



AFRICAN HISTORIES  
AND MODERNITIES

# South African Autobiography as Subjective History

## Making Concessions to the Past

Lena Englund

palgrave  
macmillan

# African Histories and Modernities

Series Editors

Toyin Falola

The University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX, USA

Matthew M. Heaton

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, VA, USA

This book series serves as a scholarly forum on African contributions to and negotiations of diverse modernities over time and space, with a particular emphasis on historical developments. Specifically, it aims to refute the hegemonic conception of a singular modernity, Western in origin, spreading out to encompass the globe over the last several decades. Indeed, rather than reinforcing conceptual boundaries or parameters, the series instead looks to receive and respond to changing perspectives on an important but inherently nebulous idea, deliberately creating a space in which multiple modernities can interact, overlap, and conflict. While privileging works that emphasize historical change over time, the series will also feature scholarship that blurs the lines between the historical and the contemporary, recognizing the ways in which our changing understandings of modernity in the present have the capacity to affect the way we think about African and global histories.

### **Editorial Board**

Akintunde Akinyemi, Literature, University of Florida, Gainesville, USA  
Malami Buba, African Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin, South Korea

Emmanuel Mbah, History, CUNY, College of Staten Island, USA

Insa Nolte, History, University of Birmingham, USA

Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o, International Studies, Rhodes College, USA

Samuel Olorunoba, Political Science, TMALI, University of South Africa, South Africa

Bridget Teboh, History, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA

More information about this series at

<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14758>

Lena Englund

South African  
Autobiography as  
Subjective History

Making Concessions to the Past

palgrave  
macmillan

Lena Englund  
Finnish Language and Cultural Research  
University of Eastern Finland  
Kuopio, Finland

English Language and Literature  
Åbo Akademi University  
Turku, Finland

ISSN 2634-5773

ISSN 2634-5781 (electronic)

African Histories and Modernities

ISBN 978-3-030-83231-5

ISBN 978-3-030-83232-2 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83232-2>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image © David Noton Photography / Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	1
	1.1 <i>Structure of the Book</i>	10
	<i>Works Cited</i>	13
<b>2</b>	<b>Writing Subjective Histories</b>	17
	2.1 <i>Autobiographical Writing</i>	17
	2.2 <i>Revisiting the Past</i>	25
	2.3 <i>Personal Histories in the Making</i>	29
	2.4 <i>Belonging</i>	32
	<i>Works Cited</i>	38
<b>3</b>	<b>Struggling for Space in Christopher Hope's <i>The Café de Move-on Blues</i>, Sisonke Msimang's <i>Always Another Country</i>, and Tumi Morake's <i>And Then Mama Said....: Words That Set My Life Alight</i></b>	45
	3.1 <i>Lost Lessons of the Past</i>	48
	3.2 <i>Contested Monuments</i>	51
	3.3 <i>Uncomfortable Belonging</i>	56
	3.4 <i>From Expatriate to Returnee</i>	61
	3.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	69
	<i>Works Cited</i>	71
<b>4</b>	<b>Fighting Disadvantage in Trevor Noah's <i>Born a Crime</i> and Malaika Wa Azania's <i>Memoirs of a Born Free</i></b>	75
	4.1 <i>Education and Equity</i>	78

4.2	<i>Economic Prospects</i>	86
4.3	<i>Black Tax and Class</i>	89
4.4	<i>Addressing Disappointment and Anger</i>	95
4.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	98
	<i>Works Cited</i>	100
<b>5</b>	<b>Coming to Terms with Violence and Xenophobia: Mark Gevisser's <i>Lost and Found in Johannesburg</i>, Kevin Bloom's <i>Ways of Staying</i>, and Clinton Chauke's <i>Born in Chains</i></b>	<b>105</b>
5.1	<i>Violent Crime and Whiteness</i>	107
5.2	<i>Private Security</i>	114
5.3	<i>Excessive Violence</i>	117
5.4	<i>Xenophobic Violence</i>	126
5.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	134
	<i>Works Cited</i>	135
<b>6</b>	<b>Contemplating Forgiveness in Desmond Tutu's <i>No Future Without Forgiveness</i>, Lesego Malepe's <i>Reclaiming Home</i>, and Haji Mohamed Dawjee's <i>Sorry, Not Sorry</i></b>	<b>139</b>
6.1	<i>Forgiveness and Reconciliation</i>	141
6.2	<i>Revisiting South Africa and the Past</i>	154
6.3	<i>Whiteness and Wokeness</i>	161
6.4	<i>Conclusion</i>	169
	<i>Works Cited</i>	170
<b>7</b>	<b>Rewriting the Legacy of Nelson Mandela: The Memoirs of Ndileka Mandela, Zoleka Mandela, and Ndaba Mandela</b>	<b>175</b>
7.1	<i>Seeking Autobiographical Freedom</i>	176
7.2	<i>Family Controversies</i>	180
7.3	<i>Raised by Grandparents</i>	187
7.4	<i>Final Years</i>	195
7.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	199
	<i>Works Cited</i>	200
<b>8</b>	<b>Making Autobiographical Concessions to the Past</b>	<b>203</b>
	<i>Works Cited</i>	209
	<b>Index</b>	<b>211</b>



