

IDEOLOGY AND FORM IN SOUTH AFRICAN
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: A STUDY OF THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF FIVE SOUTH AFRICAN AUTHORS

by

THENGAMEHLO HAROLD NGWENYA

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

ENGLISH

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

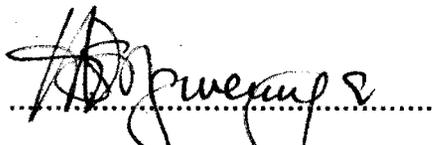
PROMOTER: PROF P D RYAN

NOVEMBER 1996

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
SUMMARY	v
o INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 The Ideology of Liberal Humanism in Peter Abahams's <u>Tell Freedom</u>	31
CHAPTER 2 Modisane's <u>Blame Me On History</u> : In Search of Purpose and Fulfillment	68
CHAPTER 3 Conformity and Rebellion in Naboth Mokgatle's <u>The Autobiography of an Unknown South African</u>	98
o CHAPTER 4 The Liberal-Christian Vision in Alan Paton's Autobiographies	142 157, 172, 180.
CHAPTER 5 Sindiwe Magona : Autobiography as Counter-hegemonic Discourse	181
o CONCLUSION	220
NOTES	227
APPENDIX	258
BIBLIOGRAPHY	261

I declare that *Ideology and Form in South African Autobiographical Writing : A Study of the Autobiographies of Five South African Authors* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


.....
Signature THNGWENYA

30 November 1996
.....
Date

Dedicated to my mother and to the memory of my father.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to my wife and children for their support and encouragement throughout the duration of this study. I also wish to thank the late Professor Ernest Pereira who was my promoter for three years (1993-1995) and my present promoter Professor P D Ryan. I am also grateful to Mr Dawie Malan of UNISA library for helping me trace books and articles. Thanks are also due to Ms Jaya Chetty for typing the thesis for me. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council in financing the research for this study.

Summary

Relying on Lucien Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism, this study examines the relationship between ideology (world vision) and the autobiographical form in South African writing. The five autobiographers selected for discussion represent different social groups in the South African social formation. The central argument of this thesis is that there is a relationship between autobiographical self-portraiture and the collective interests, values and attitudes of particular social groups in South Africa. Therefore, most South African autobiographies are more concerned with the articulation of collective consciousness than with the celebration of individual talents and achievements. Chapter 1 on Peter Abrahams explores the values underpinning the ideology of liberal humanism and their influence on the process of self-representation within the mode of autobiography. The second chapter examines the apparently contradictory conceptions of self-identity in Bloke Modisane's autobiography. Chapter three focuses on the conflict between Naboth Mokgatle's ethnic loyalty to the Bafokeng tribe and his newly acquired radical working class consciousness. The fourth chapter examines the liberal-Christian ideology in Alan Paton's two volumes of autobiography. The fifth and final chapter explores counter hegemonic modes of self-definition in Sindiwe Magona's two-volumed autobiography. In all the five chapters there is an attempt to link the authors' self-presentation to specific social classes or groups.

The thesis argues for a literary-sociological approach to the analysis of autobiography and seeks to challenge the deconstructive theoretical perspectives on autobiography which, by rejecting the validity of humanist assumptions regarding human subjectivity, deny any possibility of meaningful socio-political action.

IDEOLOGY AND FORM IN SOUTH AFRICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: A STUDY OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF FIVE SOUTH AFRICAN AUTHORS.

Unless criticism springs out of genuine analyses of the real world, and in its turn affects it (and in the word "real" I include the self that lives out and in history as well as writes), then it inhabits the realm of fantasy. (Nicole W Jouve,1991:8)

Having been relegated to the dubious status of 'the dark continent of literature' as well as 'the Other of literature',¹ autobiographical writing, and its theory and criticism have grown by leaps and bounds since the publication of Georges Gusdorf's seminal essay, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', in 1956². Contemporary critical debates about autobiography revolve around questions of its generic status as a form of writing, the role of language (discourse) in reconstructing past experience in the light of present awareness, autobiography's epistemological mode as history or literature and the ontological status of the writing self³. Robert Folkenflik's comments on these theoretical debates alert us to what seems to be their inherently contentious nature: having described autobiography as 'a battlefield on which competing ideas about literature (and for that matter history) are fought out', he goes on to say:

It [autobiography] is a highly problematic form (some would say genre) that encourages the asking of questions about fact and fiction, about the relations of reality and the text, about origins. Is autobiography to be found in referentiality, textuality, or social construction? Is there a self in this text? The subject is radically in question. (1993:11-2)

In addition to these literary-theoretical and philosophical issues theorists are beginning to show an interest in what may be broadly described as the sociological

functions and implications of autobiographical writing. Critics such as Stephen Butterfield (1974), Susanna Egan (1987), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1988) and Shirley Neuman (1992) have shown that conventional theories of autobiography which emphasise the singularity of personal experience and the stability of the writing self (often denoting the "straight white Christian man of property"⁴) may not necessarily apply to autobiographies written by marginalised social groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Butterfield's comments on the presentation of the self in black American autobiography suggest a communally based conception of selfhood which is absent in Western autobiography:

Mphellek-

The "self" of black autobiography ... is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political entity, drawing from the past experience of the group...
(1974:20)

Even critics who normally emphasise the uniqueness of individual experience in autobiographical writing are beginning to appreciate the need to broaden critical perspectives to include the social, political and cultural dimensions of human experience:

Because each autobiography is a cultural artifact celebrating individual consciousness, style, and experience, its readers must learn to adjust critical focus from *individual text* to *social context* to appropriate conceptual frameworks - and, I would argue, back to the single text again. For we are chiefly interested in autobiographies in order to find out how people, events, things, institutions, ideas, emotions, relationships have become meaningful to a single mind as it uses language to pattern the past. (Albert E. Stone, 1981:8) (my emphasis)

There is therefore a growing awareness among critics of autobiography of the importance of historical as well as social aspects of this form of writing. The present study hopes to contribute to these debates about autobiographies that have been largely shaped by socio-political considerations rather than by the urge to celebrate idiosyncratic personal qualities manifested in individual achievements and talents. While articulating the individual experiences and perceptions of their individual authors, the life histories chosen for this study also illuminate political and social attitudes peculiar to specific historically determined social groups. The autobiographical self (which always assumes the form of the 'displayed self' rather than the empirical or 'real' self⁵) in these autobiographies will emerge as a continuously evolving entity precariously situated between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive terrains.

The majority of South African autobiographers occupy subject-positions imposed on them by dominant discourses and social institutions and, in the course of reconstructing their past experience, these writers seek to challenge those imposed identities and roles and to replace them with more 'authentic' ones. Thus selfhood in these autobiographical narratives will be shown to be in a constant state of flux which can only be defined with any degree of accuracy by locating the writers within broader social categories to which they belong by virtue of their material circumstances, values, interests and aspirations. In both their form and content the autobiographies selected for this study subvert the hegemonic discursive practices which have earned autobiography the label of being an expression of 'bourgeois individualism'(Gray, 1990:101). Susanna Egan's comments on the entry of formerly marginalised groups into the creative process of 'life-writing'⁶ underscore the important sociological dimensions of autobiographical writing which will be explored in this study:

The palm has passed from white, middle class men of distinction to the Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust, to women, blacks, homosexuals, convicts, exiles, and the terminally ill, the minorities of our culture who write precisely because of their lack of other kinds of power and their need to be heard...

In place of the heroic journey we find an act of rebellion. Right is not with the dominant, white, male, heterosexual, society but with the sufferer and protester of indignity and wrong. For minorities, the dominant society establishes the norms by which they are rejected and which they, in turn, reject. The very effort to articulate a self becomes an expression of spirit; it asserts the value of an individual life by creating its literary existence. (1987:23)

A convenient starting point in an attempt to offer an overview of the theory of autobiography is the work of Georg Misch, Georges Gusdorf, Roy Pascal and James Olney who may be credited with having established what is generally considered to be the 'classical theory of autobiography' (Gunn, 1982:6). While acknowledging most of the theoretical issues raised by poststructuralist critics, especially such contentious points as the knotty issue of the ontological status of the narrator-protagonist in autobiography and the difficulty of 'bringing the self to language', these critics argue that human consciousness is at the centre of all meaningful human activity including an attempt to reconstruct past experience (Gunn, 1982:9)⁷. For example, Georges Gusdorf's description of the autobiographical undertaking suggests the presence of an active human agent in the process of writing about the past:

Every autobiography is a work of art and at the same time a work of enlightenment; it does not show us the individual seen from outside in his [sic] visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he [sic] was, not as he is, but *as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been*. What is in question is a sort of *revaluation* of individual destiny; the author, who is at the same time the hero of the tale, wants to elucidate his past in order to draw out the structure of his being in time. (1980:45) (my

emphasis)

According to this essentially humanist ⁸ view, autobiographers are not mere victims of linguistic or rhetorical conventions, as poststructuralists would argue⁹, but responsible agents who can make well-considered choices about the content and presentation of personal experience. John Sturrock's argument in favour of the notion of an active autobiographical subject is even more persuasive than that of Gusdorf:

... the autobiographer qua human being is not an abstraction, he [sic] is someone who in life has had a *real* face; so to argue without qualification that autobiography is simply an extended exercise in prosopopoeia is to banish the living and suffering author from the scene too radically, as nothing more substantial than a projection of his rhetorical endeavours. (1993a:5)

It is important to remember that when autobiographers write their stories they are essentially *interpreting* their past lives and offering 'readings' of their past selves which will reflect deliberate distortion, omissions and emphases of certain facts and events. This retrospective creative process is guided by the principle of selectivity based on the writer's purpose for telling his/her story and his/her circumstances at the time of writing. Sturrock reminds us of the *interpretive* roles of both the reader (who may be a theorist) as well as the writer of autobiography:

The theorist [reader] knows, but is not deterred by the knowledge, that the autobiographer is already the interpreter of his [sic] life, already a textualist, and not some godlike chronicler mysteriously exempted from the equivocations of language. To an extent the theorizing of autobiography begins in the writing of autobiography. (1993b:25-6)

Wilhelm Dilthey, whose ideas on autobiography influenced the theories of both Misch and Gusdorf, stresses the important role played by human consciousness in selecting and ordering past experience on the basis of value, meaning and purpose:

What is it, then, which, in the contemplation on one's life links the parts into a whole and thus makes it comprehensible? It is the fact that understanding involves, in addition to the general categories of thought, those of value, purpose and meaning. (1961:103)

Obviously Dilthey's view of autobiographical writing is that of a process of meaningful self-presentation governed by the conscious intentions of the author, the value and meaning attached to a life as seen at the moment of writing, as well as the purpose of telling the story of his/her life. This conceptualisation of the role of selective (and therefore creative) memory, consciousness as well as present interest, in creating the autobiographical portrait of the self is further elucidated by John Sturrock in his book, The Language of Autobiography. For Sturrock the subject in autobiography is an active agent with intentions and not simply a product of discourse:

It is no longer necessary to decide whether this episode or that in autobiography is perfectly factual when the factual and the fictive alike are *intentional* - a word I use here in its perhaps less familiar philosophical sense, as describing that which is not given by the world but "intended" by the mind. ... As theorists set on interpreting the contents of the text we can take comfort from knowing that the autobiographer was there before us, that what we are reading is *already* an interpretation and the writer an active, not a passive force. (1993a:287)

In opposition to the humanist conception of autobiography as 'a document about

a life'(Gusdorf, 1980:43) are the poststructuralist theories which propose that autobiography is simply another mode of self-referential discourse with its own underpinning conventions of meaning and codes of signification (Renza, 1980:295). The logical conclusion of the latter argument seems to be that autobiographers have no objective personal histories to write about (their past) lives either never 'existed' or they are irretrievably lost in the maze of textuality. This theoretical position also effectively denies people from historically disadvantaged communities a position from which to act to recover their lost or diminished self-esteem and dignity. As Shirley Neuman puts it:

To posit an understanding of the subject as only a product of discourse rather than as also a product of oppressive historical and material circumstances is to deny the experiential, even the corporeal, sources of some of these subjects' self-knowledge. (1992:217)

The general tendency in the theories of poststructuralism is to see the process of writing as taking precedence over the cognitive functions of the mind. Edmund Smyth sums up the guiding assumptions of this approach as follows:

For theorists such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, the self is situated within the texture of discourse; rather than being, in humanist terms, the origin of meaning, it is deeply implicated in language.... Just as the text was no longer to be considered as univocal and coherent, so the subject had to be seen as fractured, disconnected and unstable. The emphasis on the decentered self would mean that autobiographical writing could no longer be regarded as a privileged and unproblematic site of self-expression: the unity of the text had been contested in parallel with the unity of the subject. (1995:2)

Arguing from a deconstructionist perspective, Willis R. Buck Jr. contends that the

autobiographer's identity is a 'fiction' as it is a product of choices of formal approaches rather than an articulation of a consciousness with an *a priori* existence:

Few autobiographers, of course, are willing to acknowledge openly the fictionality of their constructed identities and the falsity of their writing simply because they share with every other human being the bias toward identity. But in this unwillingness, the autobiographer is guilty of a second degree of falsehood. Claiming to represent the truth about himself while at best capable only of offering the formalisation that is identity, the autobiographer makes false overtures to his readers. He is, as it were, guilty of a representational falsehood in portraying the fiction of identity as truth. (1980:483)

It is not immediately clear what Buck means by 'formalisation' here, but it would seem that what he has in mind are the pre-determined rhetorical conventions of autobiographical discourse which supposedly 'create' identity and subjectivity. Louis Renza, another critic in the deconstructionist school, has proposed a way of viewing autobiography which goes beyond the limiting categories of 'truth' and 'fiction' to accord priority to the writing performance:

We might say, then, that autobiography is neither fictive nor nonfictive, not even a mixture of the two. We might view it instead as a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self-representation, of converting oneself into the present promised by language. (1980:295)

For Renza only the present writing self exists empirically and the past self or selves can only be represented through impersonation. As he puts it:

Autobiographical writing thus entails a split intentionality: the "I" becoming a "he"; the writer's awareness of his life becoming private even as he brings it into the public domain and putatively makes it present through his act of writing. (1980:279)

Thus according to Renza what is crucial in the writing and reading of autobiography is not the knowledge and recoverability of the writer's personal history but the dynamics of the writing (*graphe*) element of the autobiographical undertaking. Renza's position, with minor variations, represents the general deconstructionist approach to literature as a whole which, by denying the primacy and relative stability of the self (*autos*) and denying that past life (*bios*) is partly recoverable through memory, emphasises the determining influence of writing (*graphe*) as the major factor in the writing of autobiography. For example, Paul de Man confidently argues the case for a pre-determined process of self-presentation when he writes:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium. (1979:920-21)¹⁰

Paul Eakin's interpretation of what de Man says here is worth quoting at length as it explains some of the important theoretical insights of deconstruction regarding the writing of autobiography:

Whether or not de Man's practice corroborates his theory, his stated view of autobiographical discourse in particular and of language in general controverts the traditional conception of autobiography as a theatre of self-expression, self-knowledge, and self-discovery. In his

view, the balance of power in the relation between self and language in autobiography shifts decisively to the side of language: the writer is as it were written by the discourse he employs; the self is displaced by the text, with the result that the portrait of the self is eclipsed, supplanted instead by knowledge of the trope of self-reference and its structural function in a rhetorical system. (1985:189)

In response to de Man's argument it must be pointed out that critics have long recognised the capacity of literary forms to create their own internal conventions which, to a certain extent, govern both the reading and writing of those literary forms. Presumably, this symbiotic relationship amongst texts within the same genre would be part of de Man's conception of the 'autobiographical project'. Mark Freeman warns against a reductive conception of language which characterises the work of deconstructionists such as de Man:

To confer primacy upon language need not result in breaking the covenant between word and world; it only breaks the spell of that conception of the relationship which supposes language to be a mere mirror of the world, a transparent vehicle for its disclosure. We have indeed moved beyond this conception. But this is hardly ample reason to leap to the conclusion that words cannot disclose or reveal. To leap to this conclusion is in fact to fall prey to a fallacy as well as to a particularly crude form of either-or thinking: either language is a mirror or it is a reality unto itself, autistically self-enclosed, a veritable prison, in which there exist no doors leading out. (1991:223)

Literary theories subsumed under the umbrella concept of poststructuralism have contributed important and even startling theoretical insights to the study of literature. Among other things these theories have revealed the problematic character of the notion of the homogeneous and stable self, the theoretically untenable distinction between history and fiction (literature); and perhaps most importantly, they have attempted to describe the role of language or discourse in

shaping human consciousness or subjectivity. Interestingly, these same issues have been raised, in a less extreme and apocalyptic way, by humanist critics of autobiography such as Georges Gusdorf, James Olney, Janet Varner Gunn and John Sturrock who, as mentioned earlier, grant final authority to the organising consciousness of the writer. For instance, Olney sees all three elements of autobiography as playing equally significant roles in the act of shaping the writer's past into a coherent and meaningful whole:

The *bios* of an autobiography, we may say, is what the "I" makes of it; yet as recent critics have observed, so far as the finished work is concerned, neither the *autos* nor the *bios* is there in the beginning, a completed entity, a defined, known self or a history to be had for the taking. Here is where the act of writing - the third element of autobiography - assumes its true importance: it is through that act that the self and the life, complexly intertwined and entangled, take on a certain form, assume a particular shape and image, and endlessly reflect that image back and forth between themselves as between two mirrors. (1980:22)

What emerges from this brief overview of current theoretical debates regarding autobiography is that there is a shift from a preoccupation with history, definitions and generic classification evident in the work of George Misch, Roy Pascal and Elizabeth Bruss to a concern with complex theoretical questions such as conceptions of selfhood, the recoverability of past experience and the self-reflexive character of autobiographical discourse. As William Spengemann has argued, shifts in the theoretical approaches to autobiography have been necessitated by developments in the broader field of literary theory and criticism:

The displacement of critical emphasis from life to mind to text in the study of autobiography can be attributed partly to the development of literary criticism as a whole, which has shifted its interests along

the same lines over the past half century.(1980:188-189)

It is also worth noting that the concerns of contemporary critics of autobiography reflect prevalent tendencies in the field of general literary theory which has seen the emergence of a theoretically rigorous Marxist aesthetics, psychoanalysis, semiology and structuralism over the past four decades. These new theories have found expression in the work of such influential theorists as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. It is, as Paul Jay has pointed out, the theories of poststructuralism that have had the most profound impact on the contemporary criticism of autobiography. As Jay puts it:

... the serious critical study of autobiography has come of age exactly in the age of structuralism and deconstruction (and in that of the new French Freud and Feminism)... Beyond this temporal intersection, however, we can identify a kind of intrinsic attraction between the nature of autobiographical writing and the concerns and procedures of post-structuralism. For one thing, recent literary theory has been generally preoccupied with examining the nature of literature's *referential* status - preoccupied, that is, with the asking of hard questions about the relationship between literary representations and the things represented by them. (1987:43-44)

Autobiography, it would appear, has not evaded the onslaught of contemporary critical theorising, the salient features of which are summed up by Richard Freadman and Seamus Miller as:

...the denial of the referential power of literature and of its images of the individual; the adoption of decentred models of the self; the denial of originary authority of the author; the (related) denial of determinate meaning, and so of determinate acts of interpretation of texts; the (again related) image of the text as embodying an infinite plurality of meanings. (1989:100)

In focusing on the social determinants and functions of autobiography, the present study seeks to reclaim the authority of the writing self while showing an awareness of the linguistic, philosophical and literary problems involved in re-creating and interpreting personal history within the mode of autobiography. As John Claude Curtin has argued, the elusiveness of consciousness to linguistic articulation does not necessarily imply its non-existence:

At the root of all human experience as a caring and responsible process is the mysterious, dynamic presence of consciousness. It is difficult to circumscribe linguistically this basis of all experience since it is itself the condition which makes possible all linguistic definition. (1974:343)

Against theories which deny the referential power of language and adopt 'decentred' models of the self, I want to posit the notion of the self as a semi-autonomous agent capable of using language in 'creating' and interpreting reality (whether this reality is constituted by external events or by the author's impressions and recollections). Without subscribing to a simplistic belief in the absolute mimetic or referential capacity of language, I argue that within the inescapable constraints of textuality, intertextuality and rhetorical conventions the writer of autobiography still retains some measure of control over the material that constitutes his or her past. As Sturrock (1993a) has argued, it matters little whether this material is empirically true or not, its autobiographical significance resides in the fact that it reflects the autobiographer's thinking about his or her identity and social world. Sturrock's view is further confirmed by Sidonie Smith, an influential feminist theorist of autobiography:

The fictions of the autobiographer are always mediated by a historic identity with specific intentions, if not pretensions, of interpreting the meaning of her lived experience. (1987:46)

Although its critics often present it as a narrative of private (personal and unique) experience, autobiography is a pre-eminently 'social' form : childhood, education, physical and intellectual maturation, choosing a career, fashioning a political and social outlook which are standard themes of most autobiographies, are all essentially social issues. As Jan Szczepanski reminds us:

An autobiography is not only a reflection of an individual's mind but also a reflection of the state of "social consciousness", the collectively accepted and recognised pattern of thinking, reasoning and feeling - which is changing in time. (1981:230)

Thus there is an important sense in which autobiography is a 'form of the common imagination and [also] a form of social consciousness' (Verene, 1991:56). Therefore, a socio-critical approach to the study of autobiography is, in my view, far more productive than raising unanswerable philosophical questions about the complex relationship between language and human consciousness¹¹. For the purpose of this study autobiography will be seen as a product of and a response to social, historical and cultural conditions. Thus the views advanced by de Man, Renza and Buck Jr. above are inappropriate for my purposes as I view autobiography as a vital human activity which has some relevance to the social and cultural lives of specific communities.

In the South African context autobiography in its various forms has been used by marginalised social groups as a means of creating self-identity in a political context which did not encourage self-respect for members of these groups. Thus

in this context the issue of human agency is inextricably linked to particular socio-political projects which aim at redeeming the lost identities of certain members of our society. In my analysis of selected South African autobiographies I shall follow the example of Janet Varner Gunn who, like John Sturrock, has proposed a way of viewing autobiography which emphasises the role of 'interpretation' in the act of reconstructing the past. She writes:

Rather than starting from the private act of a self writing, I begin from the cultural act of a self reading. Reading takes place at two moments of what I will be defining as the autobiographical situation: by the autobiographer who, in effect, is "reading" his or her life; and by the reader of the autobiographical text. (1982:8)

Unlike poststructuralist theorists of autobiography, Gunn emphasises the cultural element of interpreting lived experience (when the autobiographer 'reads' his or her life in the process of writing about it) on the basis of shared values, conventions and beliefs and does not regard the act of writing as taking precedence over this interpretive act. This view, as Gunn has shown in her study, is not predicated on a simplistic conception of selfhood nor does it ignore the complexities of what she has described as 'the taking up of one's life in language' (1982:17). As she explains:

This reading (or interpretive activity) takes place, moreover, by selves who *inhabit* worlds, not by a subject who has had to pay the price of world-habitation for access to itself. The self who reads, whether it be the autobiographer or the reader of autobiography, is the *displayed self*, not the hidden self. The displayed self is the self who speaks, who lives in time, and, by virtue of living in time, who participates in depth and thus can experience the inter and transpersonal grounds by which personal identity becomes possible. (1982:9)

Conceptualising autobiography as an interpretive activity with broad cultural implications has the advantage of recovering the authority of the human agent who selects, orders, and presents aspects of his or her life in accordance with the demands of present consciousness as well as the purpose of his or her undertaking. This should not be construed as naive belief in the recoverability of past experience or in the discredited notion of the stable, pre-linguistic and autonomous self, but should be viewed instead as an attempt to rescue autobiography from the power of 'the indeterminate sign' particularly in social situations where it (autobiography) is believed to have a social significance. One such situation is the struggle of women against patriarchy and racism. As Cheryl Walker has pointed out, feminists need stable self-identities to pursue the political goals of feminism:

... as a feminist I find myself dissatisfied with the abstract indeterminacy of "textuality", which has, in many cases, come to replace authorship in critical discourse. It continues to seem to me important to identify the circumstances that govern relations between authors and texts, as between texts and readers, because without such material we are in danger of seeing gender disappear or become transformed into a feature of textuality that cannot be persuasively connected to real women. (1991:110)

Gunn's view of the function of language in the autobiographical enterprise is particularly pertinent to the concerns of the present study for it stresses the role of language as a tool of self-definition and self-exploration. My analysis of autobiographies chosen for this study will therefore take cognisance of the creative - and thus relatively free - nature of the human mind as it assigns meaning and value to past experience in the context of present circumstances. My conception of human consciousness and self-awareness in particular is basically informed by the rationalist philosophical tradition which maintains that

human *freedom* and *will* play an equal role, along with the determinism of history and material circumstance, in the making of culture and in our being human; and that through the limitless capacity of language and the language-user to create universes of symbolic experience, meaning becomes as much the domain of the possible as of the actual. (Alverson, 1978:5)

As I hope to show, autobiography is a social document which emerges out of a particular socio-political milieu. Thus such factors as racial and ethnic identity, class position and gender inevitably play a crucial role in the process of self-interpretation within the mode of autobiography. My analysis of selected South African autobiographies will reveal that the notion of a unique individuality does not always apply to the life histories of people who have been forced by government legislation or by other social circumstances beyond their control to see themselves as members of particular social groups.

* * *

Autobiography, in its different modes, has dominated black writing in English since the emergence of sustained creative writing by black writers in the 1950s. For literary-sociological as well as historical reasons this form of writing has been particularly favoured by black South African writers. Critics of South African literature have offered different explanations for the popularity of the autobiographical narrative mode in black writing. Guy Butler, for example, attributes the paucity of extended fiction in the work of black authors to rapidly changing social conditions:

Some have, however, produced works in English, mainly short stories or biographies which give us an insight into what it is like to

be on the other side of the colour line (Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Nat Nakasa, Dugmore Boetie, Noni Jabavu). Perhaps a people in so rapid a state of growth and transition cannot be expected to achieve the degree of detachment needed for extended fiction. (1972:6)

All the writers mentioned here by Butler wrote autobiographies or semi-autobiographical prose narratives in which they explored the experience of being black in a racially segregated country. As Butler's comment suggests, their stories have attracted the attention of critics chiefly because of their sociological insights rather than their quality as prose narratives reflecting the writers' 'detachment' and skill. Butler's viewpoint reflects a common tendency in the criticism of South African literature to emphasise socio-historical elements of literary texts and to view the forms in which these texts are presented as mere vehicles for what are considered to be socially significant ideas. In a survey of South African English literature, Malvern van Wyk Smith makes the following comments regarding the distinctive features of the work of the urbanised black writers of the 1950s:

A further distinguishing feature of much of this writing is that it is often straight or thinly disguised autobiography. Not only did these authors lead lives stranger and more eventful than fiction normally needs to invent, but the chosen mode of social realism, the evident targeting of white audiences both ignorant and, worse, wholly prejudiced about actual township existence, and the communal base of a developing black aesthetic favoured the personal narrative of socio-political witness. (1990:103-4)

Thus van Wyk Smith emphasises the contribution of the unique and 'strange' lifestyle of newly urbanised township writers of the 1950s in producing readable and informative autobiographies. That these autobiographies have 'sociological value' is further confirmed by N.W. Visser in his comments on the life stories of

black writers published in the 1950s and 1960s:

Black South African writers are in many ways middle class in aspiration and profession, but they have been restricted, by law, to the physical and social environment of the urban slum. Hence they are aware that they can provide an inside view of a life virtually unknown to their middle class readers. It is this inside view that is responsible for much of the fascination of these works. (1976:51)

Nadine Gordimer makes a similar critical assessment in The Black Interpreters in which she remarks that, 'disaffected African intellectuals use the autobiographical form as a catharsis for the suffering of second-class citizens with first-class brains'(1973:7). The therapeutic function of autobiography implied in Gordimer's comment is further elucidated in John Povey's essay titled ' "Non-European" Writing in South Africa'. Povey cites Todd Matshikiza's Chocolates for My Wife and Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History as examples of

autobiographical works providing, simultaneously, sharply accurate journalism that re-creates the South African situation for the outsider and an essential therapy with which such writers must grapple throughout their lives, balancing despair and anger, relief and revenge, into some assimilable intellectual synthesis with which they can live.(1971:74)

The intellectual milieu and social conditions which nurtured the talent of most of these writers have been the subjects of books and journal articles, notable among which are Lewis Nkosi's Home and Exile and Other Selections (1983), Michael Chapman's The Drum Decade (1989), Paul Gready's 'The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties' (1990) and more recently, Mike Nicol's A Good Looking Corpse: The World of Drum (1991). In most of these critical assessments of the achievements of this group of writers there is an obvious attempt to explain literary creativity in

terms of its social determinants. In her comprehensive study of South African writing in English, Jane Watts raises the complex issue of the sociological determinants of form in a manner which, while not departing significantly from the approaches outlined above, alerts us to the more specific role of autobiography among minorities and other marginalised social groups:

The form does seem in many ways peculiarly adapted to the needs of South African writers, absorbed as they are with their own and their people's search for identity, with the evolution of consciousness, with the attempt to make sense of their life and condition. (1989:108)

Watts identifies important sociological as well as psychological 'functions' of autobiography in the South African socio-literary context. As noted earlier, autobiography as socially or politically motivated writing is mainly practised by black writers in South Africa. The autobiographies of white writers tend to be individualist in perspective and to celebrate the writers' achievements in a particular field of activity¹². As N.W. Visser has observed, it is in the areas of autobiography and short stories (which are usually semi-autobiographical) that black writers have made their most significant contribution to South African English literature:

...when one thinks of African literature in English one thinks primarily, though not necessarily correctly, of the novel, and then of drama and poetry. When, on the other hand, one turns to black South African literature, one thinks almost invariably of the short story and the autobiography. (1976:50)

Visser's impressions are further confirmed by the authors of Perspectives on South African Writing, who have remarked as follows on this topic:

There are fine works of African literature that are in no need of an introduction, apologia or reader's guide. Of this burgeoning mass of literature it remains true that a large proportion of the really fine works is autobiographical, or fictionalised autobiography. For, the argument goes, by keeping the autobiographical tap root alive an African writer generates a fuller and deeper access to personal, historical and religious dimensions. (Christie, S et al, 1980:122)

As the comments above suggest, there seems to be general agreement among critics about the sociologically oriented nature of black autobiographical writing. Given this critical awareness of the interconnection between autobiography and socio-political processes, it is surprising that few critics have undertaken the writing of full-length studies of the historical as well as social conditions which may have influenced, directly or indirectly, the emergence of this mode of writing¹³. Critical articles on individual autobiographers have appeared in literary journals such as English in Africa, The Journal of Southern African Studies, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Social Dynamics, and Current Writing¹⁴. The present study examines the autobiographies of five South African writers who may be taken to represent fairly distinctive social groups within the South African social formation.

In keeping with the emergent revisionist approaches to South African literature, characterised by contextualised readings of formerly neglected or marginalised literary works, the present study offers an analysis of autobiographical writing which is historically and ideologically based. The aim of this approach is to argue for a literary-sociological method of interpretation which combines close textual analysis with historical analysis. Diana Laurenson describes sociology of literature as 'the study of literature in society (or of society in literature)' (1978:6). She goes on to say that, from a socio-critical perspective, literary texts of whatever form are

products of intricately related social forces:

...literary works: novels, biographies, plays, poetry, film scripts, documentaries, short stories, etc., do not drop 'like meteorites from heaven' (Taine) or emerge solely from the lower depths of individual creativity. They are created by authors who have a history of socialisation in a particular class, gender and place and who are subject to a range of changing social pulls and pressures. They are created at a particular historical stage of society, which is never static, they are affected by a number of variants such as market situation and readership.(1978:6)

On the same topic of the relationship between literature and society, Geoffrey Thurley has made the following astute comments:

As symptomatic structures, works of art preserve certain homologies with the social and economic structures of their time, and are important sources of information about human history: every work of art is, *inter alia*, an important social document, and it is foolish to think that it can be somehow "above" such things. On the other hand, art can be seen as something we understand better by its being approached through a prior consideration of facts surrounding its birth. (1983:5)

Although the main focus of the thesis will be on black autobiography, one prominent white writer will be included for the purpose of comparing ways in which socio-historical conditions shape conceptions of selfhood amongst different racial groups. The fundamental hypothesis which I hope to validate in this study is that the form of any autobiography, by which is meant the selection, organisation and presentation of its content, is to a large extent determined by the essential qualities (both private and public) of the life it seeks to reconstruct. Related to this is the secondary aim of examining the role played by ideology in

influencing popular (dominant) conceptions of selfhood and the roles of different 'selves' in society. The concept of ideology will be used in its broad sense to denote social consciousness or a framework of belief which the writer of autobiography wittingly or unwittingly utilises in exploring his or her own identity and consciousness. For the purposes of this study ideology will not be defined in the conventional Marxist sense as denoting 'the practice of reproducing social relations of inequality within the sphere of signification and discourse' (T. O'Sullivan et al,1994:140). My own conception of ideology is more comprehensive as it also includes counter-hegemonic ideological strategies employed by the oppressed and marginalised social classes or groups to gain political power and recognition. As O'Sullivan et al further explain:

...ideology is not a set of things but an active practice, either working on the changing circumstances of social activity to produce familiar and regulated senses, or struggling to resist established and naturalized sense thus to transform the means of sense-making into the new, alternative or oppositional forms, which will generate meanings aligned to different social interests.(1994:143)

This study will therefore interrogate ways in which both dominant (hegemonic) and alternative or oppositional(counter-hegemonic) ideologies have been deployed by writers within the mode of autobiographical self-representation. The ideologies underpinning the autobiographies selected for this study include liberal humanism, aestheticism, revolutionary working-class consciousness and feminism. Thus it is the quality of each autobiographer's consciousness of self as a reflection of a broader social vision or 'world view' which I intend to evaluate in this study. I want to propose a way of looking at autobiography as an exploration and definition of both collective and individual consciousness. This study will therefore rely heavily on materialist aesthetics, particularly that branch of it which

has come to be called sociocriticism ¹⁵. Following the example of Lucien Goldmann, I intend to examine the selected autobiographies as expressions, at the highest level of coherence, of the 'world views' of particular social groups in the South African social formation. Social groups will be delineated in terms of race, class and gender as well as political, social and philosophical attitudes unique to a particular group.

At the risk of simplifying complex issues regarding the relationship of cultural artifacts to history, I propose to analyze the structure and content of each autobiography in relation to the 'world vision'¹⁶ of its writer's social group. Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism has a particular pertinence to this study as it allows the reader to examine the structural and thematic concerns of the text as well as the ideology or ideologies to which it is dialectically related. Terry Eagleton, an influential contemporary Marxist critic, explains the essence of Goldmann's theory of literature as follows:

What Goldmann is seeking, then, is a set of structural relations between literary text, world vision and history itself. He wants to show how the historical situation of a social group or class is transposed, by the mediation of its world vision, into the structure of a literary work. To do this it is not enough to begin with the text and work outwards towards history, or vice versa; what is required is a dialectical method of criticism which moves constantly between text, world vision and history, adjusting each to the others. (1976:34)

The basic principles of Goldmann's approach to the study of literature are further elaborated by Diana Laurenson:

"Genetic Structuralism" claimed to provide a comprehensive and dialectical method avoiding both social reductionism and

psychologism. In brief, Goldmann looked first to the text for structures and micro-structures which could subsequently be related to the social class or group to which the author belonged (with its "world view") and to historical moment and wider sociological context. A working model could then be set up capable of explaining the main structures of the text, refined by continuous oscillating reference to text, changing social structure and the model itself. (1978:5)

The main objections to Goldmann's theory are that it assumes an unproblematic relationship between the text and social reality and that it presupposes a 'transindividual subject'. Most of the theorists who raised these objections to Goldmann's model view it as a distortion of the Marxian base and superstructure theory¹⁷. Although Goldmann's theory shares some features with traditional Marxist poetics, its orientation is essentially structuralist. A broad definition of structuralism as an analytical strategy and theoretical approach is given by Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood:

Structuralism, has, ... many meanings, but in its most general sense it employs the crucial concept of system, whether it is linguistic, literary, or social, in which the element under analysis forms numerous dynamic relations with other elements, with the other parts of the system, and where every element has a meaning only in relation to the other parts. Fundamentally it is holistic and integrative, implying a fluid relationship between the parts and the whole. (1971:61-2)

In this study I intend to test the validity of Goldmann's ideas as methodological principles and not as dogmatic statements about literary art and its social implications. Another possible criticism of the application of Goldmann's method to the study of autobiography may have to do with the ambiguous status of

autobiography as 'history' and 'art'. Following Gusdorf, I want to argue that these 'personal histories' are in fact literary artifacts evincing a high degree of contrivance and manoeuvre on the part of the writers. A careful analysis of the internal organisation of these autobiographies as well as their contextualisation in relation to broader socio-historical conditions will reveal the attempts of different writers to engage with ideological issues while recording the unique character of their experiences as South Africans.

Critics of autobiography such as Georg Misch, James Olney and Roy Pascal all emphasise the importance of the insights which this form of writing affords the reader into the writer's personal or private life. The common critical view regarding the value of autobiography as a distinct form of writing is summed up by Roy Pascal in his book Design and Truth in Autobiography:

It is fascinating to enter into the private life of someone else, so different from us even if he is a neighbour, to hear of the small circumstances of private and social life, of emotional involvements, prejudices and passions, beliefs and convictions, that are normally each man's secret. (1960:1)

Naturally the personal and the public are closely intertwined in any autobiography, but Pascal's argument here is that it is the personal element which gives the autobiography its distinctive quality and which distinguishes it from other forms of writing. In foregrounding the social public element in South African autobiographical writing, I intend to demonstrate that personal identities, beliefs and convictions should not be seen in isolation from their social determinants.

The thesis will comprise five chapters of approximately forty pages each. The five chosen autobiographies will be dealt with chronologically (on the basis of publication dates) to indicate a sense of the historical development of this form of writing in South African literature. The first chapter will focus on Peter Abrahams's Tell Freedom (1954), a book which is generally considered to be the forerunner in the history of black autobiographical writing in South Africa¹⁸. As well as analyzing the book's structure and narrative strategies, I want to examine particularly Abrahams's conception and presentation of himself as a writer. I intend to examine ways in which Abrahams's self-conscious awareness of his creative talent influences both the style and content of Tell Freedom. Central to the autobiography as a whole is the theme of escape which has acquired both symbolic and physical connotations in South Africa (Olney, 1973:). The chapter will explore ways in which fluctuations in setting, point of view and diction reinforce and illuminate the dilemmas confronting the developing writer. Racially and socially (in terms of class), Abrahams belongs to the urbanised 'Coloured' proletariat of the 1920s and 1930s, but it is by escaping from this community that he can discover his true identity and realize his dream of becoming a writer. The book thus reflects the struggle of a boy and, later, a teenager of precocious sensitivity who would like to escape from the physical and intellectual poverty of his environment, but who, at the same time, has to strike significant identifications with members of his degraded community, namely his friends, his family and his political comrades. He can escape through art, but that art must take cognizance of his and his people's social predicament. Twelve years before the publication of Tell Freedom, recalling his childhood days in Vrededorp and his success in escaping from its squalor to become a writer, Abrahams commented as follows:

I have left Vrededorp; one of the very few who have succeeded in breaking away from the grip it has.

...Many things have happened to me. But one of the most important is, that I am a writer. I have kept faith with a dream. (1942:10)

In the second chapter I shall look at Modisane's Blame Me on History (1963). Modisane's autobiography is notable for its psychological realism in its re-creation of the mental anguish experienced by the urbanised black petty bourgeoisie of the 1940s and 1950s in the township of Sophiatown. In recounting the story of his life as one of the *Drum* writers living in Sophiatown, Modisane is simultaneously articulating the common preoccupations of the alienated members of his social class whose values had been significantly altered by the urban environment of Sophiatown. Like Abrahams before him, Modisane exemplifies the dilemma of the 'enlightened' and politically aware black man for whom the traditional past is no longer a locus of value and belief and who cannot find personal fulfilment and freedom in a country of racial oppression. In Blame Me on History there is a remarkable fusion of form and content as the book's structure attempts to recapture the feelings of frustration, alienation and powerlessness which characterise the anguished narrator. Modisane deliberately subverts the conventional chronological narrative pattern commonly associated with autobiography to show the disordered and chaotic condition of his life. I have not included Mphahlele's popular Down Second Avenue (1959) because it has received more attention from the critics than Blame Me on History. There is also an important sense in which both Modisane and Abrahams write about the same collective concerns which are the subject of Down Second Avenue.

The third chapter will focus on Naboth Mokgatle's The Autobiography of an Unknown South African (1971). Mokgatle's autobiography can be divided into

two parts, the first part dealing with the physical, moral and intellectual growth of a tribal village boy and the second dealing with Mokgatle's involvement in radical trade union politics. My intention is to examine the transformation in Mokgatle's political awareness and the composition and values of the different social groups he represents during the two phases of growth mentioned above.

Chapter four will focus on Alan Paton's two volumes of autobiography, Towards the Mountain, (1980) and Journey Continued (1988). Paton's autobiographies are particularly relevant to this study as they embody most of the values which both Abrahams and Modisane identified as their own, namely individual freedom, justice, equality. As an archetypal liberal-humanist Paton represents the liberal vision in South African writing which dates back to Thomas Pringle in the nineteenth century. The need to justify liberalism as well as to celebrate its success informs both the structure and content of the Paton's autobiographies. I intend to demonstrate in the course of this study ways in which Alan Paton's beliefs, interests and values reflect those of a particular social group in South Africa. What lends special significance to Paton's work is his sustaining moral vision which combines elements of the Christian faith with an earnest engagement with the immediate social realities of his time and place.

The fifth and final chapter will examine Sindiwe Magona's two-volumed autobiography To My Children's Children (1990) and Forced to Grow (1992) which articulates the tensions and dilemmas of growing up in a patriarchal and sexist society. This is the story of all black women who are victims of a society which privileges men at the expense of women. Magona's story exposes the double oppression that black women have endured for decades -political oppression as black people and sexual oppression as black women.

The overall aim of the thesis is to show ways in which different South African autobiographers have defined their identities and social roles in relation to the world views of their communities. As I have tried to show, each writer in this study may be identified as belonging to a particular social group united by its interests, aspirations and historical circumstances. My intention therefore is to situate South African autobiographical writing within its social and historical context and to show that autobiography, far from being a 'pre-eminently individual genre', may be read as a record of social and historical events. The examination of supposedly unique (idiosyncratic) and exceptional qualities of the autobiographer yields illuminating sociological insights about interpretation of and (responses) to social reality held in common by members of a particular class or groups located within that class. For critics of autobiography who emphasise its social rather than its aesthetic or formal features, this approach of sociological contextualisation is useful as it reveals the socially constructed character of self-identity. As Lewis Coser has observed:

The self, far from being some ineffable essence, is now commonly seen to mature in and through commerce with others. It is in the context of social acts that the self arises. It is built up and reinforced in anticipation of the response of significant others, the self-conscious individual needs an audience. (1963:99)

This approach is also useful for the ways in which it demonstrates the close relationship between autobiographical writing and history.

CHAPTER 1

THE IDEOLOGY OF LIBERAL HUMANISM IN PETER ABRAHAMS'S TELL FREEDOM.

Peter Abrahams's writing has received a fair amount of critical attention in the form of essays, theses, chapters in books and book-length studies¹. Most of these studies, chiefly undertaken by non-South African critics, focus on Abrahams's novels and usually ignore or merely use as points of reference his poetry, short stories and autobiographical writing. This critical neglect may be attributed to, among other factors, the commonly-held view that autobiography is not 'genuine' literature, and that it is therefore 'a close cousin to history' (Butler, 1977:xiv). As indicated in the introduction to this study, autobiography has only recently acquired the status of a mode of writing which critics consider to be worthy of literary-theoretical scrutiny². Yet, as shown in the paucity of critical work on Abrahams's Tell Freedom and his autobiographical short stories collected in Dark Testament, this new interest in autobiography has had no immediate significant impact on the South African literary scene. Stephen Gray, an influential critic of Southern African literature, accounts for the relative lack of interest in autobiographical writing (mainly by black writers) as follows:

Autobiographical works about the rise and entrenchment of apartheid in South Africa are notoriously unread in general, because autobiography itself as a literary category remains highly problematic; for our current tastes it is the form of sell-out bourgeois individualism. (1990:101)³

As Gray himself has shown in the above essay on Abrahams's autobiographical writings, it is not entirely accurate to describe the autobiographies written by black authors in the 1950s as a celebration of bourgeois individualism. Almost all these autobiographies were creative responses to socio-political conditions and were

therefore more concerned with social analysis and documentation than with the celebration of individual accomplishments. In the life-stories of the black autobiographers of the 1950s and 1960s the writers' achievements were always seen against the background of political realities.

