

Family and Nation in Crises: Female characters in Selected Recent South African Novels

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DECLARATION

I, **Stanisokolo Kaunda Chauque** of student number **11630422**, hereby declare that this research for the Master of Arts in English Literature hereby submitted by me has not previously been submitted at this or any other institution and that this is my own work in design and execution. All reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that representations of young women are articulated through masculine perceptions, especially in recent South African novels. This is evident in

many South African literary texts where black female characters are dependent on the writer's knowledge and views about black women. As a result, many scholars have grappled with the phenomenon of black female representation where authors represent female characters in a biased manner. These representations are contested by many female writers with the call for balanced representations in literary texts. As a result, several female writers have taken to writing fiction in order to address these stereotypes in representation. The urge for balanced representation is an important aspect of novels by female black South African writers. This study examines representations of black female characters by three black female South African writers. The selected novels provide readers with insights into the contested representations of female characters as these intersect with the recent post-apartheid South African moment. The selected novels are Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2009) & *Period Pain* (2017), Angela Makholwa's *Blessed Girl* (2017) and Cynthia Jele's *The Ones with Purpose* (2018).

Keywords: Female characters, family, nation, patriarchy, South Africa, stereotype, trauma

Dedication

To my beloved son Tiisetso Kyle Chauque.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This study explores how black South African female authors represent female characters' challenges in selected novels. A review of what most scholars have come to claim as the age of women empowerment in literature and art as a whole clearly points to a gap in the narratives by black South African writers in general when it comes to the representation of race and gender in South African fiction. The selected novels depict black South African's understanding and ideologies of the world, and crisis within homes and the nation. However, the way South African authors represent their views in fiction can be interpreted and analysed in different ways due to the already existing theories and ideologies representing their age and transition of oppression and democracy by African scholars.

Black South African female authored novels are deliberately selected because of the gap in black female scholarship on the representation of young black female characters. For example, Sinenhlanhla Memela (2020: 2) states: "In literature black women have been largely excluded from the positive representation of the female species". She further argues: "In South African literature, women are usually portrayed as domestic workers, victims of violence or infected by sexually transmitted diseases, where their objectified bodies are considered exotic" (2). This study engages with such imbalances through the addition of female voices to the male dominated views on females.

The selection of female written novels is necessitated by the need for gender and racial balance in the examination of the depiction of young black women in South African fiction. As Blessing Phakathi (2018: 1) asserts: "Female authored novels such as Cynthia Jele's *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word* and Zukiswa Wanner's *Men of the South* are frequently treated as novels that lack real academic value because they deal mostly with women's views of the world". However, as it will be demonstrated in the study, these female authors use different feminine experiences and beliefs to fictionalise ideas through young female characters in their works.

The selected novels use female protagonists to advocate the equal representation of black females in fiction and contribute to the advancement of an agenda that is specifically South African. Most of these novels contribute to gender studies by protesting the negative treatment that black female South Africans have been subjected to since the country transitioned from the apartheid to a more democratic dispensation. Some female scholars such as Elaine Showalter (1985) observe that female characters are culturally victimised by male writers within the literary sphere. This cultural victimisation projects the image of a societal mind-set and is difficult to change as fiction can contribute to the way both writers and readers perceive issues, especially when looking up to earlier authors.

The initial novel analysed is *Coconut* due to the way it weaves cultural, political, patriarchal ideologies and Africanism in order to address identity negotiation in two different places that the characters are going through. The structure of the novel deals with individual transition and cultural questioning which connects well with *The Ones with Purpose* from the perspective of Anele, the protagonist who struggles with accepting that her sister has passed away and now struggles to keep the family together while dealing with her personal challenges. It also [links](#) on how both Anele and Ofilwe the protagonist in *Coconut* struggle to express themselves due to the expectations surrounding them.

The examination of *The Ones with Purpose* is followed by *The Blessed Girl* to highlight the way male characters shy away from their responsibilities as husbands and fathers looking at Sizwe, one of the male characters who abandons his sick wife and children due to his selfishness. [This](#) is similar to [Makholwa's](#) protagonist, Bontle and Vusi, the older man who impregnated her while she was still a teenager, they both abandoned Loki, their son. *Period Pain* is in the last analytical chapter because of how it covers most issues faced by women in a black majority ruled country, ranging from their natural challenges and how the society treats them. Randi Rodgers (2013) observes that an issue that persists in many novels is the “uneasiness with tradition and a reconsideration of what should be retained from home cultures when there is a dominant one that expects assimilation” (Randi Rodgers; 2013: 12). All of the novels depict South African black women's challenges within a South African family setting and society.

Through a synergy of frameworks and theories borrowed from different discourses such as Feminism, Patriarchy and New Historism, along with post-colonialism, this study examines and explores how contemporary black female authors construct and portray black female characters. Due to feminism being the centre of the study, gender forms part of it to look at how female characters are represented differently from male characters based on their gender and sex by female authors. According to Muhammed Abasi, Hazifa Asif and Muhammad Farshad (2008), gender is an identity marker, characterised by social, psychological and physical constraints. The study explores different representations of female characters in post-apartheid South Africa.

Contemporary South African literature suggests a shift in gender inequality as female writers now have the platform to represent themselves. Oluwatoyin Kalu (2001:14) observes that “inaccurate and incomplete portrayal of female characters littered early African works. This may be due to the fact that African literature was first written by men because of the superior education they received, which was put above that of women.” In post-colonial South Africa, women have the freedom of expression which is equal to men within the literary sphere and this results in gender balanced character representations.

1.2. Portrayal of Young Women in South African Fiction

During the apartheid era, South African women were portrayed as only fit for domestic responsibilities in literature. Samuel Ibinga (2007) argues that for centuries, women's roles and functions in patriarchal societies were restricted to the domestic arena, where their status within families remained confined to their biological functions, such as procreation and childcare, confining them to a lower marital and social rank compared to men. Kalu (2001) further states that even though South African female writers are no longer excluded from the culture of writing, the portrayal of women remains problematic in the contemporary setting. Women have faced struggles similar to those of their male counterparts who were resisting the apartheid regime. However, males have been dominating most spaces that influence society at large including writing about women and their experiences, making their observations the whole truth of reality in fiction. Memela (2020:25) states: “As women had been marginalised there were no alternative voices to counteract the narratives that men were expressing.” During apartheid, very few black women wrote novels. However, in post-apartheid

South Africa, women have increasingly been involved in the production of novels, contributing to fiction using their own voice.