## Introduction

This book examines twenty-first-century South African autobiographical writing that addresses the nation's socio-political realities both past and present. The texts in focus represent and depict a South Africa caught in the midst of contradictory and competing images of the 'Rainbow Nation'. On the one hand, the great efforts of the nation to heal itself and its people are recognised, but their inevitable futility also emerges as a central concern in the writing examined. The many versions of the past on which South Africa is built relate both to its perceived failures and to its perceived successes as portrayed in the primary texts. The argument in the present study is thus that memoirs published in recent years question and criticise the illusion of a united nation and reveal the flaws and shortcomings of not only the apartheid past but also South Africa at the time each text was written. The post-apartheid period is also dealt with in contemporary autobiographical writing with the indication that this may be the most contested period of all. The nation is presented as a place of controversy and contradiction, but also as a place of resilience. This is manifested particularly well through subtle calls for concessions and compromise on which to build possible futures.

The writing examined in this book consists of autobiographical texts by fourteen different writers largely published since 2009. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's memoir from 1999 has also been included since it marks the threshold between a South Africa still caught up in its so recent



apartheid past and the ‘new’ South Africa that attempts to move away from being solely defined by it. The primary material analysed participates in creating subjective histories which reshape perceptions of past and present, and which challenge existing narratives of South Africa relating to persisting inequalities, racial divides, and ways of seeing the past. The texts contribute with their personal accounts of living in contemporary South Africa to the multitude of representations of the nation and its people through the variety of personal perspectives on developments related to society, economy, and politics in the nation. At the centre is the quest for space and belonging, and the study investigates who can comfortably belong in South Africa in its post-apartheid, post-Truth, and Reconciliation Commission, post-Mbeki, and post-Zuma state. The material examined suggests that claiming space is a struggle for all writers despite their varied backgrounds. Finding a compromise that enables making peace with troubles in the past and challenges in the present moment is at the core of the primary material. Seeking compromise as presented in the memoirs has become a central endeavour due to the nation’s complex colonial era and apartheid history, manifested particularly explicitly through the work of the Commission, and due to the conflicting social, political, as well as personal interpretations of this past.

The complex relationship between personal memory and the past is also investigated in addition to the kinds of potentially collective histories alongside the subjective ones that are portrayed in South African nonfiction. Geoffrey Cubitt (2007) has studied the relationship between history and memory and argues that what could be termed collective memory “presents particular social entities as the possessors of a stable mnemonic capacity that is collectively exercised” (Cubitt 2007: 18). Vambe and Chennells (2009: 2) contradict this in their study of Southern African autobiography when stating that the current interest in such writing is due to the “constant movement between the collective and the self”. A collectively exercised memory thus always emanates from the private and personal, which also acts as another justification for this study. In a South African context, the relationship between art and politics is also relevant. As Michael Chapman (2014: 6) argues in his tribute to Nelson Mandela and his literary contributions, “Mandela aligns content with form in ways that connect him to a long tradition of South African literature. (It is a ‘tradition’ that is appropriate to societies in which the opportunities of art are severely circumscribed by the demands of politics.)” Content remains central also to this study, and autobiography as an art form arguably also

gains much of its force from the balancing act between private and public, personal and collective. Both inform each other in complex ways as embodied in the material examined. The explicit politics dealt with in the primary material in this study become entrenched in personal narratives, and private lives are described as inherently connected to challenges of present-day South Africa.