Tell Freedom is generally regarded as a path-breaking work in the history of South African autobiographical writing by blacks. Published in 1954, Abrahams's book was soon followed by Es'kia Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue (1959), an autobiography which has earned itself the status of a classic in South African literature. Alfred Hutchison's Road to Ghana (1960), Todd Matshikiza's Chocolates for My Wife (1961) and Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History, (1963) which appeared after Mphahlele's classic, all explore, from different perspectives, the dilemmas and tensions of living in a racially segregated society. Nick Visser has described the status of Tell Freedom as a forerunner in South African black autobiography as follows:

Tell Freedom has a number of characteristics that recur in later autobiographies. Naturally, given the rigidity of South African society and of the position of blacks within it, some similarities of subject matter are bound to arise ... the works often seem to be motivated by the same impulse and to presuppose a particular relation to their audience. The impulse is stated succinctly in Abraham's [sic] title - to tell freedom, which means in turn to tell of the lack of freedom and what it does to one. (1976:51)

As implied in Visser's comments above, the similarity of themes, notably the theme of exile in these autobiographies, has given rise to the perception among some critics that these works, taken as a whole, have no thematic diversity⁴. James Olney's comment quoted below is typical of the critical tendency to stress thematic

affinities and ignore individual differences in these autobiographies:

Almost as if they were following a single blueprint for writing autobiography, these men all describe variations on a single plan; no doubt this is so because something very like a blueprint was imposed on their lives in South Africa. Moreover, the autobiographical writings of Lewis Nkosi, Dugmore Boetie, Gerard Sekoto, Noni Jabavu, Chief Albert Luthuli, Clements Kadalie, and "Dora Thizwilondi Magidi" - all of them in other ways quite unlike the mono-patterned autobiographies of Mphahlele et al. - serve to confirm and reinforce the notion that the repeated pattern in South African autobiography is the result of an omnipresent pattern in South African life. (1973:249)

Olney goes on to describe what he considers to be the peculiarities of South African autobiography as distinct from African autobiography in general:

...the pattern of South African autobiography is not determined by any internal social cohesion or social logic, not by what I have called social synecdoche, nor by a cultural heritage that extends from the present individual back through legendary ancestors to a divine source. Rather the pattern is determined by precisely the opposite - by a social disunion, by a cultural and political dichotomy. The classic pattern of South African autobiography describes a progressive alienation that, forced to the extreme, becomes spiritual and physical exile. (1973:250)

Besides examining the implications of the process of 'progressive alienation' identified by Olney in his book, this chapter will focus on Abrahams's representation of himself as a literary artist in Tell Freedom. I intend to demonstrate ways in which Abrahams's understanding of 'literature' and of his own role as a writer is embedded in the liberal humanist ideology which privileges individual freedom over collective interests and seeks a transcendental role for the writer who is often regarded as a gifted creator of literary artifacts. Moreover, as I shall argue, liberal values and the artistic sensibility provide what Karl

Weintraub (1975) has described as the 'standpoint' from which Abrahams chose to view and review his life in South Africa and to transform it into a relatively coherent and meaningful narrative. Like all autobiographies, Tell Freedom presents a particular deliberately chosen version of the writer's identity (what Janet V Gunn refers to as the displayed self). Therefore the reader must be wary of presuming a neat line of correlation between the values and interests of the 'empirical self' and those of the 'displayed self'. Because of its author's preoccupation with validating and celebrating his creative talent, Tell Freedom may be said to exhibit the features of a typical literary autobiography. Literary autobiography may be distinguished from other modes of autobiography by its focus on the career of the writer who normally has an established reputation. The story of the author's past is supposed to answer the question which is always uppermost in the minds of curious readers: how did this person become a writer? As a mode of self-analysis literary autobiography goes back to Wordsworth's verse autobiography The Prelude, described by him as 'a poem on my poetical education'⁵. There are numerous examples of autobiographies by established writers who, like Abrahams, attempt to account for the provenance and development of their literary talents in their life-stories. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this mode of autobiographical writing is Jean Paul Sartre's The Words. Interviewed in 1957, the year in which he wrote his autobiography, Sartre commented as follows on his motives for writing his life-story:

I am a writer: the first thing I must try to explain is why I write. I could have chosen another job: I could have been a painter or a businessman. Why did I in fact prefer that activity to all others?⁶

Essentially, Tell Freedom is the story of Abrahams's attainment of artistic consciousness and his subsequent development as a writer. Consequently, the

narrator-protagonist consistently foregrounds those experiences and events which contributed in various ways to the shaping of his creative talent. These include his frequent visits to the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the Christian-liberal education he received at Anglican mission schools namely, Grace Dieu and St Peters. The presentation of events in the book follows a developmental or cumulative pattern charting the gradual change in the consciousness of the young Abrahams as he physically and symbolically moved away from the slum of Vrededorp to centres of education which would equip him with the necessary skills, attitudes, and philosophies to pursue a successful writing career.

The Abrahams of Tell Freedom differs in significant ways from some of his contemporaries and literary heirs, most of whom felt the need to subordinate their art (including their autobiographies) to political causes. Black South African autobiographers such as Mokgatle, Hutchison, and, to lesser extent, Mphahlele combine the roles of political activists and literary artists⁷. In opposition to this conception of the role of the artist as political activist, Abrahams sees creative writing as the only viable career for the talented individual and tends to be sceptical of rigid political allegiances. He seeks a relatively isolated 'space' for the creative artist; a space which allows the writer to transcend the limiting and perhaps limited terrain of political contestation and conflict involving class and racial groupings. He chooses the level of transcendent creativity so that he can understand more fully what he has described as 'the business of living'. As he strikingly puts it in his autobiographical book Return to Goli:

My business as a writer was with people, with human thoughts, conflicts, longings and strivings, not with causes. Painfully, I was slowly groping to a view of life that transcended my own personal problems as a member of one oppressed group of humanity. I felt that if I could see the whole scheme

of things with the long eye of history I might be able to fit the problems of my own group into the general human scheme and, in doing so, become a writer. (1953:17)

The argument of this chapter is that these views are a reflection of broader ideological convictions which Abrahams does not fully explain in Return to Goli. Thus Tell Freedom provides him with the opportunity of explaining himself, as it were, and of justifying his aesthetic and political beliefs and principles. Consequently, Tell Freedom as the story of Abrahams's development as a writer, provides useful insights into the subtle and sometimes not so subtle workings of the ideology of liberal humanism which Abrahams's critics have consistently identified as the underpinning philosophy of his work (Wade, 1972; Ogungbesan, 1979; Ensor, 1992). For instance, Michael Wade sees Tell Freedom as an examination of the values that Abrahams had chosen in the light of the demands of his social environment:

His moral and intellectual commitment to the values of liberal humanism, and his percipient awareness of the extent of the crisis confronting these values, come from his personal experience in which they have failed, in which they are powerless to protect the natural aspirations of the dark child of a plural society. (1972:5)

As I hope to show, Tell Freedom demonstrates that self-presentation and self-definition cannot take place outside dominant ideology. As Stephen Heath has argued, the self is constructed in and through ideology:

There is no subject outside of a social formation, outside of social processes which include and define positions of meaning, which specify ideological places ... it is not that there is first of all a construction of a subject for social/ideological formations and then the placing of that constructed subject-support in those formations,

it is that the processes are one, in a kind of necessary simultaneity - like the recto and the verso of a piece of paper ⁸.

A socio-critical analysis of Abrahams's autobiography will reveal the diverse ways in which the values of 'bourgeois liberalism' (Wade, 1972:5) shaped his self-conception as writer. In keeping with the methodological and theoretical principles outlined in the Introduction, it is necessary to begin by locating Abrahams within the South African social formation of the 1920s and 1930s. In terms of the Goldmannian theoretical paradigm of genetic structuralism, Abrahams will be positioned in relation to the social group to which he belonged during the period covered by his autobiography⁹. The contention that writing an autobiography can never be an innocent undertaking in which the writer, relying on memory, simply retrieves significant aspects of his or her past has become a critical commonplace. Apart from the linguistic and literary conventions which poststructuralist theories have elevated to the status of primary determinants of consciousness, the process of self-construction within the mode of autobiography is governed by social relations which in turn, are underpinned by ideology. Following Goldmann's example, ideology will be taken to refer to the commonly-held beliefs, ideas and attitudes about social practices and the roles of individuals within a particular social formation. Goldmann sees ideology as grounded in material or historical situations which determine the behaviour patterns of particular social groups:

By "world view" we mean a *coherent* and *unitary* perspective concerning man's relationship with his fellow men and with the universe. Since the thought of individuals is rarely coherent and unitary, a world view rarely corresponds to the actual thought of a particular individual. Thus, a world view is not a given empirical reality, but a conceptual instrument for doing research; an extrapolation constructed by the historian which, however, is not arbitrary, since it is founded on the structure of the real thought of individuals. (1980:111)

This definition of 'world view', a concept which Goldmann uses interchangeably with ideology, does not differ significantly from Louis Althusser's conception of ideology which he defines as:

a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society. Without embarking on the problem of the relations between a science and its (ideological) past, we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge). (1976:231)

Thus for Althusser, ideology is distinguished by its effects on the daily lives of people in a given society, the way they conceive of themselves and of their relations with other people. It is only natural that particular 'myths, ideas or concepts' which form part of ideology should have a direct bearing on self-consciousness and self-conception as articulated within the mode of autobiography. As mentioned earlier, the autobiographer engaging in the task of self-portraiture, cannot operate outside the all-pervasive influence of ideological constraints.

In attempting to position Abrahams in terms of the Goldmannian concept of 'social group', we can refer to H.I.E. Dhlomo's illuminating definition quoted in Tim Couzens's book, The New African, of the group of so-called 'New Africans' to which Abrahams may be said to have belonged in the mid-1930s:

This class consists mostly of organised urban workers who are awakening to the issues at stake and to the power of organised intelligently-led mass action and of progressive thinking African

intellectuals and leaders. (1985:33)

While it would be simplistic to attempt an unproblematic class categorisation of Abrahams in terms of Dhlomo's classification, there is no doubt that the latter's conceptualisation of the 'New African' is a fairly accurate description of the urbanised, politically aware black population of the 1930s and 1940s. On the basis of his exposition of working-class life in his novels, as well as his family background, Abrahams has been described as 'South Africa's first working class writer' (Wade, 1978:96). Interestingly, most of the autobiographers who belong to the 1950s school of black writers had working class origins. It is therefore not surprising that their writing displays an undisguised preoccupation with personal testimony and social commentary. Like Abrahams, these writers felt the need to explain their success as writers, artists and political activists in the face of apparently insurmountable social barriers. In a short autobiographical sketch published in 1954, Gilbert Coka, a member of the class of 'progressive thinking African intellectuals' mentioned by Dhlomo above, described his social position as a black man in the following terms:

This is a short story of a Black South African. Although he lives in a wealthy, civilized, Christian land, he enjoys none of its amenities. He stands in the way of a White South Africa, White Prestige, European Supremacy, Western Civilization and other projects which are inimical to his interest. Denied opportunity of development as an individual, discriminated against as a race, exploited as a worker, a black South African leads a precarious existence in his native land... Insecurity, starvation, poverty, ignorance, unemployment and injustices are his portion. (1954:273)

In spite of the fact that they shared the suffering of other black people, the talents and education of the so-called 'New Africans' tended to create a barrier between them and their largely uneducated working class compatriots. Perhaps this justifies

their being labelled as the black petty-bourgeoisie by most critics who have written on this topic¹⁰. Kelwyn Sole explains the distinguishing features of this class in broad Marxist terms:

The petty-bourgeoisie includes two groups of agents with different positions in production. These are the "traditional" petty-bourgeoisie (small-scale producers and small traders) and the "new" petty-bourgeoisie (civil servants, non-shareholding managers, teachers, clerks, intellectuals, journalists, etc.) whose numbers have increased markedly under monopoly capitalism - particularly in "third world" countries, where their predominance is partially attributable to the present international structure of capitalist control. Though holding different positions in the economic sphere, both types of petty-bourgeois present ideological and political characteristics which are in many ways similar. These include: attraction to the status quo and the idea of "social advancement", political instability, aspirations to bourgeois status, petty-bourgeois individualism, belief in a neutral state above classes, and so on. (1979:145)

As we shall see, most of the values, attitudes and interests identified by Sole as distinguishing the petty-bourgeoisie, are to be found in the self-portrait presented by Abrahams in Tell Freedom. However, we must be careful of making reductive statements about Abrahams's class position. The concept of class is perhaps the most controversial issue in Marxist thought mainly because classes are neither completely homogeneous in their composition nor static in relation to historical, economic and political changes. It is for this reason that researchers working within the theoretical paradigm of genetic structuralism have had to define the concept of class with reference to the peculiarities of their specific research undertakings. As Goldman reminds us, the concept of class should be viewed as a methodological technique rather than a rigid description of social relations. In the South African context the issue of class relations is further compounded by racial, ethnic and gender divisions. While it may be theoretically accurate for a

thorough-going Marxist critic to speak of a distinct class of the black petty-bourgeoisie, in reality this distinction is blurred by contradictions and anomalies which necessitate a more contextualized elucidation of the nature and composition of this class within the South African social formation.

Perhaps the most accurate description of the situation of the alienated black petty-bourgeoisie hankering after the 'fruits' of Western culture is that given by Bloke Modisane in his autobiography, Blame Me on History:

...I wanted more than the excitement of the senses; the doors into the art galleries, the theatres, the world of ballet, opera, classical music, were shut in my nose [sic] because I am black, and because of this fact I am, therefore, not considered capable of appreciating them; it was decided I am not sufficiently civilised to benefit emotionally and intellectually from the halls of culture; in any case, it was an alien culture, and I was encouraged instead to develop and cultivate an appreciation for my own culture of the shield and the assegai, of ancestral gods, drums, mud huts and half-naked women with breasts as hard as mangoes; but these were the things for which I was declared to be savage and not worthy of the 'benefits' of Western culture. (1986:178)

The condition of intellectual and psychological alienation expressed by Modisane in his book is echoed by Abrahams, who shared with Modisane and other black intellectuals, writers and artists the plight of being an 'enlightened' black person who had acquired tastes for the forbidden fruits of Western culture:

Except for Maggie's home and the Bantu Men's Social Centre, I had felt out of place in Johannesburg. I had been on the outside of things. The things I had wanted to do had been "Reserved for Europeans Only". There had been the concerts and the theatres, the libraries and the parks, the bookshops and the clean, fresh-looking tea-rooms. All these I had wanted and found out of bounds. (1954:233-4)

On the one hand, in terms of his physical and social position Abrahams is obviously a member of and a spokesperson for the working class, but on the basis of his intellectual development and artistic aspirations, he may be said to display petty-bourgeoisie tendencies. This tension is reflected in the selection of episodes and events in Abrahams's autobiography. The structural organisation of the book reflects what Olney has described as the 'process of progressive alienation' (1973:250) dramatised in the conflict between the author's social and material circumstances and his intellectual, and moral aspirations. In Tell Freedom, Book I focuses on the characteristic domestic and social deprivations of the working class environment of Vrededorp where Abrahams grew up. Book II deals with the uneasy period of transition in the budding writer's intellectual outlook as he is gradually initiated into the way of life of the black petty bourgeoisie and middle class at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. The last section of the autobiography (Book III) deals with Abrahams's endeavours to bring to fruition his childhood dream of becoming a writer. Through his own personal encounters with various forms of social injustice he accepts the bitter truth that his ambition cannot be realised in the stifling South African environment and therefore chooses the option of self exile.

Given the inherent contradictions in Abrahams's social position perhaps it would be pragmatic to view him as a working class intellectual, as this designation embraces both the features of the traditional working class and those of the middle class. Tell Freedom's linear and sequential narrative structure follows the young writer's physical, intellectual and moral growth and charts Abrahams's initially unplanned movement away from the debilitating conditions of working class life to a situation where he contemplates them retrospectively as a writer-intellectual.

In some sections of Tell Freedom Abrahams articulates the 'world view' of the black urban working-class of the 1930s and 1940s while in others he projects the 'world view' of the class of 'intellectuals' who, as I have shown, had an ambiguous relationship with the working class. Antonio Gramsci explains the emergence and role of intellectuals within social groups as follows:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. (1979:102)

Working-class intellectuals are hardly a deliberate and conscious creation of the working-class but emerge in a random manner as products of social relations. David Rabkin comments as follows on the work of Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane, who also found themselves trapped between their working class origins and their middle class aspirations:

The writings of Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi, though differing in style, show a striking similarity in content and concern. They are the works of isolated African intellectuals, divorced by interests and aspirations from the bulk of the black community and refused entry, or at best given an equivocal "pass" to the world of white intelligentsia. (1976:127)

Though Abrahams comes before the group of African intellectuals mentioned by Rabkin here, nevertheless his writings, especially his two autobiographical works, display preoccupations with class allegiances similar to the work of the so-called *Drum* writers of the 1950s. Class position seems to be an unavoidable theme of black autobiography just as social analysis is the inevitable genotext of any South African autobiography. It is not fortuitous, for instance, that Lewis Nkosi, one of

Abrahams's literary heirs, grappled with the same predicament of simultaneously living in the ugly world of squalor and poverty while figuratively inhabiting an imaginary world of creative writing with its illusory comforts. As he explains:

In those days I had two sets of reality; one was the ugly world in which I lived my trapped life and the other, more powerful one, was the world of books I read. My sense of honour was propounded out of the romantic novels of Dumas, Kingsley and Marrayat, and the love I knew best was the love of knights and ladies in the drawing rooms of fifteenth-century Europe. What was happening under my eyes was filtered through the moral sieve provided by this foreign literature. It was clear I was using literature as a form of escape; I was using it as a shield against a life of grime and social deprivation. (1983:8)

As I hope to show, literature provided a similar avenue of escape for the young Abrahams who ultimately had to escape physically from his country to seek spiritual and intellectual fulfilment elsewhere. It is not too much of a generalisation to say that for black South African writers autobiographical writing has a therapeutic function as it serves to alleviate feelings of alienation and frustration engendered by the repressive system of apartheid. Moreover, the emotional consolation afforded by the semi-autonomous world of the literary text has encouraged the creation of what I would describe as 'the ideology of creativity' which stresses the psychologically redemptive quality of imaginative writing. However, to qualify for this redemption one must have the necessary artistic sensibility which is often presented as an innate quality rather an acquired, ideologically determined disposition. Richard Wright, an Afro-American writer whose experience parallels that of Abrahams in many respects¹¹, makes the following comments about the internal conflict brought about by living in an environment which militated against individual fulfilment and communal harmony:

I wanted life in which there was a constant oneness of feeling with others, in which the basic emotions of life were shared, in which common memory formed a common past, in which collective hope reflected a national future. But I knew that no such thing was possible in my environment. The only ways in which I felt I could go outward without fear of rude rebuff or searing reprisal was in writing or reading, and to me they were ways of living. (1944:20-1)

In the narrative perspective of Tell Freedom there is an unbridgeable gap between the consciousness of the resident of the crime-infested and poverty-stricken slum of Vrededorp and the frequent visitor to the library of the Bantu Men's Social Centre who listened to the displays of erudition and intellectual sophistication in the debates of the emergent black middle class. It is this tension of living in two worlds which Abrahams compellingly dramatises in the story of his life.

* * *

In my analysis of Tell Freedom I shall take as a point of departure the obvious fact that this book presents a portrait, in written form, of the young Abrahams carefully crafted by the older and maturer Abrahams in accordance with his aims and purposes in undertaking the task of self-portraiture. In Tell Freedom the standpoint of Abrahams the autobiographer plays a crucial structural and thematic role in self-narration. The narrator-protagonist in Tell Freedom is a radically altered and more self-conscious Abrahams than the boy and, later, teenager whose experiences are recounted in the book. When Abrahams published his autobiography in 1954, he had been in self-imposed exile for nearly fourteen years; during this period he had published four novels and one autobiographical book of reportage and was rapidly establishing himself as a writer. In Britain he had found the freedom and peace of mind he needed to reflect on his experience

in South Africa and to attempt to shape that experience into a meaningful and patterned narrative on the basis of his 'present' circumstances. In the introductory chapter of Return to Goli Abrahams explains his reasons for leaving South Africa and describes his first impressions of Britain:

... my spiritual and emotional want, much more than my physical want, had been the driving motive behind my leaving the land of my birth. The need to be psychologically free of the colour bar had, over the years grown into an obsession, blinding as all obsessions are ... I had escaped and reached England at the end of 1941 after two years at sea. In England, over the years, I had slowly built up self-respect South Africa had not allowed me to have. I had slowly got attuned to the climate of personal freedom and dignity and had begun to see the world through the eyes of an ordinary normal man. (1953:14-15)

Thus it is from the 'standpoint' of his newly acquired freedom and self-respect that Abrahams undertakes the task of telling the story of his life in South Africa. Roy Pascal has observed that the autobiographer's standpoint at the time of writing functions as an organising principle in reconstructing past experience:

...autobiography is a shaping of the past, it imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story. 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 may be the social position of the writer, his acknowledged achievement in any field, his present philosophy; in every case it is his present position which enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order. (1960:9)

Pascal's views regarding the writer's perspective in autobiography have a particular pertinence to Tell Freedom as an autobiography shaped largely by the writer's 'present philosophy' as well as his belief in the inherent historical (documentary)

value of events recorded. I would argue that the two major aims of Abrahams in Tell Freedom are to declare his triumph over the dehumanising conditions of Vrededorp and to offer personalised impressions about socio-political conditions in the South Africa of the 1930s and 1940s, especially in so far as they affected the black urban working-class. In addition to these aims there seems to be an implicit intention on Abrahams's part to 'explain' his decision to leave South Africa and to account for his disenchantment with the socialist vision of the Communist Party. However, all these secondary aims are subsumed under Abrahams's compelling need to celebrate his success as a writer. As Kolawole Ogungbesan has noted, Abrahams's autobiography succeeds both as social document and as an artistic record of the author's personal experience:

Tell Freedom has received more attention for its "sociological importance" but it possesses a considerable literary merit. In spite of its episodic nature it is a very organised book, the unifying theme being how Abrahams successfully escaped from conditions which have crippled his family, friends, acquaintances from childhood and most others from his race. So, a persistent Crusoeism pervades the book; every incident points out the author's yearning to break away from his surroundings and achieve his dream outside his country. (1979:86)

As mentioned earlier, the selection and presentation of events in Tell Freedom are informed by Abrahams's preoccupation with foregrounding and authenticating his own creative talent. In the course of his story Abrahams constantly refers to his almost obsessive desire to become a writer. There is an important sense therefore in which Tell Freedom is a celebration of the realisation of this childhood dream. In the introduction to his sketches and short stories collected in Dark Testament, Abrahams comments as follows on the realisation of his childhood ambition to become a writer:

I've been to college. Wandered about a great deal, learnt many things. I've had stories and poems published and rejected. I've had my picture, and some of my poems, with an article called "Coloured Boy Poet", published in the *Daily Express* of Johannesburg. I've worked for a few papers ...I have completed a novel. Done half a second, and a third of a third. Many things have happened to me. But one of the most important is, that I am a writer. I have kept faith with a dream. Whether I get published is another matter, and whether I am good or bad. (1942:11)

By the time he wrote Tell Freedom Abrahams had embraced the values of what Michael Wade describes as 'bourgeois liberalism' (1972:5). As I hope to demonstrate, it is this philosophical or moral outlook which shaped the structure of Tell Freedom. As Jonathan Culler has argued, there can be no structure without purpose:

Unless one has postulated some transcendent "final course" or ultimate meaning for the work, one cannot discover its structure, for the structure is that by which the end is made present throughout the work. The analyst's task is to display the work as a spatial configuration in which time past and time future point to one end, which is always present. (1973:474)

Significantly, Abrahams opens the first chapter of his autobiography with a symbolic description of his desire to escape from his intellectually and physically stifling social milieu:

I pushed my nose and lips against the pane and tried to lick a raindrop sliding down on the other side. As it slid past my eyes, I saw the many colours in the raindrop ...It must be warm in there. Warm and dry. And perhaps the sun would be shining in there. The green must be the trees and the grass; and the brightness, the sun ... I was inside the raindrop, away from the misery of the cold damp room. I was in a place of warmth and sunshine, inside my raindrop world. (1954:9)

This passage reveals the precocious intelligence and sensitivity of the young narrator (who must have been three or four years old). Commenting on what she regards as Mphahlele's fidelity to 'truth', Ursula Barnett draws a comparison between Mphahlele's and Abrahams's autobiographies and questions the latter's use of fictitious events for 'dramatic effect or sentiment':

Even in his avowed fiction Mphahlele never compromises with the truth for the sake of dramatic effect or sentiment as others are often tempted to do in their autobiographical writing. It seems very unlikely for instance, that anyone would remember how, at the age of two or three, he tried to lick a raindrop sliding down a windowpane, as does Peter Abrahams in Tell Freedom. (1983:225)

Barnett's comments are not only wrongheaded but also theoretically unsound as they are premised on the ill-defined notion of 'truth' as a criterion of distinguishing autobiography from fictional narrative forms. Perhaps a more pragmatic view would be to examine the narrative and thematic significance of introducing an autobiography with an event which is obviously fabricated. Besides its symbolic function of introducing the recurrent theme of escape (which assumes both physical and symbolic connotations in the story), the passage reminds the reader that autobiography is not simply an account of recovered empirical reality but an attempt to *interpret* the past in the light of present consciousness and circumstances. As explained in the Introduction, autobiographical interpretation invariably involves a complex interplay of the writer's perspective (standpoint) and his/her aims in writing the story of his/her life. Karl Weintraub explains the implications of the autobiographer's perspective at the moment of writing in the following terms:

The dominant *autobiographic truth* is, therefore, the *vision* of the pattern and meaning of life which the autobiographer has at the moment of writing his autobiography. Autobiography cannot be read in a *truthful* manner if the reader cannot, or will not, recapture the standpoint, the point of view of the autobiographer as autobiographer. (1975:827) (my emphasis)

Weintraub's remarks should not be construed as implying that the past life of the autobiographer is not recoverable, but must be understood as a reminder to the reader that 'present consciousness' plays a crucial role in both the selection and organisation of the events which constitute the writer's past. As a literary autobiographer Abrahams's main concern in Tell Freedom is to explore both personal and social events which made it possible for him to become a successful creative writer. Therefore, instead of clinging to the commonsensical idea of truth as Barnett does, we should search for the 'autobiographic truth' and thus view the opening paragraph and other episodes in Tell Freedom which seem to lack authenticity, in the context of the writer's purposes in writing the story of his life. As Abrahams's main purpose is to give an account of conditions against which he struggled to become a writer, it is understandable that he should begin his story by presenting his younger self as having been creative and imaginative. As the narrator is both the focaliser and the focalised, the younger self is scrutinised and *shaped* by the maturer writer in accordance with the latter's purposes. Therefore Abrahams the autobiographer attributes to his younger self qualities which he may not have had in reality; these include unusual perceptiveness, clarity of vision and analytical skills which are normally associated with adult life. The portrait of a perceptive, sensitive and observant child serves to reinforce the theme of intuitive creativity which pervades the whole autobiography. An illuminating example of the enlightened narrator's deliberate manipulation of his childhood consciousness is the episode where the three-year old boy suddenly, almost abruptly, acquires the

cognitive capacity to make sense of his immediate environment:

And I turned from the raindrop world and saw my family; my mother and my father, big brother Harry, big sister Margaret, and not-so-big sister Natalie: that was the beginning of awareness. I do not know exactly how old I was. Three, perhaps; or four or perhaps a little older. There are sharp, clear-cut flashes of memory. (1954:12)

It is thematically significant that Abrahams mentions 'awareness' here, for this is an essential attribute that the writer of fiction would need in the future. Besides using self-consciously evocative language and making numerous allusions to literary works and writers, Abrahams consistently presents himself as a boy who had the requisite intellectual predisposition and talent for the demanding career of creative writing. The incident in which the three-year-old Abrahams takes pity on a sick stray kitten and decides to keep it as a pet is illustrative of unusual sensitivity on the part of the young boy. The inclusion of this apparently trivial episode in the autobiography is not incidental. Almost thirty years after the occurrence of this incident, when Abrahams wrote his autobiography, he deemed it fit to conclude the story of his pet with a poem which the young boy *could not* have written, to mourn the death of his cat:

I had a cat called Moe
My little brother Moe;
He had a bleeding toe,
Poor sickly little Moe.

I loved my sickly Moe,
I nursed his bleeding toe;

We played all day, you know
And O, we loved it so!

One day death came to Moe,
No blood dripped from his toe;
I lost my brother Moe,
I grieved and grieved him so (p.13)

In spite of Abrahams's attempts to close the gap between the perceptions and impressions of the experiencing self and the narrating self¹² there are noticeable cognitive and conceptual differences between the two selves especially in the first two Books of the autobiography. As a result, Abrahams's narrative oscillates between consonant self-narration where the enlightened narrator attempts to recapture the perspective of the young experiencing self and dissonant self-narration where the older narrator distances himself from the young boy and adopts the stance of an objective commentator and analyst. As in most autobiographies following the conventional chronological mode, narrated events increasingly assume a broader social significance as the narrator-protagonist gradually combines the roles of observer and analyst as he grows older. Abrahams's initial observations in the first sections of the book are those of a young boy who lacks the conceptual framework to analyze and therefore understand the social forces operative in his environment. Michael Wade describes the intellectual and physical growth of Abrahams as depicted in Tell Freedom as follows:

...Abrahams' development is presented as a process of differentiation, a gradual loss of innocence and growth of awareness of the nature of the

particular historical and social forces which govern his situation as a human being. (1972:109)

In the first chapters of the book where the focus is mainly on the narrator's family, no conscious attempt is made to link the deprivation and squalor of family life to the general conditions in the community as a whole. While living with his relatives in Elsberg the young Abrahams unquestioningly accepted the dull monotony of his life and was constantly puzzled by Aunt Liza's ceaseless washing and ironing and Uncle's Sam's withdrawn and sullen character:

The pattern of my days was set. Each day I would perform the tasks I had performed this day; eat the meals I had eaten this day. With skill and speed, I would perform my chores more quickly and earn time, later, for a daily visit to the river ...Each day Aunt Liza washed, ironed. In time I lost my fear of Uncle Sam's silence. There was, of course, variety. But the basic pattern of my days was as this first day had been. (1954:31)

At this early stage in the unfolding narrative of the writer's growth the narrator has no clearly defined conception of his identity and no understanding of the socially defined racial group of which he is a member by accident of birth. However, in some episodes the impressions of the young boy are rendered with such vividness and linguistic facility that they belie the innocence and inexperience of the young protagonist. There are many scenes and episodes in the book which display the mature writer's deliberate attempts to shape past experience in accordance with conventional narrative techniques. N.W. Visser commented as follows on this aspect of Abrahams's 'novelistic' autobiography:

Another unusual aspect of Tell Freedom which recurs in other autobiographies is its markedly novelized texture within the basic autobiographical structure. There is, for instance, a surprising amount

of scenic presentation replete with extended dialogue, gestures, even changes in expression; and an equally surprising amount of rendered or reported thought - not the thoughts of the writer long after the narrated events, but the thoughts of his younger experiencing self at the time of the experiences. (1976:51)

An illuminating example of Visser's observations quoted above is the description of the bustling slum of Vrededorp with its variety of characters and lifestyles which reflects the mature writer's attentiveness to detail rather than a young boy's undifferentiated perceptions:

And all about surged the dark stream: people laughed and cursed; young women went by swaying their hips, men with caps pulled down called to them in gruff voices; carts pulled by great horses moved slowly by; children swung behind the carts till the drivers lashed out with their long whips; trams rattled out of and into the subway; trains went screaming by across it; motor horns hooted; children played in the streets till the motors were nearly on them then jumped clear; screams, laughter, shouts, cries, everything but silence. (1954:60)

In this graphically rendered scene the reader cannot help noticing the analytical perspective of the adult writer looking at life from the point of view of the young perceiver. This is a typical working-class neighbourhood characterised by disorder, general commotion and a multiplicity of human activities. Abrahams's detailed description of conditions in 'Coloured' residential areas is aimed primarily at giving information to the reader about the extent of degradation and deprivation in these areas ¹³. Abrahams describes how, after his return from Elsberg, he soon adapted to and became part of the bustling slum of Vrededorp:

The days passed, and with the passing days I became familiar with Vrededorp. I ranged far and wide, exploring the world in which I

lived. I became part of the flowing dark stream. I found that only the poorest Coloured people lived below Nineteenth Street. Above Nineteenth Street lived the more respectable; children who had fathers at work and who wore fine clothes all the time. Those with straight hair and fair skins lived higher up. I longed to steal, as other boys did, from the stalls of the Indian traders. But I always panicked at the last moment. In all other respects I became one of the citizens of Vrededorp. (1954:67)

As the boy grows older he begins to realise that his family in Vrededorp is part of a larger social group of people who seem to be destined to live in perpetual poverty while a few miles away from Vrededorp another group of people have all the basic necessities of life. One day, while selling firewood for his Aunt Maggie, Abrahams encountered for the first time the affluence of a white residential area. To the young Abrahams, the difference between this area and Vrededorp was astounding:

We walked away from Vrededorp, away from the narrow, mean streets, away from the throb of the pushing crowds. We walked steadily till we got to the broad, tree-lined streets of upper Fordsburg... The broad pavements were clean. No black water ran down the gutters of these streets. No half-naked, potbellied children fought and played in these gutters. The houses were of bricks... A stranger walking here, in the shade of the broad pavements, seeing the trim, fenced-off houses, and the riot of flowering colour within each front garden, would find it hard to believe a place called Vrededorp was less than half an hour's walk away. To me the contrast was so great, I might as well have stepped into another world, on another planet. (1954:103)

In this passage the reader notices the incipient stirring of political awareness in Abrahams as he begins to make sense of his social environment. The vision of the world as divided into dichotomies of black and white, rich and poor, could only be shattered by the liberal ideals of equality, justice and freedom which Abrahams

was to encounter later in his life at Grace Dieu and St Peter's. Quoted below is Abrahams's description of his first encounter with imaginative writing, an event which was to result in his insistence that he wanted to go to school:

She turned the pages of the book in front of her. She looked at me, then began to read from Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare.

The story of Othello jumped at me and invaded my heart and mind as the young woman read. I was transported to the land where the brave Moor lived and loved and destroyed his love. (1954:149)

When the woman had finished reading, Abrahams, who was in his eleventh year, decided to go to school the following Monday so that he could learn to read and write and, ultimately, compose his own stories. In this episode the reader detects the voice of the older Abrahams behind the boy's confident declaration that, 'When I can read and write, I'll make stories like that!' (1954:150). What is expressed here is an intuitive grasp of the inherent value of creative writing which an illiterate eleven-year-old boy from the slums could not articulate with such aplomb. This episode reveals what I have called the ideology of creativity which, as I hope to have shown in the comments of Abrahams's contemporaries, presents creativity as an inborn if temporarily latent skill requiring a repressive social environment to trigger it off. While this view may be valid it tends to downplay the role of 'education' or sustained exposure to specific cultural and political values in shaping artistic consciousness. It is the main contention of this chapter that Abrahams's political and aesthetic principles were shaped in significant ways by the values of the liberal education system of which he and most of his contemporaries are products. Those writers who manage to escape from the clutches of working class poverty and intellectual deprivation normally attribute this to 'talent' rather than to the complex functioning of certain ideologies in the

social formation. After only three years of uninterrupted schooling Abrahams began reading Shakespeare. In words which echo Lewis Nkosi's and Richard Wright's comments quoted earlier, he describes how he progressively acquired a new outlook on life after his discovery of the enchanting world of literature:

With Shakespeare and poetry, a new world was born. New dreams, new desires, a new self-consciousness, was born. I desired to know myself in terms of the standards set by these books. I lived in two worlds, the world of Vrededorp and the world of these books. And, somehow, both were equally real. Each was a potent force in my life, compelling. My heart and mind were in turmoil. Only the victory of one or the other could bring me peace. (1954:161)

As the victory of the world of Vrededorp would have meant intellectual and spiritual death for the aspirant writer, it is obvious that the world of reading and creative writing was the only worthwhile option open to Abrahams. The sad fate of some of his friends and relatives who had been destroyed by the poverty of Vrededorp, was a constant reminder to the young Abrahams of what could happen to him if he allowed the world of Vrededorp to win the battle in his soul. His description of the conflict resulting from his newly acquired tastes and interests and his social position as a Coloured boy living in a slum suggests deep emotional turmoil:

The familiar mood that awaits the sensitive young who are poor and dispossessed is a mood of sharp and painful inferiority, of violently angry tensions, of desperate longings. On these nightly walks, that mood took possession of me. My three books fed it. (1954:165)

Perhaps the most important event in Abrahams's life during this period was his accidental encounter with Peter Dabula who introduced him to the Bantu Men's

Social Centre. It was at this Centre that Abrahams encountered the writings of Afro-Americans such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes. His intellectual horizons were extended to encompass a world and a sensibility hitherto unknown to him. The two important lessons he learnt from American i.e. Negro Literature are that there are black people who had suffered the same fate as his people and that there were black writers who could write books about the experience of their people. His own past experience as a boy growing up in a slum came back to him with vivid clarity when he read Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk:

"For this much all men know: despite compromise, war, struggle, the Negro is not free..." I remembered those "Reserved for Europeans Only" signs; I remembered no white boys ever carried at the market or ran from the police; I remembered my long walks in the white sections of the city, and the lavatories, and the park benches, and the tea-rooms; I remembered Elsberg; I remembered Jim's Passes; I remembered "The Burning Meat"; I remembered Harry at Diepkloof; I remembered Aunt Mattie going to jail; I remembered spittle on my face... The Negro is not free. (1954:192-3)

Significantly, it was during his stay at the Anglican College of Grace Dieu near Pietersburg that Abrahams became aware of the social barriers that would make it difficult if not impossible for him to realise his dream of becoming a writer. Like Mphahlele in Down Second Avenue, Abrahams soon realised that the College environment, characterised as it was by understanding, tolerance and compassion, was in sharp contrast to the external social environment pervaded by racial bigotry, prejudice and oppression¹⁴. As he puts it:

The fathers who taught us lived up to their teaching. They were good men and they poured their lives into good work. Belief was translated into

reality. We were the witnesses. But we would leave this peaceful valley and go out into the big world. And there, among the whites, it did not work out(1954:238)

There is no doubt that Abrahams was strongly influenced by the liberal humanist philosophy which underlay most of the literature he read both at Grace Dieu and St Peter's. This was the philosophy which, to a large degree, shaped his own belief and value systems. Abrahams's particular brand of liberalism is a combination of liberal values and the philosophy of Romanticism as articulated in the poetry of the leading British Romantic poets. Wordsworth was expressing a typically Romantic conception of the creative talent when he described the writer as:

a man... endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind. (1973:601-602)

It is hardly surprising therefore that Abrahams had a particular preference for the poets of the Romantic Movement as he believed that they were expressing his own inchoate ideas about the 'human condition'. Consequently, he began to regard idealism and universalism as the criteria of 'good' literature. In addition, he conceived of imaginative writing as the preserve of the gifted individual. Abrahams's endorsement of the idealistic and individualistic conception of literary creativity is shown in his decision to emigrate to Britain rather than to the land of the Black writers whose work he admired for its political commitment:

My mind was divided. The call of America's limitless opportunities was strong. The call of Harlem, Negro colleges, and the 'New Negro' writers, was compelling. But Charles Lamb, Elia [sic], John Keats, Shelley, and the glorious host they led, made a counter call. And my

mind's eye saw a peaceful land that offered peace to a poet.
(1954:199)

Abrahams's preference for British Romantic poets is presented here as an intuitive grasp of the true vocation of the poet. He chooses to ignore the Afro-American writers whose work, as he himself admits, displays a deep commitment to the struggle of black people for justice and freedom. Individualism and the idealization of the poet's creative imagination as expressed in the palliative diction of Romantic verse appeal more readily to the sensitive soul of the young Abrahams than the call of his 'own kind' (p.200) to subordinate art to the collective concerns of the oppressed racial group. He describes his immediate and spontaneous identification with British, i.e. Romantic poets in terms which suggest absolute admiration bordering on religious reverence:

Yet England, holding out no offer, not even the comfort of being among my own kind, could counter that call because men now dead had once crossed its heaths and walked its lanes, quietly, unhurriedly, and had sung, with such beauty that their songs had pierced the heart of a black boy, a world away, and in another time. I decided I would go to England one day. Perhaps I would go to America afterwards. But I would go to England first. I would go there because the dead men who called were, for me, more alive than the most vitally living. In my heart my going there would be *in the nature of a pilgrimage*. (1954:200) (my emphasis)

This revealing passage which occurs in Book II reveals a lot about the impact of the experiences recorded in the first five chapters of Tell Freedom. What is shown here is the powerful influence of 'literature' on the young and impressionable Abrahams. As I hope to have demonstrated, British literature served as a useful avenue of escape for the members of the social group that I have chosen to designate as working class intellectuals. The imaginary world of literary creation

provided a temporary haven for psychologically and culturally alienated writers such as Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, and others. Therefore, the extent to which Tell Freedom is prototypical of the autobiographies of the black writers in 1950s and 1960s cannot be overemphasised. The overarching thematic concern of all these autobiographies is the writers' ambiguous relationship with the dominant culture, underpinned by the values of liberal individualism. In his book Politics and Culture, Michael Ryan has offered an incisive critique of the ideological underpinnings of liberalism some of which have a direct bearing on Abrahams's self-representation in Tell Freedom:

Few social theories so actively demonstrate the power of rhetoric in the construction of social reality as liberalism. Yet few social theories so strive to refute rhetoric's claims. Liberalism presented itself originally (in the late seventeenth century) as a rational social system; ... Yet this rationality was formal and ideal, universal and transcendental, rather than democratic and material, or substantial and egalitarian. It privileged logic over rhetoric, and it guaranteed rights only in a formal or abstract sense, not in a realised material one. (1989:134)

Abrahams's conception of liberalism does not differ in any significant way from the general Western liberal tradition explained by Ryan above. However, it is worth noting that the individualism which characterised the black working class intellectuals as a whole was not merely a reaction to social conditions but a direct consequence of an environment which was not conducive to collective action. As I have shown, this obsession with individual experience could be attributed to the type of education most of the writers received in missionary schools. Robert Ensor explains the effect of the missionaries' 'civilising' or 'humanising' mission as follows:

Assisting the African to advance and to become "civilised" was the liberals' prime aim. "Civilisation", however, signified a complex set of values and political and cultural relations. It included the valuing of a liberal education and liberal literature; appreciation of the value of parliamentary democracy and bourgeois systems of representation and decision-making; acknowledging the liberating effects of private property and individual enterprise; and appropriating the symbols of bourgeois culture. (1992:71)

In designating Abrahams as a bourgeois liberal we need to ask ourselves whether there were other options available to him at the time. To answer this question one needs to look at two opposed though not irreconcilable conceptions of literature presented by Abrahams in Tell Freedom. There is a significant difference between Abrahams's first encounter with creative writing at the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the ideologically imbricated type of literature he was taught at Grace Dieu and St Peter's. In the former case Abrahams was particularly impressed by the sociological and documentary insights of the books he read whereas in the latter instance he was taught to view literature as a semi-autonomous and self-justifying art. He explains his own vision of literary art as follows:

At St.Peter's, a motherly woman teacher of English, Mrs. Lindsay, took over where Father Adams had left off and helped me on my journey into the golden realms of language and literature. With her, I first discovered the independent life possessed by a work of art and the strange loyalty art demands of those who would serve it. (1954:250)

Naturally, Abrahams attempted to conform to this idealistic conception of literary art in his own writing and, if Mphahlele's impressions of Abrahams as a budding writer are anything to go by, the latter did actually imitate the style if not the content of their prescribed works at St Peter's:

Abrahams wrote verse in his exercise books and gave them to us to read. I admired them because here was a boy writing something like the collection of English poetry we were learning as a set book in school. I remember now how morose the verse was: straining to justify and glorify the dark complexion with the I'm-black-and-proud-of-it theme.(1959:128)

From Mphahlele's comments it is evident that Abrahams employed Western poetic models to write poetry in which he attempted to articulate the Pan-Africanist philosophy of Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois he had read about at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. It is therefore evident that Abrahams had the option of following the example of Afro-American writers who had chosen to use their art to promote the political aspirations of their people ¹⁵.

At St Peter's Abrahams, who had by this time published some of his poems in The Bantu World, was initiated into left-wing politics by a Jewish couple who had befriended him ¹⁶. To the young and impressionable Abrahams Communism seemed to have the requisite potential to solve his country's problems. In Return to Goli he explains how he was drawn to the doctrines of Communism which promised total freedom and equality for the dispossessed:

... Communism has a dynamic appeal all its own. It offers the idealistic young a fine faith to live and fight for: it promises that the poor and hungry and dispossessed shall inherit the earth: it offers a kind of social consciousness in a socially conscienceless world. And to me, and those like me who were not white, it offered freedom from the colour bar and imperialism and a future in which we would run our own affairs in our lands. For the young, sensitive, idealistic, angry, frustrated and embittered non-European there can, on the face of it, be no greater prize than the communists offer. (1953:16)

Abrahams was to discover in 1942, with the publication of Dark Testament, that he could not be an independent and objective writer and be a Communist political activist at the same time. By prescribing to him how he should employ his creative skills, the British Communist Party, like the racist South African government, was threatening to 'dispossess' him of his most valued asset - his artistic freedom. As he explains in Return to Goli: 'I was beginning to feel as personally unfree as I had felt in South Africa. Marxism was inhibiting my desire to see the world and people in the round' (1953:16).

Thus at the age nineteen, armed with the knowledge of literature he had acquired at the Bantu Men's Social Centre and St Peter's, Abrahams was ready to embark on his dream career as a writer. To describe the circumstances which made it difficult for him to write freely in South Africa, Abrahams recreates a dialogue with his friend Max Gordon in which the latter comments on difficulties facing 'non-European' writers in South Africa:

Don't be a bloody fool. You know, and I know, that there's no room for you here. Who wants a writer? The whites? Sure if you'll be performing monkey and tell them how happy you are with your lot. The blacks? They've no time for reading. Most of them can't. And those who can are concerned with improving their miserable lot, not with reading poetry. You could become a propagandist but you are too much of a bloody artist for that. You'll never be satisfied with being only a propagandist. You look at too many sides of a question. And it'll get worse as you develop. So what's left? Nothing. Nobody wants you, or, at least, even those who do don't know it. (1954:263)

In this apparently contrived dialogue, Abrahams offers the reader, through Gordon's observations, an assessment of his own situation in 1939. What he seems not to have realised is that all literature is 'propaganda' in so far as it implicitly or

explicitly projects a particular view of life. In this regard the liberal humanist conception of literature is even more propagandistic than the explicitly political literature which does not disguise its aims.

* * *

Abrahams's autobiography follows the conventional autobiographical narrative pattern which traces, in a chronological sequence, the growth and development of the writer. As I have demonstrated, Abrahams's stages of development reflect what in Goldmann's theory would be described as the world view of the emergent black working class intellectuals of the 1930s. The characteristic features of this world view as reflected in Tell Freedom include a celebration of individual freedom and a sceptical attitude toward collective political action. What emerges with striking clarity from a socio-critical reading of Tell Freedom is that it is shaped by its author's reactions to his social environment as well as by the need to find meaning in the chaotic events of his life in South Africa. In analyzing Tell Freedom as the story of a growing artist, we have seen that Abrahams regarded all other social or political roles as peripheral to his chosen career of creative writing. Thus Tell Freedom is, as the critic O.R. Darthone has noted, 'the story of the growing artist' (1975:137). In this regard Tell Freedom shares some thematic concerns with James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man, which tells the story of a young boy with a precocious artistic sensibility who questions and ultimately rejects his community's dominant religious teachings. Like Abrahams, Stephen Dedalus has an intuitive understanding of his future role as a writer. The narrator's description of Stephen's rebellion against the restrictive religious ideology of Catholicism suggests Stephen's desire to become an 'artificer'; Stephen chooses the 'disorder' of human life which has the promise of creative freedom against the

dull life of the Jesuit religious 'order':

He crossed the bridge over the stream of the Tolka and turned his eyes coldly for an instant towards the faded blue shrine of the Blessed Virgin which stood fowlwise on a pole in the middle of a hamshaped encampment of poor cottages. Then, bending to the left, he followed the lane which led up to his house. The faint sour stink of rotted cabbages came towards him from the kitchengardens on the rising ground above the river. He smiled to think that it was this disorder, the misrule and confusion of his father's house and stagnation of vegetable life, which was to win the day in his soul. (1986:165-7)

For Abrahams the main obstacles to the fulfilment of his ambitions were physical rather than emotional or spiritual. Like Stephen, he needed to be personally free to explore the creative talent he was certain he possessed. Whereas the young Dedalus had to break free from the powerful influence of religion in order to become an 'artist', Abrahams had to leave the racially segregated country to settle in Britain where he could pursue his writing career in peace. Besides the need to escape from the degrading conditions of Vrededorp, there was the equally urgent need to write about the plight of the people he had left behind and, in doing so, 'make up for leaving them'(1954:300). The 'displayed self '(Gunn,1982) presented in Tell Freedom is that of the writer involved in an on-going search for the role of the artist in society. The notion of the displayed self as opposed to the unknowable 'real self' is particularly pertinent to Tell Freedom as Abrahams's self-portrayal in this book seems to be partly contrived and, to a certain degree, inconsistent with his practice as a writer. As Stephen Gray has rightly observed, in Tell Freedom Abrahams presents himself as the *writer* he wished to have been rather than the writer he was in the late 1930s:

What Abrahams wishes himself to have been is an individual, a *writer*, destined for personal freedom. This retrospective sense of destiny drives the work, hones it down so that the trajectory is not interfered with. Dissonant relationships, in productive learning experiences, blank, purposeless years at a time that do not contribute to this drive are simply not recollected, omitted from the pattern. (1990:110)

Whereas the autobiography foregrounds the liberal idealist conception of the writer concerned with 'human thoughts, conflicts and strivings', Abrahams's writing demonstrates a high degree of sensitivity towards socio-political realities in South Africa. The desire to find a transcendent plane from which to contemplate 'the human condition', as articulated in Return to Goli and Tell Freedom, does not find adequate expression in Abrahams's novels¹⁷ and his only poetry collection, The Blackman Speaks of Freedom!