This creates a space for women to write their own fiction and represent their imaginations along with ideas to fill the gap that was in existence from the apartheid era due to racial and gender inequality also specified as racism and patriarchy. According to Adrienne Rich (1985: 35), “patriarchy is not only the prevention of women from occupying powerful positions in society, but also the creation of negative social views which men attach to women. African literature is replete with write-ups that projects male dominance and inadequately pleads the case of African women. Writers recreate the day-to-day reality in their imaginative writing in order to highlight the present position of women in the South African society, thus becoming imperative to trace the genesis of gender inequality in South African literature”. Due to the fictitious representations in literature, gender inequality cannot be directly traced through novels, rather, it can only be represented based on the views of the author using literary devices to communicate with the reader.

Additionally, the representation in literature has been excluding women in the diaspora due to their inability to write before transitioning from the apartheid era. Memela further states “in literature, black women have been largely excluded from the positive representation of the female species” (2020:2). She argues that, in South African literature, women are usually portrayed as domestic workers, victims of violence or infected by sexually transmitted diseases, where their objectified bodies are considered exotic. Novels written by both men and women usually share the same narratives of black women. Women are either depicted as rebellious against society's standard or passive partakers in the social constructions of what constitutes a decent woman. Therefore, black women are misrepresented in two ways in literature due to their race and gender by men who hold different masculine views, imaginations and experiences.

Moreover, the male perspective represented in fiction praises male characters through patriarchal ideologies which forces women to adhere to. This includes arranged marriages by black families giving male characters control over female characters. Zola Peter observes: “Arranged marriage is one of the social aspects that clearly explain the status of women in literature written by male writers” (2010:69). These

texts depict male writers as discriminators against female characters who use this custom to validate their arguments that marriage in African communities is an arranged relationship and that women should accept it as a custom and stop playing the victim. Thus, male writers use literary texts to fictitiously represent their biased views.

Therefore, women did not have the power to write and represent the world from their own perspective and imagination, rather, they were dependant on men to have a textual portrait of them. The portrayals were different from how they wanted to be represented in novels just as many female authors are against arranged marriages in literary texts. Peter (2020) further states that in literary texts, a marriage is considered an arranged aspect because this match originates with someone other than their future spouse. Homi Bhabha (1991: 65) observes that the tendency of contemporary critical fictions from the cultural peripheral parts of the world is towards the valorisation of “feminisation” in the public sphere. This therefore means that fiction which was mostly produced by male writers had the tendency of producing female characters who are in the authority of their fathers and later that of their husbands when they get married, where they often do not have a say in who they marry.

Additionally, through characterisation, female characters are treated like people who cannot do anything on their own and who depend on male characters. However, Showalter (1985) believes that female characters are also victimised by male writers culturally within the literary sphere. When applying Showalter’s expression to the South African black female characters, they are victimised by both men and whites in general including females due to their culture, skin tone and natural afro hair. This cultural victimisation projects the image of a societal mind-set that is very difficult to change. This is in line with the westernized definition of beauty where a black woman has to meet certain standards to be defined as beautiful. For example, in *Coconut* the female protagonists should have specific features to be considered beautiful. This study also critiques the ideology of western beauty in the African sphere.

Jessica Murray (2012) argues that for a woman to be properly feminine or considered beautiful, she must manipulate her appearance to conform to very specific ideals of beauty, which means that male writers create their own setting to place black women in an environment they can easily manipulate through exaggeration and irony. Male

writers often shape their female characters to serve a specific purpose, which is in line with unfair gender practices in South African novels. Slavery, colonialism, and apartheid have created the notion that has raised society to believe that the function of “women’s bodies is to please men sexually and symbolically” (Pumla Dineo Gqola, 2015: 8).

Therefore, female characters are depicted through allusion as objects for a man’s pleasure as men do not know how women want to be depicted. Veronica Magar (2003) argues that females are not valuable to men for the usefulness of their nature, but in terms of their value relative to other females or rather relative to the abstract scale of equivalence, which enables them to be exchanged like any commercial commodity. The portrayal of female characters being exchanged like any commercial commodity, can be seen in *Blessed Girl* where Bontle is taken advantage of by men who spend money on her from a young age. However, this portrayal is more likely to occur in literary works written by men. Regardless, the dominance of the male portrayed as the figurehead is indisputable, whereby such literary works silence women who know that they have no say on any matter in a man’s world. Even with their mistreatment of women and lack of responsibility, men such as Thiza in *The Ones with Purpose* still do not see anything wrong with their selfishness because of their toxic hypermasculinity views.

Female characters are depicted as flat characters in order to be portrayed as people who are expected to uphold the values of stability and morality just like when Anele’s mother pushes her to make a phone call to Thiza in *The Ones with Purpose* even upon knowing that he has not been supportive from the beginning. They must make their homes a special place, a refuge from the world where their men can escape from the highly competitive, unstable and immoral world. Most literary texts by male writers support the view that the man is the head of the family, and the wife must obey him and be submissive to him at all times. Thus, the man’s decision is final and often not to be questioned (Peter, 2010). This is common in South African novels across all cultures and has never been thoroughly challenged.

Diane Elson and Barbara Evers (1998) argue that boys and girls are trained differently at home, school and within the community. Thus, it is acceptable in these literary texts written by men that boys have to fight, be more aggressive and competitive, while girls

are supposed to be non-aggressive and less competitive. Female characters are depicted as the primary caregivers in the family and are also portrayed as passive and nurturing people. This is mostly influenced by the social learning activities given from childhood within our communities.

Learning activities that are commonly portrayed in fiction gave rise to gender stereotypes making it hard for female characters in recent novels to overcome the ideologies formed by patriarchal societies. Robyn Warhol (1993) states that attention to gender stereotypes is another issue in which feminists' criticism can usually be identified as the stereotypical way of persecuting female characters in a male dominated society. Some feminists believe that some male writers depend upon this distinction as a key to combat essentialism, or a deterministic view that biology is destiny. Some writers perceive female characters as characters that lack competence, deficient and envious of males in their communities which makes female writers contest such stereotypes by using female characters as protagonists.

1.3. Selection of Novels

The representation of young black females in recent South African authored narratives points to a crisis of gender inequality in the South African post-apartheid period. The crisis is evident in the selection of the novels of this study. Through the examination of six recent South African novels by black females, this study explores the representation of black female characters in contemporary South Africa. The study of females has been growing rapidly in the South African English literary sphere during the transitional period. The novels examined in this study confirm Ibinga's (2007) idea that for centuries, women's roles and functions in patriarchal societies were restricted to the domestic arena, where their statuses with families remained confined to their biological functions such as procreation and childcare, confining them to a lower marital and social rank compared to men. Indubitably, the novels examined in this study reflect and refract the on-going experiences of young black women in the post-apartheid South Africa. The selected narratives are Angela Makholwa's *Blessed Girl* (2017), Cynthia Jele's *The Ones with Purpose* (2018) and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2009) and *Period Pain* (2017). An examination of a broad range of novels provided me with a scope to interrogate issues of culture and geographic location in greater detail and depth by giving authors of different cultures and locations equal academic

scrutiny. Furthermore, it allowed me to trace the writers' view on the representation of women, as well as the impact of patriarchy on South African black women.