South African autobiographical and nonfictional writing have attracted scholarly interest previously (see among others Coullie 2006, 2014; Gagiano 2009, 2020; Garman 2015; Horrell 2009; Mbaio 2010; Nuttall and Coetzee 1998; Twidle 2012, 2019). The role of nonfictional writing for the nation has thus been well-established before and its importance is not abating to which the present study also testifies. Examining representations of the nation from an explicitly socio-political perspective drawing on social studies has not been done to such an extent before, and much of the primary material discussed in subsequent chapters has received little scholarly attention previously. The present study also includes voices of so-called born free South Africans, people who came of age after the end of apartheid.

Using various forms of life writing to address these issues, particularly in the form of memoir and memoir-like texts which are the chosen medium of all writers in this study, relates to what Helen M. Buss (2002: 2) argues about memoir and the relatively limited attention it has received when compared to autobiography, two genres that John Paul Eakin (2020: 68) explains have now more or less merged since the 1990s. Buss states that memoir has remained more obscure partly due to “the identification of the form as a life-writing practice associated more with history than with literature”. Although memoir can no longer be said to be obscure, or to receive limited attention—on the contrary, it has become a dominant form of life writing—the notion of history’s precedence is still central to the present study as well which draws considerably on social studies in its examination of twenty-first-century South African autobiographical texts. Buss’s claim works as a justification for the multidisciplinary nature of this book, although the present study does not engage with notions of autobiographical writing as a less ‘literary’ genre or as secondary to writing that is labelled fiction.

Life writing balances between truth and fiction, and this balancing act creates unique pieces of writing that not only address events in the past but also envision futures based on whatever challenges the present moment is dealing with. Therefore, literature’s role for nation building is profound.

Literature in all its shapes and forms imagines and represents individuals, societies, and histories, and also participates in the creation of a national repository of memories, traumas, and experiences, often relating to a troubled past. The many conflicting narratives of South Africa thus become central as the nation is still processing its apartheid past, although the texts indicate that the present moment can no longer be seen as fully immersed in and emanating from that past. South Africa's past, present, and future exist in these subjective histories and renditions of what has been, what is, and what may come, and the selected texts all attest to this.

Such a premise for the present study is reinforced by Buss (2002: 2), who adds that "memoir does not claim to be a 'complete history,' but rather the testimony of a writer who has 'personal knowledge' of the events, the era, or the people that are its subject". This is echoed by Judith Lütge Coullie (2006: 2) in a more recent edited collection titled *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography* where she writes that autobiographical texts "establish and cement relations" to people around us. Further, they are connected to hierarchies, "sometimes also offering alternative ones". More importantly, "our auto/biographical accounts become entwined in struggles about justice" (ibid.). These lines were stated in the years after the TRC and the monumental work carried out by the Commission. Seeking justice in terms of retributive or restorative efforts has turned into a search for balance, for recognition and legitimacy. To this, the selected primary material attests, giving notions of hierarchies, justice, and histories an urgently needed present-day perspective in an era no longer solely defined by apartheid or by the TRC.

Njabulo S. Ndebele (1999: 22–23) argues in his article written in the immediate aftermath of the TRC that any potential healing will require time and will emerge "from the new tendency for South Africans to be willing to negotiate their way through social, intellectual, religious, political and cultural diversity. In sum, it will come from the progressive accumulation of ethical and moral insights". The memoirs examined here can be argued to provide the ethical and moral insights Ndebele calls for, and they also emerge from a variety of social, political, and cultural contexts. To state that they provide the hindsight needed in order to exhaustively assess the effects of apartheid and the TRC would be to undermine and undervalue the personal stories put forth in the texts, and just as narratives of the past continue to change as writing history remains a subjective endeavour, so too will the ways of seeing South Africa's past keep changing. The primary material offers a variety of perceptions of South Africa

and its present challenges while remaining personal and private; to the extent that published autobiographical texts ever remain private, having been written for posterity and, in this case, for English-speaking audiences across the world.

