glaser 46). Juvenile gangs, consisting mainly of adolescent boys, were active in many townships throughout South Africa. One feature of this gang culture was "an exaggerated assertion of manhood," and it "awarded status to multiple sexual conquests" (44). The gang members, so-called *tsotsis*, "competed furiously for the most attractive local girls" (44). Refusing a *tsotsi*'s advances was dangerous for women because if they did, they were either severely beaten or raped. The gang members considered any girl within their territory as their property. Many girls had *tsotsi* boyfriends because "it offered protection from the molestation and harassment of other gangsters" (44). Being in a relationship with a *tsotsi* meant that the girl was his property and could therefore not be harassed by other gang members. If girls were without *tsotsi* protection, they ran the risk of being kidnapped, locked up and sexually assaulted: "Gangs kidnapped women, in full view of the public, from parties, dance halls and jazz shows. Even the 'more respectable' gangs, such as the Americans of Sophiatown, would regard it as a personal insult if a woman resisted abduction" (Delius and Glaser 45).

The effects of this gang culture become apparent in *Miriam's Song*, especially during the riots of the 1980s. These periods of unrest are not only characterized by violence committed by the Security Police, the military and the student activists in the ghettos, but it also means that schools are closed temporarily, often for many months. "'A lot of girls became pregnant the last time we stayed away from school too long'" (*MS* 191), her cousin Jane worries during one of the riots, hinting at widespread sexual abuse and rape in Alexandra and other townships.[6] And indeed, not only does Miriam become pregnant, but so do her friends Gertrude, Cynthia, Petronella and Latisha. Unfortunately, many of them cannot rely on the support of their parents, their husbands or their boyfriends, which is why the young women have to rely on each other. This is closely linked to the ideas of gender norms within township culture.

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[6] Dee Smythe notes that between 1983 and 1993, the rate of reported rapes in South Africa "almost doubled from 15,342 to 27,056" (16) due to the rise of militarisation, emasculation and apartheid laws which had been destroying family structures for decades.

III.6. Gender Norms in *Miriam's Song*

This chapter explores the gender norms that are constructed in *Miriam's Song* within the cultural and historical context of South Africa. Therefore, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by gender norms and how they materialize. Gendered roles are produced and reproduced in a social context, with the family being "one of the most important arenas of [this] socialization process" (Augestad 139). Heidi Augestad draws on social constructionism which theorizes that basic shared assumptions about reality are constructed when

> persons and groups interact with each other and […] these interactions form social systems that over time become habitualised and eventually institutionalised as an organised form of human action and behaviour […]. The knowledge produced within these institutions will eventually be embedded in society and experienced as impersonal and objective truths and then become a foundation for people's perceptions and beliefs of what is real in life, thus contributing to their definition of what reality is. (136)

These institutionalized interactions also produce and influence gender roles, in other words, beliefs and norms about acceptable behaviour for women and men. The way in which a child is raised within and family and the "social expectations required by family members, friends and communities, as well as the social control mechanisms that take place, are largely influencing the individual perceptions of what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour" (Augestad 137).

Social expectations and cultural practices may have a negative influence on girls' sense of self. In South Africa, "girls are socialized to do household chores as home keepers and child bearers early in their lives. This role allocation affects their future lives in the workplace as they are given less challenging duties in other areas of work" (Nomlomo 121). Such an understanding of gender roles and gender stereotypes is highly likely to lead to inequality and discrimination. Moreover, gender stereotypes are also reproduced and reinforced in schools, as girls and boys are expected to play different roles in educational settings (122). Vuyokazi Nomlomo's qualitative case study, conducted in a primary township school in the Western Cape in 2010, exemplifies these gender stereotypes. Fifty girls from low socio-economic backgrounds at an average age of 14 were interviewed, and her findings can be summarized as:

- "[T]he girls' gender identification is based on psychological, physical and biological changes which distinguish them from their male counterparts, particularly from the puberty stage" (124). Puberty was identified as an important stage by almost all the girls. Menstruation as a biological change in the girls' bodies distinguishes them from the boys and "is regarded as a crucial requirement and role for any woman in the traditional patriarchal society. […] [G]irls are expected to show self discipline and respect in preparation for married life. At an early age girls are taught to respect men so that they can make good, dignified and respectful wives" (124).

- The girls put a lot of emphasis on "good behaviour" in an effort to become "good wives." (125) A woman is expected to be submissive and obedient, and to respect a man and the in-laws in order to "qualify for marriage which is linked to cultural capital" (125).

- Gender stereotypes are instilled in the girls very early. Young girls help their mothers in the household, which is regarded as being female, while men and boys are seen as the providers of the families.

- Gender stereotypes are reproduced in the school. For example, girls are expected to do chores, such as cleaning the classrooms or the teachers' desks, while this is not demanded of the boys. Even though the girls are aware of this discrimination, they feel like they cannot protest because they are required to be respectful to their teachers, which again "portrays girls as polite and voiceless individuals" (126).