The selected narratives demonstrate how South African black female characters deal with challenges that have become part of their everyday lives. They also look at how black South African female writers portray challenges and stereotypes within societies along with transculturation, loss of identity, gender-based violence and trauma in a democratic era. The narratives engage with the stated issues due to their current topicality in South Africa. The novels narrate the victimisation of women by their husbands, families and society as a whole, as well as the counterpart by women from these experiences. This victimisation can be seen in Warner's *Behind Every Successful Man*, which shows some of the fascist ideologies linked to domesticity such as infidelity. As rightly put by Memela (2020), men have been dominating most spaces that influence society at large where they have even written about women and their experiences, making their observations the whole truth of reality. As seen in these novels, the misrepresentation of black women by male writers affects the livelihood of females. Therefore, as means of providing balanced representation, black South African female writers represent female characters from own lived experiences. Makholwa, Jele, Warner and Matlwa create characters from various environments and cultures to showcase the real experiences from female perspectives.

Recent South African novels critically engage with the issues of neo-colonialism, patriarchy and feminism. Writers use their work to engage and interpret the traumatic past of the country engaging with the shadow the apartheid regime has left especially on black South Africans. These novels attempt to reshape the previous ideologies for a better future of South African fiction and to figure a way forward from the painful past experiences represented in earlier works. These novels help the society to have a better understanding of itself, looking at its own reflection and imagined portrayals. Therefore, the representation of women is based on how a writer perceives and wishes to represent them and not always upon studying how women behave and the challenges they go through. This is why the narrative is different when presented from a female point of view. This is evident in many literary texts produced in South Africa during the post-apartheid period. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the novels narrate feminine matters relating to their hardships, protest and views about the ideologies

created by societies. These novels provide readers with different personalities of women.

1.4. Approach and Methods of Exploration

Textual analysis as proposed by Catherine Belsey (2013) is used in this study as the research methodology. The six primary novels tell stories of black women's experiences in the post-apartheid South Africa. The method is applied to explore the alignment of the selected texts with relevant literary theories. The selected narratives are analysed according to their social issues and other distinctive feminine aspects. Biographical and historical sources are also used to try and explore the social and political aspects behind the portrayal of their characters.

1.5. Chapter Outline and Breakdown

Chapter 1 explains how black South African female authors portray the daily struggles of black women in their novels. It highlights the gap in the literature regarding the representation of young black female characters and how their experiences are depicted. The chapter identifies African feminism as the most fitting theoretical framework for this analysis. This theory addresses themes such as race, class, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, religion, identity, double consciousness, and trauma, highlighting how Western and patriarchal ideologies have historically devalued and oppressed African women. Despite the current age of women empowerment in literature, the chapter outlines how black South African women are often negatively represented or excluded from positive portrayals.

Chapter 2 outlines existing literature on the novels being studied as well as the theories applied in the study, acknowledging the extensive research already conducted while aiming to identify gaps in previous studies. According to John Creswell (2003: 101), researchers use the scholarly literature in a study to present results of similar studies, to relate the present study to an ongoing dialogue in the literature, and to provide a framework for comparing results of a study with other studies. The selected novels are analysed through both African Feminism and post-colonial lenses to challenge stereotypes and cultural degradation stemming from colonialism and power dynamics. Additionally, Du Bois' concept of double consciousness is used to illustrate how the characters struggle to reconcile their African identity with the constraints imposed by a Euro-centric and patriarchal society, impacting their sense of belonging.

Chapter 3 discusses identity crisis and cultural mingling in a country in transition in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*. This chapter explores the identity crisis by focusing on the female characters of the novel. It also looks at the struggle to keep one's culture intact in a country in transition. It focuses on how the two main female characters deal with their struggles with identity in the post-apartheid South Africa. It also discusses how the author signals her concern with issues of women's appearance by starting the novel with a female character's reflections through the sight of a little black girl during a church service. It explores how females transition from their culture to western lifestyles as it questions their value. Through Fikile, who narrates the second part, Matlwa demonstrates how individuals both internalize and act on the ideologies that underlie their own subordination. The chapter also focuses on oppressive ideologies and explain how the author reflects on them as well as how people change due to such ideologies.

Chapter 4 discusses young females' coping strategies in the face of sickness and death in *The Ones with Purpose*. Throughout the depiction, the author explores the coping strategies in the face of sickness and death of a loved one. This chapter discusses these strategies, after exploring the challenges faced by the female protagonist. These coping strategies are explored based on how the main character deals with her challenges and the way she is depicted throughout the process. This novel is selected for its representation of the challenges faced by women who take the responsibility of dealing with family issues and keeping their mental state intact. It explores what women go through on a daily basis and draws on what some families and communities expect from women, as well as the pressure they put them under. Family dynamics are put in place from a woman's point of view who is trying to keep up and keep it together throughout the hardship.

Chapter 5 uses feminism and antifeminism insights in a post-apartheid South Africa in analysing the *Blessed Girl*. It focuses on the way young females use the power they possess and shows the use of power by the female main character through her lavish lifestyle. Antifeminism is explored through the consequences of her lifestyle. It explores how the young lady who is the main character sustains her luxurious lifestyle through rich men with no regret or feeling of concern about the negative outcomes of such behaviour. It depicts the factors that lead to girls living a 'blessee' lifestyle as narrated from the perspective of a young woman. As written by a woman and narrated

by a female character, the novel brings some of the South African lifestyles through the perspective of women without the use of stereotypes.

Chapter 6 explores corrective rape in a democratic country in *Period Pain*. The concept of corrective rape is explored from the angle of a democratic country with a history of apartheid. The chapter explores gender-based violence through the life of the female main character who is going through challenges focusing on corrective rape and gender-based violence. The chapter focuses on how the author paints a societal picture whose failure to live up to the promises of its liberation from decades of race-based oppression has spawned a general sense of ill will/discomfort and an atmosphere of disenchantment. The chapter also looks at women menstruation-related problems, the shift of their mental states caused by the burdens they carry, as well as the general sense of social malaise gripping their countries. It exposes the level of corruption and racial tensions that women come across in their daily lives.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by showing how the chapters are weaved together to develop one coherent argument about the depiction of young women in recent South African novels. It gives a recapitulation of how young women are depicted in the novels and why they are depicted in such a way, the impact of apartheid, race and culture in the depiction. In addition, this chapter also offers recommendations for related future studies.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a broad review of literature that has been produced on the topic under research. This literature review identifies knowledge gaps in previous studies. Creswell (2003: 42) posits that a literature review provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings.