Unresolved—and potentially unresolvable—issues relating to race and the past still, however, form a central part of post-apartheid disillusionment in South African life writing. To what extent apartheid can and should be held accountable for more contemporary troubles is relevant in this context and also addressed in the primary material. This also raises questions about the relationship between personal experiences and collective memory, particularly with regard to coming to terms with profoundly negative aspects of the past (Assmann 2008; Boehmer 2012; Stone 2017). This historical and political background thus forms a starting point for the present book. The desire to unite the nation, for example through the work of the TRC, is sometimes portrayed as impossible, naïve, or even insincere in the memoirs under scrutiny. Contemporary events and developments in South Africa also attest to this, such as the removal of statues connected with the colonial era as well as protests against tuition fees at universities. This discrepancy and gap between that which is shown on the surface and the actual reality beneath suggests that something beyond the Commission, something more than policies of affirmative action, is needed in order to establish legitimacy and equality for all. The autobiographical texts examined in this book speak to this imbalance, offering a unique possibility to investigate the notion of a unified nation working towards a common good and to expose illusions and persisting narratives of South Africa. The primary material both support and refute this ideal, addressing and depicting a South Africa that consists of a cluster of conflicting and competing representations and voices that battle for recognition and visibility. This contest takes place despite, but paradoxically also due to, efforts to reconcile and unite people across social and racial boundaries.

Society since apartheid has attempted to come to terms with what happened to and by its people, to reach some level of reconciliation between those deemed victims and perpetrators, and to create sustainable and just futures for all of South Africa's citizens. This utopian endeavour is described in a number of works of fiction and nonfiction published since the end of apartheid and the beginning of Nelson Mandela's presidency in 1994, for example in the fiction of Lauren Beukes, Zakes Mda, and Niq Mhlongo. Since 1994, huge steps have been taken in order to resolve the past and work towards a stable and equal future for all citizens. Despite

enormous efforts, many of the steps taken have proven inadequate. Righting wrongs created by decades of systematic abuse is a monumental task and inevitable shortcomings have led to certain disappointment and disillusionment. The years of apartheid created a society based on race but remained notoriously inconsistent in its categorisation of people. Race still defines much of societal debate and is a running theme throughout the primary material for the present study.

The apartheid years of unimaginable atrocities and state-sanctioned injustice also created a society mired in inequality, a legacy the nation seems unable to make peace with and from which it struggles to move forward. Inequality emerges as a central topic in several of the memoirs examined, if not all, from perspectives such as access to education, economic prospects, and levels of crime. Few nations have taken as concrete steps in order to reconcile with a brutal past as South Africa, through the TRC first and foremost but also by implementing measures such as the affirmative action policy after apartheid. Despite these efforts, research shows (cf. Leibbrandt et al. 2012: 19; ‘Inequality Trends in South Africa’ 2019: 4) that inequality has not decreased. These notions are also discussed in the primary material in this study; memoirs which address the many challenges still present in South Africa. The past is reflected against the present and vice versa.

The present moment and foreseeable futures of South Africa thus remain complex, and as research has also shown, past, present, and future remain “intertwined” (Lundgren and Scheckle 2019: 58). For example, Chana Teeger (2014) investigates to what extent and in what ways South Africans use the past to explain occurrences of crime in the country at present and found that White and Black respondents “selectively referenced the past” in different ways (Teeger 2014: 50). Thus, the struggle over the past is by no means over and also encompasses more recent pasts since the end of apartheid. The two presidents, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, elected after Nelson Mandela’s presidency ended, have both struggled with their own controversies and troubled legacies. Mbeki’s presidency coincided with the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, and the president’s personal statements, as well as the statements of his administration, stalled access to treatment and prevention of the disease (cf. Natrass 2010; Kalichman 2014; Sesanti 2018; Jaiswal et al. 2020). The end of Zuma’s rule is characterised as follows: “The ousting of South African President Jacob Zuma and his replacement by Cyril Ramaphosa brought to an end a decade of South African politics characterised by widespread

corruption and increasingly dysfunctional governance” (‘South Africa after Zuma’, 2018). Ramaphosa’s legacy remains to be properly recorded and analysed at the time of writing as he is the current head of state (2021).

The role of party politics and the future of ANC are at the core of the futures of South Africa too, and in terms of politics surrounding the ousting of Mbeki and later of Zuma, both had much to do with internal politics. Therefore, the future of South Africa’s democracy is also entangled with that of the ANC, a notion which has officially been challenged and contested by new voices such as that of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Economic Freedom Fighters, and its leading figure Julius Malema who has also been involved in controversies of his own (cf. Gunner 2015; Posel 2013). These turns of events will also be briefly addressed in this book as they connect with the discussion of subjective history and voice in multiple ways. These complicated political events and transformations remain the reality of South Africa and form part of a very recent past and the present moment, and also indicate that the nation may be divided on so many more accounts than race. This is also exemplified in the primary material examined.