CHAPTER II

MODISANE'S *BLAME ME ON HISTORY*: IN SEARCH OF PURPOSE AND FULFILMENT.

William Bloke Modisane belongs to the group of black writers, critics and journalists commonly known as the *Drum* writers who came into prominence in the 1950s and who at some stage in their careers, worked for *Drum* magazine. This group includes such well-known South African writers as Es'kia Mphahlele, Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Casey Motsitsi, Arthur Maimane and Todd Matshikiza. Most of these writers, including Modisane, lived in the vibrant cosmopolitan township of Sophiatown¹. Apart from being a journalist Modisane was also an actor and appeared in Athol Fugard's No Good Friday and The Blood Knot. Modisane was born and educated in Sophiatown which provides the setting of Blame Me on History and functions as an organising metaphor in the autobiography as whole. While working for *Drum* Modisane published short stories and wrote music reviews for the Golden City Post². Like his autobiography, Modisane's short fiction and his social commentaries in *Drum* reflect the attempts of a largely self-taught writer-intellectual to come to terms with feelings of alienation and powerlessness in the face of repressive and discriminatory legislation³.

Modisane left South Africa on an exit permit in 1959 to settle in Britain where he worked in London as an actor and broadcaster⁴. Because he was a listed person, Modisane's autobiography, which was published in 1963, was banned in South Africa and South African readers could only have free access to it in 1986 after it had been published by Ad Donker in silent defiance of Modisane's banning order⁵. Modisane's story of his life in South Africa as told in Blame Me on History is part of the broader creative phenomenon of self-narration and self-definition

which characterised the emergence of extended prose by black South African writers in the 1950s. Like the autobiographies of Abrahams, Mphahlele, Hutchison, Matshikiza and Mokgatle, Modisane's life-story was written in exile and therefore shares some of the thematic concerns with the life histories of the writer's contemporaries. Donald Burness has identified the following as recurrent themes in the black autobiographies of this period:

(a) police brutality; (b) the death of a relation or friend; (c) illicit brewing of beer by a mother, aunt or other female relation; (d) racial conflicts among Blacks, Coloureds and Indians; (e) the sacrifice of a mother or aunt who works as a washerwoman to provide for the family; (f) the moral defeat of a black man close to the author (in Modisane's case it is the author himself who is morally vanquished); (g) the love of learning and (h) the need to escape from South Africa to preserve one's integrity as a man and / or artist. (1970:84)

In spite of its distinctive features, particularly in its pointed focus on the narrator's consciousness, thematically Modisane's autobiography conforms to the pattern described by Burness above. As Nadezda Obradovic has remarked, 'Through his story we can imagine the lives of thousands of black children in South Africa and the dilemmas and oppressions of many educated blacks in that "stone country"' (1991:353). Confirming Burness' and Obradovic's observations, Paul Gready has remarked that the writings of the so-called Sophiatown writers of the 1950s should be seen as a collective response to the socio-political pressures of the time:

The Sophiatown of this era was a pressure cooker of societal potential and contradictions, and provided a "moment" in which a collective dream emerged of a black urban culture that might have been... The co-existence of an emergent black urban culture and the National Party's intent to destroy such a phenomenon, moulded both the significance and tragedy of Sophiatown. The literature that

surrounds it is less a series of individual works than a composite picture of a world, in which both Sophiatown and the writers symbolised the vitality, novelty, and precariousness of the new black urban generation. (1990:139)⁶

Although there are a number of studies of the cultural ethos which characterised the lives of the black intelligentsia in Sophiatown, (Andre Proctor, 1979; Tom Lodge 1983; David Coplan, 1985; Don Mattera, 1987) there has been no attempt to offer an extended critical evaluation of Modisane's autobiography and the socio-cultural context which shaped his self-conception and self-presentation in the form of autobiography.

Following Goldman's theoretical paradigm of genetic structuralism, this chapter will examine the conception and presentation of selfhood in Blame Me on History. Unlike Tell Freedom, Blame Me on History is largely psychological even surrealistic in orientation as it focuses on the writer's emotional and mental struggle to define his social role and, in doing so, reject identities and roles imposed upon him by the hegemonic ideologies and political policies of his time. Thus the central concern of Blame Me on History is the exploration of the author's heightened sensitivity to the injustice of the restrictive and stifling laws of apartheid. While it would be reductive and simplistic to separate social commentary from self-analysis in Modisane's book, it is significant to note that it is the latter which gives the autobiography its narrative depth and vitality. Modisane consistently foregrounds his emotional and intellectual reactions to the reality of living in a racially segregated society. More than anything else, it is the writer's awareness of the psychological implications of political oppression for sensitive and politically aware individuals like himself which holds together the otherwise fragmented narrative pattern of Blame Me on History. Part of the aim

of this chapter, therefore, is to examine the intricate relationship between Modisane's consciousness of self and the apparently divided selves he projects or 'displays'⁷ in his autobiography. As stated in the Introduction, the central argument of this chapter is that the apparent lack of narrative structure in Blame Me on History is a reflection of the narrator-protagonist's disordered and chaotic life in a social environment which militated against the realisation of individual ambitions and aspirations. It has been argued that Modisane's story in Blame Me on History lacks form and pattern and that the book is an unstructured collection of reminiscences, anecdotes, factual reports and fantasies⁸. This formlessness, the critics argue, is further reinforced by Modisane's deliberate eschewal of narrative chronology and adoption of a Joycean stream of consciousness narrating strategy. Lewis Nkosi, Modisane's colleague on Drum, comments as follows on the plot structure of Blame Me on History:

Even the way Bloke Modisane structures the book shows a dedication to a superior form of realism which succeeds partly because the author is alive to the fact that reality itself is elusive to the process of time as an orderly sequence of events. Thus the events narrated are in no way chronological; Modisane shuffles them about like a pack of cards, allowing only emotional intensity to dictate their sequence in time. (1983:133)

As Nkosi points out, in Blame Me on History Modisane subverts the conventional autobiographical narrative structure characterised by linearity and consistent narrative perspective and creates a symbolic rather than a temporal structure in his story. John Sturrock has suggested a structural paradigm which I think is particularly pertinent to the analysis of Modisane's innovative narrative style in Blame Me on History:

If the object of autobiography is to take possession of our past in as original and coherent a way as possible, then chronology works against that object by extending the past merely conventionally and claiming itself to be the source of life's meaning. For chronology, as we know very well, is seldom understood simply as a succession of events; it is read as an intelligent concatenation of events, and temporal sequences are effortlessly raised into causal ones. We are reassured by believing that what follows after also follows from, a reassurance we are fully entitled to reading a fictional narrative, whose sequence has been dictated by its author; we are hardly entitled to it reading a chronological life story, which is largely a sequence of contingencies. A life story so organised is the counterfeit integration of a random life into convenient fiction. (1977:54-5)

Sturrock's comments suggest that a chronological presentation of events in autobiography creates an artificial temporal structure where none exists *a priori*. The general import of Sturrock's argument is that autobiographies with a neat chronological structure are 'convenient fictions' as the imposed sequential structure tends to mask the random or contingent character of recorded events. As the central focus of the thesis as a whole is the analysis of the relationship between ideology and form, my discussion of the structure of Blame Me on History will attempt to show ways in which the structural organisation of the book is a reflection of social pressures which have a direct bearing on self-consciousness and, consequently, on autobiographical self-presentation. Two relatively distinct theoretical constructs of selfhood will be employed in the analysis of Modisane's autobiography, namely the communal self (the author as social being) manifested in those events in the book in which Modisane identifies himself as a member of the black community of Sophiatown, and the aesthetic-intellectual self which manifests itself in Modisane's persistent search for intellectual and artistic fulfillment⁹. As I hope to show, both these representations of the self are, in essence, what Olney would describe as 'metaphors of self' as they are mere

projections of the primary self which is the overall organising consciousness in the autobiography. Perhaps the best way to conceptualise the nature and functioning of human consciousness in Blame Me on History is that suggested by John Claude Curtin:

Consciousness is not only intentional but also reflexive. The reflexive dimension of consciousness functions as a kind of diastolic gathering together of intentional multiplicity. Consciousness as reflexive knows itself inchoately in all of its intentional developments. Consciousness as reflexive also seeks to preserve its transcendental unity throughout all of its intentional incarnations. (1974:344)

In examining the content and presentation of the two 'intentional incarnations' of self I have identified, I hope to show that the uneven and fragmented narrative matrix of Blame Me on History is directly traceable to the conflicts and contradictions between these two conceptions of self identity.

Like Abrahams before him, Modisane may be said to have occupied the nebulous social terrain between the urban working class and the African bourgeoisie represented by such characters as Dr A.B. Xuma and Chief Luthuli in his autobiography. Thus in terms of the Goldmannian concepts of 'social group' and 'world vision' it would be inaccurate to see Blame Me on History as reflecting a consistent world vision linked to a clearly demarcated social group. However, in spite of its inherent contradictions and inconsistencies the book exhibits the author's marked preoccupation with the lifestyle and attitudes which I identified as characterising working-class intellectual life in the previous chapter. In Modisane's case the most conspicuous of these so-called petty-bourgeois tendencies is his almost obsessive awareness of the uniqueness of his talents as an individual. Thus instead of reflecting a consistent world view the autobiography

displays, in various complex ways, the conflict between liberal individualism and an African communalism created and fostered by the need of black communities to cope with the demands of a shared social milieu. Obviously, not all aspects of Goldmann's theory will fit neatly in an analysis of a book as riddled with contradictions as Blame Me on History. However, I shall continue to employ such concepts as 'world view' and 'social group' as methodological tools and not as fixed descriptive categories. If there are any distinct communities or social groups whose world visions are explored in Blame Me on History it is those of the urbanised and largely proletarian community of Sophiatown and the emergent petty-bourgeoisie existing within it. Modisane's own description of the 'situation'¹⁰ of the educated black person provides an insight into the nature of class relations within the community depicted in Blame Me on History:

There is a resentment - almost as deep-rooted as the prejudice itself-against the educated African, not so much because he is allegedly cheeky, but that he fails to conform to the stereotype image of the black man sanctified and cherished with jealous intensity by the white man; such a Native must- as a desperate necessity-be humiliated into submission. The educated African is resented equally by the blacks because he speaks English, which is one of the symbols of white supremacy, he is resentfully called a Situation, something not belonging to either, but tactfully situated between white oppression and black rebellion. (1986:94)

It is an undeniable fact that in spite of their common material circumstances there were noticeable class differences within the urban black communities in most of South African major cities during the period covered by Blame Me on History. By the 1940s and 1950s urbanisation and industrialisation which had accelerated in the early decades of the twentieth century had resulted in the creation of heterogeneous black middle classes while repressive and discriminatory

legislation led to the emergence of a politically conscious, militant and organised proletarian class. These two classes are only distinguished here for analytical purposes. Tom Lodge has offered a perceptive account of the social factors which determined the dynamics of class relations in urban black settlements such as Sophiatown:

Though there may have been conflicts of interest within ghetto society of the 1950s these were not always consciously realised. Many petty-bourgeois Africans of the 1950s had intimate personal experience of the poverty and insecurity most people lived in. African townships, though socially heterodox in a number of ways, did not have the "geography of class" that was and is a feature of white suburbia. Given these conditions it is artificial to define interests with rigid precision: they were bound to have an ambivalent quality. And given these conditions it was understandable that politically conscious men and women should have believed their feelings were a true reflection of popular concerns. Certainly, intellectuals and small entrepreneurs in the African community may have had petty-bourgeois aspirations, but there is also evidence in their literary culture, in their welfare activities and in their political commitment of a degree of social compassion and depth of anger that went well beyond their immediate class interests. (1983:92-3)

Given their situation in residential areas dominated by people they considered to be below them in social status, it is understandable that intellectuals like Modisane and Abrahams should be preoccupied with the theme of symbolic and literal escape from their social environments in their autobiographies. In a far more poignant way than Abrahams, Modisane examines the precarious position of the self-styled African intellectual in a situation where a proletarian identity is imposed on him by government legislation and social conditions. The very appellation of 'working class intellectual' implies divided allegiances and, by implication, divided conceptions of social roles and identities. As Lodge rightly

points out, it was inevitable that the interests and class allegiances of urban black residents should display a marked degree of ambivalence. As I have indicated, in Modisane's case this ideological ambivalence is shown not only in the content but also in the structural organisation of his autobiography. Thus in terms of Goldman's analytical paradigm, Modisane's autobiography may be said to reflect extra-textual tensions in the material and social life of the different social groups characterised by each group's struggle for the realisation of its goals and aspirations.

As Modisane's autobiography has no patterned plot structure, it may be useful to begin by offering a brief critical synopsis of events which have a bearing on the presentation of the two displayed selves I have identified. The story of Blame Me on History defies neat paraphrase, however there are discernible areas of focus worth pointing out. Jane Watts identifies the important aspects of the autobiography as follows:

The writer is haunted by certain subjects and ideas throughout the book - his father's death and his own nameplate on the coffin, his broken marriage and his promiscuous sexuality, his daughter, the violence in himself and in those among whom he lives in the black community, his intensely ambivalent feelings towards whites, and his repetitive efforts to escape his situation into culture or married bliss, or orgies, or work or exile. Yet persistent as they are, none of them, any more than the recurrent figures in the book - Fiki, Ma Bloke, Daisy - provide structural leitmotifs for the autobiography. None of them are used systematically as the string on which to thread his memories or analyses. Yet they do provide dynamic focuses for the welter of emotions and memories. (1989:148)

Modisane begins his story with a partly literal and partly symbolic description of the destruction of Sophiatown. He explains the shattering impact the demolition

of Sophiatown had on him:

Something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown; it was in the winter of 1958, the sky was a cold blue veil which had been immersed in a bleaching solution and then spread out against a concave, the blue filtering through, and tinted by a powder screen of grey; the sun, like the moon of the day, gave off more light than heat, mocking me with its promise of warmth -a fixture against the grey-blue sky - a mirror deflecting the heat and concentrating upon me in my Sophiatown only a reflection. (1986:5)

Modisane's spiritual death alluded to above has, as its objective correlative, the physical death of Sophiatown. The sun which seems to be mocking him functions as an image which enhances the sense of loss felt by the profoundly shocked narrator-protagonist. Thus the theme of mental alienation which is explored from various angles throughout the book is introduced in the opening paragraph of Modisane's autobiography. Modisane's description of the demolition of Sophiatown suggests that his life was inextricably intertwined with the life of Sophiatown and everything it stood for. As I hope to show, Modisane's symbolic identification with the largely uneducated community of Sophiatown is not without ambiguities and contradictions. The first six chapters begin with references to some aspect of life in Sophiatown and deal mainly with the author's immediate family including his parents, wife and daughter. In this section of the book Modisane relates the story of his unsuccessful marriage to Fiki Plaatje and his father's tragic death which resulted in a premature assumption of adult responsibilities for the young Modisane and a complete change of lifestyle for the whole family. His mother had to open a speakeasy (shebeen) to support her children and to pay for their education. Modisane explains the effect of shebeen life on his consciousness as follows:

The responsibility mounted upon me by the death of my father transformed my entire life, exposed a print of living which appalled me; I became a part of shebeen life and the spectacle of so many drunken people horrified me:... (1986:38)

Thus Modisane, who had dreamt of becoming a medical doctor like Dr A.B Xuma, the leader of the African National Congress who lived in Sophiatown, soon left school and took up employment as a sales assistant at Vanguard Booksellers in Johannesburg. It would seem that at this stage in his development Modisane's artistic talent was beginning to manifest itself, as suggested in the following account of his friendship with his white colleague Phillip Stein:

It was at the bookshop where I made my first transcolour friendship; Phillip Stein and I were the same age, he had been to university, was a poet and completely non-political....Phillip's friendship was free, there was no question of nursing the sensibilities of the poor, under-privileged Native; I need not have read Plato or understood, and appreciated, art, music and drama, to be recognised by him as *an intelligent Native*. But we did have literature in common, each hoped for a far richer and more satisfying triumph in writing, and a result more fundamental and astounding; he wrote poetry and I tried my hand at prose. (1986:85-6) (my emphasis)

Modisane's friendship with Phillip Stein was an important formative experience in his growth as an aesthete for it crystallised his inchoate yearnings for artistic achievement. Modisane's need to acquire white friends to whom he would demonstrate his 'intelligence' and his palate for Western art became an obsession bordering on neurosis. It is this almost neurotic preoccupation with self-advertisement and self-justification which constitutes the rationale for writing Blame Me on History:

But I am a freak, I do presume an appreciation for Western music, art, drama and philosophy; I can rationalise as well as they (educated whites) and using their own system of assumptions, I presume myself civilised and then set about to prove it by writing a book with the title, Blame Me on History which is an assumption that if I am a freak it should not be interpreted as a failure of their education for a Caliban, but a miscalculation of history. (1986:178-9)

Chapters seven to twelve focus on the history of apartheid laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and the Separate Amenities Act. Modisane offers brief personalised commentaries on each of these laws and shows their cumulative effect on his freedom as an individual as well as their effect on the African people as a whole. The extent to which Blame Me on History is a record of the history of apartheid laws and their effect on the black community is remarkable and merits a full study on its own¹¹. Historical figures who played different roles in shaping the political destiny of South Africa mentioned in Modisane's book include Hendrik Verwoerd, Robert Sobukwe, Chief Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela. With characteristic ambiguity, Modisane presents himself both as an active participant in, and a powerless victim of, historical processes. As will become evident in my analysis, Modisane's presentation of history in his life story has implications for the way he presents his identity as a social being and as a unique person with an individualised identity. Chapters thirteen to sixteen deal mainly with the author's attempts to cope with feelings of isolation and despair. Strategies of dealing with these problems include excessive drinking and womanising. Modisane's sexual exploits are described with unusual candour and, in some cases, with what seems to be deliberate exaggeration. Creative writing and marriage are also presented as survival strategies rather than pursuits with an inherent value. The autobiography concludes with the author's account of his journey into exile.

As the central argument of this chapter is that Modisane's alienation has a direct bearing on the structural organisation of his autobiography, I shall begin my analysis of Blame Me on History by suggesting ways in which the two projections of the self I identified above are articulated in the book. Like most black South African autobiographers, Modisane cannot tell the story of his life without referring to the broader historical narrative involving his community. Thus the story of the writer's private life is constantly interrupted by direct social commentary as the narrator-protagonist attempts to authenticate and validate his personal experience through appropriate historical contextualisation. The constant shifts in narrative focus from private concerns and preoccupations to public issues is the principal cause of the autobiography's apparent lack of structure and thematic coherence. As indicated in Lewis Nkosi's comments I quoted earlier, the fragmented structure of Modisane's autobiography is regarded by some critics as a positive feature rather than an organisational flaw. The reasons given in support of this view are that the lack of narrative pattern in the text reflects the lack of order and harmony in Modisane's world and that this confers authenticity on the events recorded in the book. Jane Watts's offers a far more convincing argument about the structural arrangement of Blame Me on History than Nkosi's brief descriptive comments:

... Blame Me on History is a genuine search for meaning- that ultimate criterion of autobiographical form. Modisane has set out on his journey without a map: the startling honesty and brutal self-revelation of his record spring, to a great extent, from his refusal to predetermine his form. For planned structure is an autobiographer's chief tool in the evasion of total self-revelation. And it is the courage of this refusal to draw the map before he begins the journey which accounts the book's power - for as a result the reader is able to accompany the writer *genuinely*, not apparently, by virtue of some clever literary device, on the search for identity: the book is a voyage

of discovery for them both. Only thus can he reflect his being authentically, and liberate the consciousness of the reader as successfully as he liberates his own. (1989:151)

Watts's comments seem to imply that the non-chronological presentation of events in Modisane's autobiography is merely a strategic structural device designed to expedite the process of self-discovery and ensure the authenticity of the writer's experience. Like poststructuralist critics of autobiography, Watts seems to attribute to the writing process and its underlying conventions the capacity of shaping the autobiographer's self-awareness¹². According to this view both the narrative pattern and the 'true identity' of the writer emerge from, and are constituted by, the writing process. In response to this argument which is not without merit, I would argue that Blame Me on History is not so much concerned with a search for identity as with the articulation of continual frustration in the author's search for possibilities for personal fulfillment. In my view, Modisane has a well formulated sense of identity. Consequently, what he records in the book is not simply a search for the 'authentic self' but the frustrations of this self as possibilities for its self-realisation are continually thwarted. It seems to me that Modisane wrote Blame Me on History not with the purpose of resolving some uncertainties or doubts about his 'identity' but to show how a person with his aspirations and interests could not lead a rewarding life in the South Africa of the 1950s. Such a person would, like the protagonist of Blame Me on History, experience perpetual emotional torment and frustration. This view of Modisane's autobiography as a record of a talented man's search for purpose and fulfilment is corroborated by the narrator-protagonist's anguished articulation of his emotional responses to those elements of his social environment which make it impossible for him to pursue his interests.

Like Abrahams who consistently presents himself as a writer in Tell Freedom, Modisane keeps reminding the reader of his distinctive personal qualities as a lover of art, a critic, a well-read intellectual and, finally, a writer. Modisane's chosen role as a writer (or more generally an artist) may not be as well-defined and focused as Abrahams's but it constitutes the thematic crux of his autobiography. Thus Modisane, as he presents himself in Blame Me on History, is not an autobiographer in search of a role or an identity but an artistically inclined person in search of opportunities for realising his dreams and ambitions. Whereas Abrahams has to work hard towards the realisation of his childhood dream of being a writer, Modisane believes that he already has the necessary requirements for his chosen role. Like everything else in Modisane's book the role he chooses for himself is not without its own inherent contradictions. As I have already mentioned, Blame Me on History's structural asymmetry reflects the disjuncture between the aesthetic-intellectual self and the communal self with its social and political obligations. What emerges with striking clarity in the autobiography is that for Modisane it is the former aspect of his displayed self which takes precedence over and is qualitatively superior to the identity imposed on him by the political struggles of his own community and the hegemonic political ideology of his time. In other words, Modisane sees intellectual and artistic pursuits as more worthwhile and urgent than socio-political obligations. In this regard he does not differ significantly from Abrahams who was shown in the previous chapter, to be a victim of liberal ideology conveyed through mission education. Modisane's description of the yearnings of his aesthetic-intellectual sensibility suggests that he seeks mental liberation from an environment which stifles his talents:

And as true South African I am tempted to blame the emptiness of my life on history, and pretend a reason for the loneliness, the need

for love and companionship; but these are diversions. I want acceptance in the country of my birth, and in some corner of the darkened room I whisper the real desire: I want to be accepted into white society. I want to listen to Rachmaninov, to Beethoven, Bartok and Stravinski; I want to talk about drama, philosophy and social psychology; I want to look at the paintings and feel my soul touched by Lautrec, Klee and Miro; I want to find a nobler design, a larger truth of living in literature. These things are important for me, they are the enjoyment of a pleasure I want to share. (1986:218)

It has become a critical commonplace to regard autobiographies written by black South Africans as expressions of collective social awareness rather than articulations of the unique private experience of the individual. In a report on autobiographical readings organised by the African Writers Association, the editors of Staffrider Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic magazine commented as follows on the interplay between the historical and the personal in black South African autobiography:

It is hardly incidental that the genre of autobiography occupies a unique place in South African literature. Falling, as it does, between fictional and historical narration, it enables the autobiographer to inscribe his life history within the context of his social and historical environment. In addition, it makes possible the elaboration of the interrelation between the individual's most private experiences and broader social determinants. In South Africa, the individual's experience, particularly when the individual is black, will invariably be informed by the humiliations, hardships and sacrifices brought about by the oppressive social dynamics of apartheid and the need to struggle against it. Thus the autobiography and its structural as well as thematic relationship to historiography implies a narrative which actualises the fact that the life of the individual also contains the life of a society. (1988:86-7)

Conforming to the pattern described above, Modisane in Blame Me on History recounts his emotional, psychological and moral struggles against the backdrop of an analysis of his social environment responsible for the psychological malaise which is the subject of the autobiography. Thus in spite of its overtly psychological focus Blame Me on History is very much a sociological (historical) autobiography. Modisane's historical analysis of the South African political scene, his evocations of the cultural milieu of Sophiatown and his detailed commentary on the laws of the 1950s all attest to the status of Blame Me on History as an informative socio-historical document. Modisane's portrayal of his identity as member of the community of Sophiatown accords with my conceptualisation of this aspect of his personality as the communal self. In identifying the representative element in Modisane's experiences I take my cue from Lucien Goldmann's conception of 'mental categories' which shape both collective consciousness of particular social groups as well as the content of narratives dealing with such an awareness:

The experience of a single individual is much too brief and too limited to be able to create such a mental structure; this can only be the result of the conjoint activity of a large number of individuals who find themselves in a similar situation, that is to say, who constitute a privileged social group, these individuals having, for a lengthy period and in an intensive way, lived through a series of problems and having endeavoured to find a significant solution to them. This means that mental structures or, to use a more abstract term, significant categorical structures, are not individual phenomena, but social phenomena.(1967:495)

By definition, autobiography (both in African and Western cultures) is an individual undertaking, but as critics of autobiography such as Olney (1973; 1980) and Shirley Neuman (1992) have shown, life-stories which deal with historical

collective experiences of marginalised social groups fit Goldman's label of significant categorical structures as social phenomena. Writing about Afro-American autobiographers, Valerie Smith makes the following observations about the social content of their life histories:

On the one hand, the politics of their situation as writers required them to point up the representative quality of their stories: it was incumbent upon them to sustain the illusion that their suffering typified the broader slave experience. On the other hand, as autobiographers and literate survivors of an oppressive system they occupied a position that advertised their individuality. At one level they hoped to prove their common humanity with the readership to which their narratives were addressed. Yet at another they felt the need to distinguish themselves from the conceptions of humanness that were implicated in their oppression. Their texts thus work at cross-purposes, presenting the narrator-protagonists as simultaneously collective and unique personalities, at once similar to and different from their readers. (1987:65)

The significant categorical structures transposed from the material condition of his social group into Modisane's autobiography have to do with the endeavours of the black urban working class of Sophiatown to define its identity as a group and to resist ideological, political and material forces which undermined its integrity and status. Modisane's repeated references to the destruction of Sophiatown highlight both the literal and symbolic dissipation of a close-knit community and the values it represented:

WHATEVER else Sophiatown was, it was home; we made the desert bloom; made alterations, converted half-verandas into kitchens, decorated the houses and filled them with music. We were house-proud. We took the ugliness of life in a slum and wove a kind of beauty; we established bonds of human relationships which set a pattern of communal living, far richer and more satisfying-materially and spiritually-than any model housing could substitute. The dying

of a slum is a community tragedy, anywhere. (1986:16)

The recurrent use of the collective pronoun 'we' instead of the standard autobiographical 'I' serves to remind the reader that the narrator is a member of a broad social group and that his experience is therefore not entirely unique. The resilience and cohesiveness which characterise the community of Sophiatown are in stark contrast to the persistent struggle against forces of history which seek to impose life style, behaviour patterns and the identity on the group as a whole. Like the protagonist of Blame Me on History, the community of Sophiatown is a product of legislation which it is apparently powerless to change. Thus Modisane's own helplessness in the light of political obstacles is emblematic of the broader condition of powerlessness which characterises the community as a whole. It is therefore not fortuitous that Modisane gives his autobiography a suggestive if rather ambiguous title which implies that the narrator-protagonist, together with the people he represents, is a passive victim of history.

Significantly, the concept of history as a descriptive category in Modisane's book has two apparently contradictory interpretations. On the one hand, it signifies an evolutionary process involving ideological and political forces over which the individual has little or no control while, on the other hand, it denotes a socio-political terrain of struggle where social groups and interest groups constantly compete for recognition and domination. According to both interpretations Modisane is implicitly acknowledging the defeat of the black nation; in the first instance because the nation did not attempt to alter the cause of history and, in the second case, because the nation failed to manipulate 'history' to its advantage. The explanation Modisane offers in his autobiography is characteristically ambiguous:

I could perhaps present eloquent argument that in a normal society I could have made this or that of my life. Perhaps all of us in South Africa have reason to blame the hypocrisy, the race attitudes, the dangerous state of race relations, on the colour-bar; there are even those who see it as a sequence of history, we have been committed by history to this condition. Blame the subjugation of one race by another on the commitment of history; blame the bigotry on history; blame black nationalism on history. I have heard argument that the white races have had their turn of being on top, and that history has come round for the coloured races to be on top. It is a logic of history, they say. (1986:217)

Here history is presented as an all-powerful ubiquitous force which determines individual and group relationships. This view of history obviously encourages passivity on the part of the victims of political injustice as they have to wait patiently for their turn in the evolutionary process to be 'on top'. History therefore is seen as the complex set of socio-political processes in which the writer and the people of his race are unwilling participants. There is no doubt that the version of history presented here is deliberately ironic and designed to expose the subtle functioning of the ideology of racial domination to legitimise social relations. Modisane would like to break free from the all-pervasive clutches of 'history'; he attempts to do this in many ways and, ultimately, opts for self exile. He does not realise that escaping from the demands of history implies shirking his political responsibilities as a member of an oppressed social group.

When contemplating the ruins of Sophiatown Modisane sees in them a symbol of the capitulation of African traditional leaders such as Dingane to the invading settlers. Thus the position of subservience and powerlessness symbolically represented by the demolished Sophiatown triggers a retrospective contemplation of the past and a vision of the future in which the destruction of Sophiatown

assumes the role of an important historical event. For example, Modisane is also the member of the defeated black race, as distinct from the uncommitted intellectual who is speaking in the passage quoted below:

And there in Sophiatown I seemed to be walking on the pages of history, a broken, defeated soldier, crushed and humiliated, walking among the human wrecks along the banks of the river which ran red with blood after the battle of Blood River; my eyes surveying the wasteland of mutilated bodies of the once proud army of Dingane, and as then, I knew that defeat was to lose the land by annexation. (1986:42)

The past and the present mingle in the author's consciousness to highlight the fact that present entrapment in political domination is just one episode in the *history* of successive defeats suffered by his people. Although Modisane acknowledges the defeat of his people at the hands of history, he does not see it as his obligation to ensure that the system of political domination is transformed through collective political action. It is worth noting that Modisane's decision to leave South Africa in 1959 was in part motivated by his failure to find a meaningful role for himself within the major political organisations involved in resistance politics during this period. This failure on Modisane's part may be regarded by unsympathetic critics as an indication of political indifference or apathy. However, Modisane's disenchantment with the strategies employed by black liberation movements reflects the ideological position adopted by the class of petty-bourgeoisie of this period. As black people, intellectuals such as Modisane were subject to the discriminatory laws of apartheid whereas as educated or so called enlightened people they tended to be sceptical of collective undertakings of the black mass movements. This was largely due to the liberal values of individualism which they had acquired through liberal education.

Although it may seem appropriate and theoretically sound to categorise Modisane as a petty-bourgeoisie this label is only appropriate in so far as it refers to the alienation and the sense of displacement which characterised the emergent black petty-bourgeoisie class of the 1950s. As Michael Chapman maintains, Modisane himself would like to be seen as an individual with no rigid class or political allegiances:

Modisane almost simultaneously wants to shift his experiences out of the material concerns of any class and, as the writer intellectual, to posit an "aesthetic" of freedom and constriction. (1989:205)

Chapman's comment alerts us to the inherent ambiguity in Modisane's social position as exemplified in his desire to transcend the limitations of his social group. It would not therefore be inaccurate to contend that the metaphor of self I have described as the communal self was imposed on Modisane by the political ideology of apartheid. Throughout his autobiography Modisane is at pains to demonstrate that he is an *individual* with distinctive personal qualities, interests and talents. Thus in Blame Me on History we are constantly reminded of the conflict between public obligations (which are of a principally political nature) and the writer's private interests. Like Abrahams, Modisane believed that the 'objectivity' and inherent idealism of bourgeois art (including literature) could afford him the intellectual freedom he fervently desired as a person with a highly developed artistic sensibility but, for the perceptive Modisane this position also has its own contradictions, as indicated in his reaction to Philip Stein's advice that he should devote himself to 'creative writing':

... I was too personally involved in the dynamics of being black in South Africa, I could not intellectually shrug off the oppression, the

cruelty, the injustice, as though it were a careless trifle; I lived with it twenty-four hours a day, everyday of my life, I could not be an uncommitted and disinterested spectator; yet I knew Phillip was right, knew that I had to re-educate myself into believing in myself, into an acceptance of the *objectivity of art*, the inalienable persuasion of philosophy, the principles of freedom and equality. Subjectivism was, however, emotionally more persuasive: oppression, poverty, and personal humiliation cannot be wholly experienced vicariously, or something one can be intellectual about; one can perhaps only sympathise, nothing more. (1986:86) (my emphasis)

Unlike Mphahlele and Abrahams who seem to have had no reservations about their chosen social roles as writers, Modisane appears to have turned to creative writing only as a strategy of coping with alienation and frustration engendered by living in a materially deprived environment. As he explains, the need to explore his creative talent emerges out of the internal contradictions which characterise his social and political roles as a communal being:

I directed my energy to my writing, determined to use it as the weapon for gate-crashing into the worlds which rejected me; my writing showed a studied omission of commitment, the histrionics of tight-fisted protest, and in my first published short story, The Dignity of Begging, I created a satirical situation in which I sat back and laughed at the worlds which rejected. (1986:88)

Modisane examines the plight of being 'handicapped' by one's skin colour and strategies of coping with this 'deformity'. During a period of disillusionment with the political strategies of the African National Congress Modisane again turned to the intellectual and emotional haven of creative writing:

I burned my Youth League membership card and retreated into a political wilderness. I was disillusioned beyond reconciliation, and decided to separate my life and interests from politics, until there

shall rise from out of the slum of African politics a new and more professional liberation movement. I assumed a mask of political innocence and established a reputation for being apolitical. I turned again to my writing, but this time there was a broad omission of the commitment to fight against the prejudice against my skin, to speak out against injustice and wrong. I wrote innocuous short stories, escapist trash, about boxers with domestic problems, respectable pickpockets, hole-in-the-wall housebreakers, private detectives and other cardboard images of romanticism, and yet even against this background my escapist hero was seldom, if ever, on the side of formal law and order.... I did not recognise the sociological significance of what I was doing, that with a central idea behind them I could use my stories as a reflection or a study of our society. (1986:139)

Yet as Modisane himself admits, there was no way of escaping the reality of being black in a society where people are judged according to skin colour:

BUT I AM black, because I am black I was a piece of the ugliness of Sophiatown and a victim of the violence of white South Africa; I became an unwilling agitator trapped in the blackness of my skin, and because I am black I was forced to become a piece of the decisions, a part of black resistance. I wanted to be both black and unconcerned with the games at politics, but a non-committed African is the same black as a committed Native. Intellectually I resisted involvement with political parties, rejected attempts to be drawn into political discussions, yet my physical being became a tool of the decisions of the African National Congress. There was no choice, during riots the police shot their rifles and sten guns at anything which was black. (1986:140)

After Modisane's break with the African National Congress because of what he perceived as the hypocrisy and self-centredness of its leadership, he became convinced that only revolutionary violence of the masses could free black people from racial oppression. As he puts it, 'I had reasoned myself that only in blood will

I see an end to my oppression or be myself destroyed. This was the harsh reality' (1986:231). Modisane subsequently became a detached admirer of the Pan Africanist Congress:

This was around 1957 when, because of the frustration at the immaturity of African politics, I had separated myself from political involvements. I was to find myself stimulated by the Africanists in the same detached manner that I was by the Hollywood films, and there the attraction stopped. I was not going to charge ahead and take out a membership card. I had learned my lesson. The Africanists never failed to excite my mind and to disturb the friends of the Africans, especially by the assertion that the Africans have reached that time in history when African liberation can no longer be entrusted to left-wing or right-wing groups of the privileged and powered white minorities. (1986:233)

Modisane's criticisms of the tactics and principles of black political organisations lack consistency and political insight. He argues that he is opposed to violence yet at one point he believes that violent revolution is the only solution to South Africa's problems. He is critical of both the ANC and the PAC yet he fails to suggest an alternative political strategy. He talks in idealistic terms about 'the enormous family of man' (1986:168) and about equality, justice and human dignity but fails to act meaningfully and pragmatically in his own social context to achieve these goals. However, these obvious shortcomings in Modisane's political vision should not be used as criteria in the evaluation of Blame Me on History as Modisane's interpretation of his past. It would be unfair and unprofessional to judge the success of the autobiography by Modisane's political convictions as David Rabkin does in the comments quoted below:

Blame Me on History is effective in its attack on apartheid, particularly in its use of well-chosen quotations to illustrate the

absurdity as well as cruelty of apartheid legislation. His writings on the African political scene, however, are peculiarly inept, especially the extremely unconvincing attack upon the Freedom Charter. Modisane shows all the intellectual's ability to confuse the wood with the trees, when confronted with the problems of political action. The confused reactions and emotional immaturity, though effective when noted as the subjective dilemma of the situation, are inadequate tools of analysis in a situation where the emotive half-truth can have serious, even fatal, consequences. (1976:137)

In my view, what Rabkin dismisses as 'political immaturity' is a practical manifestation of the conflict between the obligations of the communal self and the desires and aspirations of the individuated intellectual self. It is significant that Modisane distinguishes between his intellectual and physical reactions to political pressures as this constitutes the major distinction between the two metaphors of self I have identified. As will become evident, Modisane's 'aestheticism' is not confined to creative writing. His knowledge of art in the broadest sense of that term is shown in his numerous quotations from and allusions to canonical texts such as the plays of Shakespeare and the works of famous composers and painters. Modisane argues that he does not conform to the stereotype of a primitive and barbaric savage and would therefore like to be allowed to enjoy the fruits of Western culture which include visiting art galleries, theatres, listening to classical music and reading literature and philosophy. For Modisane this lifestyle and all it entails in terms of material and spiritual benefits is a full and rewarding existence. Ironically, this implies that he must become 'white' because, according to the dominant South African cultural ethos, he has 'white' tastes. As I explained earlier, Modisane went out of his way to seek white friends whom he hoped to impress with his erudition and 'intelligence'. His description of his friendship with Roy Carter to whom he had been introduced by Phillip Stein suggests that he thoroughly enjoyed these encounters with the representatives of the desired

culture:

It was precisely because he thought I was intelligent that we became friends, and it was for this reason I accepted the invitation to dinner at his house; this friendship never ceased to amaze and stimulate his interest, and that evening he was to find himself exposed to another shock. We discovered that we both liked Dylan Thomas and poor Roy was constrained to shake his head in disbelief, he was excited to discover that *Do not go gentle into that good night* was also my favourite Dylan Thomas poem. I was deliberately baiting him into a realisation of my wide range of interests; ...as Roy discovered a "cultured" African I learned a bitter lesson: our attitudes rise from a lack of rapport between the peoples of our country. (1986:253)

To argue that Modisane enjoyed these relationships merely to 'show off' would perhaps be a misrepresentation of his motives. It would seem that he deliberately manipulated South African racial stereotypes in an earnest attempt to assert his dignity as a 'member of the enormous human family'. Thus those of his white friends who reacted with amazement and incredulity to his knowledge of Western art forms were betraying their own racial prejudice. Modisane seems to have been fully aware of the often unexamined assumptions white people use to evaluate the 'intelligence' and cultural sophistication of black people. Inviting 'cultured' people who included his colleagues on *Drum* as well as some white friends to his room in Sophiatown was not simply a bohemian antic but an attempt to advertise his legitimate artistic tastes:

My little room in Sophiatown was a fly-over which connected the two worlds, and in it I erected all the symbols of the world which rejected me: on the walls were hanging reproductions of Lautrec, Van Gogh, Chagall, Klee and Miro, there were books and folders of the Impressionists unobtrusively lying about; the cabinet was stocked with cocktail glasses, wine, brandy and beer glasses discreetly

paraded, and those of my African friends who came to dinner were meant to be impressed by the ritual of making martinis served in chilled cocktail glasses before meals, wine with meals and after-meals drinks in fresh glasses. All this was done for the pleasure of hearing them say, Bloke you're a white man; why not, if I could not be white physically and legally, I could pretend a white existence. (1986:254)

This may be interpreted as either a paranoid game or an extreme case identity-crisis. However, it is essentially a strategy of self-assertion by a person who has been denied the right to lead a meaningful life in accordance with his interests. In a country where white is a symbol of cultural sophistication and advancement and black a symbol of primitivism and backwardness Modisane's need to advertise his 'sophistication' is perfectly understandable. For him becoming white meant being allowed to fashion his lifestyle according to his tastes. As indicated in the passage quoted above, being white also meant a certain level of material affluence which black people could only fantasise about. Thus while there may be some ambivalence and inconsistency in Modisane's presentation of his need for white friends and his almost obsessive yearning for the fruits of white culture, there is no doubt that his aim in Blame Me on History is to satirise the perverted racial attitudes of the South Africa of the 1950s. As the comments quoted below betray, David Rabkin believes that there was a possibility of a clear-cut and unambiguous stance in Modisane's relationship with the representatives of white culture. In his view the conflict involving the author's 'Africanness' and his desire for the friendship of white people is not adequately resolved in Blame Me on History. He writes:

Modisane tells how he went out of his way to cultivate the friendship of white intellectuals, deliberately displaying his knowledge of classical music, and so on, to impress and surprise them ... There was

in this activity a deep ambivalence which the author notes in his narrative but which, one feels, he has hardly resolved. The African intellectual despises his white counterpart for his pusillanimous attitude to the race laws, his unconscious prejudice and his simple ignorance of African life. To overthrow these assumptions is thus an African victory, but one which consists in itself of winning white approval and in turn undermining the intellectual's sense of his own "Africanness". (1976:136)

In my opinion, a literary or autobiographical resolution of the dilemma accurately outlined by Rabkin above, would be contrived or artificial as it would negate the social reality which the autobiography seeks to depict. More than any other factor the inhibitions on Modisane's life to realise and express his talents and interests are the principal cause of the overwhelming sense of alienation which pervades the autobiography as a whole. It is these restrictions which drove Modisane to a life of debauchery characterised by womanising and excessive drinking. It is the impossibility of becoming 'white' which gives rise to the anguished sense of self-identity which is the subject of Blame Me on History. Thus in writing his life story Modisane is attempting to vindicate his contention that in another social environment or historical era he could have made his life worthwhile and intellectually rewarding by utilising his artistic and literary talents:

I believe in achievement, I would as soon live in a meritocracy. But I have been denied recognition, denied the opportunity to develop whatever talents I thought I might have. (1986:208)

The autobiography announces itself in its title as a two-pronged narrative and suggests an unremitting conflict between the protagonist and the ineluctable forces of history. In the title (Blame Me on History) the subject form of the personal pronoun 'me' refers to the artistically-inclined narrator-protagonist whereas the

concept of 'history' signals social forces which shape self-consciousness and determine both private and public obligations. As I have attempted to show, the constant clash between the historical narrative and the story of the individual's private aspirations and hopes contribute to the uneven narrative structure of Modisane's autobiography.

CHAPTER III

CONFORMITY AND REBELLION IN NABOTH MOKGATLE'S THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN SOUTH AFRICAN.

We must learn how to connect biographies and lived experiences, the epiphanies of lives, to the groups and social relationships that surround and shape persons. (Denzin,1989:82)

Naboth Mokgatle's The Autobiography of an Unknown South African was first published in London in 1971, seventeen years after its author's departure from South Africa to self-imposed exile in Britain. As Mokgatle was a listed person under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1965, his autobiography was not available to South African readers until 1990 when, due to changed political circumstances, it was published by Ad Donker. Thus Mokgatle's life history, like most autobiographies by black South Africans, was written in exile primarily for readers in Britain where Mokgatle had lived and worked for nearly two decades¹. That Mokgatle had a foreign audience in mind when he wrote the story of his life in South Africa can be inferred from both the selection of events and their presentation in the book².

As the title of the book suggests, Mokgatle's main purpose in writing the story of his life is to make himself 'known' to the reading public and thus avoid the fate of other (mostly black) opponents of apartheid whose experiences, ideals and achievements have been relegated to the dustbin of history by hegemonic ideologies and dominant discourses³. Like other black South African autobiographers, Mokgatle uses the 'literary' form of autobiography to challenge imposed definitions of social and political roles and identities. Thus for Mokgatle, the form of autobiography is a powerful vehicle for 'talking back'⁴ to the authorities who created the condition of anonymity implied in the title of his book.

Consequently, in telling the story of his life Mokgatle achieves the dual goals of rewriting history from an underdog's perspective and simultaneously constructing an 'authentic' identity for himself⁵. As Jane Starfield has pointed out, counter-hegemonic interpretations of history have become a distinctive feature of autobiographical writing by black South Africans:

There seems to be a common purpose among black autobiographers in South Africa, if one may generalise for the moment, in that they often set out to rewrite the "fictions" of official white histories. The autobiographer seeks to lay on record that the harshness of his own experiences gives the lie to "official" versions of events. Autobiography is expressly used to offer an alternative reading of history. (1988:16)

Thus in offering a personalised version of history Mokgatle is making an implicit claim that his involvement in oppositional politics should have earned him the distinction of being a 'well-known South African' rather than an obscure trade unionist.

In writing about personal experience, writers of autobiography often focus on one outstanding feature of their lives which is then used as an organising theme around which other aspects of their experience revolve. This overarching theme often becomes the standpoint or point of view from which the autobiographer reviews his or her life. As Roy Pascal puts it:

Autobiography means ... discrimination and selection in face of (sic) the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of emphases, choice of expression. Everything depends on the standpoint chosen; and it is clear that the more arbitrary the standpoint, the greater is the likelihood that the autobiography will be one-sided, blinkered, or downright false. This is the reason, I believe, why the best autobiographies are by men and women of

outstanding achievement in life. Their standpoint is not as it were chosen by them, ... : it is there, the indubitable result of their life's work, often acknowledged publicly, but at any rate for them the concrete reality of the meaning of their life.(1960:10)

In the previous chapters we saw how Abrahams and Modisane organised their life- stories around some central preoccupation or goal. For Peter Abrahams the central theme which functions as a structuring device in Tell Freedom is his success in overcoming almost insurmountable social barriers to realise his dream of becoming a creative writer. In characteristically innovative fashion, Modisane in Blame Me on History organises the story of his life around his anguished quest for physical freedom and spiritual fulfilment. As we shall see, in Mokgatle's book the main thematic concern is unmistakably 'autobiographical'⁶ as it has to do with the formative process of growth and the dramatic shifts in social and political awareness this process entails. In The Autobiography the process of intellectual and moral growth is explored in its cultural, social and political dimensions, revealing the author's decisions to renounce or embrace certain culturally as well as ideologically predetermined roles or those public oriented and private choices resulting from the conjuncture of history and material conditions. As I hope to demonstrate, the cultural-anthropological dimension of Mokgatle's life history renders the book amenable to an ethnographic sociological analysis which will not only examine theories regarding the relationship between the individual and society, but also show that in the perennial contest between nature and nurture it is not always easy to determine which takes precedence over the other⁷.