The narratives of the novels are centred around characters questioning their identities. According to Bystrom (2016: 12) a reading that blurs the boundaries of black characters trying to reconcile with their African identities may give way to newer ways of reading embedded in “intellectual, emotional, and embodied labor of memory necessary for psychic repair”. The process of reconciliation can be considered as ‘working through’ which is connected to mourning, often located at the epicenter of post-apartheid culture. Since the process is not tied to events of loss such as actual death, it should be intertwined with psychological, political, and material conditions so that it may address the “insidious trauma,” or “chronic psychic suffering” generated by racism and colonial oppression (Bystrom 2016, 12). Nonhlanhla Dlamini (2022: 7) states: “‘Working through’ may also be adapted to speak back to the questions of guilt and complicity experienced by perpetrators and beneficiaries of apartheid as well as its intrusive memories. The process of working through is posed as a tool or concept that can be used to think about and challenge South African national and private transformation projects (Bystrom 2016).

2.2. Previous Studies on African Feminism and Selected Novels

According to Sinenhlanhla Memela (2020: 16), African feminism does not gloss over gender inequality, the women want to be part of the decision making, they want their ideas and thoughts to be valued and not just get dictated to by males. This is also presented in *The Ones with Purpose* (2018), *Coconut* (2007), *Blessed Girl* (2017) and *Period Pain* (2017).

However, due to the Eurocentric views that exist in postcolonial Africa, the process of transitioning has put the nation in crises as the female characters are caught between

two existing identities of both the colonized and the colonizer with pathological effects. One then loses his or her identity and ends up not belonging anywhere. According to Penelope Midzi (2019: 5), “the way a person sees the world, both geographically and culturally, is dictated by how one understands the world”. The issue of lost cultural identity and belonging manifests in the characters as they struggle to live to their expectations and meet the societal expectations at the same time. They live double lives and yet crave for one, either Africanism or Westernism with the freedom to make their own decisions.

2.2.1. Previous Studies on *Coconut*

According to Nonhlanhla Dlamini (2015:133) *Coconut* concerns itself with the cultural identities and the future of black South African ‘coconut’ youths. The novel excels as a literary text because of its effortless narrative technique. Using Dlamini’s view as a point of departure, this study looks at how the ‘coconut’ youth struggles to find belonging in both white and black environments. The study also looks at how these characters’ identities and sense of belonging came to be estranged in the democratic South Africa.

Dlamini (2015:133) further asserts: “Matlwa identifies the reader of *Coconut* (2007) as ‘child of my country’ and dedicates the novel to this child. She envisages her readership to be young, black and born after 1994 when the collapse of apartheid opened doors to various forms of identification, racial interaction, black social mobility and the constitutional equality of cultures and languages. The contradictory nature of the present is one of the propelling factors that motivated Matlwa to write and dedicate *Coconut* (2007) to an imagined child of South Africa. Matlwa’s ‘child of my country’ struggles with the complex and contradictory nature of cultural identities in the ‘post-apartheid’ era.” Reflecting on this analysis, various forms of identification and racial interaction can be found in this study. The study delves deeper into the struggle to juggle between financial stability and self-belonging/ identity.

According to Dlamini (2015:140) the impact of Westernism on individuals creates a global village. She points out that the idea of a global village, universal culture and language is dystopian at its best. It is a new form of cultural imperialism in the sense that the exchange of languages and cultures is not symbiotic, but unidirectional with content moving from the centre to the periphery. This leads to the commodification of

cultural practices. Due to this view, this study is inspired to look at how the issue of global village negatively impacts black women's identity but does not do the same to white women. This is explored through the white women around both the protagonist female characters that look down on them and criticize their hair and skin colour, while the main characters try by all means to mimic the same white women.

Louise Vincent (2008: 1442) states that the racially perceptive youths feel the brunt of racial prejudice and its dehumanising gaze outside their familial spaces at work where they interact with white people. Vincent's respondents point out that they only feel black and coloured in the proximity of white people. In *Coconut*, the friction witnessed between Ayanda and the white woman patron at Silver Spoon offers an example of such. This study explores the reasons behind the black female characters' need to adopt white women's lifestyle and body features. Characters such as Fikile and Ofilwe try to be white after interacting with whites and being exposed to the media due to different reasons based on how they feel and how they are treated around whites.

Moreover, *Coconut* represents the varying levels of apartheid's impact on both races which gets dramatized in the 'post-apartheid' era. In the contemporary epoch, it comes in the form of amnesia which signposts the mourning of the passage of a history and time when whites were in control. The amnesia and the need to forget is witnessed in the use and occupation of space. Social space and the manner in which it is used and experienced by South Africans in the present era plays a vital role in identity re-creation (Vincent 2008: 1443). Vincent's view helped shape the focus of the current study in order to explore how Fikile's occupational space helped influence her mentality and the need for whiteness, which in turn affects how she as a black woman treats the two races (black and white) differently.

Achille Mbembe (2004: 242) observes that "in the wake of the collapse of apartheid, the contemporary city space has opened up ways to express nostalgia, amnesia, displacement, substitution and hysteria." The use of space in the novel expresses 'displacement' and clash of identities and cultures. This guides the current study as it looks at how the relocation of the Tlou family affects how they live as they had to fit in within the white suburb. The expression can be seen in the way Ofilwe's brother is in conflict with his father due to the course he chose at school and his lifestyle. The

cultural clash witnessed in the novel also depicts the entrapment of the Tlous in the villa, which reflects Mbembe's expression on displacement.

2.2.2. Previous Studies on *The Ones with Purpose*

According to Karen Laura Thornber (2020: 8), in *The Ones with Purpose* (2018), Cynthia Jele introduces readers to the complex dynamics within a South African family. Such dynamics are reflected in this study from a female point of view looking at how these dynamics are centred around women only and exclude men in the root of the family. The study at hand also reflects on the depth of women's connection. In this case, it evaluates how female siblings are more connected to each other emotionally than their male siblings. Due to the connection, female characters in the novel manage to carry their families on their back with courage and positivity without exclusion unlike male characters.

Chad Chmielowicz (2014:7) has observed that individuals who have a strong sense of purpose are "the ones who are more likely to experience higher levels of well-being and psychological resilience." The expression is witnessed in *The Ones with Purpose*, however, this research focuses on how women are faced with oppressive forces within families and the healthcare system, and how these forces end up leading to their breakdown. Even though women show resilience towards their daily challenges, their strength is drained by their respective families as this is where most of their trauma comes from. Instead of receiving support from their families, the opposite is received even from the community.

Barbara Boswell (2020: 09) asserts: "Jele delves into the intrinsic motivations that drive individuals to pursue meaningful and fulfilling lives. Jele explores how a sense of purpose shapes an individual's attitudes, behaviours, and overall well-being." This means that those who have a clear sense of purpose exhibit higher levels of resilience in the face of adversity increased satisfaction with their daily activities, and a greater sense of direction in life. Furthermore, it highlights the role of purpose in fostering a sense of connectedness with others and promoting overall psychological health. Using this as a point of departure, this study explores how the individuals that are said to pursue a meaningful life do it out of necessity and not voluntarily. In other words, these characters did not choose to live the lives they live, and they do not enjoy the hardships

that come with it. This study shows how these characters would choose differently if they did not have their existing family challenges.