The very recent past (and present moment at the time of writing) has seen the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic which struck the entire world in 2020, causing South Africa too to implement strict measures in order to keep the virus from spreading out of control. Controversies surrounding the measures again led back to the question of who gets to speak and on what matters in South Africa. The measures were criticised, for example, by Dr Glenda Gray, who faced a serious backlash on government level due to her public criticism of the lockdown which was implemented during the pandemic (Evans and Cowan 2020). This raises urgent questions about the current state of freedom of speech in South Africa. Daniël J. Louw (2020: 1) addresses the dangers of a more totalitarian turn in his paper on recent developments of democracy in South Africa and makes the following noteworthy observation: “It seems that, due to a growing dissatisfaction, governments respond in a more autocratic way. The fear for a loss of power brings about a shift from democratic sensitivity to autocratic control”.

To what extent the pandemic could lead to an increasingly autocratic South Africa remains to be seen and perhaps future works of nonfiction will attempt to make sense of this particular period in time, the years of the pandemic, and create new subjective histories that revisit recent and more distant pasts. Arguably, no historical moment is ever as contested and

complex as the so-called present, which is perhaps better seen as the recent past yet stretching into the future. As James Olney (1998: 343) states, memory “is both recollective and anticipatory”. Further, he concludes the following: “[m]emory reaches toward the future as toward the past, and balance demands a poised receptiveness in both directions” (ibid.). The present study attempts to conduct its analysis from a perspective of receptiveness in terms of both past and future. The COVID-19 pandemic sees no signs of abating at the time of writing despite vaccines and vaccine programmes being rolled out (in parts of the world that can pay for them), but the early months of 2020 when the pandemic spread rapidly around the world are already part of the past. The memoirs examined also belong to the past, as the present moment remains the most elusive and intangible temporal space of all. We may interpret the known past through our subjective histories, and we may predict the unknown future, but the fleeting present moment always belongs in equal parts to both past and future. The primary material in this book reflects this complexity. The writers write for the future while drawing on their pasts.

All these notions briefly discussed in this introduction give rise to the following questions: what is the relationship between ethical memories that propel towards healing and reconciliation, and memories that speak of racial stereotypes and divides? What kind of legitimacy and for whom is sought through the memoirs? In what ways do the memoirs express and depict national mourning for a lost past and in what ways can this be said to manifest the missing piece between the TRC and true reconciliation? What kind of futures are envisioned? In what ways do the memoirs embody a new era beyond post-apartheid through their representations and imaginations of the nation’s past and present, most of all through the indication that making concessions to the past and present is necessary in order to move forward?

The present study is built around these questions that are addressed in some form and to some extent in all memoirs examined. Much if not all of the writing examined in this book also deals with questions of belonging in addition to voice and authenticity. Who gets to be part of the new South Africa and on what terms? More importantly, who sets the terms? All memoirs in focus express anxieties to different degrees about the space the writers occupy, and it is a most relevant theme throughout the book. To be South African today, as represented in the primary material, seems to mean having to balance between not only the past and present but also between the many challenges affecting the lives of all citizens. These

challenges are, as mentioned, connected to notions of class, race, inequality, crime, political futures, access to education, landowning, and many more. Such notions also form the core of the chapters in this book, which address particular themes and topics that emerge as central in the memoirs analysed, and which have also been particularly sensitive in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

This suggests that what may be most central to the autobiographical writing examined here is the need for concessions not only to the past and its troubles but to present challenges too. The contest for space, for redress and equal prospects, culminates in the realisation that compromises must be made if there is to be a possible future for all. To what extent the writers agree to making concessions, and in what ways, is a central question for the study. The main argument is that compromise may be the only way forward, as suggested or refuted by the writers in focus. Does compromising and conceding to the past in South African autobiographical writing manifest and embody the continued process of reconciliation in disguise? A hypothetical answer is yes, they do. This connects with the importance of narration as stated by Andrew van der Vlies (2008: 951; emphasis in original): “The fact of the TRC’s elevation of a multitude of *petits recits* to counter the monstrous master narratives of the period, and the sense that the Commission had in effect initiated a process of storytelling rather than produced a final version of the past, endorsed narrative and narration”. Instead of producing a single master narrative, South African writers have set out to narrate themselves and their lives, as part of the process of storytelling that the Commission put in motion. Just as the Commission conducted its work based on the notion of compromise, so do twenty-first century South African autobiographical texts too. Living together after apartheid is already a massive concession of its own, and the discontent on many sides is present in the writing examined.