In its chronological⁸ and realistic presentation of the accumulative process of physical and intellectual development, Mokgatle's autobiography fits Bruce Mazlish's definition of autobiography as

... a literary genre produced by romanticism, which offers us a picture from a specific present viewpoint of a coherent shaping of an individual past, reached by means of introspection and memory of a special sort, wherein the self is seen as a developing entity, changing by definable stages, and where knowledge of the self links with knowledge of the external world, and both together provide us with a deep and true grasp of reality. (1970:28)

However, in Mokgatle's case the term 'romanticism' requires some qualification as it means more than mere self-absorption or a narcissistic contemplation of the creative imagination. Moreover, given the undecidable generic status of autobiography as history or literature, the unreliability of memory, and the autobiographer's deliberate omissions dictated by his purposes in undertaking the task of self-definition, it is arguable whether a 'true grasp of reality' can be attained in any autobiography. I hope to show in my reading of Mokgatle's autobiography, that, taken as a whole, his life-story is certainly not 'fiction' and that his book is more of an historical than a 'literary' document. Mokgatle's exploration of the growth and development of his selfhood has the political purpose of inspiring the opponents of apartheid as well as registering protest against political oppression. In spite of its banning in South Africa, Mokgatle must have known that his book would be read by members of different international organisations opposed to the racial policies of the South African government and that this audience would include South African exiles like himself. Thus his book is, in an important sense, an active intervention in the then ongoing process of political struggle rather than a retrospective assessment of 'finished' past experience. As S.Dentith has argued, working-class autobiographies which present themselves as re-interpretations of history always have a direct strategic bearing on 'present' political struggles:

... history writing *must* presume a relationship between the language of generality which is used to explain the past (whether explicitly political or not), and political strategies directed towards the present. (1986:61)

Mokgatle's life-history, which has been described as a 'working-class autobiography' (Thale, 1994 :43)⁹, may be seen as forming part of a trend in South African autobiographical writing initiated by Clements Kadalie and popularised by such trade unionists as Solly Sachs, Emma Mashinini, Petrus Tom, Mandlenkosi Makhoba, Ben Baartman and others¹⁰. This is political autobiography of a special sort wherein former trade unionists describe their participation in the struggles of the workers for higher wages and better working conditions, recount and explain decisions and choices they made, and perhaps offer guidance to other people who may choose to follow a similar path. Usually, these autobiographical accounts originate from the writer's own experience as an exploited or for some reason aggrieved worker, and this opens his or her eyes to the collective plight of other workers and thus motivates him or her to act in order to alleviate their suffering.

Like most of the trade unionists mentioned above, Mokgatle is neither a creative writer¹¹ nor a literary critic but a political activist who considers his experience typical as well as exemplary and, for these reasons, worth preserving in the form of a written record. However, Mokgatle's autobiography differs in significant ways from most 'working-class' autobiographies by South African trade unionists in that his account of events and experiences leading up to his involvement in trade union politics is more comprehensive and covers a longer period than the life- histories of other South African labour activists. In addition, Mokgatle seems to have grasped the complex relationship between socio-political struggles in general and

the shop-floor struggles of the workers in various forms of employment¹². Finally and perhaps most importantly, Mokgatle's understanding of international politics and its bearing on the local political scene is articulated with a striking insight which is lacking in the autobiographies of the other working-class leaders mentioned above. As I shall demonstrate, Mokgatle's sharp political acumen, evident in the section of the autobiography dealing with his experiences as a trade unionist, is traceable to his association with experienced and committed members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) who acted as his mentors during the early stages of his career.

Apart from entries in companions to African writing and quotations in sociology and social anthropology books, Mokgatle's contribution to South African autobiographical writing has never been the subject of any sustained critical analysis¹³. James Olney, whose study Tell Me Africa (1973), still stands as a landmark in the criticism of African autobiography, devotes only one page to Mokgatle's 350-page book. Besides comments of a general nature designed to corroborate his thesis that the communal way of life of African communities determines self-conception¹⁴, Olney offers the following remarks about what he sees as the The Autobiography's 'unliterary' quality:

Because he records the details of his life chronologically and without the artist's eye for significant detail or the philosopher's need to find a meaning in his experience, Mokgatle's book is largely lacking in structure and pattern. While it is true that his autobiography does lead up to exile and political asylum in London, there is no reason why it should be London rather than Paris or Moscow. Mokgatle describes the human need for escape from oppression, but it is not escape to

anything in particular. His escape *from* rather than *to* is not the artist's escape, motivated by a search for conditions in which he can not only live but create. (1973:252)

Olney's remarks here betray his unstated preferences and assumptions about the nature of autobiography, which he seems to believe should be the preserve of 'artists' and 'philosophers'. Also implicit in his argument is the assumption that autobiographies are essentially aesthetic or literary documents evincing the authors' creative capacity and skill in manipulating past events and experiences for aesthetic (literary) effect. This parochial view which seeks to appropriate autobiography for the embattled domain of literary discourse, precludes what George Egerton describes as 'political autobiography', which is by definition politically motivated and thus closer to history than to literature¹⁵. Another untenable assumption implied in Olney's assessment of The Autobiography is that chronology somehow undermines the 'literary' quality of autobiography as well as its structure or pattern. He does not explain how this undermining effect is achieved or why chronology cannot have a similar effect on fiction. It may be inferred from Olney's comments that the critical neglect of Mokgatle's autobiography is partly attributable to the tendency of literary critics to read historical accounts of personal development and achievement as 'literary artifacts', and to look for aesthetic elements in works which have no pretensions to 'literariness'¹⁶. It would seem that as far as literary critics are concerned, Mokgatle still remains an 'unknown South African'. As one reviewer puts it:

Mokgatle was vir my ook 'n totale onbekende. Toe hy gevlug het, het die meeste van ons nog met swaart maatjies op die platteland gespeel. Politieke bewustheid was daar nie, en, sover bekend, het Mokgatle nie soos ander swartes in ballingskap iets gedoen om sy naam lewend te hou in Suid Afrika nie. (Kuhn, 1991:8)¹⁷

Mokgatle ends his story with his arrival in Britain in 1954 so that his autobiography is strictly about his life in his homeland. It would appear that this is a deliberate omission which serves Mokgatle's purposes rather than a structural flaw in the book. In Britain Mokgatle worked in the store-room of a big department store and did not continue with his trade union activities¹⁸. There are two probable reasons for the omission of this period in Mokgatle's life history. In the first place, the book is essentially about his experience as a political activist in South Africa. Secondly, his life in Britain seems to have lacked the political drama and adventure which characterised his South African experience.

* * *

In line with the central aim of this study which is to offer a socio-critical reading of South African autobiography, this chapter will explore ways in which the story of Mokgatle's personal growth and development reflects changes and modifications in the world views of the social groups to which he belonged from early childhood until he left South Africa in 1954. Although the delineation of social groups may seem to be a reductive and, at times, artificial analytical exercise, it is the most fruitful means of analyzing autobiography as an expression of commonly held ideas, attitudes and beliefs. In accordance with the basic principles of socio-criticism, I intend to examine 'ideological traces' in the different projections of selfhood in Mokgatle's life story. However, despite its obvious historical and sociological value, this approach has its shortcomings when applied to a mode of writing which, of necessity, concerns itself with the evolution of individual consciousness. Without treating Mokgatle's autobiography simply as a microcosm of the symbolic worlds of belief and praxis, I intend to show that

it can illuminate the ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour which characterise the communities alluded to above.

Unlike the autobiographies of Abrahams and Modisane in which there are relatively consistent world views which develop concurrently with the authors' physical growth, in Mokgatle's story we encounter a decisive break in the growing writer's outlook as the narrative setting changes from the village of Phokeng to the city of Pretoria. This epistemic break in the author's consciousness is significant in so far as it is 'deviant' rather than conventional (it is normal for people to change and modify their beliefs and perceptions as they encounter new circumstances). It is this transformation in moral outlook and political awareness, aptly expressed in the title of Thomas Thale's essay 'Of Tribal Boys and Communists', which I intend to examine in this chapter. On the one hand, the period of childhood in the tribal village is characterised by what I shall refer to as *conformity* and *typicality* in the young Mokgatle's reactions to his immediate social environment. On the other hand, the periods of young adulthood and adulthood (Mokgatle was 43 years old when he left South Africa) show signs of what I regard as implicit and sometimes overt *rebellion* against those norms, customs and 'laws' of his tribe which the 'enlightened' Mokgatle considered to be narrow, restrictive and conservative. As will become evident in my analysis of The Autobiography, cultural non-conformity is not always a result of a conscious decision on the part of the 'deviant', but is often a result of the complex interplay of external influences on the perceptions of the developing individual.

Essentially, The Autobiography articulates the conflicting impulses within the narrator-protagonist to conform to or rebel against the values of his tribe. The concept of the tribe in Mokgatle's story assumes a literal as well as symbolic

significance as it denotes more than just an ethnic aggregate of people kept together by geographical location, history and culture, but also a symbolic, ideologically constructed entity which determines public roles and lays down rules for acceptable social behaviour. Leroy Vail (1989) has shown how missionaries and dominant classes during the colonial and post-colonial period in Africa have created the concept of the tribe as a signifier for ethnic identity. Although Mokgatle seems to be using this concept unproblematically, even simplistically, in the context of his autobiographical undertaking as a whole, the use of this concept subverts conventional definitions. In The Autobiography it is not only Mokgatle, the tribal boy, who undergoes change in response to social, economic and political pressures but the entire tribe as well. Taken at face value Mokgatle's project in The Autobiography may seem to pander to the ideological machinations of the Nationalist government by legitimising the category of ethnic identity. However, a more judicious analysis of his book reveals that he is actually challenging the ideologically constructed notion of tribe and presenting himself 'as a citizen of the world' who can choose only what suits him in the traditional values of his tribe. In his life-story Mokgatle describes how he gradually drifted away from the norms and values of his tribe and became a political activist and a vociferous opponent of the apartheid state. However the severance of ties with the tribe could not be complete or absolute as there were beliefs and practices that he could not renounce without denying the essence of his own identity. Thus we see that in spite of the rigid and hierarchical social organisation of the Bafokeng tribe, Mokgatle succeeded in asserting his individuality by challenging, through his choice of career and literal escape from the tribe, certain roles that his tribe would impose on him. The development of Mokgatle's self-assertion and distinctive individuality should be seen against the background of cultural disintegration in his tribe engendered by the advent of Christianity and the industrialisation of

South Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century.

There are two distinct social groups whose collective experience and ideas are explored in Mokgatle's autobiography. The first group is constituted by Mokgatle's tribe, the Bafokeng of Phokeng, among whom he grew up, and the second group comprises the mass of semi-urbanised and urbanised black workers in Pretoria and Johannesburg during the first part of the twentieth century. The former group is distinguished by its fairly conservative values of obedience to authority, conformity to cultural values and an unquestioning acceptance of prescribed social roles and obligations, whereas the latter group finds itself in an oppressive and hostile environment characterised by dehumanising laws and economic exploitation. Therefore, in as much as The Autobiography is the story of Mokgatle's life, it is also an historical record of the lives of the communities to which he belonged at different stages of his life in South Africa.

As Roy Pascal reminds us, most autobiographies are written to celebrate certain achievements in the writer's calling or profession:

All good autobiographies are in some sense the story of a calling, that is, they tell of the realisation of an urgent personal potentiality. But in some cases the inner calling merges into a social function, a profession, and a public personality grows out of the private. The autobiography may then be written not primarily for private reasons, but for public, perhaps to satisfy public curiosity about a well-known figure, but more seriously, to illuminate the nature of the public achievement and perhaps reinforce it. (1960:112)

Mokgatle's major accomplishment in the trade union movement was to establish and administer trade unions for African workers in Pretoria and, with the

assistance of the South African Communist Party, actively to campaign against influx control laws and other discriminatory and repressive legislation. When Mokgatle wrote his autobiography in 1970, most of the freedoms he had fought for in South Africa had not been attained. Instead, the Nationalist government had become more ruthless in its suppression of political protest. After the promulgation of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 which affected Mokgatle directly, a plethora of laws designed to stifle protest politics were passed by the National Party government. Thus Mokgatle's story can hardly be described as a celebration of far-reaching political victories which would in turn serve to reinforce his 'public achievements'. However his own personal accomplishments as a committed trade unionist merited recording in the form of a life history as they would undoubtedly have served to inspire active opponents of apartheid in countries where his book would be available.

The history of the Bafokeng tribe which takes up the first twelve chapters of the book may be seen by some as a superfluous anthropological exercise in the story of a political activist. On the contrary, it provides the reader with the necessary background information about the evolution of Mokgatle's political awareness. From the detailed exposition of the social institutions and cultural practices of the Bafokeng, it is not difficult to understand why a person with Mokgatle's personality and temperament could not be content with being a 'mere tribesman'. However, as we shall see, it is not simply a question of personality and temperament, but a combination of these with social and political forces which shaped Mokgatle's outlook on life. In analyzing Mokgatle's transformation from being an unsophisticated and barely literate tribal boy into a popular and respected trade unionist I shall raise and attempt to answer questions about the relationship between individual consciousness and social institutions.

* * *

Historical materialism, of which Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism is one permutation, has offered convincing theories about the relationship of cultural products such as literary texts to social 'relations of production'. However, when it comes to the crucial issue of social consciousness materialist critics often posit a reductive view of ideology (usually defined as false consciousness) as a major determinant of self-conception and thus of social action. While I agree with some of the obvious propositions of these critics regarding the nature and functioning of ideology, I believe that individuals have some measure of cognitive autonomy and do make choices about their lives.

In spite of its obvious shortcomings,¹⁹ Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism seems to me to be the most appropriate analytical approach to the study of autobiography as it combines immanent criticism with historical or social contextualisation. Goldmann's theory is particularly pertinent to the study of an autobiography such as Mokgatle's which seeks to rewrite history and to comment on the effects of socio-political and cultural phenomena on the individual. It is only by locating Mokgatle's life history within the broader historical and cultural context that we can begin to grasp the distinctive concerns of The Autobiography as a personal record of the author's attempts to find a meaningful social role for himself. In foregrounding the historical context and using it as a framework of formal analysis, I shall be 'explaining' and 'interpreting' the autobiography's constitutive features. Goldmann explains the complementary processes of interpretation and explanation as follows:

Interpretation and explanation are not two different intellectual

procedures but one and the same procedure referred to different coordinates. Interpretation involves the illumination of a significant structure which is immanent to the object under study. Explanation is nothing more than the insertion of this interpreted structure, as a constitutive and functional element, into an immediately englobing structure which the researcher does not necessarily study in a detailed manner but only enough to render intelligible the genesis of the object under study.²⁰

The encompassing structures within which Mokgatle had to choose roles which suited his personal convictions and values are constituted by the world views of the two social groups identified above. However, it must be noted that these social categories do not accurately match Goldman's conception of social formations. The Bafokeng tribe only constitute a social group in terms of cultural homogeneity and geographical location, whereas the newly urbanised group of Black workers in Pretoria hardly form a class as defined in orthodox Marxism²¹. Nevertheless, these two social entities do constitute significant social structures with identifiable corresponding 'world views' and are therefore useful for my purposes as analytical categories.

* * *

For convenience of analysis Mokgatle's autobiography may be divided into two structurally distinct yet thematically related parts. These divisions are roughly coterminous with the presentation of the material circumstances and the corresponding collective social consciousness of the two groups enunciated above. The first part of the autobiography focuses on the narrator's immediate family as well as the history and traditions of the Bafokeng tribe and presents a genealogy of the tribe's chiefs. Before offering a detailed account of the way of life of twentieth-century Bafokeng, Mokgatle traces the history of his people to the

broader Tswana nation whose history goes back several centuries. Having established the origins and ethnic identity of the Bafokeng, he goes on to describe the pre-colonial cultural practices and traditions of this Tswana tribe such as the use of traditional medicine, circumcision, ancestor worship and polygamy. He also explains the role of myth and legend as methods of preserving and perpetuating the values, traditions and the history of the tribe from one generation to another. Part of the information he gives about his people's way of life was passed on to him by Mogale Mokgatle who was regarded 'as an authority on [our] tribal laws and customs'(p.8). In these informative accounts of tribal life the narrator's perspective shifts constantly from justificatory identification with certain practices or beliefs to the distanced stance of an objective and authoritative informant. An example of this oscillating point of view is Mokgatle's account of the European perceptions of tribal doctors. As someone who understands both the African and Western views of traditional African medicine, he attempts to give a balanced assessment of both without offering any personal opinions on the matter:

Europeans who have made Africa their home, and others who lived there, have a deep-rooted belief that the Africans fear and worship their medicine men. They say that everything the medicine man says goes without question. Therefore they believe that the only way to get the Africans away from believing in their medicine men is to discourage them by emphasising to them that their doctors, whom Europeans call witchdoctors, do not know what they are doing, and because they have not been trained in a scientific way cannot possibly know anything about curing the sick. (1990:25-6)

Suddenly, however, the objective point of view is discarded as Mokgatle gives what may be considered as an authoritative opinion on the subject:

I myself think that the Europeans are wrong...I admit that the Africans, even my own tribe which is largely Christian today, consult their medicine men more than European doctors and Africans trained by Europeans to be doctors. There are various reasons for this behaviour or attitude. In the tribes, in the villages far away from European towns or cities, the people for generations have known only one man whom they could consult when they were in pain or other difficulties, and this was their own medicine man. They saw his medicine help and saw him fail, and his predictions coming true and sometimes false. All this they took as inherent in human beings and unavoidable. (1990:26)

Throughout the autobiography, Mokgatle seems to be anticipating the responses of his reader who is presumed to be unfamiliar with South African life in both its rural and urban settings. Accordingly, he does not merely record the social history of his people in a purely factual and descriptive manner, but also offers commentary on those aspects of it which may not be immediately comprehensible to some readers. Thus the authorial voice constantly intrudes in the descriptive accounts of tribal life to offer critical commentary or 'to set the record straight' as in the following passage:

Europeans who live in Africa say that the Africans are superstitious people and false believers. I agree with the former, but contradict the latter. But I confess that superstition is very strong amongst the Africans I know in South Africa. However, it cannot in my opinion be dismissed as wholly bad; rather it is a mixture of good and bad. It can inspire people to do good and restrain them from doing bad things to their neighbours. (1990:33)

In the first part of the autobiography, the Bafokeng emerge as a cohesive and close-knit community kept together by the unwritten moral codes embodied in the person of the chief, the 'father of the tribe' (p.30). In the structural organisation of the family and the tribe as a whole there was a system of social stratification based

on gender, age and seniority (in terms of closeness to the royal family). Belonging to a higher stratum in this social order meant that one enjoyed certain privileges. For instance, Mokgatle expected the members of the chief's family to treat his own family with respect because his grandmother had been chief Mokgatle's second wife:

I resented strongly the way some of Mokgatle's descendants wanted to relegate him [Naboth's father], my mother, my sisters and myself to the last position in our tribal society.

I could not accept this, and felt that we were being cheated of our rightful position in the tribal order. I refused to accept it as being lawful that others whose grandmothers did not have the honour of being paid dowry twice, or the right of occupying the house of Paramount Chief Mokgatle's second wife, should feel that they occupied a higher position in the tribe than my father and myself. (1990:52)

As Mokgatle explains, this hierarchical and discriminatory social order was demonstrated in its most blatant form in gender roles:

Like most male-dominated social organisations, men were masters, made laws mostly in their own favour and to suit their needs, and made it appear that this was right, and being so, ought to be liked and obeyed. Women had no free choice in marriage. Law and custom allowed men to have more than one wife but women to have only one husband. This raises the question whether women were in fact happy under such a system. (1990:8)

This is one of the few instances in Mokgatle's story where the enlightened narrator looking back at his past expresses direct disapproval of his tribe's cultural practices. Another instance where the author questions the validity and logic of his people's cultural beliefs is when he rejects as 'false' their belief in reincarnation:

They also believed in the second coming of their *badimo* in new forms. When a male baby was born it was imagined that his dead grandfather had come back to life, and so the child was given the dead grandfather's name. The same thing applied to female children ... I will accept that these ways of thinking were false. (1990:36)²²

Apparently Mokgatle's purpose in giving such a detailed history of his people as a prologue to his own life history is to show that his identity is part of the collective identity of his people. In anticipation of the reaction of some readers to what may be considered as an unconventional beginning to an autobiography, he says:

Some people may wonder why I went so far back in tracing my background. My answer is that the birth of my ancestors and my grandparents after them ushered my coming, and therefore I am a continuation of them. As my mind develops, I increasingly believe that wherever I am, whatever I do, my ancestors play a leading part in my actions. I believe that they guide me and protect me. (1990:51)

If one takes Mokgatle at his word, it would not be inaccurate to say that his ancestors offered him the necessary guidance in the process of writing his story. In this light the very act of writing is a way of paying homage to his ancestors. Accordingly, the book is dedicated to his paternal grandmother of whom Mokgatle says: 'I am part of her and she is part of me. I believe firmly that as long as I live, she lives' (Dedication). Although some of his beliefs had to be redefined in the light of his new role as a trade unionist and self-styled citizen of the world (p.227), Mokgatle seems never to have questioned the belief in the protective role of the spirits of his ancestors. It must be noted, however, that this belief is common among African people and is not restricted to the Bafokeng. Another probable reason for the inclusion of this anthropological treatise in the autobiography is

Mokgatle's intention to challenge the commonly-held colonial view that traditional (pre-colonial) African communities had no systematised social institutions which facilitated the smooth functioning of the social structure as a whole. Thus part of Mokgatle's aim is to show that, in the words of Chinua Achebe, the African past 'with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them' (1975:45). Therefore in the course of his story, Mokgatle sometimes undertakes the task of humanising the African past by consciously justifying and rationalising traditional beliefs and practices as in the following passage:

Seasons, too, had significant meaning. Autumn was called *dikgakologo*, summer *selemo*, spring *letlhabula*, and winter *mariga*. They had their own beliefs, right or wrong, that there were certain things you could do in one and not in others. Some of their beliefs undoubtedly hampered them, but others prevented them from acting in mischievous ways. *The essential things are that they led organised lives in orderly communities*. They had surveyors who mapped their territories and defined their boundaries. They had lawyers who framed their unwritten laws. Doctors of their own cured them when ill. (1990:24) (my emphasis)

Researchers of oral history (Tonkin, 1992) have shown that it is not an easy task to render the experience of oral cultures in the mode of written discourse. Often historians writing the history of cultures with no written records fall into the trap of using their own linguistic and conceptual nomenclature to describe oral modes of thought and expression. In Mokgatle's case, interpreting the past of a pre-literate society within the modern mode of autobiography, compels the narrator-protagonist to use modern terminology which will be intelligible to the modern literate reader, hence the use of such terms as 'surveyors', 'lawyers' and 'doctors'. The narrator's main preoccupation in this part of the autobiography seems to be to

demonstrate to his reader that his ancestors' way of life was based on functional, rational and orderly principles. Ironically, Mokgatle succeeds through careful and selective presentation of history to confer respectability on his tribe's cultural practices by identifying them with the dominant Western culture. If the reader must see him as a product of this culture, then he must portray it as a rational, adaptable and relatively sophisticated social system. Thus cultural history in Mokgatle's life story serves to legitimise the autobiographer's identity as a product of a dynamic cultural system. What is included or omitted in any autobiography depends partly on memory, but is also determined to a large extent by the autobiographer's aims in telling his or her story. We have seen that Mokgatle would like the reader to see his tribe as Westernised, progressive and characterised by a strong feeling of ethnic identity. It is not surprising therefore that he omits such an important cultural ritual as the rain ceremony and deals very superficially with the tradition of circumcision.²³ It would seem that Mokgatle believed that a positive presentation of these practices would portray his tribe as 'backward' or 'primitive'. Thale's comments on other significant 'silences' in Mokgatle's autobiography are revealing:

Significantly, Mokgatle is conspicuously silent about the two occasions when his paternal ancestor, Mokgatle Mokgatle, collaborated with the Boers in these frontier wars [wars between the Boer trekkers and indigenous African tribes]. He colluded with the Boers to suppress first the Matabele and later, Bapedi (Bozzoli, 1991: 34,35). In addition, Mokgatle fails to mention that Mokgatle Mokgatle offered some of his subjects to Piet Potgieter as labourers on farms (Bozzoli,1991, 20,40) where they were often physically abused and assaulted. (1994:47)

Regarding the relationship between the Bafokeng chiefdom and the neighbouring Paul Kruger's Republic, R. D Coertze makes the following telling observations:

The degree to which the chiefdom felt involved in the fortunes of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek is indicated by Mokgatle's readiness to send assistance in the form of manpower whenever the Republic was at war. On his orders, Bafokeng regiments fought as auxiliaries on the Boer side. He also sent wagons and food ... During the first Anglo-Boer War in 1880-81, Mokgatle sent no fewer than four regiments "to help Kruger"....It is said that they [the Bafokeng] had to raise a force of 150 men to assist in the war against Cetswayo (sic) in 1879. Hermannsburg sources confirm this. (1988:40)

Writing in the 1970s when the Afrikaners were perceived as the enemies of all black people, it would have been 'inappropriate' for Mokgatle to include these episodes of strategic cooperation between the Bafokeng and the Boers. With the advantage of hindsight, what seems to have been an innocuous alliance based on mutual interest may be interpreted as an act of treachery which Mokgatle the autobiographer is likely to have found embarrassing. It is important to view these omissions, which appear to be deliberate, within the context of Mokgatle's probable aims for telling the story of his life. As I have shown, there is a strong element of rationalisation or justification in Mokgatle's presentation of Bafokeng history. We must not lose sight of the fact that Mokgatle is reviewing his past from the standpoint of a political activist. Therefore his present situation and his vision of the future have a direct bearing on the way in which he presents the past.

To emphasise the theme of progressive growth and maturation which is central to the autobiography as a whole, Mokgatle constantly reminds the reader of his innocence, naivety and lack of subtlety or intellectual sophistication, which is supposed to be the lot of country boys. His general behaviour during this period is that of a *typical tribal boy*: he looks after his father's livestock, attends school and occasionally goes to the nearby farms to seek temporary employment. The social system of which he is part is organised in such a way that there is little

scope for individual initiative, members of the community have to conform to pre-determined patterns of behaviour. However, we notice stirrings of political awareness resulting from his encounters with whites on the farms where he held temporary jobs. In his first job at a farm in Kroondal he was completely unaware of the existence of racial discrimination in South Africa and was therefore puzzled by the shabby treatment of black workers by the white farmer:

The hiring of myself to the Langes in Kroondal showed me two things which I did not know existed. The European way of life as practised in South Africa, and Segregation, Apartheid. At first, though I did not ask, I wondered why we, the black people who worked for the Langes, slept in a tobacco shed and wheat store which was next to the horse stable. There were no chairs for us to sit down on or tables in the place where we slept. *I was an innocent tribal boy* beginning to live in a different world from the one I was born into and knew. (1990:112-3) (my emphasis)

Here childhood innocence is equated with political ignorance which only first-hand experience of racial discrimination could remove. In spite of the obvious 'innocence' of the experiencing self, the mature writing self can retrieve aspects of significant childhood experience and, with the aid of hindsight, offer enlightened commentary on their significance. For example, only the mature narrator could have the requisite insight to understand the historical and cultural significance of Mogale Mokgatle's story telling:

I, with my friends who listened with me, were enjoying what he was saying but not taking anything seriously. For us it was a mere story which had no connection with our life. We had no idea what the past meant to old Mogale. We were a new generation, and he represented the old world we didn't know and felt nothing about. Later, when I grew up - when I was away from him, working in Pretoria, struggling with the impact of Christianity and the European way of

life and all we were getting from it - I realised that I made a mistake by not writing down all the old man told me. (1990:11)

Mokgatle keeps invoking his supposed 'innocence' as tribal boy but does not entirely succeed in recapturing in dramatised narrative form what it felt like to be an unsophisticated Bafokeng boy. This lack of narrative appeal in Mokgatle's life history may be attributed to his concern with factual 'reportage' and historical analysis rather than creative 'portrayal' of lived experience. As the autobiography is written in the form of analytical historical discourse, the informed reader is quick to notice lapses in analytical rigour as well as gaps and inconsistencies in the presentation of historical events.

For Mokgatle writing the story of his life is an important method of preserving the history of his tribe for posterity. By recording the collective experience of his people he is making up for not writing down old Mogale's stories about tribal life. Thus Mokgatle the literate autobiographer plays the role of Mogale the traditional storyteller in a modern context. However, Mokgatle the autobiographer is not merely a storyteller but also an historian who records both past and contemporary events. Whereas Mogale the oral storyteller had a circumscribed audience of Bafokeng boys, Mokgatle addresses an international audience. Most people of Mogale's generation had been converted to Christianity, and the impact of this new religion on the unity of the tribe was profound. Thus even before Mokgatle's generation came into the picture, there were already cracks in the formerly unified and coherent world view of the tribe. When Mokgatle was born in 1911, the Bafokeng tribe in Phokeng was undergoing radical social and economic changes ushered in by the arrival of the German missionaries in 1866. The missionaries of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society led by Ernest Penzhorn had won many

converts to their faith, including chief Mokgatle who had come to the throne between 1834 and 1836. (Coertze; 1987:38) Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the Bafokeng had their own religion which, as Mokgatle explains, was based on carefully considered beliefs :

The period before the arrival of Europeans is referred to by my tribal people as before literature (*pele-a-lekaollo*); after their arrival, after literature (*morago-a-lekaollo*). Before the arrival of literature my tribe believed in God.....Their dead forefathers, whom they could not see and talk to, could somehow meet *modimo* [God] in mysterious ways and talk to him. They then decided to worship their dead forefathers and through them talk to God to ask him to forgive them if they had wronged him. (1990:35)

In his presentation of life in Phokeng at the turn of the century, Mokgatle does not examine the religious, economic and political factors responsible for basic changes in the lives of the Bafokeng. For example, he does not explain why young men and women of his generation had to leave their homes to seek work in the cities. The impression he creates in the mind of the reader is that rural migration to the cities was not motivated by economic and political considerations but was simply a logical consequence of undergoing confirmation as a full member of the church. The political factors which made this choice seem *natural* and plausible are left unexamined. Although the semi-literate teenager could not have known about the existence of taxes and the intricacies of the functioning of the cash economy, the adult writer must have been aware of these things. The lack of analysis in this section of the autobiography seems to be a consciously chosen narrative strategy on Mokgatle's part as it serves to underscore the theme of innocence which, as shown earlier, is equated with a lack of political insight. This is in sharp contrast to the analytical rigour found in the section dealing with Mokgatle's urban

experience as a labour activist. His account of the Smuts-Hertzog coalition, the ascendance of the National Party to power, the failure of the Native Representative Council all display the political insight of the adult (and now better educated) Mokgatle. In fairness to Mokgatle, it must be pointed out that in Phokeng economic factors such as rural poverty and lack of arable land did not play a significant role in determining patterns of migration to urban areas. The Bafokeng tribe was relatively well off and owned farms bought from the earnings of migrant workers sent to Kimberley diamond mines to earn money for this purpose. (Coertze,1988:66; Bozzoli,1991:38) Commenting on the economic self-sufficiency of the Bafokeng in Phokeng, P. L Breutz writes:

This tribe is one of the wealthiest in the Union, owing to the large number of farms it owns, and the minerals (platinum and chrome) found thereon. Some revenue is derived from mines. The tribe is able to live on its agricultural products. Many families reap enough grain in normal years to be able to sell. All young men periodically go to the towns to work in secondary industry or as domestic servants. (1953:76)

Breutz's point about self-sufficiency is further confirmed by Belinda Bozzoli in her socio-anthropological study of the women of Phokeng:

Africans from this region placed themselves in a relatively strong position in relation to the emerging, labour-hungry capitalist economy after gold was discovered in 1886, their participation in migrant labour remaining discretionary and centred upon the needs of the rural economy (rural centred), rather than involuntary and centred upon the labour needs of the urban economy (urban centred) as late as the 1930s. (1991:38)

While Mokgatle's portrayal of his tribe as a relatively affluent and self-sufficient

peasant community is accurate, one would expect a trade unionist of his calibre to elaborate on the socio-political circumstances which favoured migrant labour. Instead he emphasises the influence of a religious ritual in determining what seems to be a purely economic issue:

I was now going to a school which had a strong influence on the children of my tribe; once they had gone through that school, been confirmed and issued with confirmation certificates, they were no longer boys and girls but men and women who had reached adult stage from which they must prepare themselves the higher stage of becoming fathers and mothers. I too became a victim of that influence. My father knew the likely impact of that influence, but left the decisions for my own future to be cut and dried by me. He had done his duty as a parent, but realised that he could not make me do things I was not willing to do. (1990:156)

What Mokgatle was not 'willing to do' was to go back to Phokeng Preparatory School to finish his primary education so that he could later go to Tigerkloof Institute to train as a bricklayer as his father wished him to do. After confirmation Mokgatle was ready to join other boys of his tribe who were doing menial tasks in the white-owned farms in Rustenburg as well as the newly-established industries in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

When Mokgatle left his home to look for permanent employment in 1930, many events had taken place in South Africa which were bound to have direct and indirect effects on his future. The discovery of gold on the Rand in 1886 had created a need for cheap labour while the white farmers who owned large tracts of land needed manual labour in their farms. Young Africans went to the city for a variety of reasons all of which were linked to the changing political and economic situation. As Leo Marquard explains:

For many years the Bantu men and women who went to earn money working in the towns, on the farms, and on the mines looked on this as a purely temporary occupation. Their real roots were in their own country and when they had earned enough cash to pay their taxes, to buy some of the European goods that attracted them, or buy cattle for *lobolo*, they would return to their ancestral homes. (1948:3)

As explained above, the conspicuous lack of political insight and analysis in the section of the autobiography dealing with the Mokgatle's childhood and teenage years may be attributed to his obvious intention to portray himself as an 'innocent tribal boy' and to the unique economic situation in Phokeng in the 1930s. There is no doubt, however, that Mokgatle sees the introduction of Christianity as having done more good than harm in his community:

Mr.Penzhorn, the first Lutheran priest in our tribe, not only taught my people how to read the Bible, but transformed their lives entirely. He brought European architecture into their lives and new ideas. Houses built with bricks began to appear... Old habits of building houses ... died out...

As a result of these new methods, which were due to the church and Mr Penzhorn's influence, well-surveyed streets developed and houses faced each other in a manner which was absent before the church came. Phokeng became a Europeanised tribal village. (1990:61)

Besides brief casual observations about the attitude of the missionaries towards polygamy and circumcision, Mokgatle chooses not to examine the negative effects of the new religion on his community especially in so far as it affected the unity of the tribe. It is true, however, that Christianity and the social values associated with it played a pivotal role in improving the material conditions in Phokeng. Mokgatle seems to regard the cultural damage as having been compensated for by the benefits of Westernisation. R.D Coertze offers a more balanced analysis of the

impact of Western culture on the tribal values of the Bafokeng:

...the Lutheran Church has been propagating western standards of behaviour since 1886. It would be safe to say that, after well over a hundred years of mission work, the entire Bafokeng population has been at least nominally Christianised. However, the influence of the missionaries has not been confined to purely religious matters. They opposed ancestor worship and sorcery, discouraged all forms of polygyny, and expressed strong disapproval of the initiation ceremonies for young people. (1988:66)

Apart from economic pressures there were also political factors responsible for the influx of able-bodied young men into the cities in search of employment. In a biography of Moses Kotane, Brian Bunting sums up the political and economic factors which drove Kotane to the city in 1918 as follows (the similarities between Kotane's situation and Mokgatle's are remarkable):

All over South Africa, millions of Africans were taking the same path as Kotane, driven out of their tribal towns and villages by their desperate need for money and the things it could buy, dissatisfied with the restrictions of the old way of life which was in any case no longer able to survive in the face of stronger pressures from outside. Tribal self-sufficiency was a thing of the past. For one thing land was no longer freely available, and the acquisition of land by Africans was severely curtailed by the Land Act of 1912, which prohibited Africans, except in the Cape, from buying or leasing land from non-Africans outside the eight per cent of the country's area which had been set aside for them by the Government.... Debts could no longer be settled with cattle. Money was needed for taxes and to buy the commodities from the local store which the people could not make for themselves,... The net effect of all these developments was to turn the Africans into a vast pool of cheap labour for use on the mines and the farms owned by whites. (1975:8)

It is worth noting that Mokgatle hardly draws the reader's attention to these

obvious factors. He does not explain, for instance, why confirmation classes had replaced the traditional initiation ceremony as a ritual of marking an important stage in a person's growth. Bunting explains that initiation ceremonies were denounced as evil by the missionaries:

The missionaries and the church denounced these initiation ceremonies and practices and described those who took part in them as evildoers who would surely land in hell. The children of Christian parents were forbidden by the church to go to these ceremonies. On the other hand the Christians, especially those who had never been through the initiation schools, were looked down upon and mocked by the non-Christian majority, who referred to them contemptuously as boys and girls who had not been initiated into manhood and womanhood, people who had been misled by the foreigners to forsake their customs and way of living, and to worship God in strange ways. (1975:5)

Thus we see a gradual disintegration in the old social structure and its ethos as well as world view. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz distinguishes between ethos and world view and explains the reciprocal relationship between the two as follows:

A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.... The ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression. (1975:127)

The equivalent of the concept of ethos in Goldmann's model is the idea of 'actual consciousness' as distinct from 'possible consciousness'. Geertz's concept of world view corresponds to what Goldmann would describe as possible consciousness which is never fully attained by social groups, but may be articulated in a fairly coherent fashion in the works of 'great writers'. In describing his political development Mokgatle is presenting the changes in the collective consciousness of his social group. In the Phokeng of the 1920s and 1930s old beliefs and myths had lost their meaning and cultural significance in the face of the material consequences of the cash economy and Westernisation; therefore changes in the world view were inevitable. The gradual disintegration of the old social structure paved the way for young men like Mokgatle to rebel against some of their tribe's cherished values. With the advent of modernisation the very institution of chieftainship began to lose its power. As one commentator has observed:

In tribal society, the chief was always a symbol of the unity of the tribe, a repository of tribal law and a guardian of the tribal customs and traditions. While certain forces were compelling the Bantu to abandon their pastoral and agricultural economies, other forces were also at work weakening the position of chieftainship. Christianity was one of these, as also the advent of the trader with a new range of cultural goods,... With this disruption in the people's economy and their pattern of life, there followed a corresponding reassessment of the value and respect attached to the office of chieftainship. (F.S Mncube, 1958:9)

However, the old traditions were never entirely wiped out but existed alongside the new religion and modern values. This co-existence of the old and new was evident in both rural and urban contexts. For example, the tribal kinship ties were maintained in the urban environment in the form of football and dancing clubs. Faced with the challenges of city life, young men from the same tribe relied on

groups of 'homeboys' to assist them with accommodation, food and finding a job. Mokgatle himself was treated with hospitality and generosity on his arrival in Pretoria as a first-time job seeker. While working in Rustenburg, he had joined the Matopo Hills Football Club formed by young men from his tribe (p.170). Thus to all intents and purposes the network of 'homeboys' functioned as an urban version of the tribal kinship relations. Baruch Hirson explains the significance of these relationships as follows :

The intimacy of rural communities, whether real or imagined, was recreated in hometown (or 'homeboy') associations. These bodies acted as mutual aid societies, maintained links with families in the rural areas, reinforced traditional cultures, and even sought control of specific jobs on the mines and in the towns. (1989:9)

After leaving home in 1930, the barely literate Mokgatle had worked for a few months in Rustenburg, before moving to Pretoria, which was to become his home for the next twenty-four years. He explains that at this time he only had a vague understanding of race relations in South Africa. Thinking of himself as a 'tribal boy' who had come to the city to earn some money in order to fulfil his obligations at home, he could not foresee his future role as a national political activist. However, it would be simplistic to believe that the transformation in Mokgatle's political awareness was a smooth progression from 'tribal innocence' to 'working-class militancy'. As we shall see, the process of change in Mokgatle's social awareness did not follow a progressive linear pattern which culminated in epiphanic political insights. Instead we see old values and beliefs gradually undergoing modification in response to the demands of the new urban environment and Mokgatle's newly acquired political awareness.

In 1932 at the age of 21 Mokgatle, having changed employers twice, was still considering going back home to settle down among his people:

I was still not politically-minded, but merely a working boy still hoping that one day, after making enough money to get married, I should go back to my tribe, find a girl to marry and settle down *as a true tribesman*. I thought that the best way to get away from the Europeans' web of pass laws and curfews was to go back to the tribe. (1990:188) (my emphasis)

Significantly, it was the little education he had acquired at Phokeng Preparatory School that opened possibilities for political participation for the young Mokgatle. While working for Prices Limited as a 'delivery boy', he became an avid and regular reader of the Sesotho section of the *Bantu World*, and this changed his understanding of local and international politics considerably. He began to see the connection between events in his own country and those in countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain and Russia. He was particularly moved by the suffering of the Jews in Germany:

That year the *Bantu World* was bringing news which broke my heart, about the plight of the Jewish people in Germany. What I read there happening to them was my own story, the story of the African people in South Africa. When I read that they were deprived of freedom of movement in the land of their birth, that they were segregated, denied education, dismissed from their jobs,.....that was description of the Africans' life in the country of their birth. (1990:190)

Perhaps the most decisive event in Mokgatle's life during this period of transition and adaptation was being invited to attend adult literacy classes organised by the SACP²⁴. As he explains, learners were taught more than reading and writing in these classes :

Apart from basic things like reading, writing and counting, we were taught, those of us who could already read and write, many things like politics, trade unionism, the formation of organisations, the running of such organisations, the reasons why trade unions were necessary to industry, and the reasons for the low wages and bad conditions experienced by the workers, particularly the Africans, in South Africa. (1990:195)

The success of these night schools may be judged by Mokgatle's sudden rise from being a 'delivery boy' to a position which required advanced administrative and communication skills in the trade union movement (Mokgatle had only gone as far as Standard 2 at Phokeng Preparatory School). The quality and content of education given to new African recruits by SACP may be inferred from the following comments by Moses Kotane:²⁵

The aim and object of our study classes and schools must be:

1. To establish firmly in the minds of students the story of social changes, the causes of those changes and how they were brought about, and the political, economic and social conditions in South Africa and the necessity for changing them.
2. To create in the minds of Non-European students confidence in their ability to become capable administrators and to lead their own people to freedom and happiness.
3. To make it abundantly clear to these students the fact that they are being taught, not merely for the sake of possessing knowledge, but primarily that the knowledge they are acquiring should enable them to take their rightful places in the leadership of the party and the working class movement. (1981:174)

The reasons for the appeal of the teachings of the Communists to harassed African workers are not hard to find. The Communist party is essentially a workers' party (though most of its leaders are middle class intellectuals) and as such, it is the only party in South Africa which concerns itself directly with the problems facing the working class. Solly Sachs explains some of these problems in his semi-autobiographical book on the history of the Garment Workers' Union:

He [the African male] must carry numerous passes and is liable to be stopped by any policeman, white or black, and be asked to produce them. Should one be missing, he is arrested and usually sent to gaol, as he cannot afford to pay the fine of £1 or £2. While seeking work he must have a work permit and, if he cannot find employment within a few days, he may be considered a vagrant. His permit may be extended, or he may be deported, not necessarily back to his home. If he wishes to avoid conviction he can accept work as a labourer for some white farmer. (1957:110)

In the face of these overwhelming pressures, it is understandable that the political rhetoric of the South African Communist Party elicited enthusiastic support from unskilled and semi-skilled victims of economic exploitation and political oppression. The Communists did not only promise black workers better working conditions and higher salaries, but also political freedom in a non-racial socialist state. They encouraged African workers to be actively involved in campaigns to fight the oppressive capitalist system. Understandably, these injunctions struck a responsive chord in Mokgatle's mind who was working as a delivery 'boy' for Cuthberts shoe company:

As time went by I found myself being attracted to their ideas, particularly since they did not promise us anything by waiting for it to come. Their frankness that we would have to do things ourselves if we wanted wrongs ended appealed to me most. They built within me a feeling of being someone who could do something with others

to achieve something for ourselves. (1990:198)

Apart from shaping his political future, the night school offered Mokgatlé an internationalist perspective from which to interpret political events at home: 'I had begun to read about events in other countries, trying to relate them to the events at home. I had become convinced that the way South Africa was ruled was influenced by events abroad'(p.197). Mokgatlé became a frequent visitor to the Left Book Club where he attended lectures on Communism and read books on a variety of political topics including Lenin's Selected Works and Problems of Leninism by Joseph Stalin. About this period of intellectual growth he writes:

Sometimes in the evenings when my deliveries of shoes were finished I used to attend lectures on trade unionism, politics, and social subjects at the Left Book Club by Sam Woolf, George Findlay, Franz Boshoff and others. *Moscow News* was one of the papers I used to read there, and from that came into contact with the Communist International Organisation's activities and its reports. They too widened my knowledge of world affairs. (1990:199)

Undoubtedly, Mokgatlé's acquaintance with the SACP afforded him the opportunity to broaden his mind and to look at the whole world as his home (p.227). Perhaps an unintended yet inescapable consequence of his liaison with Communists was his gradual alienation from the norms and values of his tribe back home. He seems to have been aware of the tension between tribal obligations such as looking after his family and marrying 'the right girl', and the demands of political involvement. Although he attended the open meetings of the ANC, the ICU and SACP, he deferred his decision to participate actively in any of these organisations. Apparently he understood that committing himself to a life of political activism would entail a renunciation of some of his values and roles as

a Tswana. As indicated above, Mokgatle had maintained links with the rural community of Phokeng through the network of 'homeboys' (and 'homegirls') and yearly visits to his homestead during Christmas holidays.