Wai Yip, Hongting Zhou and Suet To, (2023: 41388) mention that “by delving deeper into the intersection of purpose and work satisfaction, Jele brings to light the significance of fostering a sense of purpose among employees for organizational success and employee well-being”. This claim concludes that purpose-driven individuals exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being in the workplace. However, this study highlights that Jele’s *The Ones with Purpose* (2018) focuses more on the characters’ need for reliable jobs which they need to take care of their siblings and given their vulnerability, their need for financial stability, jobs with higher salaries would be welcomed with both hands.

2.2.3. Previous Studies on *Period Pain*

Period Pain (2017), according to Dlamini (2022: 5), is a novel whose themes are steeped in discourses on and around negrophobia, the lingering effects of apartheid and colonialism in the minds of black people, Pan Africanism, ideals of black people’s success in the post-apartheid era, feminisms, Christianity, the appalling state of the public health system in South Africa, working through the transition from apartheid to democracy in a manner that seeks to normalise freedoms, empathy and its limits with regard to human relations, respect for human life/death, gender-based violence (rape) as well as mental health issues. In the narrative, these themes are broached and seamlessly woven with the female body, the family and its disintegration in the post-apartheid era, rape, the female psyche and child bearing in a manner that resists the “writing back to the centre paradigm” as espoused by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2003), and the Fanonian representational trope which writes the family as the microcosm of the nation/state. Dlamini’s expression inspired the study to look at the treatment of women in the democratic South Africa, along with their exclusion within the society. However, the study differs with Dlamini’s view on gender-based violence as just violence against women. This study views gender-based violence as a tool used to oppress women and control them by instilling fear in them.

Kerry Bystrom (2016) makes a useful observation about post-apartheid literature and the domestic spheres (home and national frontiers) in her reading of South African literature, artwork and photography produced during the extended transitional years,

1994-2009. This observation is used in the study to look at the societal forces that lead to the mistreatment of women especially those who are regarded as foreigners. Bystrom argues that South African writers and artists have created profoundly engaged critical conversations on the challenges of social and political transformations. These issues are framed in ways that belie the notion of home as an allegory of the broader nation. The home is evoked, depicted, and used as an exploration of the ties and relations that “bind us to our households or those we consider as kin” (Bystrom 2016: 3). Bystrom adds that the focus on the home and relationality asks us to think about the manifold forms of apartheid perpetrated by the state. It is also a flexible signifier meant to draw attention to the threads, emotional and rational, real, and imagined that link us to other people. Bystrom (2016: 43) states: “It directs our gaze to family matters and asks us to consider carefully the way we live with relatives and others with whom we share domestic space, without losing sight of how these intimate relationships connect with wider social ones”. This study focuses on the country as a single family in *Period Pain* that is supposed to be hostile towards anyone who lives in it regardless of their sex and nationality.

Dlamini (2022:6) states that “making freedom a normal reality is a personal and political stance that is also interlocked with how we relate.” This expression is used to analyse how the relationship of the characters in *Period Pain*, *Coconut*, *The Ones with Purpose* and *Blessed Girl* make personal decisions on how they interact with each other in the midst of freedom to achieve their goals as individuals. The study explores if these decisions are politically motivated or weaved through patriarchal ideologies.

Period Pain touches the issue of humanity in a South African context. The novel “contributes towards private and national circuits of transformation that mainly focus on the economies of affect and empathy. The focus on the lack of empathy and psychological fatigue of the doctors and the numerous social problems is subtly linked to apartheid and postapartheid politics of othering. The novel suggests that the private sphere provides a threshold into the public/national sphere through relationality to attain transformation. Therefore, the concepts of working through and empathy as well as its antithesis are appropriate ways of thinking about the manner through which Matlwa uses relations, risky exposure, intimacy and the psyche to depict the dilemmas of the present in a manner that seeks to proffer humane ways of relating” (Dlamini, 2022: 6). This study concurs with this expression as it approaches the lack of empathy

on women as one of the tools used by men who have attained freedom and want to control everything without taking women into consideration, rather than a possible postapartheid and apartheid political way of othering as the mistreatment goes towards all women.

Matlwa's novel links different issues affecting the growth of a South African society. Ulla Wischermann & Ilza Mueller (2004: 84) state: "Matlwa's seamless linkage of the public and private spheres should not be read as merely weaving the familial site with broader social communities, it should also be analysed as an on-going feminist work that seeks to disintegrate boundaries between the private and public spheres". The blurring of boundaries also demonstrates how the violence of the public sphere permeates the private, thus negatively affecting the lives of the marginalised, vulnerable, and weaker members of society. My study concurs with the conclusion as the novel is read as a work that reflects on the way women are vulnerable to men, leading to their marginalization.

Dlamini (2022: 8) observes that "the novel's broaching of the themes of outbreaks of negrophobic violence and their concomitants on the psyche of those framed as 'foreign' seeks to demonstrate the failure of empathy and searches for alternative affects that may open on-going debates on South Africa's failed transition. In South African public cultures, limits of empathy have been witnessed through various forms of violence, the questioning of Mandela's legacy in the South African socioeconomic terrain and its negotiated settlement, and the TRC performances of forgiveness and reconciliation on the national podium." Dlamini (2022: 8-9) further states that "by making a return to empathic affects, Matlwa's novel joins and problematizes the above in her work as it offers a critique of the violence towards those framed as queer/foreign within the national boundaries. Its return to empathy also begs for a reading that examines the limits of intergroup empathy and subtly suggests ways of overcoming them". Using Dlamini's views as a point of departure, this research looks at how foreign women are not only threatened by negrophobic acts but also by so-called curative rape. Curative rape as part of masculinity is used to scare off foreign women out of the country as they fear suffering the worse than their male counterparts.

Period Pain, according to Dlamini (2022: 9), does not gloss over the gendered, racialized, and masculinized components of the violence, but it proffers a slightly

different outlook in that it foregrounds the role of intimate exposure, intimate relations and tactical empathy in the contexts of violence. Such contents of violence can be found in the current study; however, its focus is on how these masculinized components of violence are turned into an ideology of mass/community way of living believed to be the right way of life. This focus explores how the male characters embed their ideologies on women based on their male interests in order to have their way with anything they want without women's resistance.