The study departs from a discussion of subjective histories and the role they play for national repositories. The focus is mainly on memoir as it is the chosen medium and forms the primary material for the present study, and the chapter particularly takes issue with the confessional mode and its many dimensions. Remembering, forgetting, and claiming a voice are all central questions, and who gets to write what in the context of South Africa is a significant theme. Writing memoir can be seen as a most selfish form of writing, centring as it does on the author and their perspective. Despite demands on truth and truthfulness, memoir too is eventually a kind of fiction, relying as it does on real, lived life but taking as its starting



point the shortcomings of human memory. This inevitably places the genre somewhere in the grey area between fact and fiction. The facts presented are one person's facts, adding to the many dimensions that is South Africa. Examining the challenges of the nation past and present is most effectively done through the written medium that is memoir; a genre of writing that has an equally complex relationship to truth, past, present, and representation as does South Africa itself.

The selection of primary material for the study does not set out to be comprehensive in its examination of South African life writing, which arguably would not even be possible, nor does it pursue equal representation of all racial categories into which South Africans are generally divided. Instead, the works in focus speak to the many themes and topics that emerge as particularly central in contemporary South Africa and therefore in nonfiction as well. Having time to write and financial support to do so is a privilege available to few individuals, not to mention who gets published and is able to gain visibility through their writing. The voices that emerge in the selected material all address in different contexts and from a variety of perspectives the many challenges South Africa faces today. Thus, the primary material for the present study has been selected in order to support dialogue between the different texts in connection to the themes and topics discussed.

## 1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The chapters have been organised and structured in a manner that supports the inclusion of texts across racial, social, temporal, and geographical divides. The ordering of the chapters aims to provide a cohesive whole, starting with the question of belonging most concretely in Chap. 3 and moving on to examine disadvantage and privilege from perspectives of education, crime, and xenophobia in Chaps. 4 and 5. The following two chapters are more focused on political realities and histories in South Africa, exploring first the notions of forgiveness and reconciliation in Chap. 6 and then the legacy of Nelson Mandela in Chap. 7. A concluding discussion is provided in Chap. 8.

In addition to Chap. 2 on subjective histories, which functions as a starting point for the analysis and provides a theoretical and conceptual background of sorts for this study which remains highly contextual throughout, five main chapters thus constitute the book. Chapter 2 also offers a brief discussion of subjective history in terms of autobiography,

outlining previous studies of South African life writing and the intricacies of making subjective histories public, often with a collective purpose. The aim of the five subsequent chapters is to provide analysis of a variety of nonfictional texts by South African writers and to explore recurring themes and topics that expose, reinforce, or redress challenges that constitute the nation.

The actual analysis of memoirs starts in Chap. 3, which centres on the memoirs of Christopher Hope, Sisonke Msimang, and Tumi Morake. Although an unlikely group, the three writers can be brought together in this manner as their writing emanates from the desire to understand their place in contemporary South Africa. Hope left the country in the 1970s, the same year Msimang was born, and returns to ponder particularly the place of Whites in the country. Msimang's outsidersness comes from having spent her childhood and youth elsewhere, returning as a highly educated professional to pursue a career in South Africa. Past repression and transgressions still hold South Africans in a firm grip, and both Hope (2019) and Msimang (2017) contemplate their own complicity in a long history of subjugation and social division. Their position is one of privilege, portraying two returnees for whom South Africa is still home, yet uneasily so, but which still provides a bond that is not easily broken. Morake (2018) offers a somewhat different viewpoint, writing about her early life but dedicating a significant part of her memoir to the controversy in which she became involved while working for a South African radio station. The controversy quite explicitly centred on how to talk about the past and led Morake to reconsider her place and voice in South Africa as an outspoken public figure.

In contrast to these somewhat privileged perspectives on belonging in South Africa, Chap. 4 deals with memoirs by two writers from a very different background. At the centre are experiences of disadvantage in the memoirs of Trevor Noah (2017) and Malaika Wa Azania (2018). The two writers grew up in similar circumstances, with fierce mothers for whom getting an education for their children was a primary goal. Education is a running theme for both writers, and they deal with the experiences of going to, for example, former Model C schools and realising the privilege connected with such schools. Whiteness as a marker of privilege is also dealt with, as Noah is of mixed origin making his position somewhat fluid from time to time, while Wa Azania is more vocal about the persisting inequalities and frequently raises the question of equity in her writing. The complex relationship between race and class also emerges. The concept of

Black tax is addressed in both memoirs, and it is something to which many of the writers examined in this study refer. It is therefore discussed in this chapter too.