The death of Mokgatle's father in 1935 resulted in a temporary resolution of the conflict of allegiances alluded to above. He chose not to get involved in politics as this would certainly draw him away from his people. He decided to seek other ways of spending his leisure time apart from attending political meetings and visiting the Left Book Club. As he puts it:

Having buried my father I vowed that I was no longer going to worry about politics but would become a *true tribesman* and care for my mother and the animals father left us. (1990:204) (my emphasis)²⁶

As indicated in the above quoted statement, Mokgatle had a particular conception of the duties of the 'true tribesman'. As the only male child in the family, he had the responsibility of looking after his father's family and property. Involvement in politics would prevent him from fulfilling these family obligations. Taken at face value, the distinction between 'tribal duties' and the demands of political activity may seem artificial. However, a closer examination of the implications of active participation in politics, especially in the trade union movement will reveal that the two situations were relatively irreconcilable. A 'true tribesman' only went to the city to earn enough money to pay the bride price (*bogadi*) and perhaps buy oxen for farming purposes, but he never regarded the city as his 'home' and would not even contemplate settling permanently there. A study conducted by a social anthropologist as late as 1978 revealed that the concept of home had a very definite meaning for the Tswana. Out of seventy-four responses to the question quoted below, only one person said *she* would prefer to live and work in town:

Which of the following would you prefer, if you had both enough money and otherwise complete freedom to choose: to live in town (Gaborone) and work in a congenial, good-paying, steady job and live in a nice town-house, or would you prefer to live here(X) (or at the respondent's home) and earn a living by agriculture and cattle husbandry.(Alverson,1978:238)

Reasons given for this choice ranged from high crime rates in urban areas to the corrupting influence of city life. Obviously, the respondents were making an implicit comparison of city life with the tranquillity, intimacy and communalism of rural life. Mokgatle's situation might have been slightly different from that of the Tswanas of the 1970s, but he confronted a similar dilemma. For Mokgatle settling in the city as a full member of the Communist party would entail a *de facto* severance of ties with his family and community. Thus, in an attempt to retain his tribal identity, Mokgatle started erecting 'barriers between [himself] and politics' (p.205); these included girlfriends and dancing clubs. Despite his unwillingness to get involved in politics, local and international political events forced him to rethink his position. As he points out, it was mainly the local political situation in Marabastad which made him change his mind:

It was there at Marabastad that I decided to engage in politics. Many heartbreaking episodes were taking place around me. Not a single month passed without the police raiding Marabastad and other African locations searching for beer and passes. As a result many African men and women were arrested. (1990:210-11)

In 1941 the 30 year old Mokgatle officially joined the SACP and was subsequently elected to the party's Pretoria district committee. This crucial decision which marked a turning point in Mokgatle's life was an inevitable and logical consequence of his heightened political awareness, which did not allow

him to turn a blind eye to the suffering of his people both in their places of work and their residential areas. During the same year that Mokgatle joined the Communist party he married Nana Tlhogo, a girl from the township of Atteridgeville. The latter act was in deliberate defiance of the well-known practice of inter-marriage within the Bofokeng of Phokeng. That Mokgatle understood the full implications of his decision is shown in his initial reluctance to continue his relationship with Nana:

I began to try and avoid meeting her because I knew that with me a tribal man and she a town girl it would be difficult for us to marry. We tribal people still thought that townspeople had lost discipline, they were more influenced by money than by personal values. They in turn had developed fears of tribal people that they never married girls unless they were told to do so by their parents and that by and large they were still polygamists and would not be satisfied with one wife. There was a gulf between us. (1990:225)

It is interesting to note that at this stage in his life Mokgatle still regarded himself as a 'tribal man' who, as he puts it, had to comply with 'tribal ethics'(p.226). Obviously, his relatives did not approve of his decision to marry a 'townsgirl':

My letters to my sisters and relatives in Phokeng increased, and nearly every month I went to Phokeng to convince my relatives that I was not throwing myself into the sea to get drowned. One of the main reasons my people were not happy at my marrying a townsgirl was that they would lose me. She would keep me away from the tribe, and they could not see how I could prosper anywhere other than with them in the tribe. Even when I told them that I had grown beyond the tribe's boundaries, that I had broadened my mind and was looking on the whole world as my home, they only thought that I was mentally ill. (1990:227)

It was in 1943, two years after joining the South African Communist Party, that Mokgatle became a fully-fledged trade unionist when he was elected secretary of the Non-European Distributive Workers Union. From 1943 onwards he devoted his life to politics and seems to have deliberately ignored his familial and tribal obligations. Three incidents determined Mokgatle's fate namely, becoming a full member of the SACP, marrying a 'townsgirl' and the death of his parents. The demise of his parents meant that he was no longer answerable to anyone at home except for his sisters and a few relatives. Ironically, the death of Mokgatle's parents resulted in freedom from cultural restrictions, he could do as he pleased without fear of censure:

My parents were no longer alive, so I was in a stronger position to resist tribal ethics without risking accusations that I thought nothing of my parents' wishes that a tribal boy should marry a tribal girl so that she could be a trusted and loyal wife to him. (1990:226)

Mokgatle tells of his numerous encounters with employers and state bureaucrats when he had to represent workers in tribunals, hearings or in court. He soon realised that in the South African context the distinction between 'labour issues' and 'political issues' was artificial. Besides dealing with unfair dismissals and other issues which amounted to unfair labour practice on the part of the employers, he had to assist workers who were victims of curfew regulations and pass laws:

Nineteen-forty-eight dawned and found me still working alone trying to keep the spirit of trade unionism alive in Pretoria. It was an uphill struggle which needed patience and a strong mind. The struggle for more wages was becoming secondary, because African workers were hit hard by being refused permission by the bureau officials to seek work of their liking. Africans who had worked in Pretoria for many years but had left their families out in rural areas in the tribes found

that they lost their jobs, instead of being given a chance to look for a new job, their documents were stamped "refused entry" which meant that they should leave Pretoria never to return, My time was more taken up by pass complaints than by wage complaints. (1990:264)

It is worth noting that Mokgatle hardly gives the reader a hint about his family life. All we know is that he was married and had two children, Keitumetsi and Matshediso. This is a curious omission when viewed against Mokgatle's elaborate anecdotes about his parents and sisters in the early chapters of the autobiography. Perhaps this reticence on this issue has something to do with the apparently unresolved conflict between his roles as a husband and a father and his public obligations as a political activist. Mokgatle admits that he and his wife did not see eye to eye on political matters, but this is hardly an excuse for the omission of family life in the autobiography:

Although my wife was loyal to me, she never shared my convictions. She was always trying to pull me down, urging me to be like everyone else, and saying that I was making trouble for myself. (1990:329)

Mokgatle's success as a trade unionist and activist of the SACP was phenomenal. In 1948 with the help of Stephen Tefu, he formed an umbrella union which catered 'for all workers regardless of their place of employment' (p.264). This union became known as the African General Workers' Union. In most studies of South African Trade Unions published prior to 1970, Mokgatle's contribution to the formation of African trade unions is not mentioned (Roux, 1948; Davies, 1966; Horrell, 1969). This should not be taken to suggest that Mokgatle's role in the labour movement as described in his autobiography is exaggerated. These omissions point to a particular methodology in South African historiography

which tended to be structuralist in orientation and, as such, ignored 'characters' involved in the drama of history in favour of general trends involving groups. However, as I have shown, this omission of the subjective element in South African historiography has been rectified by social scientists most of whom are associated with the History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand (Bozzoli,1991; Logde, 1983, 1987; Hirson,1989)²⁷.

When the SACP was banned in 1950 Mokgatle's name was on the list of Communists. To him this was a form of acknowledgement by the state that he had made his mark in oppositional politics:

Towards September that year [1950], I received a letter from the liquidator of the Communist party, telling me that because I had not made representations to him he had put my name in the list of Communists he was compiling. I treasured the letter very much; I framed it and hung it in my house at Atteridgeville. I treasured it because the Communist party was outlawed, but its haters were recognising me as a Communist. I treasured it because to me it was admitted evidence by Malan's government that I was a fighter for freedom. (1990:287)

Mokgatle did not abandon his work nor did he desist from criticising the policies of the Nationalist party after the SACP had been outlawed in South Africa. He was subsequently arrested and after his release, banned from any public gathering or activity. With all the restrictions of the banning order, life in South Africa was no longer worthwhile for him. Using an affidavit he had written himself as a passport, Mokgatle left South Africa in 1954.

As I hope to have shown, in his autobiography Mokgatle posits a progressive and accumulative process of growth in political awareness which culminates in the

broadening of intellectual horizons as the autobiographer acquires more knowledge and understanding of his social environment. This acquisition of a new consciousness has been shown to be a consequence of a complex dialectical process involving the writer's will and the material as well as social circumstances in which the author found himself. Thus we have seen both conformity to and rebellion against the dictates of culture as Mokgatle attempted to define his social roles and to create an authentic identity for himself. The Autobiography therefore does not simply reflect the world views of rural and urban communities, but demonstrates ways in which the narrator-protagonist questions the validity of commonly-held ideas and attitudes. In a socio-critical reading of The Autobiography, the Goldmannian concept of world view emerges as a socially constructed phenomenon subject to the various forces of history. Self-identity has emerged as being in a constant state of flux and subject to the exigencies of culture, history and ideology. My reading of Mokgatle's life history has been guided by the need to demystify the idea of cultural conditioning as a major factor in personality formation. In The Autobiography we have seen that both the individual will and the external social as well as material circumstances play a role in shaping self-identity. Perhaps the most accurate articulation of the relationship between the individual consciousness and external reality is that given by the social anthropologist Paul Reissman:

Because people *are* often guided by rules and customs, and because a people's customs can be systematised and compared with those of others, it has been common to think that our systematisations of people's norms correspond to an actually existing entity -"the culture" -that exerts force on people such that their behaviour comes out homogenous and predictable. Works that give us a sense, albeit imperfect, of how life is experienced and lived from within the mind of a person, however, make us realise that to view culture as acting

on a person is too simplistic. We cannot any longer take for granted that we know why any person is doing something when his action happens to coincide the supposed dictates of his or her culture. (1986:103)

In Mokgatle's autobiography the relationship between tribal life and city life which is commonly regarded as antithetical is shown to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Thus it is not incongruous for a modernised and 'educated' political activist like Mokgatle to conceive of his daily activities as being influenced by his ancestors. In Mokgatle's book the tribal community of Phokeng is not presented as a monolithic aggregate of people with rigid cultural values, but is shown to be subject to external influences such as Western religion, education as well as pressures of the new cash-based economy. Mokgatle distinguishes between the younger generation of his time and the traditional Bafokeng of the nineteenth century whose cultural history is described in the first twelve chapters of his book. In chronicling the history of tribal customs and traditions, the narrator traces the evolution of social consciousness from the golden age of agrarian self-sufficiency in the nineteenth century to the money-based economy of the turn of the century. The book is important therefore both as a personalised version of history and for what it tells us about the social formations alluded to above and the internal dynamics of change within them.

What I hope to have demonstrated in my socio-critical reading of Mokgatle's autobiography is that he does not entirely renounce the tribal value system in which he was brought up, but selects from the unwritten moral code of his tribe those values he considers useful in furthering his goals in the radically altered environment of the city. Thus it is by reinterpreting the traditions of the past in the light of present political realities and making the necessary adjustments that

Mokgatle can begin to make sense of his life as a politically-aware city dweller.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERAL-CHRISTIAN VISION IN ALAN PATON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES.

Born in 1903 in Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton is one of South Africa's most distinguished writers. Guy Butler has summed up Paton's personal qualities as follows:

Alan Paton was a human trinity whose three persons are sometimes difficult to see as one man. The world at large knows him as the writer of "Cry, the Beloved Country"; many South Africans think of him as the tireless critic of Apartheid; while to those who were privileged to get closer to him, he was the devout Christian layman who sometimes thundered like a prophet or prayed, silent as a saint. (1988:6)

Paton's claim to fame as a writer and sensitive observer of social life rests mainly on the phenomenal success of his first novel Cry, the Beloved Country, published in 1948. Concerning the unusual success and enduring appeal of Paton's first published novel Edward Callan has written:

Rarely has a first novel by an unknown writer achieved such wide popularity or succeeded in retaining so large a measure of that popularity with the passage of time. (1982:1)

In Kontakion for You Departed Paton describes the themes of his first novel and comments on the implications of its success for his private life:

It is a song of love for one's far distant country, it is informed with longing for that land where they shall not hurt or destroy in all that holy mountain, for that unattainable and ineffable land where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying... It is the story of the beauty and terror of human life, ... Just how good it is, I do not know and do not care. All I know is that it changed our lives. It

opened the doors of the world to us, and we went through. (1969:82)

As a sensitive expose' of social injustice, the book won Paton numerous admirers and critics and firmly established his reputation as a writer motivated by a strong moral conscience ¹. As I hope to show in my discussion of Paton's autobiographies, morality and political pragmatism are the cornerstones of Paton's liberal philosophy which, in turn, is grounded in firm religious principles of self-sacrifice, compassion and tolerance. That the publication of Cry, the Beloved Country had important consequences for Paton's career as a writer and politician is not an exaggeration. While reinforcing his status as a gifted writer, the success of the book also paved the way for Paton's entry into the world of politics. As Tony Morphet has remarked:

Towards the Mountain identifies the publication of the novel [Cry] as one of the seminal events of his [Paton's] life but does not give to it the transformative character that I am suggesting. I suspect that before the book he was one person and after it another, and that all his subsequent work develops out of the central experience of writing it. Seen from the most critical perspective Paton may appear, post-1948, as imprisoned within the structure of "answers" that were created out of the novel, not so much by himself as by his immediate receiving audience, the academics, clerics, editors and politicians who constituted the old liberal establishment. (1983:2)

Although Paton did not offer any practical solutions or 'answers' to the political problems facing South Africa at that time, he nevertheless provided an incisive diagnosis of socio-political problems facing South Africa which touched the moral consciences of readers all over the world. Significantly, the book's appearance coincided with the victory of the Nationalist Party in the 1948 general election for whites. In Towards the Mountain Paton identifies this crucial episode in the

history of South Africa as one of the events which had a long-lasting influence on his life. In a review of Towards the Mountain David Adey makes the following comments on the significance of 1948 in South African history:

Paradoxically, the year which set Paton free to write set the majority of South Africans to writhe, their convulsions marked by Sharpeville, Soweto, the Biko affair, coupled with bannings, censorship and unmitigating repression. (1982:51)

The new Afrikaner-dominated government was to pursue a policy of racial segregation and political repression which would lead Paton into active participation in oppositional politics as a prominent member of the South African Liberal Party (LP) formed after the National Party's second election victory in 1953. On a personal level, the publication of his first novel which became an instant bestseller offered Paton the financial freedom he needed to devote his time to creative writing. He resigned from his post as the principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, a position he had held for thirteen years. It is worth noting, however, that nothing Paton wrote afterwards could match the penetrating vision of his first novel. Apart from being the author of a legendary South African novel, Paton will be remembered for his versatility as well as for the inexhaustible moral impulse which is the source of his creativity. He was at home in all the established literary genres: to the conventional categories of narrative fiction, poetry and drama, he added biography, autobiography, journalism and criticism. All his writings - which include novels, short stories, plays, biographies and essays - have as their overarching theme, the lack of tolerance and understanding between people of different races in apartheid South Africa.

Paton's two volumes of autobiography Towards the Mountain (1980), and Journey

Continued (1988), offer a comprehensive, chronologically structured account of the author's 'journey' from his humble beginnings in Pietermaritzburg at the turn of the century to the status of a world renowned writer and politician from 1948 until his death in 1988. The first volume, written when the author was in his seventies, chronicles the story of Paton's childhood in 'colonial' Pietermaritzburg, family life characterised by ethical stringency, education at Pietermaritzburg College and Natal University College, a short teaching career at white high schools and, finally, his headship of an institution for African delinquent boys at Diepkloof (on the fringes of Johannesburg). Written in the mode of literary autobiography, Towards the Mountain is essentially the story of Paton's physical, moral and intellectual growth. However, in an important sense, it is also an account of how and why Paton came to write Cry, the Beloved Country, an event which was to have radical consequences for his career as well as his role as a fighter for non-racial democracy².

The second volume, Journey Continued focuses on Paton's life as an established writer but more specifically on his involvement in the activities of the LP. From its inception in 1953 until its forced dissolution in 1968, Paton was actively involved in the activities of the LP which included non-violent protest, raising money for the defence of people who had fallen foul of the law, writing articles for journals and periodicals, and giving speeches to local and international audiences. In Journey Continued the ageing writer-politician offers a personalised view of South African history in general and that of the LP in particular, from 1948 up until the dissolution of the LP in 1968. Owing to its overtly historical perspective and its focus on political events and personalities, the second volume reads more like a political memoir than a 'proper' autobiography³.

As a result of racial divisions which pervaded almost all spheres of life in apartheid South Africa, autobiographies written by black and white writers tended to exhibit markedly different styles and themes. The extent to which self-conception is shaped by external social, political and historical forces is clearly observable in these fairly distinct thematic and structural differences between the autobiographies of black writers and those of their white counterparts. While the former invariably recount their struggles against debilitating social milieux, the latter tend to celebrate the nurturing effect of family and community on the growing consciousness of the writer. Black autobiographers focus, almost exclusively, on the effects of racial subjugation on their communities as well as on their personalities as individuals. They write about the experience of growing up in impoverished urban residential areas set aside for blacks such as Marabastad, Vrededorp, Sophiatown and District Six and of the struggle to escape from these materially deprived areas. While white autobiographers take the myth of a happy childhood for granted, black authors tend to dwell on circumstances which made their childhoods abnormal rather than normal and happy. As pointed out in the Introduction, South African black autobiography exhibits a communal orientation not be found in autobiographies by South African white writers. As Chabani Manganyi has noted:

Quite clearly, when a black writer writes autobiography it will centre around his own life. Yet this life will intrigue us not only in terms of the ups and downs recounted, nor the subtleties of personality but in terms of *how this "autobiography" is a biography of the people.* (1981:59) (emphasis in the original)

It may be argued, therefore, that white autobiography in its focus on individual achievement and talent, displays a preoccupation with 'bourgeois individualism'.

It has become a critical commonplace to describe black autobiographical writing as political or historical rather than personal and private, and to view the autobiographies of white writers as concerned, in essence, with the fortunes of the individual. A typical critical comment on this issue is that offered by Sonja Bahn:

It makes little difference whether one takes Paton, Millin, Campell or Plomer and compares them with Abrahams, Mphahlele, Rive, Hutchinson or Modisane. The spirit in each work may be different but basically the Non-European has to flee, escape, from the country to gain a certain self-dignity whereas the European can remain with dignity; both may be against apartheid but only one side really suffers it. (1984:27)

Generalisations of this nature have a certain deceptive simplicity, but on the whole Bahn's assessment is fairly accurate. However, as I pointed out in chapter one, this distinction (between 'black' and 'white' autobiography) is only applicable to literary autobiography and not to political autobiography which generally exhibits a pronounced preoccupation with the public (political) than with the private and idiosyncratic. Where does Paton fit into this picture? I would argue that Paton's autobiographies straddle the racial divide sketched above: whereas the first volume is a typical narrative of growth with its domestic focus and its exploration of individuality, the second volume is more of a political memoir than a conventional autobiography and is thus closer in orientation to the life histories of black writers. Like most autobiographies following the classical formative model of St Augustine, Wordsworth and Rousseau, Towards the Mountain conforms to the usual pattern of literary autobiography described by Susanna Egan as depicting 'the myth of paradise lost (the usual "shape" childhood takes), the heroic journey (youth), conversion (characteristic of maturity) and confession' (1984:4).

In the previous chapter we saw how Mokgatle defines his identity in relation to the ideologically constructed concept of the tribe. In the course of self-definition within the context of the changing material and cultural conditions of tribal life Mokgatle's self-identity emerges as a product of a disjuncture between his desire to conform to his tribe's traditional value system and the opposing impulse to question its efficacy and relevance in the face of new political realities. Like Mokgatle's, Paton's sense of self will be shown to be partly dependent on the dynamics of the world view of his social group while displaying certain distinctive individual qualities.

Like its predecessors, this chapter examines the social construction and expression of selfhood in the mode of autobiography. In analyzing Paton's two volumes of autobiography I shall focus on the ways in which he projects himself as a writer, politician and moralist whose vision of his private and public roles was shaped by Christian doctrines of obedience to authority (both secular and divine) and an outgoing concern for the welfare of others. Paton's autobiographies provide us with the best example of the dialectical relationship between the private domain of personal convictions and the public sphere of political action. Consequently, the motivations and choices of Paton the public figure cannot be understood without reference to the deeply religious private man. As Stephen Watson has argued, Paton's reputation as a writer and sensitive social commentator rests chiefly on his 'moral authority', a personal philosophy which finds expression in his creative writing and political views:

Whether he is dealing with his two marriages, the ill-fated history of the Liberal Party, or the most blinkered of reactions to incidents in recent South African history, there is always a larger design that remains in focus. This is both his own inner history as a believing

Christian, journeying towards God, and his own, often sorely-trying, faith and hope that justice will prevail in South Africa, ... In other words, his journey is as much an ethical, religious one, a pilgrim's progress and constant battle between personal good and personal evil, as it is a political saga. And this does more than just colour his writing; *it informs it at the deepest level.* (1988:105)(my emphasis)

As I hope to show, Paton's spiritual journey is explained and defended in his two autobiographical books. Whereas in the sphere of creative writing this moral standpoint gives Paton's writings an idealistic and moralistic slant, in the domain of public life it manifests itself in his (and the L P's) respect for the 'Rule of Law' and a belief in the virtues of evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary political change. Paton's religious beliefs and principles are consistently shown to take precedence over his political convictions. The latter are shaped by the former in a fundamental and profound way. Paton found a comfortable political home in the LP because the latter's principles accorded with his own understanding of the role of the Christian in the perilous and conflict-ridden domain of politics. As David Papineau puts it:

Paton's political life coincided with the life of the South African Liberal Party. He was a founding vice-president when the Liberal Party was formed in 1953, and he typified the membership, as an English-speaking white who felt it his Christian duty to oppose apartheid. (1988:1043)

In examining the content and structure of Paton's autobiographies I shall attempt to account for homologies between the values and interests of a particular social group (liberals) within the broader South African society and the views expressed in Paton's autobiographies. I hope to demonstrate that Paton unwaveringly clung to a conservative and idealist version of liberalism in the face of criticism from members of radical political organisations such as the Congress of Democrats and

the African National Congress. It was possible for Paton to maintain this stance because his understanding of liberalism had a strong religious foundation. I shall also argue that Paton's upbringing and education had prepared him for his role as an active participant in the promotion of liberal values in South Africa. Russel J. Linnemann confirms this view in his largely dismissive essay on Paton's writing:

Even though Paton's vaguely Utopian political philosophy might seem painfully and lamentably inadequate to confront the monstrous evils of the contemporary South African world ... it is easy to see why he was drawn to it. By the time he was fifteen, the western liberal democracies had won the war to make the world safe for democracy. Almost simultaneously, Paton, who studied at Maritzburg College and Natal University College, became involved in the Students' Christian Organisation, a group that blended religious ideals (frequently with a methodist bent) and considerable degree of political liberalism. (1984:91)

People who shared Paton's world vision tended to belong to a particular class, to be relatively well-educated, and to display a high degree of moral sensitivity in their conduct and beliefs. In terms of Lucien Goldmann's theoretical model, liberalism may be seen as a distinctive world view shared by the 'transindividual subject' of middle-class English-speaking white intellectuals. Paul Rich's description of this category within the South African social formation suggests that its members have a common social background and moral outlook:

South African liberalism has for the most part been the political expression of a small body of white educationalists, philanthropists, missionaries and social workers who have been concerned to alleviate the harsh economic and social consequences of industrialisation in a racially divided society. (1984:123)

Thus a Goldmannian reading of Paton's autobiographies offers the reader direct

access to one of the most coherent and consistently presented interpretations of the constellation of beliefs, attitudes and values which constitute South African liberalism. Whereas it is true that a study of Paton's novels could serve a similar purpose, I believe that the 'factual' and 'historical' nature of autobiography affords a less mediated and thus more explicit expression of the ideology of liberalism in the South African context than narrative fiction. As the central thesis of this study is that autobiography offers us an *explicitly* articulated account of world visions peculiar to particular social groups, I shall attempt to relate Paton's personal or idiosyncratic beliefs and values to those of the white English-speaking intellectuals. As Francis Mulhern has observed, Goldmann's theory explicitly privileges collective awareness over individual consciousness:

A world vision encompasses the complex of ideas, feelings and aspirations that defines the consciousness of a social class. The ultimate source of a literary text, then, is not the "I" of its author, but the "we" of the social class whose world vision it embodies - as Goldmann was later to put it, literary creation is the work of a "transindividual subject". (1975:36-7)

However, Goldmann's model does not simply collapse individual consciousness into the surrounding collective awareness of the 'transindividual subject', nor does it deny the existence of individual interpretations of social reality. Instead Goldmann merely emphasises the importance of ideology and material conditions in shaping both individual and commonly-held views about external reality. In the creative and interpretive act of autobiographical writing it is the individual who selects, organises and interprets the salient features of his group's vision of the world. While it may not be entirely accurate to speak of the English-speaking intelligentsia as a class in the Marxist sense of that term, this social group constitutes an identifiably distinct category within the broad spectrum of the white

middle-class. Following the orthodox Marxist distinction between the economic base and ideological superstructure, Goldmann regards socio-economic conditions as the major determinant of class position:

It [the world vision] is a system of thought which, in certain circumstances, imposes itself on groups of men (sic), in similar social and economic circumstances - that is to say, certain social classes. Few individuals embody it totally, but each does so sufficiently for them to constitute a community of feelings, thoughts and actions which unite these particular men and oppose them to other social classes. (1975:40)

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, South African autobiographers often present the ideologies of their social groups or classes as solutions to the problems of race and contending national aspirations. In Tell Freedom Peter Abrahams suggests the adoption of a transcendent liberal-humanism whereas Mokgatle, as a working class activist, proposes a proletarian socialist system as a viable political solution to the racial problems of South Africa. As we shall see, for Paton the solution to South Africa's political problems is to be found in the application of the liberal ideals of equality, freedom and justice. For Paton these values could only have validity when interpreted within a broader Christian-humanitarian framework.

Paul Rich (1993) has shown that South African liberalism of the post World War II period (common society liberalism) was a 'moralistic' political ideology given theoretical respectability by party ideologues such as R.A.F. Hoernle, Edgar Brookes and others. According to Rich, liberalism 'served as the moral conscience of the English speaking intelligentsia' (1993:6). Jordan Ngubane, an influential member of the LP comments as follows on the 'unassailable' principles of the LP

in his book, An African Explains Apartheid:

[T]he Liberal Party exerted a very powerful gravitational pull on moral grounds, where its principles were unassailable. It was showing that non-racial collaboration works, and it debunked the Nationalist doctrine that the black man is not yet ready for participation in the government of his country. (1963:198)

The idea of 'morality' as an integral part of the liberal philosophy is also confirmed by less charitable commentators on South African liberalism such as Gail M. Gerhart:

Like the proponents of trusteeship, liberals have often proceeded from a paternalistic view of race relations, but they have also been moved by *religious or humanitarian* biases to feel that the black wards of the white man deserve a free and fair chance to "grow up" and become the white man's equal. Whites, in fact have a duty to promote the black man's assimilation, through education and through the extension of political rights appropriate to his level of acculturation. (1978:7) (my emphasis)

My analysis of Paton's autobiographies will therefore focus on the humanitarian or moral aspect of South African liberalism. My aim is to show that liberal humanism and the Christian religion have a complex ideological relationship and that this relationship is not, as it may appear at first sight, one of an accidental convergence of interests.

* * *

Paton begins the first volume of his autobiography with an informative and detailed account of his childhood in the city of Pietermaritzburg during the early part of the twentieth century. This was before South Africa became a Union, and

the Natal Province with Pietermaritzburg as its capital had a distinctively British character. From his selection and presentation of experiences, events and episodes which characterised his family life during this period it is evident that Paton believes that his upbringing had a profound influence on his beliefs and attitudes as an adult. As he remarks in the autobiographical tract 'The Case History of a Pinky':

...I think that the Christian character of his home had a great influence on Pinky [Paton]. That does not mean that he became a good man. To be a Christian does not mean to be a good man, it means to want to be and to try to be a good man and sometimes to try less hard than others. (1975:237)

Like most literary autobiographers,⁴ Paton presents his childhood self as having been particularly sensitive to the beauty of nature and unusually responsive to written and oral stories. The autobiography opens with a graphic account of the scenic beauty of the city of Pietermaritzburg which Paton describes as a 'paradise'(1980:1). His evocations are reminiscent of Wordsworth's effusions about the munificent and spiritually redemptive beauty of Nature:

My reaction to nature was intense.

I cannot describe my early response to the beauty of hill and stream and tree as anything less than ecstasy. A tree on the horizon, a line of trees, the green blades of the first grass of spring, showing up against the black ashes of the burnt hills, the scarlet of the fire-lilies among the black and the green, the grass birds that whirred up at one's feet, all these things filled me with an emotion beyond describing. (1980:4)

However, it was in the context of the family environment that Paton was taught the most important moral lessons which were to guide him throughout his rich and

varied life as a writer and politician. As members of a Christadelphian sect, his parents were deeply religious people who wanted to keep 'their children unspoiled from the world' (1980:13). Ironically, in spite of their aloofness from the affairs of the world, the Christadelphians regarded indifference to the suffering of their fellow human beings as the greatest offence of all (1980:14). Thus, Paton's concern for the welfare of others and his rejection of political authoritarianism may have their origins in his strict upbringing. While he learned some positive lessons from the teachings of the Christadelphians, his father's autocratic behaviour taught him to hate any form of tyranny:

The thing that I resented bitterly about my home was my father's authoritarianism, maintained by the use of physical force. His use of physical force never achieved anything except useless obedience. But it had two important consequences. One was that my feelings towards him were almost those of hate. The other was that I grew up with an abhorrence of authoritarianism, especially the authoritarianism of the State, and a love of liberty, especially liberty within the State. (1980:14)

These observations reveal an analytical and distanced authorial perspective afforded by hindsight as the connection between domestic authoritarianism embodied in James Paton and the state violence of the post-1948 era could only be perceived and articulated by the mature autobiographer. Paton makes no attempt to blur the distinction between the perceiving younger self and analytical older self. However, it is worth noting that it is the latter's perspective which predominates in the book. Consequently, a large portion of the book is devoted to 'explaining' the impressions and attitudes of the childhood self. Paton's biographer, Peter Alexander, has suggested that Paton downplays his father's tendency to use physical violence on his children:

Although his writing about his father appears completely frank and largely objective, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Alan Paton played down the brutal aspects of his father's behaviour... He carefully and consciously downplayed his father's less attractive characteristics, for he took the Fifth Commandment very much to heart. (1994:9)

In my view, Paton's portrayal of his father in Towards the Mountain has very little to do with the Fifth Commandment and a lot to do with the adult autobiographer's perspective at the time of writing. Instead of dwelling on his father's 'cruelty' Paton attempts to account for his irritable disposition in terms of his (Paton's) maturer understanding of his father's personality:

As I grow older I am able to understand my father better... I am sure that his autocracy at home was a compensation for his diffidence abroad. I do not know all the causes of this diffidence, but undoubtedly his lack of professional status was one of them. (1980:18)

Thus in Towards the Mountain, Paton's younger self emerges as a character distanced in time and consciousness from the mature writer yet exhibiting the essential defining qualities of the latter in embryonic form. It is, however, not only the desire to reproduce a faithful portrait of his childhood self which shapes and directs Paton's narrative, but also the need to account for the adult writer's beliefs and convictions with reference to the formative experiences of childhood. William L. Howarth's conception of autobiography as a self-portrait fits Paton's project accurately:

A self-portrait is ... uniquely transactional. No longer distinctly separate, the artist-model must alternately pose and paint. He *composes* the composition, in both senses of that verb; his costume

and setting form the picture and also depict its form. In a mirror he studies reversed images, familiar to himself but not to others. (1980:85)

The 'artist-model' in Paton notices contradictions in his younger self which find ready explanations and rationalisations in the views and beliefs of the adult autobiographer. For instance, the paradox of the co-existence of qualities of docility and stubbornness in the childhood self is described at length to illuminate the older Paton's obedience to divine and secular authority and his 'stubborn' opposition to social injustice:

I shall have in the course of this story to develop the paradox of my docility and my obduracy, my obedience to - even my fear of - authority and my rebelliousness against anything I felt to be unjust. Both the docility and the obduracy, both the fear and the rebelliousness, were in later life - much later life - to disappear, and to give way to or even perhaps be progenitors of a certain unshakeableness of will, the very contemplation of which makes me marvel when I think of my childhood. For if in this case the child simply maturing was father of the man, certain qualities were not discernible. (1980:19)

In the political terrain this respect for both secular and divine authority was to translate itself into an exaggerated deference for the Rule of Law. In most of his writings Paton accords the Rule of Law an almost sacrosanct and transcendental role. This is particularly evident in the court scenes in Cry, the Beloved Country. This may explain Paton's difficulty willfully to disobey the law even when circumstances such as state-sponsored violence warranted such a step. Significantly, respect for the law was also one of the cornerstones of the philosophy of the Liberal Party as articulated in its principle of employing 'constitutional means' in opposing the unjust laws of the Nationalist government.

In Save the Beloved Country Paton explains his conception of the Rule of Law as follows:

If one is to devote one's life to the pursuit of a more just order of society, one of one's highest moral values will be justice. One of the noblest concepts of sinful man is the Rule of Law. By consenting to the rule of law he ensured that baser instincts and impulses of his own nature would be continually held in check by the higher. He yielded the tasks of trial and judgement, and if necessary, punishment, into the hands of an authority which was to be higher than himself. That authority was the court of law, (1989:238)

Thus in Towards the Mountain we see the liberal values and beliefs of the mature Paton in their incipient stage. It would seem that Paton's intention is to present his political philosophy, which also happens to be shared by a distinct social group within the South African social structure, as the logical outcome of his upbringing in a religious family. As he himself points out, 'the child... became the father of the man'(1980:19). Another noticeable childhood preference in Paton's autobiography which has a tangential bearing on his political views but which is linked directly to his writing career, is his fascination with the world of imaginative writing. He points out that his love of story telling is traceable to the stories of the Old Testament he listened to at home. Most creative writers who happen to write autobiographies in old age tend to see their creativity as intimately connected with their passion for stories in their childhood. Paton's experience in this regard is no exception:

These childhood years, which were characterised by an intense response to nature, now [when he started attending school] witnessed an intense response to the world of books. (1980:25-26)

As I have indicated, Paton does not simply record his childhood perceptions but comments explicitly or implicitly on their significance in shaping his personal philosophy as an adult. He winds up the account of his childhood years in Pietermaritzburg with a short commentary which, again, serves to illuminate the connection between undifferentiated childhood impressions and the enlightened consciousness of the adult writer:

I can only suppose that it was a happy childhood except for one thing, and that was the authoritarian and often arbitrary rule of my father, which my mother tempered when she was able. But for three things I am grateful - the opportunity to walk the hills of Pietermaritzburg, to know stories and noble passages of the Bible, and to enter the world of words and books. (1980:27)

In Paton's depiction of his childhood years we see what Susanna Egan has described as the 'paradisiacal sanctuary' according to which childhood is presented as a 'period of peace, safety, and rich sensations of beauty before he [the autobiographer] is forced out into the world' (1984:4). As Egan (1984:3,4) has shown, the presentation of childhood as a period of emotional security and a heightened sensitivity to natural beauty is a conventional narrative strategy in literary autobiography.

Thus before venturing into the world of higher education at Pietermaritzburg College and, later, at Natal University College, the moral foundations of Paton's liberal views were steadily taking shape. At University he was to discover that there were other young men whose religious backgrounds and moral principles were similar to his own. Perhaps the most significant formative experience in Paton's youth was his friendship with these students who shared his Christian zeal at Natal University College where he spent five years as a student. His circle of

friends included Reginald Pearse, Cyril Armitage and Neville Nutall all of whom were members of the Students' Christian Association. Paton subsequently rejected the doctrinaire and rigid teachings of the Christadelphians as he became increasingly drawn to the exemplary conduct of the members of the interdenominational Students' Christian Association. While at University Paton met Railton Dent, son of a Methodist missionary, whom he describes, perhaps with characteristic hyperbole, as 'the only human being for whom I ever felt some kind of worship' (1980:58). Of this profound influence, he writes:

He did not make me into a good man, that would have been too much. But he taught me one thing, the theme of which will run right through this book, ... that life must be used in the service of a cause greater than oneself. This can be done by a Christian for two reasons: one is obedience to his Lord, the other is purely pragmatic, namely that one is going to miss the meaning of life if one doesn't. (1980:59)

As Paton rightly points out, the theme of self-sacrifice runs through both volumes of his autobiography. It is perhaps the failure to appreciate the source of this benevolent spirit which has led some critics to criticise Paton for what they see as an inherent sentimentality and idealism in his beliefs. For Paton this world is in an irremediably fallen state, and though this is by no means a call to apathy and indifference, an appreciation of this fact alerts human beings to their limited capacity for self-redemption.

Although it would not be entirely accurate to describe Towards the Mountain as 'conversion autobiography' in the tradition of St Augustine's Confessions, Paton does refer to a number of situations and people who 'converted' him into a new or better state of moral consciousness. His constant use of the adjective 'profound'

suggests the depth of the spiritual and emotional significance of these redemptive encounters. In his account of significant formative experiences he singles out Railton Dent and Jan Hofmeyr as having had a 'profound' influence on his moral outlook particularly with regard to the social obligations of a committed Christian. From Hofmeyr Paton learned that the apparently idealist principles of liberal Christianity could be applied in practical situations. As Edward Callan remarks:

Paton admired Hofmeyr's championing of the liberal spirit. But even more, he admired Hofmeyr's determination to act in public life in accordance with his conviction of human brotherhood - a difficult and courageous posture to adopt in a society where so many were convinced that it was God who had set the races of man apart, and where it was easy to ridicule any such concept as "brotherhood". (1968:13)

A large section of Towards the Mountain is devoted to the thirteen years that Paton spent at Diepkloof Reformatory as its Principal. This period was without a doubt the most significant in Paton's life as it shaped his moral vision and sharpened his political awareness in significant ways. Working with young African delinquent boys and predominantly Afrikaner subordinates opened his eyes to the reality of racial prejudice and its effect in the social life of the African communities. The boys of Diepkloof Reformatory came from all over South Africa and from their life-stories Paton learned of the harsh social conditions under which black South Africans were forced to live. In 'The Case History of A Pinky' Paton describes at length the effect of this experience in shaping his political awareness:

For the first time in his [Paton's] life - he was now 32 - he saw South Africa as it was... during those years at Diepkloof Reformatory he began to understand the kind of world in which Black People had to

live, struggle and die. I won't say that he overcame all racial fear, but I will say that he overcame all racial hatred and prejudice.(1975:238-9)

Characteristically, Paton approached the task of transforming the Diepkloof 'prison' into a rehabilitation and educational centre with zeal and enthusiasm:

I had come to Diepkloof believing that freedom was the supreme reformatory instrument, yet most of white South Africa believed that a reformatory was a place where you sent trouble makers to get them out of the way for a while. (1980:148)

With the approval and assistance his friend and mentor Hofmeyr who had advised him to apply for the position of headship, Paton soon transformed the foul-smelling cells of Diepkloof Reformatory into places fit for human habitation. Believing as he did in freedom coupled with responsibility, he allowed some boys to visit their parents or relatives if their behaviour merited this favour. After six months Paton's daring reforms were beginning to bear visible fruit:

The atmosphere was changing from one of grimness to one of almost gaiety, and a very industrious kind of gaiety. The closed dormitories were no longer there to reproach us. The morning stench had gone. Typhoid fever was going. Small boys did not any longer tremble when one approached them. (1980:181)

However, what is significant for the purposes of this study about the Diepkloof experience in Paton's life is that he was, almost by accident, involved in the humanitarian social upliftment of Africans that the Christian liberals of the early twentieth century had engaged in at missionary establishments such as Lovedale, Morija and Marianhill. As Callan points out, Paton's social conscience was adequately developed for him to see his task at Diepkloof within the broader

socio-political context of his time and not merely from a narrow 'philanthropic' perspective:

Although, as Principal of Diepkloof, his speciality was the care and rehabilitation of African delinquents, Paton could not separate the causes of African crime from the general malaise of society, nor could he see any hope for eliminating crime among Africans unless the whole social structure based on prevailing racial attitudes underwent reform. (1968:19)

Having grown up in the culturally secluded British province of Natal, Paton was keen to learn the way of life of other South African ethnic and racial groups. As a young man he had always believed that the Afrikaner and white English-speaking South Africans could live together harmoniously in spite of their differences which had culminated in the Anglo Boer war . There were many Afrikaner clergymen and academics who shared this vision of peaceful co-existence. Paton had taken the trouble to learn the Afrikaans language with the hope of gaining a better understanding of the culture and way of life of his Afrikaner compatriots. This was another practical expression of the philosophy of brotherhood which has its origins in Christian doctrines of neighbourly love and tolerance. As he explains in The Land and the People of South Africa:

I am a white English-speaking South African, born in the largely English-speaking Province of Natal. In childhood I never heard any Afrikaans spoken, but learned at home to feel sympathy for the language and cultural struggle of the Afrikaner people; and later learned to speak the language itself, studied its literature, and the history of its people. All these attempts to appreciate and to understand were strengthened by religious motives (Callan, 1968:11).

Thus when in 1938 the Afrikaners organised the celebration of the Centenary of the Great Trek Paton was more than eager to join in the festivities. However, the event turned out to be nothing more than a celebration of the narrow ethnocentric Afrikaner nationalism which showed little tolerance towards English-speaking South Africans not to mention black South Africans. While taking a shower before the official opening of the proceedings Paton, who was sporting an impressive symbolic beard, was asked by an Afrikaner whether he had seen the crowds and when he said 'yes' the young Afrikaner went on to say, 'Now we will knock the hell into the English' (1980:209). This casual and unexpected remark alerted Paton to the political significance of this apparently innocuous celebratory event:

The young man was not expressing the official view of the Centenary officials, but his attitude was widely shared. The most notable characteristics of this immense gathering were its fervour and its exclusiveness. The theme of every meeting was Afrikanerdom, its glory, its struggles, its griefs, its achievements. (1980:209)

What Paton was witnessing was the emergence of exclusive Afrikaner nationalism which was to propel the Nationalist Party into victory in the 1948 election. He returned home a disillusioned yet politically wiser person than before. The introspective self-questioning which followed this event opened Paton's eyes to the precarious position of the English-speaking South Africans in the ethnically divided South African society of that time:

What I had done in good faith and such good will turned to ashes. I wanted only that the celebration should come to an end. It was a lonely and terrible experience for any English-speaking South African who had gone there to rejoice in this Afrikaner festival. (1980:210)

Perhaps the most important consequence of this event was that Paton began to appreciate the inherent incompatibility of chauvinistic nationalism with liberal values, as well as the importance of his own politically and culturally defined identity as an English-speaking white South African:

Many English-speaking South Africans were shocked by the revelation of the depth of and intensity of the new Afrikaner nationalism. But they were frightened also. They were apprehensive of what a triumphant nationalism might do to their *security and traditions*. (1980:212) (my emphasis)

One of the traditions that would be placed in jeopardy by this exclusive and potentially violent nationalism of the Afrikaners was that of egalitarianism, one of the cornerstones of British liberalism. In spite of being anti-Nationalist, Paton maintained his friendship with enlightened Afrikaner intellectuals and clergymen who shared his vision of a non-racial and democratic South Africa. Hofmeyr, the Afrikaner liberal whose progressive philosophy Paton tried to emulate had offered the most eloquent expression of the liberal position regarding the so-called 'Native question':

As long as we continue to apply a double standard in South Africa to determine our attitudes towards ... European and non-European on different ethical bases, to assign to Christian doctrine a significance which varies with the colour of a man's skin we suffer as a nation from what Plato would have called the lie in the soul - and the curse of Iscariot may yet be our fate for our betrayal of the Christian doctrine which we profess (Callan, 1968:14).

For Paton the Centenary celebrations became one of the many revelatory 'conversion' situations in his 'journey' towards a true grasp of the nature of race

relations in South Africa. This was a period of acute self-doubt and introspection which necessitated a reconsideration of his allegiances and personal philosophy:

Now having rejected Afrikaner nationalism, I went in quest of a new nationalism that would be based on the love of one's land, though many would argue, and not without foundation, that a common land cannot compete with a common language, a common culture, a common history, as a binding force. Nevertheless, foolishly or not, that is what I went in quest of. (1980:212)

What Paton expresses here is the guiding philosophy of the liberal vision of society which transcends linguistic, cultural and historical barriers. As Martin Rubin has noted with regard to this incident:

He [Paton] was deeply repelled by the ugly manifestations of Nationalist hatred he encountered and this was an important influence on the development of his patriotism that included all the peoples of South Africa, whatever language they spoke or whatever the colour of their skin.(1983:262)

In the Centenary affair we see the beginnings of a political philosophy based on humane principles and ideas rather than narrow ethnocentric considerations. Ironically, Paton's earnest attempt to transcend his own ethnic limitations as a 'colonial Natalian' had brought him face to face with an even more sinister form of national exclusiveness:

It is an irony that it was my sympathy for the renaissance of Afrikanerdom that enabled me to escape from the narrow British nationalism of God, King and Empire, only to find that Afrikaner nationalism was just as narrow. I realised at the Monument that one would be acceptable to Afrikaner nationalism only if one wholly supported its political aims, and to do that I had no wish or intention.(1980:211)

intention.(1980:211)

Although the section dealing with Paton's years as Principal of Diepkloof Reformatory focuses on both the public and private aspects of Paton's life, very little is said about his family life while whole chapters are devoted to the effects of the Second World War on staff relations, the rising Afrikaner nationalism, the Hertzog and Smuts coalition and other important events in the history of South Africa. In keeping with the chronological depiction of the writer's intellectual and moral growth, the book assumes a more sociological dimension as the autobiographer progressively attains socio-political awareness.