In addition, Dlamini (2022: 10) states: "Matlwa's text ushers us into discussions on empathic failure and the politics of precarity through the 'iconic' body of a patient named Maputo, a Mozambican man admitted in the hospital with 3rd degree burns on 90% of his body after an outbreak of negrophobic attacks in Johannesburg. Maputo's burnt body is 'iconic' in the history of the outbreak of negrophobic attacks in South Africa in that it becomes an embodiment of the wave of attacks that engulfed the country at that time and beyond. Through its depiction, the novel draws parallels to the factual death a Mozambican immigrant man named Ernesto Nhamuave. The visual and print media pictorial reportage of his attack gained prominence in 2008 because of the trail of carnage, shock, horror, and disbelief it left in its wake." Speaking about the 2008 xenophobic attacks, Helene Strauss (2011: 107) and Jason Hickel (2014: 103) concur that the newspaper's front page and TV screens were splashed with the "necklaced" burning body of Ernesto Nhamuave. The spectacular, affective and symbolic force of the image of a burning man crouched on his hands and knees canonised both the image and the violence of the attacks to the extent that it was re-enlisted to accompany news articles on the state of South Africa's lack of hospitality and irritation with those construed as foreigners (Strauss, 2011: 107). Strauss (107) adds that the force of this symbolic image has been contrasted with Sam Nzima's 1976 photograph of a dying Hector Pieterse. As the sentiments above reflect on the masculine part of the victims, this study delves into the feminine part of the chaos looking at what the female foreign nationals are going through in the novel. My study explores how the chaos affects South African women like period pains that men cannot understand.

2.2.4. Previous Studies on *Blessed Girl*

Angela Makholwa's *The Blessed Girl* (2017) is analysed by Rebecca Fasselt (2018: 376) as "an example of African chick lit that adopts deception trickery for self-advancement to interrogate the ways in which the complex and contradictory politics of chick lit presented in the novel nonetheless resists what critics, such as Ferguson have called Trump's anti-political neoliberal feminism." For Ferguson's reading of neoliberal feminism, it does not consider the potential for resistance inherent in forms of cultural expression such as chick lit that are often associated with neoliberalism. As a post-feminist African trickster figure, Makholwa's protagonist offers an alternative to the Donald Trump like "tycoon trickster" (Fasselt, 2018: 376) and his political feminism through her simultaneous embrace and critique of the trajectory of neoliberal self-making often found in chick lit texts. Inverting the developmental logic of the Bildungsroman, Fasselt (2018: 383) further asserts that "the narrative also offers a pointed critique of Trumpian trickster politics and neoliberal self-betterment." Fasselt also adds that in Makholwa's text, the repurposing of the trickster trope and its use of discursive strategies, such as unreliable narration and reader address attest to a similar narrative questioning of formal strictures. This study moves away from the post-feminist African trickster to parenting in the postcolonial South Africa, which leads to the convergence of two different generations, whereby one is from the colonial era and the other from post-colonial period. This focus looks at how the clash of the two ideologies leads to the confusion of the post-colonial generation which base its lifestyle on western ideologies.

According to Jeanne Smith (2022:13), trickster tales, even though often "offering a socially sanctioned way of institutionalizing rebellion in order to reinforce political and cultural norms (as when the tales teach morals through negative example)," also consciously undermine established order and authority. Fasselt (2018: 383) further asserts that Makholwa's "blessee novel" escapes dichotomous portrayals of transactional relationships and also demonstrates how so-called "'traditional' genres," such as the trickster tale, as Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome (2014) observe, are frequently used in popular cultural expression to comment on current affairs. These ideas help shape the analysis of Makholwa's characterization of Bontle in the current study. Smith's explanation contributes to the analysis of the way Makholwa uses her female characters, especially her main character to teach her readers

lessons and morals. On the other end, Fasselt's idea helps shape the analysis of Makholwa's view on current affairs and the reason she shaped her characters the way they are.

While *The Blessed Girl* displays a number of characteristics of mainstream, as well as Lynda Spencer's (2019) "uprising" chick lit formats, it also unsettles some of the central paradigms of these forms by placing its narrative focus on the blessee phenomenon. The sentiment is supported by Anita Harris looking at the narrator's initial self-presentation which allows for a reading of her character as an embodiment of the girl power paradigm that according to Harris "encapsulates the narrative of the successful new young woman who is self-inventing, ambitious, and confident." (Harris, 2004: 52). Central to the idea of girl power, Harris further avers, is the influence of young women by a "can do," DIY philosophy and the assumption that "they can have (or at least buy) it all." (52). These insights are used by this study to explore how the DIY mentality leads to the young generation's recklessness which gives them diseases and depression.

Fasselt (2018: 382) asserts that in *The Blessed Girl*, "Makholwa extends the repertoire of chick lit heroines in African literature even further, employing a first-person narrator, *"the Queen of Bling"* (Makholwa, 2017: 57) as another character calls her, who dismisses romance as a fantasy and believes in *"money [as] the key to happiness"* (58). The novel engages with the widespread blessee phenomenon, centring on a young woman "who lives a luxurious lifestyle funded by an older, sometimes married partner in return for sexual favours. Involved in numerous transactional relationships, Bontle uses her physical attractiveness to leave behind township life and finance her excessive lifestyle. In contrast to other South African chick lit novels whose protagonists often belong to the country's growing black middle class, Makholwa's novel foregrounds issues of class that are central to blesser-blessee transactions. Makholwa's focus on the blessee phenomenon thus complicates the romance strand by casting it more directly in a vocabulary of economic transaction and exchange." (Fasselt, 2018: 382). In the light of the foregoing, my study looks at the transactional relationship and lifestyle from a postcolonial point of view to explore how colonial parents were not exposed to such lifestyle. As a result of the generational gap, this study argues that the transactional relationship was not shaped by an individual belief

as stated by Fasselt (2018) but was shaped by the exposure to social media which people worldwide use to flash their possessions.

Fasselt (2018: 382) states that “the novel, also partakes in and extends a strand of post feminism that Harzewski terms “late heterosexuality,” in which women are more likely to question “romantic myths,” (Stephanie Harzewski, 2011: 55-56) “courtship is de-romanticized and reframed within the idiom of business” or, to quote Mißler, “the idea of romantic love” is substituted “by a notion of neoliberal love, a love at least partly chosen for its capitalist benefits” (Lucinda Newns, 2018: 57). Makholwa takes this economicization of courtship further by introducing blesser-blessee relationships into the chick lit formula. This leaves a gap in the way these blessers have gained their riches as blacks living in the postcolonial South Africa and also does not reveal the difference between young female and male generation when it comes to job applications and access to occupation. This inspired my study to explore how young black females get jobs and tenders in South Africa.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Chioma Filomena Steady’s 2005 theory of African feminism is used as the main framing idea for this study. As a result of the South African transition in the selected novels, Steady’s theory will be used to analyse the selected novels as according to her, regardless of one’s position, the implications of the feminist movement for the black woman are complex, whereby several factors set the black woman apart as having a different order of priorities, just as it appears in the novels. African feminism is espoused by African women who reside on the African continent. It addresses their living conditions and challenges which they encounter as black or African women. Sinenhlanhla Memela (2020: 15) observes: “For African women, feminism recognizes the dignity of women and men, that their value is both equal in society, therefore both genders deserve respect and acknowledgement.”. The contexts and settings of the primary texts of this study are in South Africa. The leading characters of each novel are black women who are faced with daily challenges that are not comparable to Western females. African Feminism is suitable for this study because it is a term that has many different meanings to different people in different cultures, which relates to the context of the selected texts. According to Memela (2020: 15), Western feminism is very individualistic and seems to prove a point that women are as good as men, if