Chapter 5 continues to explore the topic of inequality as it takes as its primary focus experiences of violence and crime in Mark Gevisser's (2014), Kevin Bloom's (2009), and Clinton Chauke's (2018) memoirs. All three writers attempt to outline the realities of living in a society rife with violent crime, albeit from widely different perspectives. Gevisser and Bloom are both White South African journalists, but while Bloom's memoir shows more journalistic tendencies in his quest to understand the role of violent crime in South Africa, Gevisser utilises his journalistic skills to uncover pasts and presents of Johannesburg not only through crime but also via its apartheid history. Much of this is related to the repressive measures against homosexuals. Chauke, for his part, belongs to the contested category of the born frees; those who were born or came of age after the end of apartheid, depending on the definition, and who have only known free South Africa. As Chauke depicts in his memoir, that freedom may still not be the same for all of the nation's citizens and especially not for those born poor and Black. Violence and xenophobia emerge in his writing as central themes and Chauke ponders the ways in which they interconnect with lack of privileges.

Chapter 6 examines notions of forgiveness in three texts that offer quite separate perspectives on the work of the TRC, on coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid in twenty-first-century South Africa, and on the evolving relationship between Black and White South Africans. Desmond Tutu's *No Future Without Forgiveness*, published in the immediate aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, offers a detailed account of the hearings and the importance of learning to live together despite the lasting pain of apartheid. Through the texts of Haji Mohamed Dawjee (2018) and Lesego Malepe (2018), the chapter explores how notions of forgiveness and reconciliation are addressed in more recent works by South Africans who experienced the effects of apartheid. However, the texts are not looking towards the past but remain anchored in present-day South Africa, for example, in Malepe's memoir, which offers perspectives on the land compensation schemes for South Africans whose land was appropriated by the apartheid government. Dawjee's essay collection is a forceful commentary on what it means to be coloured not only in South Africa but in the world at large, where whiteness still dominates socially, economically, and culturally.

Chapter 7 deals with the legacies of Nelson Mandela, who passed away in 2013. The focus is on memoirs by three of his grandchildren: Ndileka Mandela (2019), Ndaba Mandela (2018), and Zoleka Mandela (2019, originally published in 2013). The three texts reveal controversies within the family and address the various difficulties the family faced during Mandela's imprisonment but also challenges that emerged after his release. The three writers have quite separate aims with their memoirs, as Ndileka tries to differentiate between her own persona and the burden of being a Mandela, whereas Ndaba's memoir reads more like a tribute to Nelson Mandela's life. Zoleka only fleetingly discusses the challenges of being a Mandela while centring first and foremost on her breast cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment. The three texts both reinforce Mandela's image as the nation's benevolent father and acknowledge the difficulties his long imprisonment created in the family and how his absence is repeated in the lives of so many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who were also raised by grandparents or other relatives. Interrupted family patterns are a central thread through all three memoirs. The final text, Chap. 8, brings the analysis of all memoirs together, providing a brief concluding discussion of central findings and highlighting the need for compromise and concession as expressed in the primary texts.

## WORKS CITED

- Inequality Trends in South Africa. 2019. *Statistics South Africa*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- 'South Africa after Zuma'. 2018. *Strategic Comments* 24(4): i-ii. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2018.1470741>.
- Assmann, Aleida. 2008. Transformations between History and Memory. *Social Research* 75 (1): 49-72.
- Bloom, Kevin. 2009. *Ways of Staying*. London: Portobello Books.
- Boehmer, Elleke. 2012. Permanent Risk—When Crisis Defines a Nation's Writing. In *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel—Essays*, ed. Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga, 29-46. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Buss, Helen M. 2002. *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Chapman, Michael. 2014. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918-2013) A Tribute to His Contribution to Literature. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 26 (1): 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2014.897461>.