As mentioned earlier, in both volumes of Paton's autobiography the reader comes across constant references to exemplary heroic figures whose behaviour and beliefs influenced Paton in various ways. Two such characters are Bishop Clayton and Alfred Hoernle, a professor of philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand. Of the former Paton writes, 'The Bishop of Johannesburg was an extraordinary man, one of the few persons in my life of whom I would have used the adjective "great" (1980:239). Hoernle was an agnostic whose approach to race relations was pragmatic and cerebral: in his presidential address to the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1941 he said, 'I have no use for a faith which is unthinking, or which can flourish only in an intellectual holiday'. (1981:241-2). Paton had been chosen to serve on the commission entrusted with 'the task of defining what it believes to be the mind of Christ for this Land' (1980:243). Although he does not state it in these terms, it is evident that in the course of his interaction with these influential people Paton was slowly evolving his own principles which were to form the foundation of his liberal vision in the post-1948 era. Paton quotes a long passage from his biography of Clayton, Apartheid and the

Archbishop, in which he assesses the effect of this time and experience on his own beliefs and attitudes:

As for myself, having lived for thirty-eight years in the dark, the commission opened for me a door, and I went through into the light and I shut it against myself, and entered a new country whose very joys and adversities were made resplendent by the light. This conversion can in a way never be complete, because one continues to live in a colour-bar society, and to obey its laws and to benefit by its privileges. (1980:243)

As I have already indicated, Paton uses the tropes of the journey and conversion as structuring motifs in both volumes of his autobiography. He makes it abundantly clear in the passage quoted above that serving in the Bishop's commission was an edifying and transformative experience (conversion) which significantly altered his perceptions and marked the beginning of another stage in his 'journey towards the holy mountain' of democratic values and racial harmony. Not surprisingly, there is a striking resemblance between the recommendations of the commission and the policies of the LP which was formed a decade later. Underpinned by the philosophy of trusteeship and humanitarian benevolence, the report emphasised the importance of the social upliftment of blacks and the formation of a common voters roll for all 'qualified' voters. Paton concludes the chapter on the commission with revealing comments on his attempts to apply these principles in the world of politics:

That is the story of the bishop's commission. It didn't change the heart of the nation but it changed me. Ten years later I tried with others to apply its principles in the hard world of politics. (1980:248)

In the final chapter of Towards the Mountain Paton offers a synoptic overview of events and episodes which constituted the major turning points in his eventful life:

The birth and rise of Afrikaner nationalism is one of the most powerful subthemes of my life story. My childhood and boyhood in the city of Pietermaritzburg, an intense love of nature, the discovery of literature, the influence of Railton Dent, and the conscious adoption of service as the proper watchword for life, love and marriage and family life, the slow awakening to the real nature of South African society, and the opportunity granted to few of creating a new institution out of an old, all these have been subthemes of my life. (1980:307)

As all these important events are presented as subthemes the reader is justified in believing that the main theme will be examined in the second volume of the autobiography. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the most important event in Paton's life occurred in 1948 when the publication of his first novel catapulted him to world-wide fame and made him a legend in his lifetime. Journey Continued explores the consequences of this momentous occurrence in Paton's life as well as his involvement in the activities of the LP.

After the publication of Towards the Mountain in 1980, a period of four years elapsed before Paton began writing the second volume of his autobiography which Colin Welch has fittingly described as 'the final testament of a good and great man'(1988:27). As implied in its title, Journey Continued is meant to be a continuation of the symbolic journey towards the holy mountain described in the first volume. Despite the obvious thematic affinities between the two volumes, there are noticeable stylistic and thematic differences. Whereas Towards the Mountain conforms to the conventional narrative pattern of 'literary'

autobiography in its preoccupation with the writer's growth and maturation, Journey Continued written more in the tradition of a memoir, focuses on Paton's newly acquired status of an international celebrity as well as on his involvement in politics. Francis Hart describes a memoir as 'personal history that seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self [by] placing the self relative to time, history, cultural pattern and change'. (1970:491) In Journey Continued Paton seeks to do this by examining his role as a prominent figure in the LP. Hart's explanation of the 'unpredictable' nature of autobiographical form may be useful in describing the formal structure of Journey Continued. He writes:

Formal principles in autobiography evolve and fluctuate as autobiographical intentions interact and shift; a formal problem or option often refocuses the autobiographer's intention or even redefines the nature of his truth. Such is the relationship of form to intention. It is not reasonable for the interpretive critic of autobiography to demand or expect unity and consistency of intention. It is certainly not safe to suppose that intention will always be explicit or that intentions are independent of their dramatic locations. (1970:491)

Whereas Paton's apparent intention in Towards the Mountain is to give an account of the development of his moral and social consciousness, in Journey Continued he sets out to explain how and why he acted in accordance with the dictates of the social conscience developed during formative years of his life. Thus it is the historical character of recorded events rather than Paton's failure to adopt a consistent narrative perspective which necessitated the change of narrative mode from confession to memoir.

It has become one of the unexamined conventions of the criticism of autobiography to regard those sections of the life-history dealing with childhood

and young adulthood as having an inherent narrative appeal in comparison with the story of adult life which is often considered to be prosaic and uninspiring. Following this critical trend, some critics have bemoaned what they see as the pedestrian and perfunctory style of Journey Continued. Peter Alexander makes the following comment on the volume's apparent lack of narrative vitality and appeal:

Journey Continued also showed Paton's growing lethargy in its lack of sparkle. The writing is flat and dutiful, with little of the vibrant energy so typical of his letters. His mind was clear as ever, but his spring was gone, and he knew it. (1994:246)

Apart from the shift in intention and motivation explained above, the apparent lack of 'sparkle' may also be accounted for in terms of the basic differences with regard to focus and orientation between historical autobiography and literary autobiography. Moreover, the few instances of stylistic unevenness and thematic disjuncture may also be attributed to fact that the book was written over a period of roughly four years during which the author, now advanced in years, had numerous other social, political and professional engagements.

As Paton explains at the end of Towards the Mountain, by the time he wrote Journey Continued he had been fully 'converted' from relative ignorance about race relations in South Africa and had a more or less well-defined political philosophy. The long process of conversion had not only engendered a deeper state of political sensitivity but also a desire to act decisively to promote the basic liberal values of freedom, equality and justice. Although Paton had ended the first volume of his autobiography with a declaration that he hoped to write the second volume before he died, there seems to have been a particularly urgent need to do so in the mid-eighties. In 1984 Paul Rich published a scathing yet scholarly attack

on South African Liberalism exposing its inherent paternalism, the morally untenable assumptions of permanent trusteeship and the contribution of liberal scholars such as Alfred Hoernle and Edgar Brookes to the theoretical underpinnings of the policy of racial segregation (1984:127). As suggested in the title of his book White Power and the Liberal Conscience, Rich argued that liberalism functioned as a 'conscience' of white political hegemony which had failed to have any significant impact on the ideology of apartheid:

Although the South African liberal tradition from the time of the Union in 1910 has taken over a fairly cohesive body of political values from the nineteenth century Cape, it has been unsuccessful in translating these into a political programme that had real impact on the body politic. (1984:123)

Obviously Rich's contentions, later elaborated in another book published in 1993, were seen by leading liberals such as Paton and David Welsh as a deliberate distortion of basic liberal principles and as an attempt to undermine the achievements of the party. In response to Rich's criticism Paton wrote a review in the *Sunday Times* provocatively entitled 'Author Rich: Book Poor' in which he made the following vindictory points:

The Liberal Party, whatever its merits, or demerits, was the most concrete and articulate expression of the liberal conscience in this century, and amongst its members were some of the best human beings that I have encountered in my long life⁹

Another significant consequence of the publication of this book was the convening of a conference on the heritage of the liberal party in Grahamstown in July 1985. The aim of the conference seems to have been to 'set the record straight' concerning the history and principles of the LP. Thus the justificatory even

defensive tone of Journey Continued arises out of Paton's desire to defend the aims and achievements of the LP in South African politics. Operating within the conventions of autobiographical discourse which constrained him to privilege his own interpretations over those of his colleagues and critics, he could not be expected to offer anything more than personalised impressions of the ideals of liberalism.

Journey Continued opens with a re-affirmation of the theme of hope which pervades the earlier volume. Paton sees himself as having spent the best part of his life travelling towards the biblical mountain 'where they do not hurt or destroy and towards which some of us spend our lives travelling'(1988:1). As in the first volume he is at pains to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between his religious beliefs and political convictions. It is therefore not fortuitous that he begins the story of his political career with a defense of his essentially idealist moral vision:

There are also those who believe that this whole dream of the holy mountain, and of the leopard lying down with the kid, is not worthy of anything but the contempt of rational men and women. Such people believe that such dreaming is an obstacle to the liberation of mankind from darkness and superstition. (1988:1)

Paton is evidently one of those South African liberals who had found it difficult to distinguish between the ethical principles of Christian humanitarianism and the harsh competition for scarce resources which is the stuff of politics. Answering his own question: 'Why did we start the Liberal Party?', he writes:

I did it because I felt it was my duty. I felt compelled to oppose the National Party and its policies of apartheid, to oppose any law that

decreed racial separation... When I write that I did these things out of a sense of duty, I mean that in my case the main motives were moral and religious. I believed that I could not be true to my Christian beliefs and at the same time keep my mouth shut, nor could I refrain from defending those human rights which should be safe from the power of the state. (1988:116)

As Paton goes on to explain, moral sensitivity played a crucial role in the decisions of the early 'converts' to the party:

Most of those who joined the party in its early days, or in its later days for that matter, did so for moral reasons, and many of them had religious reasons also. The party itself was not, and could not be a religious organisation, but it was a moral one.(1988:116)

David Molteno's comment about what he perceived as Paton's conflation of politics with religion sums up the latter's moralistic perspective on politics succinctly : ' The trouble with you, Paton, is that you think the Liberal Party is a church'(1988:122). In Journey Continued Paton demonstrates how the quest for an ideal human society was, after the personally transformative events of 1948, translated into a commitment for the search for a democratic South African society. Unlike creative writing, this new undertaking entailed co-operation with people who shared his aspirations and were prepared to struggle to achieve them. After the financial success of Cry, the Beloved Country Paton had toyed with the idea of settling down and devoting his time entirely to creative writing. His moral conscience, however, would not allow him to fold hands while South Africa was steadily moving towards an ugly form of totalitarianism. As he puts it: ' I was beginning to realise that, deep though my love of literature was and deep as was my love of writing, my love of [my] country was unfortunately greater' (1984:60). As can be seen from his remarks below, Paton thoroughly enjoyed the new

freedom afforded by his almost overnight success as a writer:

Our entry into the Bohemian life was very decorous. We rented a cottage at Anerley, a little seaside village on the south coast of Natal, about seventy miles south of Durban. Our life can be described by one word and one only - it was idyllic. After an early-morning cup of tea we would walk to the Southport beach, where we could swim in the Indian Ocean or in the Southport pool. (1988:10)

Acknowledging the socio-historical dimension of the book, Paton reminds the reader that Journey Continued is not simply a record of the writer's achievements and failures, but the story of the unique South African nation:

Is it a vanity to write the story of one's life? Partly, no doubt. But partly not. For it is also the story of millions of people, and they are my countrymen and women. And by virtue of their racial histories and origins, their customs and languages, they make up a country, or a nation if it may be so called, unlike any other on earth. (1988:2)

Paton's account of the history of the LP in Journey Continued is interspersed with anecdotes about his frequent visits to Britain and America to attend events connected with the success of his first novel. As an internationally recognized authority on race relations in South Africa he was invited to numerous overseas conferences and seminars.

As I have already indicated, a significant portion of Paton's life history offers an account of the attempts of English-speaking South Africans to apply the liberal values of freedom, equality and justice in a racially divided South Africa. Although Paton claims to be telling the story of millions of South Africans he is in fact narrating the story of a circumscribed social group held together by a

common ethical, cultural and political vision. The formation of the LP was in part a reaction to the lacklustre performance of the United Party which had represented this constituency. In essence the principles of the new party were a political expression of a deeply-felt sense of alienation and uncertainty among the ranks of the English-speaking South Africans who, understandably, felt threatened by the opposing nationalisms of the Afrikaners on the one hand and the disenfranchised blacks on the other hand. Since the time of Cape liberalism liberals had occupied an ambiguous position in South African politics: some of their intellectuals had been involved in the Afrikaner's attempts to find theoretical justification for the policy of racial segregation and, at the same time, they had played a crucial role in providing education and other essential social skills to black people. In 1948 when it became clear that the Nationalist party would have no dealings with people who believed in racial equality, liberal-minded South Africans (there were a few blacks among them, thanks to missionary education) felt obliged to form a political party which would challenge the policies of the National party.

As mentioned earlier, in terms of Lucien Goldmann's model of genetic structuralism liberalism may be viewed as a 'world vision' associated with a particular social group in the South African society. This group consisted of educated middle-class whites most of whom considered Britain as their cultural home. While this group was motivated by the purely pragmatic desire to safeguard its identity and interests, it was also concerned with promoting tolerance and understanding between people of different races in South Africa. Thus humanitarianism and political pragmatism (often presented as universal rationalism) were the cornerstones of the world vision known as liberalism in the South African context. Richard Elphick has shown that South African liberalism has a close historical relationship with Christianity. The so-called Christian

liberals together with missionaries were responsible for the establishment and administration of such important centres of African education as Lovedale, Morija and Amanzimtoti. Elphick sums up the relationship between Christianity and liberalism as follows:

They [the Christian Liberals] fought for good liberal values: freedom from tyranny, equality of all before the law, the dignity of the individual, limitation of the power of the state. But in many cases these notions originated in the commonplaces of Anglo-American thinking and were not the products of hard thoughts about South Africa... liberal Christians were not aware that liberal institutions needed to be imagined, planted and nurtured in South Africa as exotic plants; their survivability outside the greenhouse was far from assured. (1987:79)

Unlike the younger and more radical members of the LP, Paton seems to have clung to what Elphick describes as 'Christian liberalism' even when political circumstances proved this philosophy to be futile and inappropriate. Perhaps Elphick had liberals like Paton in mind when he made the comment that:

The liberal-christian synthesis in South Africa ... inspired men and women of admirable character and dedication and left a record of sheer decency amidst sorrow which future generations may honour more wholeheartedly than we are able to do. (1987:79-80)

In Journey Continued Paton makes no attempt to offer a critical examination of the ideology of liberalism (for him liberalism is not an ideology). Instead he selects certain individuals within and outside the LP whom he either censures severely or praises in his characteristically hyperbolic tone. In the former category are the leaders of the National Party and radical members of the LP, whereas in the latter group he includes Trevor Huddlestone and Bishop Clayton. Since the late 1930s

there had been a growing chasm between the older generation within the party who believed in constitutional opposition within the constraints of the rule of law and younger generation who were beginning to question the efficacy of these methods in opposing an inherently violent system of government. As early as 1939 the prescient Alfred Hoernle had perceived and articulated this tension among liberal-minded South Africans:

The old Cape liberalism survives in a few grand representatives of its departed glory. The younger generation, as a whole, tends to regard the term with loathing and contempt. Some - a minority - do so because they stand further to the "left". Liberalism, to them, is too half-hearted, too cowardly, too ready to compromise; tinkering with symptoms instead of advocating revolutionary cures. (1939:103)

From Paton's point of view, the main cause of the divisions within the party was the decision of some members to use violence as a means of achieving political goals. Paton was particularly firm in his opposition to the use of violent methods. His distaste for violence is shown in his largely negative portrayal of Patrick Duncan whom Paton accuses of having thought that he had been 'born to set things right' (1988:154), and is perhaps best demonstrated in his harsh judgement on the activities of the African Resistance Movement (ARM), a group of young radicals within the party who resorted to violence after the Sharpeville shootings of 1960. The frustration of these members was understandable given the brutality of the state in its response to peaceful protests. As Paton himself admits:

The year of Sharpeville, 1960, must be regarded as a watershed year. It was a year in which some of the most determined opponents of the government decided that normal, legal, constitutional, political activity was useless. They were knocking on the door that would never open. There was only one thing to do, and that was to smash

the door down, to break in and confront the enemy, using violence as the weapon, just as he had used the violence of authority, of police and soldiers and prisons against them for generations. (1988:219)

However, in spite of his apparent understanding of the desperate situation which prompted liberals like Randolph Vigne, Adrian Leftwitch, and others to form the ARM, Paton is uncompromising in his condemnation of what he considers to be acts of betrayal. The reason for Paton's harsh judgment of Patrick Duncan and the members of the ARM is not hard to find: the Christian in him found it difficult to believe that noble goals could be attained through what he considered to be ignoble methods.

Most of the historical events recorded in Paton's autobiography have been exhaustively documented in South African history books. They include the treason trials of 1956 and 1964, the removal of black people from Charlestown and Sophiatown, the Sharpeville shootings of 1960 and the subsequent banning of the ANC and the PAC. The role of the member of LP in these events was that of sympathetic observers who, within the constraints of constitutionalism and legality, did what they could to assist the victims of political injustice. Paton concludes the story of his political career with a brief overview of the interests and beliefs that had sustained him through the traumatic period of political activism:

Although politics has played a major role in my eighty-four years, it has not dominated my life. Literature and the love of the word, and the love of writing the word, have been equally important. And the third dominating force has been my religion, my reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ whom I could have served much better ... and my sense of wonder when I contemplate the universe. (1988:285)

In this socio-critical evaluation of Paton's autobiographies I have tried to demonstrate ways in which Paton's private and public roles were to a large degree, shaped by his liberal-Christian beliefs and values. By anchoring his political philosophy in religious principles Paton positions himself above conflicting political ideologies and presents his vision of the future in utopian terms. However, this utopian vision is only an ideal which serves the function of sustaining those struggling to create a better society in the real world of imperfect humanity. In spite of their inherent idealism Paton's writings reflect a keen awareness of the problems facing his community.

CHAPTER V

SINDIWE MAGONA: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE.

Sindiwe Magona's two-volumed autobiography, To My Children's Children (1990); Forced to Grow (1992) offers a comprehensive account of a black woman's struggle for self-reliance and dignity in a socio-cultural environment fraught with numerous obstacles to personal fulfilment. Born in the Transkei in the early forties, Magona now lives and works in New York as a press officer for the United Nations. Like most black South African autobiographers, Magona writes of her struggle to create an 'authentic self-identity' by challenging and, ultimately succeeding in rejecting, those roles and identities imposed on her by dominant cultural and political ideologies. Despite its sad ending with the author's departure from South Africa, Magona's life story is largely a celebration of victory over debilitating social conditions and hegemonic discourses rather than an implicit acknowledgement of defeat by repressive socio-political conditions.² Like other autobiographies included in this study, Magona's story may be read as an articulation of the collective consciousness of her social group as well as a personalized account of a particular period in the history of South Africa. However, as I hope to show, the concept of class or social group cannot be applied rigidly in the case of Magona as she is a writer for whom social mobility by means of education and the opportunities attached thereto is the defining feature of personal growth and development.³

Most black South African women autobiographers are not established writers : very few have published anything else besides their life histories.⁴ Their male counterparts, on the other hand, are relatively well-known writers of narrative

prose in the form of short stories or novels and, in their autobiographies some of them include commentaries on their careers as writers. Although there may be other reasons for this anomalous situation such as the lack of suitable role models for aspirant women writers and the lack of leisure time which could be utilised for writing, this state of affairs may be attributed to the various oppressive conditions to which black women are subjected as women and blacks.⁵ Magona's explanation of her initial reluctance to express herself through creative writing in spite of encouragement from her literary-inclined friends confirms this view:

Despite such encouragement, I did not embark on a writing career. I did not know I could write. I did not know anyone like me who did. Even the Xhosa writers I knew of were much older, all men, none of whom lived in or near Cape Town....

I am convinced my case is not peculiar. What wealth lies buried in our hovels, to be dug up one day? Daily battles just to exist sap energies to an extent hard to imagine. (1992:184)

Magona has published two collections of short stories: Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night (1991) in which she offers an imaginative recreation of her experience as a domestic worker, and Push-Push (1996), a collection of largely fictional stories.⁶ Like Bloke Modisane whose short stories have a significant intertextual relationship with his autobiography, Magona's short stories, particularly those in her first collection, have conspicuously autobiographical themes. As the first short story collection was published a year after the publication of the first volume of the autobiography, there is an important sense in which the autobiography constitutes the 'pre-text' of the collection.⁷ It is therefore not surprising that there are striking thematic and stylistic affinities between some of Magona's short stories and those sections of To My Children's

Children where she writes about her experience as a maid. Magona's autobiography therefore represents her most successful attempt at sustained 'creative' writing.⁸ Although most of the stories in the recently published second collection are mainly fictional, two deal with Magona's childhood in Blaauvlei and one examines her initial impressions of American life when she went there to take up employment with the United Nations in 1984.

The most common theme in the autobiographies written by South African women revolves around their or their husband's involvement in the political struggle for equal rights in the 'old' South Africa. In their life-stories, Ellen Kuzwayo, Helen Suzman, Emma Mashinini, Mary Benson, Maggie Resha and Helen Joseph all write about their participation in the activities of various political organisations. Thus active involvement in a sphere of life commonly dominated by men has provided an effective avenue of self-definition for these South African women with different family and cultural backgrounds. Magona's concerns in her life history differ slightly from what has become a general pattern in South African autobiographical writing by women. The central focus of her autobiography is not exclusively on political activism, but her life story also examines her own personal development from a position of a social nonentity and 'cultural outcast' to one of international fame and recognition.⁹

Although she was actively involved in various women's organisations and supported their philosophy of liberal reformism, Magona does not present her life as having been solely determined or influenced by her involvement in politics. Admittedly the socio-political implications of being a black South African woman during the 1970s and 1980s are explored in the autobiography, but this is done from the point of view of Magona's personal struggle to make her own life

worthwhile. This is not to suggest that Magona's autobiography is 'apolitical'. Obviously her personal struggles as a daughter of poor working class parents, a migrant labourer's wife and, at a later stage, a single parent are influenced in direct and indirect ways by political conditions. Commenting on the contention that Poppie Nongena - an autobiographical book which shares a number of themes with Magona's autobiography - is 'apolitical' because 'it is primarily concerned with a woman's attempt to keep her family together' (1991: 202), Anne McClintock makes the following telling points regarding the unavoidable convergence between the personal and political aspects of life in the personal narratives of South African women:

... being a perpetual minor in the eyes of the law and under the permanent tutelage of a male relative, being "endorsed out" of one's home on marriage and forced to depart for a husband's "bantustan" often hundreds of miles away, being ineligible for residence rights without the signature of a male relative, pregnancy, birth, and child raising under the most perilous of circumstances: these are not problems that are faced by white men or white women. These problems are not even faced by black men. Far from being universal problems, they are problems that confront black women alone, and they were written into South African statute books at identifiable historical moments.(1991:202-3)

McClintock's comments have a direct bearing on Magona's story as she mentions almost all the 'personal' and apparently apolitical problems Magona faced as a South African black woman. While acknowledging the political provenance of the issues highlighted by McClintock in the above quote, I wish to retain the distinction between autobiography as a record of the writer's participation in political activities and autobiography as an account of the more private process of personal growth.

Feminist critics of autobiography have long recognised the inherently subversive nature of personal histories written by women caught up in the double bondage of patriarchy and racism. Mainly because of the historical or referential status of this mode of writing, women autobiographers are in a position to create a counter-hegemonic discourse by re-defining their roles and identities to oppose cultural and political institutions from which they are excluded.¹⁰ As Regina Blackburn puts it:

Autobiography has proved to be a conscious, deliberate method of identifying and revealing the black female self. The process of these women's self-analyses gives rise to the themes of identity, assigning value to this identity, and the double jeopardy of being both black and female in America.(1980:147-8)

Although Blackburn is talking about Afro-American women here, her comments have a particular pertinence to South African black women who, like their American counterparts, have consciously 'chosen to use the autobiographical genre as their resource for self-analysis'(Blackburn, 1980:147). It is hardly surprising therefore that most South African women's autobiographies deal, almost exclusively, with the theme of constructing an identity and finding a voice within the constraints of the dominant ideology underpinned by patriarchy and racism. In a recent theoretical study of women's autobiography, Leigh Gilmore accentuates the political implications of autobiographical writing in relation to hegemonic discursive practices:

If subjectivity, figured by the autobiographical I, is produced in relation to discourses and institutions, then autobiography, the "genre" most explicitly identified with self-representation, can be taken as a participant in that production. If we then also regard autobiography more broadly as part of a historically and formally

changing discourse of self-representation, it is possible to interpret it as a *political site* on which human agency is negotiated within and against institutions on the grounds of truth. If this is so, then autobiography may also be a site of resistance, especially as it engages the politics of looking back and challenges the politics of how the past and the present may be known in relation to a particular version of history.(1994:79-80)(my emphasis)

As Gilmore's astute comments suggest, autobiography is a powerful tool which may be used by women and other minority groups to 'write themselves into history'. The concepts of history, subjectivity, individuality, gender and race are all contestable within the mode of autobiography. The definitions of these terms which, for political and ideological reasons, may have become 'conventional' or 'commonsensical' can be challenged within the process of autobiographical self-construction.

Most of the life-histories written by women in South Africa are stories of triumph or achievement in some specific field of human endeavour traditionally considered to be the preserve of men. A few representative examples will serve to illustrate the common trends: in Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life, Emma Mashinini writes about her involvement in the trade union movement in the 1980s; in My Life in the Struggle Maggie Resha tells of her active involvement in the various campaigns of the African National Congress and Mamphela Ramphele's A Life chronicles her meteoric rise from Black Consciousness intellectual activist to a respectable academic career. All these women are achievers in their own right but their achievements are made even more distinctive by their status as members of the marginalized social group of black women.

Magona's autobiography merits critical attention mainly because of the revealing

and self-conscious ways in which it explores the convergence of class, race and gender in the creation and legitimation of certain social roles and subject positions within the South African social formation. She describes her development from being a daughter of an urbanised working-class family, a wife and a mother, a single parent, an 'unskilled worker' and ultimately, a professional woman who enjoyed the hard-won respect and admiration of her community. As Margaret Daymond explains, Magona's autobiography accounts for 'the transition from Xhosa cultural traditions and peasant economy to the current realities of black, urban, professional lives in a racially-based capitalist society' (1995:570). Although she is aware of her distinctive qualities and achievements, Magona writes as a person positioned within a particular social group (black South Africans) and more specifically, belonging to a smaller sub-groups within that category namely, black women and the Xhosa tribe.

* * *

As in the previous chapters, my main aim in this chapter is to examine autobiographical self-representation in relation to socio-historical factors such as the writer's class position, the historical period covered by the autobiography and the common concerns, attitudes, values and interests shared by the writer's social group. My secondary aim therefore is to analyze Magona's life history as an articulation of the struggles, failures and achievements of a South African black woman who is both typical and unique. In Magona's account of her growth and development the reader notices both the influence of her forceful and resilient personality as well as the impact of the inescapable political realities of her time. My analysis of Magona's autobiography will therefore focus on the historical and material particularities of her life as a South African black woman. Applying Lucien Goldmann's theoretical insights, I shall attempt to show ways in which

Magona's autobiography articulates the mental structures of particular social groups in South Africa. My discussion will take into account Magona's gendered position as a woman autobiographer and will explore the possibilities of applying theoretical paradigms proposed by feminist theorists of autobiography. In many respects the content of Magona's autobiography conforms to the theoretical propositions posited by feminist theorists whereas, in terms of structure, she may be said to have adopted - perhaps unwittingly so - the developmental pattern of classical male autobiography.¹¹ As noted earlier, it would be imprecise and unhelpful to pigeon-hole Magona into a rigid social category whether this is based on gender, class or social status. If there is any one point that emerges from a critical reading of Magona's life history it is that identity is a continuously evolving phenomenon linked to, among other factors, a person's socio-economic status. Thus instead of speaking of one social category whose world vision is presented in Magona's autobiography, I shall refer to different social groups to which Magona may be said to have belonged during different stages in her development. As Nancy Fraser reminds us, it is somewhat theoretically imprudent to overemphasise 'gender difference' as the main determining factor is social relations:

In today's context, we [feminists] can no longer focus exclusively on gender difference, as many of us have done in the past. We must understand gender difference as intercut by other salient axes of difference, such as class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and "race". And we must figure out how to keep all these intersecting differences in view as we struggle simultaneously to expand democracy and to remedy multiple forms of injustice. (1996:61)

Feminist studies of autobiography, especially those published during the 1960s and 1970s, display a marked tendency to present women in essentialist terms as

a monolithic group¹². The common aim of these studies seems to be to expose and challenge male domination of women in its various manifestations. As Nancy Miller explains, for feminists in the 1970s, 'challenging the universality of the male autobiographical subject - the universal, but as it turned out Western, European, heterosexual, in a word canonical "I" - seemed an all-consuming task' (1991:125). The oppression of women was often taken to display some characteristic features which transcend cultural and political ideologies. Critics such as Jeanne Costello and Anne McClintock have criticised this totalising and simplistic categorisation of women which they attribute to reductive theorizing based on the erroneous assumption of a universal female subject. Costello identifies the common erroneous emphases in these studies as follows:

These tendencies include the totalisation of theories about women, the isolation of gender from other conditions as the only category of analysis, the application of preconceived theories about female experience to women's texts, the privileging of a few primary and secondary texts for analysis, the dependence upon traditional measures of aesthetic value, and the consideration of women's texts separately from those of men.(1991:125)¹³

Perhaps a more pragmatic approach would be to examine female subjectivity and identity not as a totalizable and universal phenomena, but as a products of a subtle interplay of a variety of factors relating to racial, material and socio-political considerations. As Costello puts it:

Our reading of women's texts must give more thorough consideration to the whole range of material conditions that have historically determined female subjectivity and,....,to the various institutional relationships that have constructed identity.(1991:125)

McClintock's comments on the assumptions underlying the idea of 'the Feminist Woman' are even more emphatic than Costello's:

Some feminists have been justly skeptical of the idea of a universal, female "gynesis", fearful that it runs the risk of being fatally essentialist, formalist, and utopian. There is a very real danger in baptizing certain texts with the holy water of a new female privilege, erasing historical and cultural variations, and subsuming the multiplicity of women's lives into a single, privileged, and, as it happens, white middle class vision.(1991:220-1)

Bearing these prudent words of warning in mind, I shall attempt to avoid reductive feminist theory in my discussion of Magona's autobiography. A socio-historical and not exclusively 'feminist' analysis of Magona's life story will reveal the crucial roles played by race, class, culture and history (in the broadest sense of that term), in the shaping of social consciousness and the allocation of domestic and public roles to women. As I hope to show in my analysis, Magona consciously challenges these predetermined roles and succeeds in creating her own 'authentic' identity which accords with her desires and aspirations. In an important sense therefore, Magona's autobiography demonstrates that hegemonic¹⁴ discursive practices which underpin ideology can be effectively challenged both in the contested terrain of social action and in the arena of creative writing.

Within the broader socially and ideologically delineated group of black women, Magona represents the relatively small group of liberal-minded professional women who have consistently challenged the political and cultural constraints designed to ensure their subservience to men and, politically, to the dominant white group. Another important aspect of Magona's self-portrayal is her keen awareness of her ethnic identity as a Xhosa woman. For example, she chooses to

tell the story of her life from the perspective of a Xhosa grandmother who is concerned with the preservation of her grandchildren's cultural identity. Consequently, my discussion of Magona's attempts to forge an authentic identity with its concomitant domestic and social roles will focus on her responses to challenges and opportunities presented by cultural and political institutions such as the family and the Xhosa tribe and the broader socio-political milieu of the 1960s and 1970s.

* * *

Feminist critics of autobiography have argued that women's approach to the writing of autobiography is decidedly different from that of men. As Leah D. Hewitt has remarked:

A female name attached to an autobiography particularizes the text in ways that a male name does not. Whatever position a contemporary woman autobiographer takes vis-a-vis the autobiographical tradition, she is aware that gender affects the reading of her position whether she likes it or not.(1990:2)

Often 'the reading of her position' implies assessing her autobiography against the classical tradition of male autobiographical writing. Estelle C. Jelinek, the editor of the first collection of critical essays on women's autobiography, maintains that autobiographies by women writers exhibit recognisably different thematic and structural features from those written by men:

Surveying quite a number of bibliographies from various countries and periods, one is struck by the number of women writing diaries, journals, and notebooks, in contrast to the many more men writing

autobiographies proper. From earliest times, these discontinuous forms have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives. But they also attest to a continuous female tradition of discontinuity in women's autobiographical writing to the present day.(1980:19)

As we have seen in Modisane's Blame Me on History, the fragmented and anecdotal narrative structure is not confined to women autobiographers. However, Jelinek's point which is nothing more than a cogent expression of a broader critical view on this issue, is that men tend to write linear, sequential narratives while women's autobiographies are generally anecdotal and discontinuous. While this view may be corroborated with empirical evidence (as Jelinek amply demonstrates in her Introduction), it should be qualified to take account of the experimentalism and innovation in modernist approaches to autobiographical self-representation as well as the 'disordered' lives of minority groups other than women. Fragmented 'real' life as well as fragmented 'narrated' life seem to be a common feature of the experience of all oppressed groups in any society. Nevertheless, Jelinek's comment on the differences between women's and men's autobiographies has an element of disturbing finality: '... the final criterion of orderliness, wholeness, or a harmonious shaping with which critics characterize autobiography is often not appropriate to women's autobiographies'. (1980:19)

A number of books dealing with the subject of women's autobiography grapple with the demanding task of formulating a coherent poetics of this burgeoning sub-genre (Smith 1987, Stanley 1992, Stanton and Lionnet, Smith and Watson, 1992, Smith 1993). For my purposes the issue of gender and the network of social relations influenced and determined by it will be seen as ideological constructs which assume different forms in different societies and historical epochs. The

relationship between ideology and consciousness is described by Catherine Belsey in her essay aptly entitled 'Constructing the Subject' in which she writes:

The subject is constructed in language and in discourse and, since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology, in ideology. It is in this sense that ideology has the effect, as Althusser argues, of constituting individuals as subjects, and it is also in this sense that their subjectivity appears "obvious". (1991:596)

Without granting ideology an all-determining role in the creation of subject positions, I shall argue that social roles prescribed by society for women as for other social groups are contingent on historical, cultural and political conditions. Autobiographical self-definition always takes place within the context of dominant 'languages'. As Sidonie Smith explains, 'the autobiographer situates herself and her story in relation to cultural ideologies and figures of selfhood'(1987:47). Smith amplifies her argument as follows:

As she examines her unique life and then attempts to constitute herself discursively as female subject, the autobiographer brings to the recollection of her past and to the reflection on her identity interpretative figures (tropes, myths, metaphors, to suggest alternative phrasings). Those figures are always cast in language and are always motivated by cultural expectations, habits, and systems of interpretation pressing on her at the scene of writing. (1987:47)

Magona has chosen the discourses (what Smith calls "langauges") of culture, race and gender within which to situate the story of personal growth and development. For Magona these major determinants of self-identity, particularly that of race, are far more important than her current status as a member of the professional class of the petty bourgeoisie. After all she is writing about the past period of personal evolution and about her current status as a professional. She has also chosen the

conventional chronological narrative mode to depict her gradual development from a state of being a helpless victim of political conditions and repressive cultural values to a condition of an articulate, self-reliant and assertive professional woman. Obviously the structure of Magona's story is at variance with the commonly held view that women autobiographers write anecdotal, fragmented or discontinuous autobiographies (Jelinek,1980:19). However, in Magona's case the deceptive smoothness of chronology conceals ruptures and disjunctures in the narrator's stages of development: She was saddled with the responsibility of motherhood and marriage at the age of nineteen, became a single parent at the age of twenty-three and had to go back to the life of a student from the age of twenty-eight to up to her early forties. This could hardly be described as a smooth sequential pattern of growth and development commonly associated with 'classical male autobiography'. As Magona herself remarks, '... I am the one who had hardly any carefree, young adulthood: I was middle-aged by twenty-three'(1992:174). As Anne McClintock reminds us, the structural anomalies in women's personal narratives may reflect inhibitions women encounter in their interaction with restrictive social institutions:

The category of "woman" is a social construction, and the ruptures in women's narratives are expressive of ruptures in social experience. Narrative differences speak not of anatomical destiny and design, but of the daily difficulties women experience in negotiating their lives past the magisterial forms of male selfhood. (1991:221)

What is revealed by the structural organisation of Magona's autobiography is that narrative structure does not always conform to pre-determined rules of composition but often reflects the writer's peculiar circumstances and her attempts to give meaning to those circumstances. Besides dividing both volumes into

distinct chapters with appropriate sub-titles, Magona has chosen the theme of physical and intellectual growth as an organising motif in her life history. Thus, the metaphor of growth with its literal and symbolic connotations is central to Magona's autobiography as a whole. For Magona growing up does not merely denote the process of physical development and life-cycle changes this entails but has a deeper connotation of intellectual and emotional maturation linked to an awareness of the interplay between socio-political factors and personal choices, desires and interests. It is therefore not fortuitous that she chose the suggestive sub-title of 'Forced To Grow' for the last chapter of To My Children's Children in which she recounts her first decisive steps towards achieving the goal of self-reliance and independence. The theme of self-reliance which is introduced in the final chapter of the first volume constitutes the thematic focus of the second volume, also strategically entitled Forced To Grow.

To My Children's Children deals with the first phase in Magona's 'growth', the phase which culminated in her ill-fated marriage at the age of nineteen and her subsequent suffering as a single parent. The book is divided into five sections corresponding with the writer's stages of physical and intellectual development. The first part deals with the period of childhood at Gungululu and various townships and shantytowns around Cape Town; the second part focuses on the author's education. The third and fourth sections deal with the author's premature marriage and its subsequent breakdown. The fifth and final section examines the most difficult period in Magona's life when she had been left to fend for herself and her three children by her husband.

A large section of the first volume is devoted to the period of childhood in the rural district of Gungululu in the Transkei in the early forties. As shown in

Magona's account of her childhood, the contention that childhood feminine subjectivity is relational, with the mother acting as a role model for the young girl may not apply to Magona's situation.¹⁵ In Magona's depiction of her childhood there is no obvious attempt to highlight the significance of her closeness to her mother. This is how she describes her relationship with her parents and grandparents:

My recollections of myself, as a little girl of three or four, revolve around my great-grandmother, Nophuthukezi, my two grandmothers, my mother, and my maternal grandfather. My paternal grandfather is there, but in a rather shadowy way....
My father, in these early mind-pictures, is even more of a shadow than his father. (1990:2)

It would seem that for Magona, being close to her grandmothers has less to do with being a woman than with the sociological reality of the migrant labour system. Similarly, the communalistic ethos which characterises the peasant community of Gungululu is shown to be the consequence of the clan system as well as the value attached to extended families and has very little to do with 'feminist consciousness' on the part of the author:

The intricate ways in which relationships are drawn among us make it almost impossible for an individual to be destitute in the sense of having connections with no living soul. One could conceivably, be minus parent, or issue; have neither spouse nor sibling; but to be alone, with no relative, no one to care for or lean on, is virtually unheard of ... (1990:3)

This is one instance in which cultural values coincide with common attitudes engendered by oppressive political policies. However, traditional communalism must be distinguished from solidarity brought about by the shared condition of

being oppressed or discriminated against on the basis of race or gender. As shown in those sections of Forced to Grow dealing with this topic, Magona apparently understands the difference between feminist solidarity which may cut across racial barriers and cultural solidarity which is often confined to the members of a particular ethnic group. Her understanding of the former is evident in her account of her participation in various non-racial women's organisations.

When she was five, Magona's family had to move to a shantytown of Blaauvlei near Cape Town so that her ailing mother could be near serviceable health facilities. The vividness with which Magona evokes domestic scenes at Gungululu and Blaauvlei suggests a very retentive memory aided by the analytical capacity of adult consciousness. She describes in elaborate detail how her family, accustomed to the traditional communalistic lifestyle of rural life, had to adapt to the rigours of an urban lifestyle where the only factor which maintained a tenuous sense of community among the residents was the reality of common poverty:

Here, each shack declared to all and sundry that it had nothing to do with any other shack. Such was the complete lack of co-ordination in whatever one could care to think of, ... Such individualism would have been hard to design. (1990:21)

Although a five year old girl could not have grasped the significance of the glaring contrasts between rural and urban conditions, the adult narrator, looking at her past from the perspective of a 46-year old social worker, is in a position to describe and explain the deeper social implications of these childhood impressions. Her description of the peasant community of Gungululu highlights the characteristic warmth and cohesiveness of rural neighbourhoods. Implicitly, the positive features of this community are contrasted with the harsh reality of an urban working-class

lifestyle:

It was in such a warm human environment that I spent the first five years of my life. I had much attention, much discipline, much loving, much caring, much play, much work; in short, total immersion into a group where my own place in it was clearly defined.... And my world seemed safe and secure.(1990:7)

This world which *seemed* safe and secure to the young Magona was in fact not so as the system of migrant labour had made incursions into the very fabric of family life the result of which was the virtual absence of 'able-bodied' men in the community. Thus Magona has very vague recollections of her father during this period as he worked in Cape Town and only came to visit his family 'once in a long while' (1990:2). As she explains, this was not unusual:

Then, as now, villages in South Africa were peopled by women, children, and those men who were either old or disabled. Able-bodied African men were in the cities where the mines and the farms and industrial complexes swallow them. The law forbade them to bring their families.(1990:2)

The absence of the father figure during these crucial years of cognitive development may explain Magona's closeness to her mother to whom she dedicates the second volume of her autobiography. It is also worth noting that her list of people who had a long-lasting influence on her life includes her two grandmothers, her resourceful and exemplary mother, and her aunt Dathini. Magona's father, in spite of his positive portrayal in both volumes as a disciplined and hard working man, seems to have played a peripheral role in Magona's life during the formative period of childhood. Magona's elder brother, Jongilizwe is mentioned as another important role model who exemplified the importance of

education which Magona regarded as the only viable means of escape from the clutches of working class poverty.¹⁶ Generally, it was women relatives and colleagues who served as role models for Magona both in her childhood and adult life. As in Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue, Magona presents rural life as a locus of traditional values and practices which included the art of storytelling as a means of preserving cultural history. Like Mphahlele's, Magona's comments on the content of these stories suggest that they had an inherent educational value:

Some of these stories told us of the origin of man, others were about natural phenomena, and others still were designed to teach us, the unwary audience, some aspect of morality. Looking back now, I can see clearly how *intsomi* are an essential and integral part of the socialization of the child among ama-Xhosa.(1990:6)

As suggested in the title To My Children's Children, Magona's story of her 'womanhood, wifehood and motherhood' (preface) is meant for her grandchildren who are supposed to learn something useful from their grandmother's resilience and determination to succeed. In this light, the autobiography assumes the status of a modern written *iintsomi*. Though ostensibly narrated within the traditional mode of the oral storytelling, Magona's *iintsomi* is not the story of myth, legend and folklore but an account of the harsh realities of fighting for independence and respect in a patriarchal and racist society. As indicated in the opening paragraph of the first volume, it is not only the content of the *iintsomi* that has had to be modified to accommodate changed socio-political circumstances but also the story's mode of presentation : written autobiography has replaced the fireside oral tales.¹⁷ The way in which Magona begins and ends her autobiography suggests an organic sense of ethnic identity¹⁸ which links her to her ancestors as well as to her as yet unborn great grandchildren: 'By now I understood also that I was part of

the stream of life - a continuous flow of those who are still alive, and the spirits, our ancestors.' (1990:183). It is clear therefore that she sees the task of telling the story of her life as her duty to posterity. Thus her autobiography has as its intended primary audience the younger generations of Xhosa 'children'. Magona has ensured that the book reaches the majority of her Xhosa speaking readers by publishing a Xhosa translation of To My Children's Children in 1995. Apparently she hopes that her grandchildren will learn something useful about their culture and the challenges facing them within that culture as it adapts to the values of Western philosophies.

That Magona's presentation of lifestyles and habits of Xhosa rural communities is not mere romantic idealism is confirmed by similar accounts in the autobiographies of Noni Jabavu and Phyllis Ntantala both of whom grew up in the Transkei. Although they come from educated black middle class families they both emphasise the virtues of the extended family and the strong sense of community displayed by rural people. Although the Magona family spent only three years at Blaauvlei, Magona remembers this shantytown as the place where she acquired the rudiments of social awareness:

Blaauvlei! When I think of my growing up, Blaauvlei seems to be where it took place. I lived there for a total of three years,... But the vastness of it, its vibrancy, throbbing aliveness, and its many-faceted complexity make those three years seem much longer. The filth, squalor, poverty, shabbiness, sharpened one's senses. (1990:37-8)

Blaauvlei was a typical black shantytown similar in many respects to the slums of Marabastad, Vrededorp and Sophiatown described by Mphahlele, Abrahams and Modisane in their autobiographies. In spite of the obvious problems of slum life

Magona claims to have had a generally happy childhood (1990:90) at Blaauvlei. What she lacked materially was compensated for by the emotional warmth and affection provided by her close-knit extended family. Among the members of her family Jongilizwe, Magona's elder brother seems to have had a profound influence on her as a young girl:

I admired Jongi tremendously. He was nothing if not a hero to me. I read all the books he read. When he joined the Boy Scouts, he taught me some of the things he was learning there :... He was perfection and I proudly paid homage. (1990:47)

Having started school in Blaauvlei, Magona continued her secondary education in Gugulethu when the government moved the residents of that slum to the newly established township in 1960. After passing standard eight (Junior Certificate) she went on to train as a teacher because, among other reasons, she did not think that as a woman she was intelligent enough to attempt matric. As she puts it in Forced to Grow:

... to me at that time, all men were infinitely brighter than women. ... Therefore I condemned myself to never doing matric in the firm belief that if gentlemen of such superior age and intellect could not pass it, it was way, way above my own nothing-to-write-home-about mind.(1992:15)

Having qualified as a teacher at St Matthews Teacher Training College in 1961, Magona felt adequately empowered to free herself 'from the grinding poverty that is the status of the African in South Africa'(1990:91). Besides the anticipated material benefits that would accrue from this achievement, her success would enhance the image of the Magona family and demonstrate to the sceptics that educating a girl had its value. As Magona explains, her entry into the male

dominated arena of professionals had important implications for the family as a whole:

In the history of my family, going back three or four generations, except for one of Father's uncles, a forester, I was breaking virgin ground. Although Jongi had passed his Junior Certificate before me and was now grappling with matric, I had not only passed JC, I had a professional certificate: I was a qualified teacher.(1990:91-2)

Magona's belief in what she saw as an inherent value of education reflects the values of her parents who had accepted the teachings of the Christian religion stressing individual responsibility and self-improvement. Although Africans had limited civil rights they were expected to 'improve themselves through hard work'. It is worth noting that no mention is made of Magona's parents' involvement in or even awareness of, the various campaigns of the African National Congress in the 1950s. While showing loyalty to the Anglican church, they seem to have chosen not to play any active role in the activities of their community, particularly those meant to challenge oppressive government policies:

Mama and Tata were very ordinary in any way you care to think. Neither of them had completed primary school. They did not have any money. Neither had any ambition, for themselves, to get involved in any of the community organizations. The exception was the church. Much as they valued education and were keen on us children going to school, they were not interested even in the school committees. (1990:41)

Although Magona's parents had no ambition themselves they apparently wished their children to escape from the poverty of the unskilled working class people. Perhaps it was an illusion to think that a black person could ever escape from his or her class of birth because by law black people belonged either to the working

class or the nondescript group of the petty bourgeoisie whose status was never clearly defined. It is therefore hardly surprising that Magona generally presents her racial identity as a black person as taking precedence over her gender and class identities. Magona's apparent over-emphasis of her racial identity over her newly acquired class membership is perhaps the predictable consequence of her situation in a country where racial identity determines almost every aspect of a person's life. The complex relationship between gender, class and race in social contexts such as Magona's is accurately explained by Evelyn Higginbotham:

... in societies where racial demarcation is endemic to their-socio-cultural fabric and heritage - to their laws and economy, to their institutionalized structures and discourses, and to their epistemologies and everyday customs - gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity. We are talking about the racialization of gender and class. (1992:254)

Magona soon discovered that her training had not prepared her for the abysmal salaries of African female teachers and the frustrating conditions under which they had to work. Instead of joining the class of successful petty bourgeois to which she apparently aspired, she had joined the large amorphous group she describes as 'the working poor' (1992:54). As she puts it: 'No sooner had I started teaching than I had two basic, if hard lessons:... I learnt that a certificate confirming my competence was no guarantee of (i) a job, or (ii) meaningful remuneration' (1990:105). Interestingly, the problems she encountered as a young enthusiastic teacher were to become her own personal problems as an unemployed single parent later on in her life:

I had not been trained to teach children from poor homes; ... I had been trained to teach children from homes where there was a father

and a mother. I had been trained to teach children of working parents. The children in my class came mostly from women-headed homes. And those women stayed in at their places of employment: they were busy being smiling servants minding white babies. These children came from homes where, although parents worked, there was no money. (1990:90)

The harsh realities of the Bantu Education system opened Magona's eyes to the fundamental socio-political problems of her society. As she puts it, 'I thought I knew so much of my world; yet I was almost unaware of the injustices' (1990:90). During this period she had no conception of the possibility of her own involvement in attempts to change the political situation in her country. 1962, the year in which Magona began teaching was also the year when she accidentally fell pregnant. Like her educational achievements which had been shared by the whole family, her misfortune was a family disaster:

Funeral-faced relatives came. Some, during the week, usually at night, because most of them worked. Most came over the weekend, for the same reason. Tears were shed, mostly by women; although a few men shed some too.(1990:106)

To safeguard what was left of the family's dignity, Magona who was now regarded as 'spoiled goods', (1990:107) had to marry Luthando, the father of her child. Her pregnancy had another and more devastating consequence: she lost her new job as a primary school teacher. Thus less than a year after leaving St Matthews with determination and eager anticipation, she had become a housewife. Nothing could have been further from her childhood ambitions:

No feminist, I had nonetheless often joked with colleagues at St Matthew's: "I was born for better things than washing shirts and mending socks." In my clear eyes, I had fallen. Fallen far short of

what I had dreamt of becoming. But, I could see no way out of the quagmire in which,... I sank deeper and ever deeper, with each passing day.(1990:110)

Whereas marriage had been seen as a solution to the problem of unplanned pregnancy, it soon became a hindrance to Magona's personal development. Although Luthando failed to support his family, in the eyes of the law he had absolute authority over his wife. The first practical demonstration of this right was shown when Luthando instructed Magona's employer, a Mrs Kroon, to terminate her services as a maid because she was pregnant. The second instance was when he refused to give her permission to go to King Edward hospital to train as a nurse. Besides blaming the legal system which privileges men over women, Magona also blames herself for having married Luthando:

I have never hated anyone more than I hated Luthando at that time. But I hated myself even more. I could not believe I had, with no coercion from anybody, while of sane mind, voluntarily, nay, eagerly, placed myself in the custody of such a man.(1990:153)

It is obvious that the marriage was a *mesalliance* and was, consequently, doomed to failure even before it started: Luthando was a migrant worker from some remote area in the Transkei whereas Magona had recently qualified as a teacher. It is worth noting that Magona does not tell the reader anything about her husband's family. This is particularly curious given the kind of value she attaches to family relationships. All we are told is that she did not want to go and live with Luthando's family as a country wife while her husband was away in Johannesburg. Magona's reticence about her relationship with her husband is in stark contrast to the candour with which she describes her love life as a single mother in the second volume of her autobiography. The probable answer to all these questions is that

Magona herself did not know much about her husband's family background and his legal status in Cape Town. In Forced to Grow she stops short of admitting this fact:

We were fools to have married. We had not an inkling about what we were pitting ourselves against. Gross lack of awareness had made us naturals for our break-up. Indeed we had not even known we were pitting ourselves against anything. Definitely not against the state, the mighty government. Against all that power, just the two of us. No wonder we were pulverised.(1992:90)

While it is true that through its repressive policies the state was partly responsible for the failure of Magona's marriage, it is also true that there was a strong element of social incompatibility between her and her husband.