not better in many aspects of life. In the process of proving female capabilities, women tend to appear bitter and angry towards the male who is far more privileged than her. There are quite a few contrasts between African feminism and Western feminism. In African feminism, “motherhood is important, the responsibilities of a mother are valued, and most women enjoy being mothers” (Desiree Lewis, 2001: 6). The idea of carrying life is generally viewed as empowering by most African females; as a result, the role of a mother is significant in the family and society. The three out of five main characters of the chosen novels all have children which shows that the authors are highlighting the motherhood aspect of their daily lives. The other two novels represent teenage girls, one with a present and supportive mother and the other without a mother but a supportive and loving grandmother.

Applying African feminism to the analysis of a text calls for the inclusion and consideration of a number of themes such as race, class, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, religion, identity, double consciousness and trauma. Also, it unearths how western and masculine/ patriarchal ideologies devalue and oppress African women in Africa. Thus, *The Ones with Purpose* (2018), *Blessed Girl* (2017), *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2017) can be analysed as both African feminist and post-colonial literature, which communicate and redirect an understanding of the degradation of African people’s culture and societal stereotypes at the exposure of colonialism and power. In addition, Du Bois’ double consciousness concept also informed this study as it helps demonstrate how the characters in the selected novels have trouble in trying to reconcile their African identity and culture with an upbringing in both a Euro-centred and patriarchal society, which act as boundaries to their sense of belonging.

2.3.1. Steady’s Concept of African Feminism

It is imperative to contextualise the framework for this research, as there are many feminisms but not all are relevant to black African women. Steady seeks to reverse the western ideologies inherent in both Feminism and Womanism. She offers her theory of African Feminism to project the peculiarities of the African woman. Unlike western feminism, an African woman is oppressed not simply because of her sex but “ostensibly because of her race and, for the majority, essentially because of their class. Women belong to different socio-economic groups and do not represent a universal category. Because most black women are poor, there is likely to be some alienation

from the middle-class aspect of the women's movement which perceives feminism as an attack on men rather than on a system which thrives on inequality" (23-24). Steady's work challenges traditional Western notions of feminism, advocating for a more inclusive and intersectional approach that considers the unique cultural, social, and political dynamics of African societies. Steady's theory is used to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which African feminism challenges conventional narratives and offers alternative perspectives on gender equality and women's empowerment in the selected novels.

Western feminism is often seen "as anti-men, anti-child and disruptive of the natural state of the family and sometimes synonymous with lesbianism" (Lilian Atanga, 2013:303). As a result, African feminism has distinct characteristics when compared to Western feminism. These feminisms may have a similar broad goal but some realities within the African context are different. Some African academics have criticized Western feminism for focusing on male privilege, subordination of women and fighting battles against men, whereas men can also be feminists as long as they believe in the dignified treatment of women. African feminism entails creating spaces for women to participate in the management of their societies; this includes empowering women through access to resources such as health, education and housing (Atanga, 2013:308). Contemporary African feminism involves:

Rewriting the identities of African women not only as passive victims of male dominance and patriarchy or as preoccupied with the concerns of their 'Western' sisters, but as active social, economic and political agents in the developments of their countries, having the freedom and ability to combine some traditional practices as mothers and wives with public roles. (Atanga, 2013: 309)

Memela (2020) asserts that "African feminism does not gloss over gender inequality; the women want to be part of the decision making, they want their ideas and thoughts to be valued and not just get dictated to by males" (16). One character in Jele's novel, Mrs Mabuza states:

You should call your brother-in-law again. It is not right that he has not been to see his wife for so long (Jele, 2018: 17).

She says this so that the brother-in-law can also be part of the decision making when it comes to his wife's situation as the women cannot decide and leave him behind.

This shows how the women do not want to make decisions for men, rather, they want to be involved and decide with them as the decisions are taken for the whole family.

Furthermore, African feminism does not view marriage as a prison for women, but as a valuable institution between males and females. African feminism encourages “women to embrace their femininity put on lipstick if they want to, wear high heels or just remain natural if that is what they like” (Adichie, 2014: 39). Therefore, African feminism recognizes that women are not a homogenous group. However, it is very important to note that feminism in Africa has its own specificities due to the unique challenges that women face in that context (Atanga, 2013: 301). Africa is “very diverse as it has many countries with different cultures within, it cannot be treated as a single entity because women from countries like Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria tend to face different problems from women of the sub-Sahara” (Atanga, 2013: 301). The primary novels portray how the leading female characters pride themselves in their languages just as men do. African feminism does not neglect or look down on these issues of language because they are part of African people.

Such perceptions are unfamiliar amongst Western feminists, which make African feminism relevant for this research project. According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985), black women’s struggle is different from white women’s fight against patriarchy. Ogunyemi (1985) portrays this concept through black women’s writing in Africa and America. Memela (2020: 17) states that Ogunyemi as the author uses “writing as her symbol for black women’s challenges and that they are not only fighting the institution of patriarchy but, other issues that make up their daily experience. These issues are racial, cultural, economic and political”. She posits how black women deal with double consciousness in their lives, their need to express their African culture but also the desire to incorporate the Western methods of daily life. The primary novel of Kopano Matlwa depicts this double consciousness of the leading females, they speak English and prefer being around whites than blacks, which makes it clear that they are trying to merge the two worlds, and these are issues white women are not confronted with.

Due to the different cultures, women face different challenges, and for this study, the focus is on Black South African women. Oyerenke Oyewumi clearly shows that Western thought society was seen to be inhabited by bodies, “only women were

perceived to have bodies, men had no bodies; they were walking minds” (Oyewumi, 1997: 6). This thinking is challenged in the primary texts, because women are depicted as more than just bodies but as thinking minds that exercise power and agency.

Susan Arndt (2002) defines African feminism and its goals by showing the three main literatures of African feminism, namely:

reformist, transformative and radical African feminism. In reformist literature, men are criticised as individuals, not as representatives of men. It is assumed that society is capable of reforming and reformist texts usually have a happy ending. In transformative African feminism, men are criticised much more sharply than in reformist. It is believed that there is a possibility for them to transform and become better people. Radical African feminism believes that men are fundamentally sexist and deeply immoral as a result, these texts are normally violent, and the men die tragically or are simply powerless. (Arndt, 2002: 33).