- Chauke, Clinton. 2018. *Born in Chains: The Diary of an Angry 'Born-free'*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Coullie, Judith Lütge. 2006. Introduction. In *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*, ed. Judith Lütge Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengeni Ngwenya, and Thomas Olver, 1–115. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- . 2014. The ethics of nostalgia in post-apartheid South Africa. *Rethinking History* 18 (2): 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2013.858449>.
- Coullie, Judith Lütge, Stephan Meyer, Thengeni Ngwenya, and Thomas Olver, eds. 2006. *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Cubitt, Geoffrey. 2007. *History and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dawjee, Haji Mohamed. 2018. *Sorry, Not Sorry: Experiences of a Brown Woman in a White South Africa*. Cape Town: Penguin Books.
- Eakin, John Paul. 2020. *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography*. New York: Routledge.
- Evans, Sarah, and Kyle Cowan. 2020. SAMRC Investigation into Glenda Gray Is a 'Witch Hunt'—Adam Habib. *News24*, 25 May 2020. Accessed May 25, 2020. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/samrc-investigation-into-glenda-gray-is-a-witch-hunt-adam-habib-20200525>.
- Gagiano, Annie. 2009. '...to Remember Is Like Starting to See': South African Life Stories Today. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 21 (1–2): 261–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2009.9678321>.
- . 2020. Complicating Apartheid Resistance Histories by Means of South African Autobiographies. *a/b Auto/biography Studies* 35 (3): 667–689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2020.1762996>.
- Garman, Anthea. 2015. *Antjie Krog and the Post-Apartheid Public Sphere: Speaking Poetry to Power*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press.
- Gevisser, Mark. 2014. *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir*. London: Granta Books.
- Gunner, Liz. 2015. Song, Identity and the State: Julius Malema's *Dubul ibhunu* Song as Catalyst. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27 (3): 326–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1035701>.
- Hope, Christopher. 2019. *The Café de Move-On Blues: In Search of the New South Africa*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Horrell, Georgina. 2009. White Lies, White Truth: Confession and Childhood in White South African Women's Narratives. *Scrutiny* 2 14 (2): 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125440903461812>.
- Jaiswal, J., L. LoSchiavo, and D.C. Perlman. 2020. Disinformation, Misinformation and Inequality-Driven Mistrust in the Time of COVID-19: Lessons Unlearned

- from AIDS Denialism. *AIDS and Behavior* 24: 2776–2780. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-020-02925-y>.
- Kalichman, Seth C. 2014. The Psychology of AIDS Denialism: Pseudoscience, Conspiracy Thinking, and Medical Mistrust. *European Psychologist* 19 (1): 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000175>.
- Leibbrandt, Murray, Arden Finn, and Ingrid Woolard. 2012. Describing and Decomposing Post-apartheid Income Inequality in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa* 29 (1): 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2012.645639>.
- Louw, Daniël J. 2020. Disillusionment and the Dilemma of ‘The Democratic Type’: From Plato (Athenian Populism) to Helen Zille (Constitutional Democracy), Cyril Ramaphosa (Cooperative Democracy) and Jesus Christ (Compassionate Democracy). *In die Skriflig* 54 (1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v54i1.2516>.
- Lundgren, Berit, and Eileen Scheckle. 2019. Hope and Future: Youth Identity Shaping in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 24 (1): 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2018.1463853>.
- Malepe, Lesego. 2018. *Reclaiming Home: Diary of a Journey Through Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Berkeley: She Writes Press.
- Mandela, Zoleka. 2019 [2013]. *When Hope Whispers*. Auckland Park: Jacana.
- Mandela, Ndaba. 2018. *11 Life Lessons from Nelson Mandela*. London: Windmill Books.
- Mandela, Ndileka. 2019. *I am Ndileka: More than My Surname*. Auckland Park: Jacana.
- Mbao, Wamuwi. 2010. Inscribing Whiteness and Staging Belonging in Contemporary Autobiographies and Life-Writing Forms. *English in Africa* 37 (1): 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.4314/cia.v37i1.54987>.
- Morake, Tumi. 2018. *And Then Mama Said...: Words that Set My Life Alight*. Cape Town: Penguin Books.
- Msimang, Sisonke. 2017. *Always Another Country*. New York, London: World Editions.
- Natras, Nicoli. 2010. Still Crazy After All These Years: The Challenge of AIDS Denialism for Science. *AIDS and Behavior* 14 (2): 248–251. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-009-9641-z>.
- Ndebele, Njabulo S. 1999. South Africa: Quandaries of Compromise. *UNESCO Courier* 52 (12): 22.
- Noah, Trevor. 2017. *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. London: John Murray.
- Nuttall, Sarah, and Carli Coetzee. 1998. Introduction. In *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, 1–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press.