At the age of 23 the now unemployed mother of three children became a *de facto* divorcee. Soon after the departure of her husband for Johannesburg to look for work (a pretext he used to forsake his family), Magona started selling sheep heads to support her children. Prior to this she had worked for four different white families as a domestic worker. Luthando's irresponsible conduct strengthened Magona's resolve to assume full responsibility for her own life. In her opinion, she was lucky to have been deserted by her inconsiderate husband at her age:

My husband had left me young enough still to be optimistic: I believed I was equal to the task at hand. But above all, I came to see I was not just alone; I was free. Free of him. Free to be. So many women's lives are hindered, hampered, and ruined by husbands who will not leave long after they have ceased to be husbands or fathers to their families.(1990:182)

In To My Children's Children Magona records the impressions of a relatively young and inexperienced Xhosa girl growing up in a materially deprived social environment. In Forced to Grow Magona explores the implications and consequences of the freedom she acquired when her husband left her. For women, the institution of marriage especially in its 'traditional' (pre-colonial) form, is particularly repressive. In a male-dominated society 'married mothers' have to put up with all sorts repressive circumstances especially associated with the condition of 'motherhood'.¹⁹ Being deserted by her husband at a young age was therefore a blessing in disguise for Magona. She was not only free to develop herself as she wished but she was also free of the cultural stereotypes attached to the institution of marriage. She was now in a position to turn a deaf ear to society's condemnatory comments about her status as a single mother, although she could not ignore the emotional hurt they caused. Although she did not think of herself as a feminist during this stage, her actions and opinions suggest a strong albeit dormant, feminist consciousness.

To My Children's Children ends with Magona's resolution to assume responsibility for her own life. In her determination to pull herself out of the mire of poverty she instinctively knew she would be sustained by the exemplary conduct of the members of the family as well as by the spiritual power of her ancestors:

I did what they did. Father worked: I worked. Mother had done business at home: I did that too. Jongi had studied: I embarked on a correspondence course. I became them. By now I understood also that I was part of the stream of life -- a continuous flow of those who are still alive, and the spirits, our ancestors.(1990:182-3)

If the first volume is about the largely unreflective period of growth in Magona's

life, the second is about devising self-conscious strategies of coping with personal problems arising out sexual and racial discrimination. Forced to Grow is therefore the story of a new phase in Magona's long journey towards self reliance. As we shall see, this journey is marked by the author's enhanced self-confidence and a steadily increasing socio-political awareness. The author's changed mood is evident in the contrasting tones of the two volumes: whereas the first volume is largely factual and almost pedestrian in style, the second volume is characterised by ironic humour and a more self-conscious and analytical presentation of events and impressions.

Forced to Grow opens with an account of a crucial episode in Magona's life in which she underwent a dramatic process of conversion from being an indifferent participant in the cultural and political institutions which restricted her freedom to being an assertive person determined to make something worthwhile out of her brutalized life. This radical change of consciousness or being 'born anew' (1992:13) as Magona puts it, is dramatised in her decision - partly spontaneous and partly deliberate - to throw her ring into the sea : she was swimming with friends on New Year's day in 1967 when she felt her ring slipping off her finger and, instead of making an effort to retrieve it, she picked it up and threw it away. In retrospect, this symbolic act has clear implications for the mature narrator:

Looking back, I know that I had begun to "let go". I had embarked on the long journey that was to be the rest of my life, travelling light, sans husband. The act of letting the ring go was deliberate, but it was prompted, suggested if you will, by the workings of the waves.(1992:13)

The obvious symbolism of this decisive act and its strategic placement at the

beginning of the second volume may suggest that it has been manipulated for 'dramatic effect' by the author. However, this does not detract from its thematic significance: Magona was no longer willing to be governed by the narrow expectations and patterns of behaviour associated with the institution of marriage. Like a phoenix rising from its ashes, she was bent on initiating a new phase of regeneration in her life. As she succinctly puts it, 'My life was under rigorous reconstruction'(1992:47).

Like the first volume, Forced to Grow is arranged chronologically and covers the three major periods in Magona's adult life namely, the period of academic development, the period of her growing political and feminist consciousness and her gradual shrinking into the cocoon of individualism after her first visit to the United States in 1978. Whereas the younger Magona had either acquiesced or tacitly accepted the culturally defined roles of women in her society, the enlightened protagonist of Forced to Grow began to question and challenge the assumptions on which these roles and attitudes were based. According to the values and norms of her society, the failure of her marriage was somehow her fault. While she earned the opprobrious name of *idikazi*, the real culprit escaped the censure of society.²⁰ The illogicality of it all was not lost on Magona:

It seemed a little unfair, if not downright unjust, that it was I, left to fend for myself and three young children, who had somehow lost society's esteem. I knew then no equivalent term for a man. More than twenty years later, not only have I not discovered it in Xhosa, it has eluded me in the three other languages I speak.(1992:2)

Apparently, Magona had begun to notice the sexism inherent in the traditional values of her own community and in language itself. The critical and sometimes

downright condemnatory voice of a woman who has seen through the discourses of gender begins to emerge in the early chapters of Forced to Grow. Her awareness of her situation as 'unfair' in comparison to that of the man who had ruined her life must have alerted her to the way in which her society rewarded men for having fathered so-called illegitimate children while punishing the mothers of these children:

It was common practice for women to hide the fact of their motherhood. They were stamped as damaged goods in the pure minds of men whose reputations remained untarnished despite their fathering offspring. Indeed, rather than detracting from it, a man's stature grew in direct proportion to the number of women he had impregnated.(1992:79)

As if to demonstrate the subtle functioning of ideology in the creation and legitimization of gender roles and expectations attached to them, Magona refers to the unsympathetic attitudes of other women who were obviously unsuspecting victims of patriarchal ideology masquerading as 'collective wisdom':

The censure came from women as well as from men. Their agreement about the correct behaviour for women with children chilled me to the marrow. Married, divorced, widowed and single mothers were lumped together. Mothers, it was clear in the minds of the vast majority, had no business being anything else. But I had dreams yet.(1992:79)

The more enlightened Magona had begun to appreciate the underlying assumptions and underlying principles of patriarchy comprehensively articulated by Adrienne Rich:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers : A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition,

law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (1977:57)

In her fight for basic survival and self-affirmation Magona faced two major obstacles : on the one hand she had to contend with the ideology of culture which often took the form of 'common knowledge' and on the other hand she faced, like all black people, the repressive policies of the apartheid government. In the former case it was 'common knowledge' that women with children should not aspire to careers that would interfere with their domestic roles as mothers, whereas in the latter the myriad apartheid laws affected every aspect of a black person's life irrespective of gender or class position. Having no power to fight these oppressive conditions on her own she chose instead to pursue her childhood dream of freeing herself from the Blakean 'mind forged manacles' by acquiring higher educational qualifications. She was emboldened in her resolve to improve her academic qualifications by the success of her brother Jongilizwe who had gone to study at Oxford University on a Rhodes scholarship. In spite of her bitter experience of being an unemployed qualified teacher, she did not lose hope in education as 'a ticket out of poverty'(1992:28). Thus, in an important sense Magona's autobiography may be seen as a creative act of celebrating the realisation of her dream of becoming an educated and therefore 'important' person. Acquiring educational qualifications almost became an obsession for her:

I began to joke that I would boast of my high qualifications one day. On meeting someone for the first time, as I extended my right hand in greeting, I would say, 'Sindiwe Magona, matriculant'. Those days, people still appended B.A or M.A to their names. (1992:45-6)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that at this stage in her development

Magona's view of the liberating power of education shaped her vision of the future. As she explains, it was this vision of a secure future which sustained her during difficult times:

Therefore, with everything that I cherished taken, broken or out of reach, I resolved I would become self-sufficient. I would work hard. I would study. I would pull myself up by my bootstraps. Yes, even though I had still to acquire the boots.(1992:25)

Evidently what Magona hoped to achieve through education was not only financial self-sufficiency but also self-respect which society had denied her as an *idikazi*. When she finally got a job as a teacher in 1967 after four bleak years of unemployment, she soon enrolled for matric at Damelin College. After passing matric she registered for the General Certificate of Education with SACHED hoping to qualify for admission to any British University. It was a student of SACHED that Magona began consciously to widen her intellectual horizons as she came into contact with mature students from different cultural and racial backgrounds. The SACHED experience prepared her for her future role as an active participant in multiracial women's organisations. During the period beginning in the late 1960s to the late seventies Magona became increasingly involved in the political, social and cultural campaigns of various women's groups including the National Council of African Women which she joined in 1969. She writes as follows on her initial impressions of this group:

This organisation opened my eyes to prevailing social ills. Not to anything I had not seen or known existed, but now for the first time, through discussion and action by members, I began to see myself as someone who could do something out there - away from family, job, neighbour or friend. (1992:80)

This was a period of enthusiastic political activity for Magona who 'had woken up to [her] social duty' (1992:82). Having been deprived of opportunities to make her family life worthwhile as a mother and a wife she hoped to find personal fulfilment through involvement in public activities. In the domestic sphere she became both a father and a mother to her children while gaining popularity and recognition as a speaker and organiser in women's organisations of which she was a member. It was as a member of Church Women Concerned (CWC) that Magona really began to show an interest and to be actively involved in politics. In 1976 she was chosen as one of the South African delegates to a women's conference in Brussels where she spoke eloquently about the 'simultaneity of oppression' (Hull G.T. et al)²¹ facing South African black women:

The point I attempted to convey was that the African woman was the worst oppressed of all South Africans. Race and sex combined to put her at the bottom of the dung heap, and only her child was more pitiable. (1992:141)

The kind of feminism Magona encountered in CWC was largely underpinned by liberal values of justice, equality and individual freedom. The liberal and moderate outlook of this organisation was a consequence of its essentially religious character. Magona's description of its tactics indicates that it was a typical liberal organisation:

Issues pertaining to religion, politics and society would be explored. Mildly confrontational, the group dynamics were set up in such a way that most women felt safe. Even the name, Church Women Concerned, had been chosen with this in mind (1992:128).

In her involvement in the various politically inclined groups which included SACHED study groups and the Cape Town based Women's Movement, Magona

became more and more adept in the task of 'bridge building'. However, her experience of liberal reformist politics did not prepare her for the revolutionary period in South African politics initiated by the student riots of 1976. What Magona and her colleagues were doing in the Women's Movement paled into insignificance in comparison with the militant action of the younger generation of disgruntled black students.

All three organisations of which Magona was an active member were not exclusively concerned with issues affecting women's lives although these formed an important part of their general mission. They were concerned instead with the elimination of what they regarded as the morally untenable policies of the National Party government. Thus Magona's activities combined the tasks of fighting for political rights as well the rights of women. She soon discovered that the predominantly white women's organisations had no clear understanding of the enormity of the problem of racial oppression. Moreover, she found herself trapped between ignorant but well-meaning white compatriots and suspicious or openly hostile black friends. Whereas some people in Gugulethu were accusing her of being an informer because she had white friends, those white friends were accusing her of being too elitist and sophisticated to understand the nature and extent of the suffering of black people. For instance, white women's responses to her stand on sanctions were less than favourable. She was asked questions like, 'But, Sindi, how representative are you of the black people?' (1992:169) and 'Sindi you are educated. You are sophisticated. How do you know what black people, the ordinary black person in the street, want?' (1992:170). The almost unbridgeable gulf between women of different races brought together by their common outrage against the excesses of apartheid became increasingly evident to Magona: 'White women could not escape the privilege which their colour

bestowed on them. Black women could not escape the discrimination theirs made them heir to' (1992:129).

Magona's realisation that race was the main factor governing social relations in South Africa is shown in what seems to be a deliberate decision on her part to privilege race over gender and class in her life-story. As she explains in Forced to Grow, genuine attempts had been made on both sides of the racial divide to bring about mutual understanding, but the inescapable reality of differing political rights, lifestyles made this increasingly difficult. Black women had first-hand experience of what white women could only experience vicariously. This explains why Magona saw her racial identity as a black person as taking precedence over her gender status as a woman. Margaret Daymond has argued that Magona does not succeed in her autobiography to problematize the implications of her class status:

When she speaks of her own position, she declares no profound affinity with or loyalty to either the urbanised peasantry from which she comes or to the professional class to which she aspires. Instead she speaks as a determinedly mobile individualist and, in so doing, again plays right into the habit, in the dominant discourses of South Africa, of hiding class issues behind the "totalising languages of racism" (1995:567).

As I explained earlier, social mobility is the main theme of Magona's autobiography. There is nothing inherently wrong with what seems to be a healthy desire for self-improvement. However it becomes a problem when it results in a deliberate masking of self-identity as Daymond seems to suggest. In a society where government legislation determines class position it is short-sighted to think of oneself as belonging to any other class other than the one legally prescribed for

one. What emerges with striking clarity in Magona's autobiography as in the life histories of other black South Africans, is that the idea of a black professional class in South Africa has always been riddled with irreconcilable contradictions. It was therefore safer and pragmatic for black professionals of Magona's time to foreground their racial identities as their 'new' class identity did not afford them any practical changes in terms of political rights and material benefits. Largely because of her temperament and liberal education Magona found it difficult to identify with revolutionary politics of the 1976 era. It is not entirely accurate to regard this as failure to identify with the 'urbanised peasantry' as Magona makes it abundantly clear that she agreed with the aims of the mass-based resistance movement but objected to the use violent methods which often harmed black communities. Having played her role in liberal politics as a bridge-builder, she found herself caught between the impotence of South African liberalism and the radical political strategies of the black youth in the township. Perhaps this accounts for her decision to leave politics and to become a 'determinedly mobile individualist', a choice imposed on her by circumstances.

Magona's decision to bow out of bridge building was thus a consequence of a variety of factors including fear of arrest, distrust of her white friends and the revolutionary nature of post-1976 oppositional politics. In 1978 when she made a conscious decision to assume a low profile in politics, she had a Bachelor of Arts degree from UNISA and was teaching Xhosa in a white school. She had also earned a name for herself as a speaker and organiser in the women's organisations to which she belonged. In recognition of her talents she was chosen as one of the finalists for the woman of the year award in 1977. Obviously she no longer belonged to the amorphous class of the 'working poor' but had acquired a new status of the petty bourgeoisie. As I indicated in Chapters 1 and 2 the relationship

of the educated members of the petty bourgeois class with their largely uneducated working class compatriots has always been ambiguous and fraught with contradictions.

The 'displayed self' in both volumes of Magona's autobiography is a self shaped largely by factors of race and gender. As Daymond contends, there is very little self conscious class analysis in Magona's life-story. This is as it should be because Magona sees herself as a product of different social groups including the rural community of Gungululu, the urbanised peasantry and, finally, the professional elite. As I have shown, Magona sees the category of race as well as ethnicity as the major determinants of identity. This is evident in her use of the figure of the storyteller grandmother and her frequent references to the supernatural world of the ancestors. It is worth noting that she regards her life as exemplary and thus worth preserving as a valuable record of cultural history. This is implied in her final words to the imaginary reader in Forced to Grow:

So, my child, that is the story of your great-grandmother. That is the story of where you come from.

Here I am, thousands of miles from home, for the ancestors have seen fit that as of now I dwell among strangers. Perhaps, for now, that is the only way I can fulfil my duty to you, my child. The only way I can tell you: This is how it was, in the days of your forebears. (1992:231-2)

The idea of a valuable past worth preserving for posterity is part of the world view of the Xhosa tribe which is reflected in the autobiography as whole. This world view encompasses tensions and contradictions engendered by the convergence of Western and traditional African philosophies and cultural practices. The former

promotes independence and self reliance whereas the latter encourage women to get married and raise children within a family context in which, it is assumed, the husband will be the sole breadwinner. In the traditional culture of the Xhosa tribe women occupy a lower stratum in the hierarchy of value. The young and relatively naive protagonist of To My Children's Children accepts the values of her tribe without any major reservations. In contrast to this, the educated and sophisticated Magona of Forced to Grow is sceptical of a cultural and value system which assigns women inferior roles. As an urbanised and politically aware professional woman Magona questions the assumptions on which the repressive patriarchal system is based. The dilemma she faces is that she apparently values the sustaining beliefs and the sense of solidarity provided by the tribal belief system yet at the same time she is opposed to the sexism inherent in the system. Thus she has no qualms about accepting her mother's role as a 'witchdoctor' and no compunctions about stating her firm belief in the ancestors (1990:183). This problem of cultural allegiance does't arise for African intellectuals such as Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi who have no backward-looking cultural vision to sustain them. However, for 'traditionalists' such as Naboth Mokgatle and Magona the problem of reconciling the conflicting demands of a Westernised lifestyle and a traditional belief system has major implications for their self-identity.

Like the African community of which she is a member, Magona's social status is shown to be in a constant state of flux. Magona's upward social mobility achieved through the acquisition of educational qualifications precludes the possibility of a sustained class analysis of Magona's autobiography. She does not present herself as a member of a particular economic class. Like Abrahams and Modisane, Magona's succeeds through hard work to extricate herself from the stifling conditions of working class life and acquiring a more secure role as a member of

the professional elite. But she soon discovers that her new status has its own problems: she is too educated to get a job in South Africa. Thus like Abrahams, Mphahlele, Modisane and Mokgatle before her, Magona had to leave her country to search for emotional and material fulfilment somewhere else.

CONCLUSION

The central aim of this study has been to examine the various socio-literary aspects of selected South African autobiographies as well as to explore the relationship between ideology and autobiographical form. For the purpose of this study, the concept of ideology denotes institutionalised dominant ideas which shape and influence both self-conception and social roles of individuals as well as social classes or groups. Moreover, as explained in the Introduction, ideology also denotes collective ideas and philosophies employed by marginalised social groups in their various struggles for justice and equality. The concept of 'form' refers to the 'organising principle' which, however, is not easily distinguishable from 'content'. As M.H. Abrams explains:

All critics agree that "form" is not simply a fixed container, like a bottle, into which the "content" or "subject matter" of a work is poured; but beyond this a critic's definition of form varies according to his particular premises and orientation. (1981:67).

Covering the period beginning in the 1950s up to the 1990s, the study also sought to examine ways in which, in the South African context, autobiography may be seen as having significant sociological functions apart from its obvious literary value as a fairly distinctive form of writing. As a distinctive mode of writing, autobiography is characterised by its peculiar generic conventions and formal properties. Without denying the importance of these underlying conventions and properties, this study has focused mainly on the social functions and implications of autobiographical writing in the South African context. As Louis Horowitz has argued, the sociological value of autobiography is to be found in its dual status as

an account of collectively shared concerns and attitudes as well as a document which seeks to explore an individual's history, interests and aspirations:

... the autobiographical enterprise in some sense demonstrates that we cannot fulfil ourselves unless we are members of a group in whom there is a community of attitudes. Parenthetically, we cannot simply be a member of a community without developing a sense of individuation. (1977:174)

While acknowledging most of the obvious theoretical insights of deconstructive criticism of autobiography, I have argued for a contextualised form of 'humanism' (what Lynda Gilfillan calls 'the re-envisioned humanism' p.244) which foregrounds the roles of both individual and collective consciousness in the autobiographical articulation of social identities. My approach has been largely materialist and pragmatic instead of theoretical and discursive. In the context in which it is used here, humanism does not simply confirm Georges Gusdorf's contention that autobiography reflects the 'conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life'(1980:29). As explained in the Introduction, this post-enlightenment conception of selfhood has been shown to be ideologically and discursively circumscribed particularly by feminist and postcolonial critics. In South African autobiography, the 'humanist' self is no longer exclusively white, middle class, male and heterosexual; the concept has been extended to include people who wish to act meaningfully in their struggles against various forms of social, political and ideological marginalisation or domination. As Lynda Gilfillan has argued, theoretical approaches which completely reject realist conventions of self-representation are inappropriate in particular social contexts:

The theorisation of autobiography in postcolonial contexts inevitably and increasingly incorporates and dismantles postmodern principles

and procedures. Notions of textual authority, history, truth, realism, referentiality and factuality occupy, together with fictionality, facticity and historicity, the critical terrain. (1995:70)

As I hope to have shown, South African autobiography does not conform to the conventional mode of 'classical autobiography' (Gunn, 1982) which is restricted to 'great' persons or those 'remarkable' individuals whose lives are considered exemplary and thus worth imitating. Nor is the autobiographical genre practised mainly by established writers in South Africa. Apart from well-known writers such as Roy Campbell, William Plomer, Alan Paton, Es'kia Mphahlele and Guy Butler, South African autobiographers now include political activists such as Ronnie Kasrils, Carl Niehaus and Maggie Resha as well as trade unionists such as Naboth Mokgale, Emma Mashinini, Clements Kadalie and Temba Qabula. Thus South African autobiography has been significantly democratised to include a variety of formerly repressed voices. Significantly, South African autobiography by politically marginalized writers has served the important social function of countering hegemonic definitions of identity and social roles with 'authentic' articulations of personal experience.

The central thesis in this study is that a 'neo-humanist' socio-critical reading of autobiography which grants writers some measure of control over discourse offers people the opportunity to act meaningfully in their struggles for human rights in various social contexts. Behind every autobiographical portrait (displayed self) is a conscious human agent capable of using language to offer an interpretation of the past in the light of present interests and circumstances. This may be dismissed as a 'logocentric' view which relies on the notion of 'the metaphysics of presence', but it is also a pragmatic way of reading texts with specific social, and not only

'aesthetic' purposes. However, as Margaret Daymond reminds us, it would be theoretically naive to regard autobiography exclusively as a product of mimetic realism:

... autobiography, contrary to the commonsense view, cannot be read as simply mimetic (as a direct reflection of experience) or even as simply expressive of an individual, subjective point of view on experience. (1995:564)

Although autobiography, like other discursive modes, is admittedly shaped by discursive practices, generic expectations and other social conventions, it is also an important social document which illuminates historical processes, class relations and the world views or ideologies of specific social groups. To perform these functions it must at least 'approach' reality if not strictly 'reflect' it. Shirley Neuman's comment on the status of autobiographical writing confirms its referential and hence historical status:

... autobiography's definitive feature is that it seeks to represent, or at least is figured upon, a (perhaps impossible) correspondence between the narrating "I" and a subject actually-in-the-world. This remains true whether we grant the "self" ontological status or whether we theorize a "subject" as a product of discursive and ideological structures - whether we see the reference of autobiography as to a self already existent in the world or as to a subject brought into being through the act of writing the autobiography.(1992:213)

My argument in this study has been that autobiographies are significant social documents which articulate common concerns, attitudes, interests and values that constitute the world views of particular social groups. Peter Abrahams's Tell Freedom demonstrates ways in which the liberal education system serves to legitimise the ideology of liberalism and how this ideology, in turn, inclines its

adherents to particular modes of self-conception and social obligations. The inherent idealism of liberalism also provides the yardstick according to which Abrahams measures his achievements as a writer. As a Goldmannian 'world vision', liberalism provides Abrahams with an intellectual and philosophical perspective as well as a 'language' with which to define and interpret his experience of literally and symbolically moving out of working class poverty and adopting the relative sophistication of the Black middle class. More than anything else, Abrahams's autobiography demonstrates the extent to which the young Abrahams had embraced conventional liberal-humanist ideas about 'literariness' and literary value as well as the conception of the creative writer as a dispassionate interpreter of human experience. As shown in Chapter 1, this is an ideologically constructed and therefore limited conception of the status and role of the writer in society.

Perhaps the autobiography which best exemplifies the complex relationship between ideology and form is Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History. What the formalist critics may see as Blame Me on History's stylistic experimentalism and eclecticism is, from a socio-critical perspective, a textual manifestation of the alienated writer's material and social circumstances. Thus Modisane's autobiography, like other life stories chosen for this study, demonstrates what Althusser would describe as the 'materiality of ideology'. Significantly, in spite of his apparent confusion, Modisane uses the same liberal criteria to explore the conflict between his aspirations as an 'artistic person' (aesthete) and his restrictive social environment. Like Abrahams, his attempt to become an 'artist' is constantly undermined by the ineluctable forces of history. Both Abrahams and Modisane conceive of their roles in typically liberal idealist and transcendental terms.

The form of Naboth Mokgatle's autobiography reflects the disjunctive manifestations of individual and collective consciousness presented in the book. Whereas the first part focuses on the pre-literate oral culture of the Bafokeng tribe and examines the author's ethnic awareness, the second part explores Mokgatle's proletarian consciousness. In his life story Mokgatle attempts to integrate these two disparate world views as he accounts for the evolution of his outlook as a working class political activist.

Alan Paton's two volumes of autobiography conform to the conventional pattern or structure of autobiography as the story of physical, moral and intellectual growth and development. While Paton's life story is essentially an account of individual awareness, it is also the story of a typical liberal's interpretation of South African history. Paton's aim in his autobiographies seems to be to offer a moral and historical justification of the ideology of Christian-liberalism. It is this ideology, based on religious idealism and political pragmatism, which functions as a structuring thematic principle in both volumes of Paton's autobiography.

Like other writers chosen for this study, Sindiwe Magona represents a distinctive social category: black women who have liberated themselves from the shackles of culture, tradition and racism by acquiring educational qualifications and skills together with the concomitant economic independence. For these women formal education has had the consequence of imbuing them with a liberating feminist consciousness.

Although all five autobiographers chosen for this study may be said to belong to specific social groups, their membership of these groups is far from rigid. As they develop and grow physically and intellectually they gradually move away from

those group identities imposed on them by government legislation. This is particularly true in the case of Abrahams, Modisane and Magona all of whom may be said to have initially belonged to the black working class. In retracing the evolution of their social consciousness, they all dramatise the practical difficulties of the transition from working-class status to that of the petty bourgeoisie. They also show that in apartheid South Africa it was impossible for black people completely to cut ties with the working-class which in most cases was the class into which they were born. Perhaps this explains why it is problematic, especially for black South African autobiographers consistently to employ the category of class in autobiographical self analysis. Even those writers who had decidedly bourgeois inclinations such as Abrahams and Modisane found it difficult to disentangle racial from class issues in writing about their personal experiences. As we have seen, these autobiographies reflect significant ways in which writers articulate the 'mental structures' of their respective social groups.

Notes.

Introduction

1. Stephen A. Shapiro.1968.'The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography' Comparative Literature Studies No. 5. In his essay, 'The Critique of Autobiography' Marc Eli Blanchard refers to autobiography as 'the Other of Literature' (1982:100). Regarding the status of autobiography as 'literature' or 'history' Georges Gusdorf has commented as follows:

It is unquestionably a document about a life, and the historian has a perfect right to check out its testimony and verify its accuracy. But it is also a work of art, and the literary devotee, for his part, will be aware of its stylistic harmony and the beauty of its images. (1980:43)

2. James Olney, in his informative introduction to the collection of essays on the theory of autobiography (1980), cites Gusdorf's essay as marking a turning point in the history of the criticism of autobiography. Commenting on Gusdorf's seminal essay, Shirley Neuman states:

In 1956, Georges Gusdorf made room for the genre within the category of "literature" on the grounds that autobiography has a canon and a history consistent with and dependant upon the traditions of Western humanist thought and its conception of the self as individuated and unified. (1992:214)

Prior to this there was no coherent and sustained writing on this subject. However, as Donald P. Verene reminds us, the actual practice of 'autobiographical writing' goes back to the beginning of human civilisation:

Although the writing of lives, in the sense of biography, and 'autobiographies' (which often took the form of letters, such as Cicero's account of his consulship in his Epistulae ad Atticum) has existed since the ancients, autobiography as a subject of literary, historical and philosophical investigation is a twentieth century phenomenon. (1991:55)

3. For an informative discussion of the shift of emphasis in theoretical debates on autobiography from a poststructuralist preoccupation with 'discourse' and 'subjectivity' to a 'humanist' concern with socially-defined 'difference', see Shirley Neuman's essay titled 'Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Differences' and Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith 'Decolonization and the Politics of Discause in Women's Autobiographical Practices'. In the South African literary scene this debate was brought into its proper contextualised perspective in the articles of Judith Coullie and Margaret Daymond in the special issue on autobiography of Current Writing (1991, Vol.3) : Coullie adopts a poststructuralist perspective whereas Daymond argues for a 'humanist' reading of South African autobiography.
4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak quoted in De/Colonising the Subject (Introduction, p.xvii.)
5. Janet Varner Gunn makes this distinction in her book Autobiography : A Poetics of Experience. p.9.
6. According to Donald Verene the first use of the concept of 'life-writing' to

refer to autobiography may be attributed to the little-known English thinker Roger North (Verene, 1991:54). In this study this concept will be used in its more comprehensive sense to denote various kinds of autobiographical writing.

7. All these theorists may be regarded as following an essentially humanist as opposed to poststructuralist approach to autobiography. The poststructuralist position on the process of writing is summed up by Jane Marie Todd in her book, Autobiographics in Freud and Derrida:

I take as my premise Derrida's claim that writing is not an activity undertaken by an entirely self-conscious subject and guided by his intentions, but the repetition of an already constituted language within which the subject must take his place. Writing is an "reenactment" or an acting out because the subject must assume a role over which he has limited control. (1990:2)

See also Michael Sprinker's essay in James Olney (ed). Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical (1980). For a discussion of the relationship between poststructuralist theory and the writing of autobiography, see Germaine Bree, Narcissus Absconditus (1978).

8. My theoretical approach to autobiography is 'humanist' in so far as it seeks to attribute the capacity to act consciously and intentionally to the autobiographer. This is different from the humanist position outlined by Shirley Neuman:

In a humanist *poetics* of autobiography, the autobiographer is seen as discovering meaningful pattern in the flux of past

experience in order to arrive at an understanding of himself[sic] as unique and unified. His text is the product of an imperative to make the act of writing and the memories of the past that he writes about consubstantial within the autobiographical "I" and to make that "I" simultaneously unique *and* representative of other "I"s - his semblances as Rousseau would have it.(1992:214)

9. The views expressed below are representative of the poststructuralist stance on autobiographical writing:

... no text is profoundly either biographical or autobiographical in so far as any writer inevitably is controlled to a large extent by representational practices which make statements by dint of their own institutionalized rhetorical motions.(Shapiro, M.J.1988:61)

10. In The Language of Autobiography John Sturrock, although largely critical of de Man's views on autobiography, admits that something valuable may be gained from the latter's radical propositions:

De Man's is a frigid (and insufficiently explicit) argument, and one which few even among theorists could feel happy with, so far does it go in asserting the constitutional inability of autobiography to deliver genuine self-knowledge; but his essay is not to be ignored, since in warning us against any facile assumptions of the transparency of autobiographical writing as a record of the past, it redirects our attention to its troublingly rhetorical nature. (1993a:4)

11. The socio-critical approach to autobiography is particularly relevant to the South African context where autobiography has been used by members of social groups 'hidden from history' to reclaim their rightful place in history. Most South African autobiographies do not display the avant garde

tendencies of French autobiographers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Roland Barthes (See Germaine Bree, Narcissus Absconditus).

12. For example, the autobiographies of William Plomer, Roy Campbell and Guy Butler focus largely on their achievements as writers and critics. Recently a number of white political activists have published 'political' autobiographies (The list includes, Carl Niehaus, Ronnie Kasrils, Helen Joseph, Joe Slovo).
13. Lynda Gilfillan's and Judith Coullie's recent doctoral theses have been significant contributions to the study of South African autobiography.
14. Examples of articles on South African autobiography include: Wade, Michael (1988); Starfield, Jane (1988); Ngwenya, T.H. (1989); Shear, K. (1989); Gray, S. (1990); Gready, P. (1990); Coullie, J. (1991); Daymond, M.J. (1991); Byrne, D. (1994), Thale, T. (1994); Thale, T. (1995), Daymond, M. (1995) and Nuttall, S (1996). Current Writing(3):1991 was a special issue on South African Autobiographical Writing.
15. See Edmond Cros (1988) Theory and Practice of Socio-criticism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
16. Goldmann uses the concepts of 'world vision' and 'world view' interchangeably to denote the ideological outlook of fairly distinct social groups.

17. Eagleton comments as follows on what he regards as the 'major flaws' of Goldman's theory:

Interesting as it is, Goldman's critical enterprise seems to me marred by certain major flaws. His concept of social consciousness, for example, is Hegelian rather than Marxist: he sees it as a direct expression of a social class, just as the literary work then becomes the direct expression of this consciousness. His whole model, in other words, is too trimly symmetrical, unable to accommodate the dialectical conflicts and complexities, the unevenness and discontinuity, which characterise literature's relation to society. (1976:34)

Perhaps the most comprehensive critique of Goldman's theory is that offered by David Cate in his two essays namely, 'After Lukacs : The Literary Criticism of Lucien Goldman' and 'A Portrait of the Artist as Midwife: Lucien Goldman and the "Transindividual Subject"'. In David Cate. 1974. Collisions : Essays and Reviews.

18. According to Olney (1973:249), prior to the publication of Tell Freedom in 1954, no full-length autobiography had been published by a black South African.

Chapter 1

1. Examples of critical studies on the work of Peter Abrahams:

- (1) Vernon A February. 1981. Mind Your Colour: The Coloured Stereotype in South African Literature. London: Kegan Paul.
- (2) Wilfred Cartey. 1969. Whispers from a Continent. The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa. New York: Random House.
- (3) Robert Ensor. 1992. The Novels of Peter Abrahams and the Rise of Nationalism in Africa. Essen: Verl. Die Blaue Eule.
- (4) Kolawole Ogungbesan. 1979. The Writing of Peter Abrahams. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- (5) Michael Wade. 1981. 'The Liberal Tradition in South African Fiction.' PhD Thesis: University of Sussex.

2. As indicated in the Introduction to this study, theoretical interest in autobiography as a distinctive mode of writing goes back to the mid-fifties. According to Paul Jay (1987) the serious theoretical study of autobiography coincided with the emergence of poststructuralist

literary theories.

3. Since the publication of Gray's essay in 1990 a number of critical essays on South African autobiography have appeared in local and international journals. However, this critical activity has not matched the phenomenal proliferation of autobiographical writing in South Africa.
4. Stephen Gray warns critics against a reductionist categorisation of these writers into one homogeneous group:

While the record-keeping of the 50s events is exemplary, the group as a whole exhibits a bewildering variety of style. The same old story may be told, but in as many different ways as imaginably conceivable. Each work is uniquely individual, quirky and eccentric, indelibly printed with the style of the particular personality writing. This is one of the most heterogeneous generations in South African literature. (1990:102)

5. Quoted in M. H. Abrams's 'The Design of *The Prelude*: Wordsworth's Long Journey Home'. In The Prelude: 1799,1805,1850. Edited by Jonathan Wordsworth et al.
6. Interview with Olivier Todd, 'The Listener', 6 June 1957. Quoted in John Pilling. Autobiography and Imagination.
7. Abrahams's Tell Freedom differs from Mokgatle's and Hutchison's autobiographies in that it is a recognisably 'literary autobiography' as opposed to 'political autobiography'.

8. Quoted by Paul Willemen in 'Notes on Subjectivity:On Reading Edward Branigan's "Subjectivity Under Siege"' Screen. 19 (1):41-69.
9. Gray reminds us that in Tell Freedom Abrahams is writing about the pre-apartheid period in South African history:

The action of Tell Freedom stops in 1939, the best part of a generation before Sophiatown. Despite its often being read straight as a crying indictment of apartheid practice, which it is, Tell Freedom actually records a prior, British-dominated period between the World Wars which may not entirely be blamed upon the "Boers". (1993:164)

10. Kelwyn Sole, Robert Ensor, and Paul Gready have all referred to his group of writers as displaying petty-bourgeois tendencies (see Bibliography).
11. Clive Leeman writes as follows about the similarities between Wrights' and Abrahams's careers:

Their lives and works are remarkably similar. Black Boy (Wrights' autobiography) and Abrahams' Tell Freedom detail boyhoods of poverty, racial humiliation and explosive resentment. For both of them salvation arrived in the form of the Communist party. Their most intellectual friendships began there. Both of them wrote for the Daily Worker, Abrahams in London, Wright in Harlem. Their first published books were collections of stories (Wright's Uncle Tom's Children, 1938, and Abrahams' Dark Testament), tales of racial cruelty, violence and rebellion. They broke off from the Communist party in the same year, 1942, and became friends a few years later. (1978:29)

12. For the distinction between the narrating self and the experiencing self I am indebted to Dorrit Cohn's study of first-person narratives (see Bibliography).
13. In their critical essays on Tell Freedom Sonja Bahn and Brian Worsfold regard Abrahams's vivid account of working-class life in the slum of Vrededorp as the most revealing and significant aspect of his autobiography.
14. In Down Second Avenue Mphahlele makes the following comments regarding his experience as a student at St.Peter's:

For the first time in my life, when I was at St.Peter's, an awareness was creeping into me: an awareness of the white man's ways and his aims. There was complete harmony between us and the white teachers at school and between them and the African staff. And yet no one, Brother Roger or the Principal or the Community fathers, ever said anything about the attitude they thought we should adopt towards whites and white authority outside school. Slowly I realized how I hated the white man outside the walls of St.Peter's. (1959:126)

15. In 1940 Abrahams published his only volume of poetry entitled A Blackman Speaks of Freedom!. Most of the poems in this pamphlet volume were protest poems aimed at exposing various forms of social injustice in South Africa. A stanza from the poem entitled 'For Laughter' exemplifies the overall thematic concerns of the collection:

I have learned to love
Burningly
With the fiercest fire;

And I have discarded my humility
And the 'Will of God'
And the stories of my wise teachers.
Arming myself with the wretchedness
In every plain man's life,
And all the tomorrows my soldiers
I battle on behalf of that freedom
That will restore the laughter of man!

It is not fortuitous that Abrahams does not refer to these poems in Tell Freedom as this would detract from the aim of the book which is to present the status of the writer as someone 'above politics'.

16. Abrahams tells the story of this relationship in 'Jewish Sister', in his collection of short stories, Dark Testament.

17. Novels by Peter Abrahams:

Mine Boy. London:Dorothy Crisp and Co.1946;
Heinemann,1975.

Wild Conquest. London: Faber and Faber,1950.

A Wreath for Udomo.London:Faber and Faber,1956.

A Night of Their Own.London:Faber and Faber,1965.

This Island Now.London: Faber and Faber,1966.

Chapter 2

1. For different perspectives on the work of the *Drum* writers, see Lewis Nkosi's Home and Exile (1983); Michael Chapman's The Drum Decade (1989); and Paul Gready's 'The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties : The Unreal Reality of Their World' and Mike Nicol's A Good - Looking Corpse (1991).
2. The following short stories by Modisane were published in *Drum* magazine between 1951 and 1954:
 - 'The Dignity of Begging' (September, 1951).
 - 'The Fighter Who Wore Skirts' (January, 1952).
 - 'The Respectable Pickpocket' (February, 1954).
3. Perhaps the story which best exemplifies Modisane's 'situation' as an alienated intellectual is the one aptly entitled 'The Situation'. In this story the protagonist, Caiphus Sedumo is treated with contempt as a 'Kaffir' by racist whites whereas his own people in the township are suspicious of his middle-class aspirations.
4. Modisane acted in the London production of Jean Genet's The Blacks.
5. In terms of the Suppression of Communism Amendment Act of 1965 the writings of the *Drum* writers namely Mphahlele, Modisane, Themba, Nkosi, Matshikiza and Nakasa were banned in South Africa (See Chapman's The Drum Decade (1989:185) for a discussion of the Laws of the 1950s and their effect on work of the *Drum* writers).

6. The tendency, evident in the work of such critics as James Olney (1973), N. W. Visser (1976), Sonja Bahn (1984) and Paul Gready (1990), to emphasise thematic similarities and thus reduce these autobiographies to a formula was noted in Chapter 1.
7. I am indebted to Janet V Gunn (1982) for the idea of the 'displayed self'.
8. Lewis Nkosi Home and Exile and Other Selections (1983) and Jane Watts Black Writers From South Africa(1989).
9. These two conceptions of selfhood are taken from an article published in Current Writing. 1 (1). 1989 by Thengani H Ngwenya.
10. Nkosi defines 'the situation' as 'a term of abuse for members of the African middle class trying to "situate" themselves above the masses'. Home and Exile(1983).
11. Commenting on Blame Me on History status as social history P Shava says:

Of all the autobiographers who have written about the political ethos of this period, he is probably the only one to give a detailed, analytical critique. (1989:35)
12. In fairness to Watts, it must be pointed out that her approach to autobiography in her study is essentially 'humanist'.

Chapter 3

1. Mokgatle's residence in Britain was long enough (17 years) to have been included in his autobiography. It would have been illuminating to know how he perceived his past in South Africa in the light of his circumstances and activities during his stay in the country of exile (See note 17 below).
2. The detailed history of the Tswana and Bafokeng as well as Mokgatle's invitation to the reader to verify his accounts suggests that he presumes his reader not to be familiar with South Africa. Inviting sceptical readers to 'test' the accuracy of his story, he writes:

I am mindful that some people who read these accounts will try hard to persuade others to disbelieve them. But what I describe here is not what happened in the past but what happens today. South Africa is not a fiction, it is not an abstract state which can only be told about in stories; it can be visited, my descriptions can be tested. (1990:250)

3. In undemocratic societies, it is always the dominant group which decides on 'the makers of history'. For this reason, when a ruling group loses power, history is usually the first discipline to be re-evaluated and rewritten. The stories of other African members of the South African Communist Party such as Harry Gwala, Johannes Nkosi and Moses Mabhida who were also active in the trade union movement still have to be told. 'Hegemonic' is used here in the Gramscian sense defined by Jurgen Link and Ursula Link-Heer as follows:

a nonjuridical, but nevertheless practically effective network

of dominant economic interests, social and state institutions, and cultural practices of socialisation, selection, and recruitment, which never simply prescribe particular theoretical designs (for example, that the "bourgeoisie produces bourgeois theories"), but which "merely" marginalise "dysfunctional" theories (Talcott Parsons). Defined in this manner, "dysfunctional" refers primarily to beliefs or ideas that attempt to analyse the mechanics behind the hegemonic network critically, with the intention of destroying them. (1988:ix)

4. In her book entitled, Subjectivity, Identity and the Body, Sidonie Smith observes that women autobiographers have challenged the patriarchal, universalist and rationalist conception of selfhood and that they have used the form of autobiography as a means of 'talking back' to the institutions of power from which they are excluded. Smith's comments have a particular pertinence to the practice of autobiography by black writers in South Africa who are using the form to challenge hegemonic definitions of social identity based on the repressive and divisive policy of apartheid.
5. Notwithstanding the inevitable subjectivism and the deliberate authorial counter-hegemonic stance, Mokgatle's presentation of South African political history is fairly accurate. His accounts of the growth of African trade unions have been given added credibility by being used as source material by social researchers such as Belinda Bozzoli, Tom Lodge and Baruch Hirson.
6. Although there is no single all-embracing definition of autobiography, most critics agree that one of its defining features is that it traces (usually in a chronological sequence) the growth and development of the autobiographer.

In this regard, Mokgatle's book is recognisably 'autobiographical'.

- 7 Beginning in the early seventies social scientists have become more and more aware of the value of oral and written life-stories in illuminating the complex relationship between personality development and the network of social relations and institutions obtaining in a particular society. C Wright Mills, one of the originators of this trend in sociological research, has noted that:

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society, has completed its intellectual journey. (1970:12)

Following Mills's injunction, sociologists such as Norman K Denzin, Ken Plummer and Robert K Merton have refined theoretical and practical approaches to what has come to be called qualitative research. For a discussion of current debates on this topic, see Liz Stanley's essay, 'On Auto/Biography in Sociology'. *Sociology*. 1994. 27(1): 41-52.