- Girls are verbally and physically abused and undermined by boys at the school. For example, they are ridiculed and bullied by the boys or even sexually abused. To make matters worse, they do not get enough protection or support from their teachers, but instead are blamed and labelled 'bad girls' (128) who provoked the attack. As a result, trust issues emerge and "some of the girls began to perceive the violent acts as normal and inevitable aspects of their own lives" (129). One of the interviewees responded that "[b]eing a woman means to be someone who always gets painful experiences in life as we know that we get raped" (129), which illustrates a feeling of powerlessness and inevitability.

Nomlomo concludes that dominant socio-cultural factors "reflect the patriarchal nature of the South African society which perpetuates male hegemony" (129). Moreover, school plays a significant role in upholding traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Girls are conditioned from a very early age and accept passiveness and low self-

esteem as their character trait. Gender norms and a lack of adequate role models, in particular a lack of teachers as role models, influence their future lives as they are less likely to seek leadership positions in the workplace. Gender-based violence directed at girls and women is still a serious problem in South Africa, despite various awareness programs, activism campaigns and initiatives by the government (129-131).

In her analysis of gender and resistance in autobiographies of female writers who were involved in the suffragette movement, Maroula Joannou notes:

> However unreliable or selective the autobiographical 'I' may be, that autobiographical 'I' is not merely a textual construction, but the textual double of a woman in history who has been produced by the material differences in men and women's lives, and has selected, from the totality of her experiences, those which retrospectively appear to her to be the more significant. The place from which she writes, her place within history, is produced by difference and reproduces difference, and because the past comes to us as a series of contested, mediated and negotiated versions of events, the denotative and referential aspects of personal narratives are crucial in helping the feminist reader to understand much about the forms of women's resistance to patriarchal values. (32-33)

This quote illustrates the importance of the historical context from which an autobiographical I narrates and thus constructs, by selecting and omitting from a range of experiences, a personal account that can be interpreted as a resistance to dominant values. Miriam's story provides insights into the prevalent ideas of gender and gender norms in South Africa between 1970-2000 – ideas which have continued to exist decades years later, as Nomlomo's research summarized above has shown.

Miriam's experiences with her female friends are emphasized numerous times in *Miriam's Song*. The narrative begins with an episode at school when she and her friends Cynthia, Margaret, Janice, Dlayani and Becky are terrified of their teacher during one of the so-called cleanliness inspections. As the mistress inspects the students' fingernails and hair, the friends are cowering together in fear. Memories of being whipped at school are recounted frequently by the narrating I, and the emphasis is always on the collective experience of terror that Miriam and her girlfriends feel in these situations. Due to the violence that the girls have to deal with in school and in their neighbourhoods, they form a bond very early and support each other as they grow up. In this way, the narrative "affirm[s] the importance of qualities such as identification, interdependence and community" (Joannou 33). In this patriarchal South African society, gender solidarity and loyalty among the female characters is vital in order to persevere and survive.

What emerges from her story and the many stories of her female friends is an account of women who were marginalized, beaten, passive and deeply entrenched in a society that placed more value on men than women. One striking example is the *tikhomba* ceremony, a rites-of-passage ritual for adolescent girls that lasts several weeks. Puberty, as Nomlomo's findings have revealed, is perceived by many girls as one of the most crucial stages in their lives. Miriam is no different in this regard as she is excited and "ha[s] been itching" (*MS* 160) to attend *tikhomba* for months. During the ceremony the girls are taught "everything about being a complete woman" (*MS* 161) in preparation for marriage. In these lessons they learn that "a mature woman is self-denying and self-sacrificing, that she takes care of her children, that she stoically bears pain, that she defers to her husband, who is the head of the household, and that she bears as many children as possible to prove her womanhood" (*MS* 161). To enforce these lessons, the girls are beaten by their female teachers whenever they, allegedly, do something wrong.

It can be assumed that the adult narrator is critical of this notion of womanhood. First of all, the tone in this passage seems sarcastic and rather detached. Secondly, it is written partly in the past tense, which could be an indication of an external focalizer who retrospectively questions what she was taught. However, here, once again, I am not sure whose narrative voice this actually is. Is it Miriam's or Mark's? The passage begins with a sentence in the past tense (1), then the next sentence switches to the present tense (2), and the following sentence switches back to the habitual past tense (3):

(1) "What I *hated was*" – Miriam as an external focalizer.
(2) "We *are* taught that" – Miriam *or* Mark in a retrospective, sarcastic tone.
(3) "We'*d be* beaten for not eating" – Miriam as external focalizer who is highly critical of corporal punishment due to the triple repetition of the structure "we'd be beaten."   (*MS* 161; emphasis added)

These changes in narrative tense may simply be a result of the interview-style of this 'as-told-to' memoir, but they could also be an example of what Lindemann has referred to as "a contest for authority over textual content" (532). In this passage, it is not entirely clear *who* criticizes the lessons that the girls are taught during *tikhomba* and other rites-of-passage ceremonies.