8. Taken as a whole, Mokgatle's autobiography is structured chronologically, but it is worth noting that it is not consistently so, nor is it uniformly retrospective. In the early chapters he mentions events which occurred in the 1950s in Pretoria: the death of his sister, Majoni, and his role in the General Workers' Union (p.2). The narrative assumes a self-reflexive quality in cases where the narrator-protagonist draws the reader's attention to the process of writing; for example, he mentions research conducted into his family background (p.52) and reminds the reader that he is writing in 1970 (p.248).

9. It is somewhat reductive to describe Mokgatle's book as a working-class autobiography as this categorisation fails to do justice to the autobiography's broad thematic scope which covers personal experience, social and political history as well as cultural anthropology. Perhaps a more comprehensive designation would be 'political autobiography'. George Egerton has proposed the term 'polygenre' to describe 'the polymorphous internal constitution of political memoir, its propensity to appropriate forms of related external genres, and its diverse socio-political functions' (1992:223).
10. The titles of the autobiographies and autobiographical writings of Kadalie, Sachs, Mashinini, Makhoba, Baartman and Tom are listed in the bibliography. This list is not exhaustive but the selection is representative enough to give an idea of the scope of this sub-genre of autobiography in the South African context.
11. James Olney (1873:252); Ursula Barnett (1983:226); and Willie Kuhn (1991:8), all regard Mokgatle's autobiography as an unadorned factual (and therefore 'non-literary') account of events.
12. Mokgatle regarded as artificial the distinction made by the general secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) between politics and labour issues. Kadalie writes as follows in his autobiography:

At the 1923 conference in Cape Town the ICU declared its policy to the world in the following resolution: "This organisation resolves unreservedly to dissociate itself from any political body whatever, and declares that its objectives are

solely to propagate the individual, economic and social advancement of all African workers through industrial organisation on constitutional lines". (1970:56)

It is hardly surprising therefore that Kadalie was seen as reactionary by the leadership of the SACP and that the members of the SACP were expelled from the ICU. In an open letter the expelled members stated:

Kadalie and his clique have become "good boys" and have publicly declared their policy to be a reformist one. Having gained their main personal objective, the favour of the boss class, they now intend to sit in office and ride on your backs at leisure, unless you awake in time.(La Guma et al,1981:86)

13. Only Thomas Thale (1994) has written a comprehensively argued and well researched article on Mokgatle's autobiography. Keith Shear (1989) uses The Autobiography for purposes of comparison and has very little to say about its thematic concerns as such. In recent studies of South African autobiographies Mokgatle's book is omitted. Books and articles in which Mokgatle's autobiography as an authoritative source include the following:

(1) Belinda Bozzoli. 1991. Women of Phokeng Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

(2) Tom Lodge. 1983. Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

(3) ----- . 1987. 'Political Organisations in Pretoria's African Townships, 1940-1963'. In Class,

Community and Conflict. (Johannesburg: Ravan) edited by Belinda Bozzoli.

(4) Baruch, Hirson. 1989. Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa.(Johannesburg: Wits University Press).

These writers have tended to ignore the literary (and, by definition, fictional) status of Mokgatle's autobiography and concentrated instead on what they consider to be its historical (empirically verifiable) content.

14. Foregrounding a communal identity rather than an individual one may be a feature of African culture, but it also has to do with levels of civilisation. Karl Weintraub argues that even in so-called developed societies of the West individualism is a specifically modern form of self-conception' (1978:xiv). He cites the example of Greek and Roman civilisations:

Ask any Homeric hero who he is, and most likely he will answer: I am Telemachus the son of Odysseus, the son of Leartes, the son of Antolycus. Ask a Roman, and he may enumerate the names of the maiores, his "better ones" who went before. In fundamental ways, often so hard for us who live in a highly differentiated society of individualists and individualities to understand, these earlier lives are enmeshed in and derive their meaning from basic social and kinship relations. (1978:2)

15. For a discussion of the constitutive features of political autobiography, see George Egerton's 'Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as

Polygenre' (1992). Even this otherwise comprehensive article reveals the inherent prejudice of literary critics when dealing with autobiographical narratives in which the literary or artistic element is overshadowed by the historical function:

...the parameters marking political memoir off from other genres or types of writing often appear indistinct, as it appropriates autobiography, biography, diary, history, political science, journalism, and pamphleteering, to name but its nearest literary neighbours. (1992:223) (emphasis mine)

16. Liz Stanley has raised similar concerns regarding the valorisation of literary autobiography in feminist criticism:

A concentration on the autobiographies of writers is also a preoccupation of guardians of the male autobiographical canon, and it results from a concern with "literary" themes explored with textual sophistication... Most published autobiographies, and those most read, do not have such literary qualities and textual sophistication; and it would be a welcomed relief to find a feminist discussion of the autobiographical that was not immersed in the processes and products of high culture, that took note of the autobiographical equivalents of soap operas and of neighbourhood gossip and recognized their importance in forming many people's opinions as to the proper subjects, styles, themes and emphases of autobiography, and what a "life" looks like. (1992:100-101)

17. 'Mokgatle was for me totally unknown. When he escaped, most of us were playing with black friends in the countryside. There was no political awareness and, as far as is known, Mokgatle did not, like other blacks in exile, do anything to keep his name [memory] alive in South Africa'

18. Letter by the London based publisher of Mokgatle's autobiography, Christopher Hurst, 12 April 1995. Hurst writes:

... he [Mokgatle] did have a steady job, but it was really of the kind he might have done in South Africa. He worked at Peter Jones furnishing store in Sloane Square, Chelsea, in the store-room.

19. Besides the point raised by Terry Eagleton about reductionism inherent in Goldmann's theory, Diana Laurenson has commented on its other unproblematised aspects:

Goldmann provided us with the most comprehensive methodology to date, moreover he applied it consistently to specific works. Yet it cannot be denied that he failed ultimately to avoid the very reductionism he abhorred. In his model the author as conscious creator is submerged; while the view of social class is passive, muting the essentially conflictual and strategic roles of each. Moreover the distinction between World View (*Vision du Monde*) and ideology (expression of the interests of a class) is unclear; while the claim that only "great" works are suitable for the grist of his model poses a highly problematic task of preliminary categorisation. (1978:5)

For another critique of Goldmann's theory, see the chapter entitled 'From Experimental Sociology to Genetic Structuralism' in Edmond Cros's Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism (1988).

20. Quoted by Mary Evans in Lucien Goldmann : An Introduction, page.38
21. Ralph Miliband explains the Marxist conception of working-class consciousness as follows:

In the Marxist perspective, proletarian class-consciousness may be taken to mean the achievement of an understanding that the emancipation of the proletariat and the liberation of society require the overthrow of capitalism; and this understanding may also be taken to entail the will to overthrow it. It is in this sense that proletarian class-consciousness is also revolutionary consciousness. (1977:33)

Goldmann prefers the concept of social group to social class as he believes that the latter 'rarely achieve[s] anything approaching a full and coherent understanding of their class position and their own relationship to the social world' (Evans,1981:29).

22. Interestingly, Abel Mokgatle apparently in compliance with this tradition, has named his son after his brother Naboth to ensure that the latter's name is not forgotten in the family (Thengani H Ngwenya's interview with Abel Mokgatle 13 April 1995).

23. It is worth noting that Mokgatle does not explain the political and military significance of the tradition of circumcision (young men were circumcised so that they could be placed in their appropriate regiments to defend the tribe when the need arose). Regarding the rain ceremony, Reikie Rakhudu recalls that it was last performed in 1949 and that it was an important event involving the entire tribe. Mokgatle, who was 38 years old in 1949, must have known about this event (Thengani H Ngwenya's interview with Reikie Rakhudu 13 April 1995). Both the rain ceremony and the practice of circumcision were condemned as 'heathen' by the missionaries. (Brian Bunting, 1975).

24. Apparently it was the policy of the SACP to organise literacy classes for its members, some of whom were entirely illiterate. African members of the party who benefitted from these classes include Moses Kotane and Bruno Mtolo. The latter has written an autobiography in which he relates his involvement in the activities of the SACP and the ANC (See Bibliography).
25. Moses Kotane, a self-educated man like Mokgatle, was General Secretary of the SACP from 1939 until its banning in 1950.
26. After his father's death Mokgatle went to Johannesburg to look for another job. This was an attempt to run away from the influence of the SACP in Pretoria and to be closer to other young men from Phokeng most of whom were in Johannesburg. While looking for a job he was arrested for not possessing the right pass. After his release he went back to his old job at Cuthberts shoe company in Pretoria.
27. A special issue of Social Dynamics (Vol.14 No.2 1988), was devoted to the topic of the relationship between 'experiential testimony' and history. Most papers in this issue deal with the question of recovering formerly marginalised or silenced voices in the process of history writing in South Africa.

Chapter 4

1. Perhaps the most unfavourable response to Paton's book in the South African literary academy was of Stephen Watson's article titled 'Cry, the Beloved Country, and the Failure of Liberal Vision'. Another critic who is skeptical of the value of what he sees as Christian paternalism in Cry, the Beloved Country and regards Paton as an 'anachronism' is Russell J. Linnemann (1984) (see bibliography).
2. As Andrew Nash has noted, Towards the Mountain 'can be considered largely as the story of how that book [Cry] came to be written'(1983:12).
3. Roy Pascal makes the following distinction between a memoir and autobiography proper:

In the autobiography proper, attention is focused on the self, in the memoir and reminiscence on others. It is natural, therefore, that the autobiographies of statesmen and politicians are almost always in essence memoirs. (1960:5-6)
4. For example, Jean Paul Sartre and Peter Abrahams (See Chapter 1).

Chapter 5

1. As I indicated in the Introduction, my conception of self-identity is largely functional and pragmatic as it goes beyond the postmodern view of the 'fictionality' of the autobiographical self to examine the practical social implications of having an 'identity' capable of initiating meaningful social action.
2. As James Olney (1973) has noted, it has become a tradition for South African autobiographers to end their autobiographies with an account of their physical escape from the country. Obviously, the theme of 'escape' from poverty assumes another dimension when the writer has to physically flee the country.
3. Upward social mobility provides both the *raison d'etre* and the central thematic focus of Magona's autobiography.
4. This category includes such autobiographers as Ellen Kuzwayo, Emma Mashinini, Maggie Resha, Miriam Makeba, Mamphela Ramphela and Frieda Matthews all of whom have published autobiographies. Contrary to the situation of black women autobiographers, male autobiographers such as Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Bloke Modisane are all established writers of narrative prose. All three have included comments about their writing careers in their life histories.

5. Asked why there were so few black women novelists in South Africa, Mirram Tlali gave the following answer.

A novel is something you have to reflect on; you have to create it, you have to have characters, interplay of characters,... For a black woman, I don't think it is very easy unless you have complete peace inside, which is something I strive very much to get. You have to analyse the situation, and all that needs peace of mind and time. It needs a long time and you have to think about it. And you have to dream about it and black women do not have time to dream (Quoted in Pamela Ryan, 'Black Women Have no Time to Dream' p.95).

6. In Forced to Grow Magona refers to short pieces and poems she wrote, but these as she points out, 'did not amount to much' (1992:184). It was only with the publication of To My Children's Children in 1990 that Magona made her debut on the literary scene. (See also Magona's interview with Thengani Ngwenya).
7. Pre-text is used by the influential theorist of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune to translate the French expression "avant-texte" to refer to all materials which come before the final text but which may be regarded as preparation for it (see Lejeune's article in the bibliography).
8. I use the term 'creative' advisedly here as my aim is to emphasise the inevitable element of interpretation inherent in any act of self-reconstruction. Magona's latest publication is a collection of short stories entitled Push-Push (1996). According to Jane Rosenthal who interviewed her for the Mail and Guardian, Magona is currently

working on three novels. She has also written a collection of essays in Xhosa called Imida.

9. Besides her academic achievements, working for the United Nations during the years of Apartheid and publishing an autobiography in two languages may justifiably be regarded as major achievements.
10. In Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies, the concept of discourse is defined as follows:

Discourses are the product of social, historical and institutional formations, and meanings are produced by these institutionalised discourses. ... Thus individuals don't simply learn languages as abstract skills. On the contrary, everyone is predated by established discourses in which various *subjectivities* are represented already - for instance, those of class, gender, nation, ethnicity, age, family and individuality. (1994:93-4)

As indicated in the title, this is the sense in which the concept of discourse is used throughout this chapter (See also Leigh Gilmore's comment on subjectivity and discourse).

11. Feminist critics of autobiography such as Estelle Jelinek and Leah D. Hewitt argue that men normally compose linear and sequential life narratives charting their development along a predictable path of childhood inexperience, maturity and, finally, public fame. Rousseau's Confessions is often cited as an example of a quintessentially 'male' autobiography.

12. Writing about common critical approaches to feminist autobiography Nancy Miller has remarked:

To a great extent, this assumption of a universal female subject was of course a sign of the times. Those of us for whom "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" or "The Traffic in Women" and other stirring pieces of feminist theory published in the extraordinary years of the 1970s had been apocalyptically illuminating, found it hard to resist the appeal of the monolith. (1991:125)

13. Studies on the theory and practice of feminist autobiographical writing include : Estelle Jelinek (1980), Domna Stanton (1984), Sidonie Smith (1987), Shari Benstock (1988), Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (1988), Liz Stanley (1992) and Leigh Gilmore (1994). For an overview of feminist autobiographical theory see Janice Morgan 'Subject to Subject/Voice to Voice: Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Fiction by Women Writers'.

14. As used here the concept of hegemony denotes 'domination with consent' as explained by Tim O'Sullivan et al:

The crucial aspect of the notion of hegemony is not that it operates by forcing people against their conscious will or better judgement to concede power to the already-powerful, but that it describes a situation whereby our consent is actively sought for those ways of making sense of the world which "happen" to fit in with the interests of the hegemonic alliance of *classes*, or **power block**. (1994:133)

Lynda Gilfillan comments as follows on the 'counterhegemonic' potential of autobiography : 'Autobiography that is counterhegemonic sets up a self that contradicts the ideology of separation, apartness and inferiority.' (1996:67)

(see also Edmond Cros. 1988. Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism. p.ix).

15. Susan Stanford Friedman makes the following comments regarding 'female subjectivity' as 'relational':

Instead of seeing themselves as solely unique, women often explore their sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness. the importance of mother-daughter relationships is useful in understanding the unfolding self in women's writing. (1988:44)

16. Escaping from working-class poverty by acquiring educational qualifications is a common theme in South African autobiographical writing by blacks. For instance, both Peter Abrahams and Bloke Modisane are almost obsessed with moving out of the degrading proletarian existence into a petty-bourgeois status.

17. Mphahlele comments as follows on the significance of the communal fire place (it is significant that girls were not allowed to attend these important meetings):

We learned a great deal from the fire-place, even before we were aware of it: history, tradition and custom, code of behaviour, communal responsibility, social living and so on. (1958:15)

18. I use the term organic to distinguish this sense of ethnic identification from that imposed by the state based on the policy of tribal differences.

19. In her book Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich explains her conception of the relationship and the 'institution' of motherhood and accounts for its

inherently repressive (for women) condition:

Throughout this book I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: *the potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential - and all women - shall remain under male control. (1977:13)

20. Idikazi is a derogatory Xhosa term used to refer to an unmarried woman. It is not a neutral descriptive term but carries demeaning connotations.
21. Quoted in Rose M. Brewer 'Theorizing Race, Class and Gender'. P.16. In Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A. Busia (eds). Theorizing Black Feminisms.

Thengani Ngwenya Interviews Sindiwe Magona

7 August 1996

1. You made your debut in the international literary market with the publication of the first volume of your autobiography in 1990, did you write anything significant prior to that?

No

2. Can you give a brief account of what motivated you to write your autobiography (please refer to both volumes)?

For a long time, I had been part of the vast, very vocal majority, complaining about how others write about us, tell our story, etc. I reached a point where I felt I should do a little more than just complain - tell my story/our story, myself. The story of South Africa can never be complete without the contribution of all the various/disparate segments of its population. We owe it to posterity to, at least, make the attempt.

3. What is your understanding of the concept of feminism, especially in so far as it relates to black women writers in the South African context?

I would not assume to speak for all black women writers in South Africa. However, what little reading I have done in this regard, seems to point to the awareness of the hard life that is the lot of African women. When a group is as oppressed as the African woman is, then the ordinary assumes the realm of the extraordinary, the heroic. I hope the African woman will,

more and more, come to be presented in literature as such as a figure.

4. How important is traditional Xhosa culture in your life as a writer?

Very important. I am of the opinion that we need to look at the plight of the African family, not just amaXhosa, and examine the historical/political/traditional patterns that have led to the present-day situation in which it finds itself. We have to see what was good, what has been destroyed or taken away from us before we reclaim that while discarding that which is nefarious to our living. A lot was good with our ways of doing things - different, yes ... but good. We need to revive some of those customs, perhaps adapting them to today's living. We need to change others and, others, completely discard. There may be reason to institute new ones, who knows?

5. Are there any significant aspects of your life which you deliberately or unwittingly omitted in your two-volumed autobiography? If so, would you kindly account for these omissions.

Not really. I wrote the autobiography under the impression it would be more a record of how we lived - say, in a 100 years from now rather than contemporary literature. Consequently, I was rather ruthlessly candid (which I do not regret). I'm sure I might have been more discreet had the full implications of the act of writing been clear to me.

6. Race, class and gender are presented as the three main determinants of self-identity in both volumes of your autobiography. Of the three factors, which

would you regard as the most crucial in shaping your self-awareness as a woman in South African in the 1960s and 1970s?

First, race. However, with time, gender began to play a more important role as I became aware of the added injustices to which I was subjected to only because of my gender; and I began to realize that my African brother, my mother and my father, was not always sympathetic to that additional burden (might, in fact, be part of that burden). But it is difficult to say one is more important than the other. One is not hurt less because the injury stems from racial, sexual or other forms of discrimination, for example the debilitation that comes from the cumulative effect of the combined and daily onslaught of all these factors can not be imagined.

7. How would you describe the relationship (thematic, stylistic and otherwise) between your two short story collections and your autobiography?

I think the stories are more structured whereas, with the autobiography, all I did was really just to narrate the story of my life with little embellishment or consideration for style or any pretence at such. However, especially with the second book of short stories, there is more appeal to the imagination, more fiction, so to say, although some episodes do go back to memory. What do you think?

8. Do you plan to publish a third volume of your autobiography?

Not in the immediate future, but I do not altogether discount the idea.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Titles of autobiographies or autobiographical books are marked with an asterisk (*).

- Abrahams, Peter. 1940. A Blackman Speaks of Freedom. Durban : Universal Printing Works.
- . 1942. Dark Testament. London: Allen and Unwin.
- *----- . 1953. Return to Goli. London: Faber and Faber.
- * ----- . 1954. Tell Freedom. London: Faber and Faber.
- Abrams, M. H. 1981. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Fourth Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1975. Morning Yet on Creation Day. London: Heinemann.
- Adey, David. 1982. Review of Towards the Mountain. UNISA English Studies. 20(2):51-52.
- Alexander, Peter. 1994. Alan Paton: A Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Althusser, L. 1976. Essays in Self-Criticism. London: New Left Books.
- . 1979. For Marx. London : Verso
- Alverson, Hoyt. 1978. Mind in the Heart of Darkness: Value and Self-Identity among the Tswana of Southern Africa. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Anderson, Susan. 1970. 'Something in Me Died : Autobiographies of South African Writers in Exile.' Books Abroad. 44 : 398-404.
- *Baartman, Ben. 1988. The Autobiography of a South African Textile Worker. London: South African Congress of Trade Unions.
- Bahn, Sonja. 1984. 'Autobiography as a Vehicle of Protest in South Africa'. In Doreen MacDermott (ed). Autobiographical and Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth.
- Barbre, J. W. et al (eds). 1989. Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Barnett, Ursula. 1983. A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980). London:Sinclair Browne.
- *Barthes, Roland. 1977. Roland Barthes. London : Macmilan Press.
- , 1988. 'The Death of the Author'. In David Lodge (ed). Modern Criticism and Theory : A Reader.
- Beinart, William. 1987. 'Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism and Nationalism: the Experiences of a South African Migrant, 1930-1960'. In Marks, S and Trapido, S (eds). The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism.

- Belsey, Catherine.1991. 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text'. In Robyn R Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism.
- *Benson, Mary. 1989. A Far Cry: The Making of A South African. London: Penguin.
- Benstock, Shari (ed). 1988. The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press.
- Bertaux, Daniel(ed). 1981. Biography and Society : The Life History Approach in Social Sciences. Beverly Hills : Carlifornia/Sage Publications.
- Blackburn, Regina. 1980. 'In Search of the Black Female Self: African-American Women's Autobiography and Ethnicity'. In Estelle C. Jelinek (ed). Women's Autobiography : Essays in Criticism.
- Blanchard, Marc Eli. 1982. 'The Critique of Autobiography.' Comparative Literature. 34(2):97-115
- Bloom, H and Trilling L.1973.(eds). Romantic Poetry and Prose.New York : Oxford University Press.
- Bozzoli, Belinda (ed).1987. Class, Community and Conflict. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

- ,1979. Labour, Township and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- , 1991. Women of Phokeng. Johannesburg : Ravan Press.
- Bree, Germaine. 1978. Narcissus Absconditus: The Problematic Art of Autobiography in Contemporary France. Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Breutz, P-L, 1953. The Tribes of Rustenburg and Pilansberg Districts. Pretoria: The Government Printer.
- Brewer, Rose M. 1993. 'Theorizing race, class and gender : The new scholarship of Black feminist intellectuals and Black women's labor'. In James, S.M. and Busia A.P.A. (eds). Theorizing Black Feminisms.
- Brodzki, Bella and Schenck, Celeste (eds). 1988 . Life/Lines : Theorising Women's Autobiography: Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bruss, Elizabeth. 1976. Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Buck (Jr), Willis. R. 1980. 'Reading Autobiography'. Genre. XIII (4):477-498.
- Bunting, Brian. 1975. Moses Kotane. London: Inkululeko Publications.
- Burness, Donald. 1970. 'Six Responses to Apartheid'. Presence Africaine. 76:82-95

- Butler, Guy. 1972. 'Introduction to: "*Literature in English in South Africa*":
In English and South Africa. Cape Town: Nasou Limited.
- *-----, 1977. Karoo Morning: An Autobiography. Cape Town: David Philip.
- *-----, 1983. Bursting World : An Autobiography 1936-45. Cape Town: David Philip.
- , 1988. Untitled Review of Journey Continued. Eastern Province Herald. 16 June 1988. p.6.
- *-----, 1991. A Local Habitation : An Autobiography 1945-90. Cape Town : David Philip
- Butler, Jeffrey et al. (eds). 1987. Democratic Liberalism in South Africa:Its History and Prospect. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Butterfield, Stephen. 1974. Black Autobiography in America. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Byrne, Deirdre. 1994. 'A Different Kind of Resistance: An Overview of South African Black Women's Writing'. UNISA English Studies. XXXII (2):22-26.
- Callan, Edward. 1968. 'Alan Paton and Liberal Party'. In The Long View (essays by Alan Paton edited and introduced by Edward Callan). London : Pall Mall Press.
- , 1982. Alan Paton. New York: Twayne Publishers. (First published in 1968).

- *Campbell, Roy. 1934. Broken Record : Reminiscences. London : Boriswood.
- *-----1971. Light on a Dark Horse : An Autobiography 1901-1935.
Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Cartey, Wilfred. 1969. Whispers from a Continent. The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa. New York : Random House.
- Caute, David. 1974. Collisions: Essays and Reviews. London: Quartet Books.
- Chapman, Michael. 1989. The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s.
Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Christie, Sarah et al. 1980. Perspectives on South African Fiction. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Coertze, R.D. 1988. Bafokeng Family Law and Law of Succession.
Pretoria: SABRA.
- Cohn, Dorrit. 1978. Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- *Coka, Gillbert. 1954. 'The Story of Gilbert Coka of the Zulu Tribe of Natal South Africa'. In Margery Perham (ed).
- Coplan, David. 1985. In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Coser, Lewis, A. (ed). 1963. Sociology Through Literature. Stony Brook: State University of New York and New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

- Costello, Jeanne. 1991. 'Taking the Woman out of Women's Autobiography. The Perils and Potentials of Theorising Female Subjectivities.' Diacritics. 20(2-3):123-134.
- Coullie, Judith. 1991. "Not Quite Fiction": The Challenges of Poststructuralism to the Reading of Contemporary South African Autobiography.' Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa. 3:1-23.
- , 1994. 'Self, Life and Writing in Selected South African Autobiographical Texts.' PhD Thesis : University of Natal.
- Couzens, Tim. 1985. The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Cros, Edmond. 1988. Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Culler, Jonathan. 1973. 'Structure of Ideology and Ideology of Structure'. New Literary History. 3 : 471-482.
- Curtin, John Claude. 1974. 'Autobiography and the Dialectic of Consciousness.' International Philosophical Quarterly 14:343-346.
- Darhorne, O.R. 1975. African Literature in the Twentieth Century. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davies, Joan. 1966. African Trade Unions. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Daymond Margaret. 1991. 'On Retaining and on Recognising Changes in the Genre 'Autobiography' Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa. 3:31-41.
- . 1995. 'Class in the Discourses of Sindiwe Magona's Auto-biography and Fiction'. Journal of Southern African Studies. 21(4) : 561-572.
- de Man, Paul. 1979. 'Autobiography as De-facement'. Modern Language Notes. 94(5): 919-930.
- Denith S. 1986. 'Contemporary Working-class Autobiography: Politics of Form, Politics of Content'. In Philip Dodd (ed). Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography.
- Denzin, Norman K. 1989. Interpretive Biography. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. 1961. Pattern and Meaning in History : Thoughts on History and Society. Edited and introduced by H.P. Rickman. New York: Harper and Row.
- Dodd, Philip.(ed). 1986 Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography. London: Frank Cass.
- Dodson, Don. 1974. 'The Four Modes of *Drum*: Popular Fiction and Social Control in South Africa.' African Studies Review. 17:317-343.
- Eagleton, Terry.1976. Marxism and Literary Criticism. Oxford:Oxford University Press.

- , 1983. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Eakin, Paul John. 1985. Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Egan, Susanna. 1984. Patterns of Experience in Autobiography. Chapel Hill and London : Univ of North Carolina Press.
- , 1987. 'Changing Faces of Heroism: Some Questions Raised by Contemporary Autobiography'. Biography. 10(1):20-38.
- Egerton, George. 1992. 'Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Polygenre'. Biography. 15(3):221-242.
- Elphick, Richard. 1987. 'Mission Christianity and Inter-war Liberalism'. In Jeffrey Butler et al. (eds). Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect.
- Ensor, R. 1992. The Novels of Peter Abrahams and the Rise of Nationalism in Africa. Essen: Blaue Eule.
- Epstein, William H. 1991. Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Evans, Mary. 1981. Lucien Goldmann: An Introduction. Sussex: The Harvester Press.
- February, Vernon: A. 1981. Mind Your Colour : The Coloured Stereotype in South African Literature. London : Kegan Paul.

- Folkenflik, Robert. 1993. 'Introduction: The Institution of Autobiography'. In Robert Folkenflik (ed). The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. 'What is an Author?'. In David Lodge (ed). Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1996 'Multiculturalism and Gender Equity : The U.S. "Difference" Debates Revisited'. Constellations. 3(1) : 61 - 73.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. 1988. 'My Statue, My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women.' In Shari Benstock (ed). The Private Self : Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiography Writings.
- Freadman, R and Miller,S. 1989. 'Constructivist Anti-Humanism:Catherine Belsey' The Critical Review. 29:110-127.
- Freeman, Mark. 1991. Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative. London and New York : Routledge.
- Friedman, S. Susan. 1988. 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice'. In Shari Benstock (ed.) The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings.
- Friedson, M (ed). 1981. New Directions in Biography. Biographical Research Centre: The University Press of Hawaii.

- Geertz, Clifford. 1975. The Interpretation of Cultures. London: Hutchinson.
- Gerhart, Gail. 1978. Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology. Brekeley: University of California Press.
- Gilfillan, Lynda. 1995. 'Theorising the Counterhegemonic : A Critical Study of Black South African Autobiography from 1954-1963'. Doctoral Thesis : University of South Africa.
- Gilmore, Leigh.1994. Autobiographics : A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Goldmann, Lucien. 1967. 'The Sociology of Literature: Status and Problems of Method' International Social Science Journal. XIX (4).
- , 1975. 'Dialectical Materialism and Literary History.' New Left Review. No. 92.39-52.
- , 1980. Method in the Sociology of Literature. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Translated and edited by William Q Boelhower.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1973. The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing. Johannesburg: Sprocas/Ravan.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1979. "The Formation of the Intellectuals'. In Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau (eds). Communication and Class Struggle. (Vol. 1)New York: International General.

- Gray, Stephen. 1990. 'The Long Eye of History: Four Autobiographical Texts by Peter Abrahams.' Pretexts.2 (2):99-115.
- *----- . 1993. Accident of Birth. Johannesburg: Congress of South African Writers.
- Gready, Paul. 1990. 'The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: the Unreal Reality of Their World.' Journal of Southern African Studies. 16(1):139-164.
- Gunn, Janet Varner 1982. Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gusdorf, Georges 1980. 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' Trans by James Olney. In James Olney (ed). Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.
- Hart, Francis, R. 1970. 'Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography'. New Literary History. 1:486-511
- Hewitt, D. Leah. 1990. Autobiographical Tightropes. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Higginbotham, Eveyln Brooks.1992. 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race'. Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 17 (2) : 253-4.
- Hirson, Baruch. 1989. Yours for the Union:Class and Community Struggles in South Africa1930 - 1947. Johannesburg: Wits Universtiy Press

- Hoernle, R.A.F. 1939. South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Hopkinson, Tom. 1962. In the Fiery Continent. London: Gollancz.
- Horowitz, Muriel. 1969. South Africa's Workers: Their Organisations and the Patterns of Employment. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Horowitz, Irving Louis. 1977 'Autobiography as the Presentation of Self for Social Immortality'. New Literary History. 9(1) : 173-179
- Howart, L. 1980 'Some Principles of Autobiography'. In James Olney.(ed). Autobiography : Essays Theoretical and Critical.
- Hull, G.T.,Bell-Scott,P and Smith,B. 1982 All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave. Old Westbury, NY:Feminist Press.
- Hurst, Christopher. Letter to Thengani.H. Ngwenya. 12 April 1995.
- *Hutchinson, Alfred. 1960. Road to Ghana. New York: John Day Co.
- *Jabavu, Noni. 1982. The Ochre People Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- James, Stanlie. M and Busia, P.A. Abena. 1993. Theorizing Black Feminisims : The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women. London and New York : Routledge.

- Jay, Paul. 1987. 'What's The Use? : Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography.' Biography. 10 (1): 39-54.
- Jelinek, Estelle C.(ed). 1980. Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- *Joseph, Helen.1986. Side by Side : The Autobiography of Helen Joseph. Johannesburg : Ad Donker.
- Jouve, Nicole W. 1991. White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography. London: Routledge.
- Joyce, James. 1986. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- *Kadali, Clements. 1970. My Life and the ICU: The Autobiography of a Black Trade Unionist. London: Frank Cass and Co.
- Kadar, Marlene.(ed). 1992. Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- *Kasrils Ronnie. 1993. 'Armed and Dangerous' : My Undercover Struggle Against Apartheid. London : Heinemann.
- Kuhn, Willie. 1991. 'Beskrywing Wat Onthuts' Insig. Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis: Die Universiteit van die Vrystaat. May.p.8.
- Kotane, Moses. 1942. 'Defects in Party Education' Freedom - Vryheid. September. Article reproduced in South African Communists Speak 1915 -1980. Inkululeko Publications: London 1981.

- *Kuzwayo, Ellen. 1985. Call Me Woman. Johannesburg: Ravan Press
- LaCapra, Dominick (ed). 1991. The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Laurenson, D and Swingewood, A. 1971. The Sociology of Literature. London : MacGibbon and Kee.
- Laurenson, Diana. 1978. 'Current Research in the Sociology of Literature'. In Diana Laurenson (ed). The Sociology of Literature: Applied Studies. Keele: University of Keele Press.
- Leat, James et. al (eds). 1986. Contending Ideologies in South Africa. Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip.
- Leeman, Clive Phillip. 1978. 'Art and Politics in the Novels of Peter Abrahams. A Study of his Three Political Novels'. PhD Dissertation: University of California.
- Lejeune, Philippe. 1991. 'The Genetic Study of Autobiographical Texts.' Boundary. 14 (1): 1-11.
- Lindfors, Bernth. 1991. Popular Literatures in Africa. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Leroy, Vail. 1989. 'Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History'. In Leroy Vail(ed.) The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa.

- Link, and Link-Heer,.1988. Foreword to Edmond Cros's Theory and Practice of Sociocriticism.
- Linnemann, Russel, J. 1984. 'Alan Paton: Anachronism or Visionary'. Commonwealth Novel in English. 3 (1): 88-100.
- Lionnet, Francoise. 1989. Autobiographical Voices : Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture. Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press.
- Lodge, David. 1988. Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader. Longman : London and New York.
- Lodge, Tom. 1983. Black Politics in South Africa since 1945. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- ,1987. 'Political Organisations in Pretoria's African Townships, 1940-1963'. In Bozzoli , B (ed). Class, Community and Conflict.
- MacDermott, Doriann (ed). 1984 Autobiographical and Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth. Sabadell (Barcelona): EditorialAUSA.
- *Magona, Sindiwe.1990. To My Children's Children. Cape Town:David Philip.
- , 1991. Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night. Cape Town: David Philip.
- *-----, 1992. Forced to Grow. Cape Town: David Philip.
- *-----,1995. Kubantwana Babantwana Bam. Cape Town: David Philip.

- , 1996. Push-Push and Other Stories. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Magubane, Bernard. 1979. The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- *Makeba, Miriam (with James Hall) 1988. Makeba : My Story. Johannesburg : Skotaville Publishers.
- *Makhoba, Mandlenkosi. 1984. The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers: The Story of Mandlenkosi Makhoba. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Manganyi, Chabani. 1981. 'Biography: The Black South Africa Connection. In Antony M Friedson (ed). New Directions in Biography.
- Marks, S and Trapido, S. (eds). 1987. The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa. London : Longman.
- Marquard, Leo. 1948. The Native in South Africa. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- *Mashinini, Emma. 1989. Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life. London: The Women's Press.
- *Matshikiza, Todd. 1961. Chocolates for My Wife. London : Hodder and Stoughton.
- Mattelart, A and Siegelau, S.(eds). Communication and Class Struggle. New York : International General.

- *Mattera Don. 1987. Memory is the Weapon. Johannesburg : Ravan Press.
- *Matthews, Frieda. Remembrances. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape.
- Mazlish, Bruce. 1970. "Autobiography and Psychoanalysis". Encounter. 35 (4): 28-37.
- McClintock, Anne. 1991. "The Very House of Difference": Race, Gender, and the Politics of South African Women's Narrative in Poppie Nongena'. In Dominick LaCapra (ed). The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance.
- Merton, Robert K. 1988. 'Some Thoughts on the Concept of Sociological Autobiography'. In Martha White Riley (ed). Sociological Lives.
- Miliband, Ralph. 1977. Marxism and Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Nancy. 1991. Getting Personal. New York and London : Routledge.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1970. The Sociological Imagination. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Misch, Georg. 1951. A History of Autobiography in Antiquity. Translated by E.W. Dickes. 2 Vls Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press.
- *Modisane, Bloke. 1986. Blame Me on History.(1963). Johannesburg: Ad Donker.

- *Mokgatle, Naboth. 1990. The Autobiography of an Unknown South African. (1971). Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Morgan, Janice. 1977 'Subject to Subject/Voice to Voice : Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Fiction by Women Writers'. In Janice Morgan and Colette T. Hall (Eds). Gender and Genre in Literature : Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction. New York and London : Garland Publishing.
- Morphet, Tony. 1983. 'Alan Paton:The Honour of Meditation.' English in Africa. 10 (2):1-10.
- Mncube, F.S. 1958. 'The Bantu In Urban Areas'. In Symposia on South Africa: Roodepoort : Roodepoort-Maraisburg Rotary Club.
- *Mphahlele, Es'kia. 1959 Down Second Avenue. London: Faber and Faber .
- *Mtolo, Bruno. 1966. Umkhonto Wesizwe: The Road to the Left. Durban: Drakensberg Press.
- Mulhern, Francis. 1975. 'Introduction to Goldmann'. New Left Review. 92. 34-38.
- Nash, Andrew. 1983. 'The Way to the Beloved Country: History and the Individual in Alan Paton's Towards the Mountain'. English in Africa. 10 (2): 11-27.
- Neuman, Shirley. 1992. 'Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Differences.' In Marlene Kadar (ed). Essays on Life Writing.

- *Niehaus Carl. 1993. Fighting for Hope. Cape Town and Johannesburg : Human and Rousseau.
- Ngubane, Jordan. 1968. An African Explains Apartheid. New York : Frederick A. Praeger.
- Ngwenya, T.H. 1989. 'The Ontological Status of Self in Autobiography: The Case of Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History'. Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa 1(1): 67-76.
- 1995 Interview with Reiki Rakhudu. 13 April 1995. Phokeng.
- 1995 Interview with Abel Mokgatle. 13 April 1995. Phokeng.
- Nicol, Mike. 1991. A Good-Looking Corpse: The World of Drum. London : Secker and Warburg.
- *Nkosi, Lewis. 1983. Home and Exile and Other Selections. (1965). London: Longmans.
- *Ntantala, Phyllis. 1992. A Life's Mosaic. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Nuttall, Sarah. 1996. 'Reading and Recognition in Three South African Women's Autobiographies'. Current Writing : Text and Reception in Southern Africa. 8(1) : 1-18.
- Obradovic, Nadezda. 1991. 'Review of Blame Me on History. New York :Simon and Schuster (1990).' World Literature Today. 65:353.

- Ogunbesan, Kolawole. 1979. The Writing of Peter Abrahams. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Oliphant, Andries and Vladslavic, Ivan (eds). 1988. Autobiographical Readings by the African Writers Association on 23 January 1988.' Staffrider. 7 (1):86-88.
- Olney, James. 1973. Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature. Princeton:Princeton University Press.
- .. 1980. Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- O'Sullivan, Tim et al. (eds). 1994. Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies. 2nd Edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- Papineau, David. 1988. 'Hoping for Hope: Reviews of Alan Paton's Journey Continued and Nadine Gordimer's The Essential Gesture.' Times Literary Supplement. 23-29 September 1988:1043.
- Parker, Kenneth.1978. The South African Novel in English. London : Macmillan.
- Pascal, Roy. 1960. Design and Truth in Autobiography. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Paton, Alan.1948. Cry, the Beloved Country. New York : Scribner.
- .. 1969. Kontakion for you Departed. London: Jonathan Cape.

- 1973. Apartheid and the Archbishop : The Life and Times of Geoffrey Clayton. Cape Town : David Philip.
- , 1975. Knocking on the Door. (Paton's Shorter Writings Selected and Edited by Colin Gardner). Cape Town: David Philip.
- *-----1980. Towards the Mountain. London : Penguin.
- 1987. Save the Beloved Country. New York : Scribner.
- *-----1988. Journey Continued. London : Penguin.
- *Perham, Margery.(ed). 1954. Ten Africans. London : Faber and Faber.
- Pilling, John. 1981. Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny. London:Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- *Plomer, William. 1984. The South African Autobiography. Cape Town : David Philip.
- Plummer, Ken. 1983. Documents of life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Povey, John. 1971. "Non-European" Writing in South Africa.' Review of National Literatures.' 2 (2):66-80.
- Proctor, Andre. 1979. 'Class Struggle, Segregation and the City : A History of Sophiatown 1905-40'. In Bozzoli, B. (ed). Labour, Township and Protest.

- *Qabula, Temba. 1989. A Working Life, Cruel Beyond Belief. Durban : National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa.
- Rabkin, David. 1976. "Drum Magazine (1951-1961) and the Works of African Writers Associated with it." Doctoral Thesis:University of Leeds.
- *Ramphela, Mamphela. 1995. A Life. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Reismann, Paul. 1986. 'The Person and the Life Cycle in African Social Life and Thought.' African Studies Review. 29(2):71-116.
- Renza, Louis. A. 1980. 'The Veto of the Imagination: A theory of Autobiography: In James Olney (ed).Essays Theoretical and Critical.
- *Resha, Maggie. 1991. My Life in the Struggle. Johannesburg: Congress of South African Writers.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1977 Of Woman Born : Motherhood as Experience and Institution. London : Virago Press
- Rich, Paul. 1984. White Power and the Liberal Conscience. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- , 1993. Hope and Despair: English-Speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics 1896-1976. London: British Academic Press.
- Riley, Martha, W. (ed). 1988. Sociological Lives. Newbury Park: Sage.

- Rosenthal, Jane. 1996. "Stories Flying All Over." Interview with Sindiwe Magona.' In *Review of Books* : Literary Supplement to the *Mail and Guardian*. April 1996:3-4.
- Roux, Edward. 1966. Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Blackman's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Rubin, Martin. 1983. Review of Towards the Mountain. Research in African Literatures. 14(2):261-266.
- Ryan, Michael. 1989. Politics and Culture: Working Hypotheses for a Post-Revolutionary Society. London : MacMillan.
- Ryan, Pamela. 1992. 'Black Women Do Not Have Time to Dream : The Politics of Time and Space.' Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 11(1) : 95-102.
- *Sachs, E.S. 1957. Rebels' Daughters. Manchester: MacGibbon and Kee.
- Sampson, Anthony. 1956. Drum. London: Collins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.
- *Sartre, Jean Paul. 1964. The Words. London: Hamish Hamilton. Translated by Irene Clephane.
- Shapiro, Michael. J. 1988. The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis. Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Shapiro, Stephen A. 1968. 'The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography'. Comparative Literature Studies. 5:421-54.

- Shava, Piniel V. 1989. A People's Voice : Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century. London : Zed Books.
- Shear, Keith. 1989. 'Depictions of Childhood in South African Autobiography, with Particular Reference to the 1920s.' English in Africa. 16 (1): 39-69.
- *Slovo, Joe. 1995. Slovo : The Unfinished Autobiograpy. London : Hodder and Stoughton.
- Smith, Sidonie. 1987 . A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- , 1993 Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia. (eds). 1992. De/Colonizing the Subject : The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, Valerie. 1987. Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narratives. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Smyth, Edmund. 1995. Introduction: Autobiography and the Existential Self: Studies in Modern French Writing. New York: St. Martin's Press. Edited by Terry Keefe and Edmund Smyth.

- Sole, Kelwyn. 1979. 'Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature 1948-60.' In Belinda Bozzoli (ed). Labour, Township and Protest.
- Spengeman, William. 1980. The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Sprinker, Michael, 1980. 'The End of Autobiography'. In James Olney (ed) Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.
- Stanley, Liz. 1992. The Autobiographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Autobiography: Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- , 1994. 'On Autobiography in Sociology'. 27(1) : 41-52.
- Stanton, Domna (ed). 1984. The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the 10th to the 20th Century. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Starfield, Jane. 1988. "Not Quite History": The Autobiographies of H. Selby Msimang and R.V. Selope Thema and the Writing of South African History.' Social Dynamics. 14(2):16-35.
- Stone, Albert.E. (ed). 1981. The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays. Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.
- Sturrock, John. 1977. 'The New Model Autobiographer' New Literary History. IX(1): 51-63.

- 1993a. The Language of Autobiography : Studies in the First Person Singular. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- .1993b. 'Theory Versus Autobiography'. In Robert Folkenflik (ed). The Culture of Autobiography.
- *Suzman, Helen. 1993. In No Uncertain Terms : Memoirs. London : Sinclair-Stevenson.
- Szczepanski, Jan. 1981. 'The Use of Autobiographies in Historical Social Psychology.' In Daniel Bertaux (ed). Biography and Society.
- Thale, Thomas. 1994. 'Of Tribal Boys and Communists: Naboth Mokgatle's The Autobiography of an Unknown South African.' Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa. 6:43-56.
- . 1995. 'Paradigms Lost? Paradigms Regained: Working Class Autobiography in South Africa.' Journal of Southern African Studies. 21 (4) : 613-622.
- Thurley, Geoffrey. 1983. The Romantic Predicament. London : Macmillan Press.
- Todd, Jane Marie. 1990. Autobiographics in Freud and Derrida. New York and London : Garland Publishing.
- *Tom, Petros. 1985. My Life Struggle: The Story of Petrus Tom. Johannesburg:Ravan Press.

- Tonkin Elizabeth. 1992. Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tucker, Martin (ed). 1991. Literary Exile in the Twentieth Century: An Analysis and Biographical Dictionary. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Vail, Lerory (ed). 1989. The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa. London : James Currey.
- Van Wyk Smith, M. 1990. Grounds of Contest: A Critical Survey of South African English Literature. Kenwyn: Jutalit.
- Verene, Donald, Phillip. 1991. The New Art of Autobiography: Essays on the Life of Giambattista Vico Written by Himself. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Visser, N.W. 1976. 'South Africa: The Renaissance that Failed.' Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 11 (1):42-57.
- Wade, Michael.1972. Peter Abrahams. London: Evans Brothers Ltd.
- , 1978. 'South Africa's First Proletarian Writer.' In Kenneth Parker (ed). The South African Novel in English.
- , 1981. 'The Liberal Tradition in South African Fiction.' PhD Thesis : University of Sussex.
- , 1988. 'Ties that Bind: Dependency and Rebellion in Some South African Autobiographies.' Research in African Literatures. 19(4): 489-507.

- Walker, Cheryl. 1991. 'Persona Criticism and the Death of the Author.' In William H Epstein (ed). Contesting the Subject.
- Warhol R.R and Herndl(eds). Feminisms : An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. New Brunswick : Rutgers University.
- Watson, Stephen. 1982. 'Cry, the Beloved Country and the Failure of Liberal Vision.' English in Africa. 9 (1): 29-44.
- , 1988. Review of Journey Continued. Social Dynamics. 15(2): 104-107.
- Watts, Jane. 1989. Black Writers from South Africa: Towards a Discourse of Liberation. London: Macmillan.
- Weintraub, Karl. 1975. 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness.' Critical Inquiry. 1 (4):821-848.
- , 1978. The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Welch, Colin. 1988. 'No Other Medicine: Review of Journey Continued.' The Spectator. 10 July 1988:27-28.
- Westley, David. 1994. 'A Select Bibliography of South African Autobiography.' Biography. 17 (3):268-280.
- Willemen, Paul. 1978. 'Notes on Subjectivity: On Reading Edward Branigan's "Subjectivity Under Siege". Screen. 19 (1) : 46-69.

- *Wordsworth Jonathan et al (eds). The Prelude, 1799,1805,1850. London & New York
W.W. Norton and Co.
- Wordsworth, William. 1973. "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" In Romantic Harold
Bloom and Lionel Trilling (eds). Romantic Poetry and
Prose.
- Worsfold, Brian. 1984. 'Growing Up Under Apartheid: A Look at the Socio-
political Background in Ezekiel Mphahlele's Down
Second Avenue and Peter Abrahams' Tell Freedom'. In
Dorieann MacDermott (ed). Autobiographical and
Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth.
- *Wright, Richard. 1944. American Hunger. New York: Harper and Row.