Overall, the remembered self-concept often appears to be what Bruner has called "victim Self," i.e. the memories that are recalled are those of how Miriam and her friends "responded to the agency of somebody else who had the power to impose

his or her will" ("Remembered Self" 41) upon them. Numerous passages in *Miriam's Song* reflect the powerlessness of the young women who are too often at the mercy of somebody else. Most of their boyfriends or husbands are violent and abusive, especially when they are drunk, and severely beat their wives or girlfriends when they are insubordinate. But it is not only the men who treat them badly, since "with so many women I know, the relatives of their husbands or boyfriends often determine their matrimonial fate" (*MS* 231-232). If the women try to leave their husbands, they are threatened with more violence and often risk losing their children to him and his family. For these reasons, most of Miriam's girlfriends are forced to stay with their boyfriends or husbands even if they are treated terribly by their men.

However, Miriam's subjectivity cannot merely be reduced to a "victim Self." She is highly aware of "the forms of male control of women, and of the unequal exchange involved in gender-based relationships" (Joannou 34). The relationship between mother and daughter is a very close one and has a great influence on Miriam's sense of self. She has to grow up watching her abusive father regularly beat her mother, which is why she becomes determined to be independent from male dominance as an adult. This sentiment is reinforced by her experiences with her female peers. She witnesses the mistreatment her older sisters and many of her girlfriends have to endure at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends, and experiences it first-hand when Sabelo rapes and beats her. Nevertheless, she is able to put herself through her last years of school while taking care of her infant son at the same time, thus regaining power over her life.

Conclusion

Researchers of autobiographical memory are interested in finding out why we remember certain experiences, rather than others, and how these memories of the past shape our understanding of our present selves. Brockmeier (2001), Bruner (1994, 2001), Fivush and Haden (2004), McClean et. al (2018) and many others have shown that autobiographical memory is greatly influenced by social interactions with significant others as well as the cultural contexts in which we grow up. Moreover, they agree that autobiographical accounts tend to be constructed as narratives that follow a gist or plot. These narratives consist of episodic memories or 'chapters' that are of personal significance to the individual, and are consequently structured in order to achieve meaning and a coherent story of a self.

Relational autobiographies perfectly exemplify this phenomenon. An autobiographical I places itself within the stories of others; it places itself within the memories of his or her past self; it places itself within master narratives created by socio-cultural frameworks; and it places itself within an audience. And by doing all that at the same time, it weaves a narrative of the self that becomes meaningful and coherent at the time of telling.

Kaffir Boy and *Miriam's Song* comprise numerous relational elements that illustrate *what* and *who* was meaningful to both autobiographical subjects at the time of narration, and which turning points were crucial in the developmental stages of their selves. There is the father figure who symbolizes outdated values which may no longer be useful to narrator's present self-concept. There is the mother figure who constitutes hope, resilience, knowledge and love. There is religion which can be perceived as a tool of oppression or as a source of strength and perseverance. There is tribalism which represents segregation and division, but also important personal heritage and a sense of belonging. There is education which is a means to mould them into inferior human beings, yet it also a resource for intellectual growth and ultimate freedom. There is crippling violence that causes childhood traumata, but which is necessary in the struggle for liberation as peaceful resistance is not enough. There is a narrator whose voice may be reflective and dissonant, immediate and consonant, or even collaborative

and thus entirely inscrutable. And finally, there is an implied reader who needs to be educated and is implored to respond to these life stories.

Both texts illustrate that the autobiographical I is neither plural nor isolated, and that telling one's life story is impossible without incorporating the stories of others. Moreover, by narrating their life stories, the autobiographical Is reveal information about the cultural and historical constructs in which it they are situated. Finally, these relations are organized by remembering agents and can be interpreted as active acts of meaning-making.

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German Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht den Begriff des relationalen Selbst anhand zweier autobiographischer Erzählungen des südafrikanischen Autors Mark Mathabane. Mathabane veröffentlichte *Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* im Jahr 1986, als in Südafrika noch das politische System der Apartheid, also der staatlich organisierten Rassentrennung, vorherrschte. In *Kaffir Boy* behandelt der Erzähler seine eigene Lebensgeschichte, die ihn von seiner Kindheit und Jugend in einem Township in Johannesburg schließlich als jungen Erwachsenen nach Amerika führt. *Miriam's Song* hingegen ist die autobiographische Erzählung seiner Schwester Miriam Mathabane, die allerdings von Mark Mathabane verfasst und im Jahr 2000 veröffentlicht wurde.

Im ersten Teil dieser Arbeit wird ein kurzer Überblick über die Geschichte Südafrikas gegeben, da ein Verständnis der Geschichte des Landes maßgeblich ist, um den Inhalt beider Werke zu analysieren. Im zweiten Teil wird ein theoretischer Rahmen dargestellt, in dem relevante Konzepte der Erzähltextanalyse sowie der Autobiografietheorie präsentiert werden. Schließlich folgt im dritten Teil die Untersuchung der Primärliteratur unter Berücksichtigung historischer und kultureller Einflussfaktoren auf das autobiographische Ich, sowie unter Zuhilfenahme der Erzählerperspektive sowie der Erzählerstimmen.