African feminism encompasses a diverse range of ideologies, movements, and practices that seek to address the intersections of gender, race, class, and other social categories within the African context. It is important to highlight the unique historical and cultural dimensions that shape African feminism, as it is distinct from Western feminist paradigms. African feminists have often critiqued the universalizing tendencies of mainstream feminism and have emphasized the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and local experiences into their analysis. This approach challenges dominant narratives and offers alternative perspectives on issues such as patriarchy, colonialism, and globalization. By centering the voices and struggles of African women, African feminism contributes to broader discussions on social justice and equity (Tertius Jacobs, 2021: 329-331). Through these efforts, African feminists work towards dismantling oppressive structures and promoting inclusive and intersectional forms of empowerment and this is evident in the novels selected for this study.

According to Rosalyn Penn (1995:3-17), Steady’s theory of African feminism can be used to approach the study of African-descended women’s lives through an analysis of their own networks, which were used to overcome obstacles placed in the way of survival. Beginning with an examination of the values which foster the customs of free women in traditional African societies, historians can plot how these traits have

changed, though the values have remained somewhat the same. Perhaps the two most dominant values in African feminist theory, which are traceable through time are: encouraging self-reliance through female networks and developing survival strategies. These values have become institutionalized in many African and African-descended communities, just as they appear in the selected novels.

Chioma's work focuses on challenging patriarchal norms and advocating the rights of African women in various socio-political contexts. Through her research, Serawit B. Debele (2023: 135-140) states:

Chioma has highlighted the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in shaping the experiences of African women, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges they face. By centering the voices of African women in her scholarship, Chioma has not only brought attention to the diverse struggles and triumphs of women in Africa but has also contributed to the evolution of feminist theory within the African context. Her commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalized women and advocating their rights has had a profound impact on the feminist movement in Africa, setting a precedent for future generations of scholars and activists to follow. (Debele, 2023: 135-140)

This is crucial in the analysis of the study because in *Period Pain* (2017), Masechaba advocates the political rights of women as well as freedom of expression, and equality.

According to Emily Chamlee-Wright (2002:11) Chioma's work revolves around "various prominent themes that shed light on the complexities of African feminism. One key theme in Chioma's writing is the exploration of gender dynamics within African societies, highlighting the struggles and triumphs of women navigating patriarchal structures". Chioma delves into the twist of intersectionality, considering how factors like race, class, and religion intersect with gender to shape women's experiences in Africa. Furthermore, Chioma's work emphasises the importance of community and solidarity among women in the face of adversity, advocating collective action and empowerment. Through nuanced character portrayals and compelling narratives, Chioma's writing challenges traditional notions of femininity and womanhood, offering a fresh perspective on African feminism that resonates with readers globally. The selected novels resonate this solidarity by taking readers through the female problems faced by the main characters.

Chioma has challenged traditional patriarchal norms and advocated the empowerment and liberation of African women. Her emphasis on intersectionality and the interconnectedness of gender, race, and class has reshaped the discourse surrounding feminism in Africa. Chioma's focus on amplifying the voices of marginalized women and centering their experiences has inspired a new generation of feminists to engage in inclusive and intersectional activism. By highlighting the importance of solidarity and collective action, Chioma has fostered a sense of community among African feminists, leading to a more cohesive and powerful movement for gender equality on the continent. In essence, Chioma's ideas have not only enriched the intellectual landscape of African feminism but have also sparked tangible social change which the authors of the novels are calling for.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed previous studies on the four selected novels: *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa, *The Ones with Purpose* (2018) by Cynthia Jele, *Blessed Girl* (2017) by Angela Makholwa and *Period Pain* (2017) by Kopano Matlwa. The chapter also presented the study's theoretical framework. It was highlighted that literature does not state how the transitioning period that is represented in the novels especially affect black women. Thus, this study focuses on the research gaps found in previous studies using African Feminism as the theoretical lens of analysing the selected novels. Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* best illustrates how African feminism can be used to understand female challenges that are unique to South African girls who lived during the early years of the country's transition into a democratic state. Thus, Chapter 3 below analyses Matlwa's insightful depiction of the identity crises experienced by her two female protagonists.

CHAPTER 3

Identity Crisis and Cultural Mingling in a Country in Transition in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*

3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the challenges faced by young female characters in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*. The novel focuses on how female characters negotiate identity crises in a South Africa experiencing cultural mingling after the end of apartheid. South Africa was the last country to gain independence in Africa from colonialism. As a result of the long oppression under white supremacy, South Africa has been challenged with transitioning from a Eurocentric paradigm due to divisions and displacements caused by colonialism. Matlwa's novel was published 13 years after South African's transition to black majority rule. The novel depicts women who negotiate Eurocentrism ideas along with other patriarchal factors that contribute to their challenges. *Coconut* also depicts South African black men as victims of western ideologies and how this contributes to their oppression of black women. As a postcolonial text that engages with identity construction, patriarchy and racism, the novel can be productively analysed through Anibal Quijano's (2000) concept of colonality of power. The chapter also employs Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989) idea of double oppression to explore the cultural mingling and identity crisis taking place in South Africa as portrayed in Matlwa's novel.

Matlwa's narrative highlights and addresses existing practices of male power in black families and racism experienced by black women. The novel depicts cultural dissociation of black females that is promoted through the media. The chapter also examines how black characters struggle to fit into the middle-class environment which at the time Matlwa's novel was published was dominated by white people. Further, the chapter explores how the main black female characters' identities are affected and shaped by destructive patriarchal ideologies. The title of the novel '*Coconut*' uses a figure of speech which describes a black person who has internalized white or western identity to expose how western notions of modernity have traumatized black women to internalize white identities. According to Peter Moopi & Rodwell Makombe (2020) *Coconut* is a metaphor of colonality in that it speaks to the continued manifestation of colonial ways of being even after the end of colonialism.

Jonathan Stadler (2008) argues that coconut connotes ways of naming and labelling within the contemporary black youth culture, that both acknowledge and resist racial integration and assimilation to white culture. The narrative also attempts to show how unlike white women who fight against patriarchy, black women are also faced with racism. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) argues that black women deal with double oppression in their lives, not only their need to express their African culture but also the desire to incorporate the western methods of daily life. Such need does not only arise in women, but in men as well due to the marginalization of African customs. However, *Coconut* uses first person narrators to emphasize the way black women struggle with identity more than men due to their gender.

According to Crenshaw (1989), black women often experience double oppression because they are discriminated as black people and also as black women. Therefore, double oppression implies living under the negative effects of both patriarchy and colonialism. According to Louise Kretzschmar (1995), oppression is the imposition of the will of a certain person or group upon another person or group to the detriment of the latter. Racial-based oppression is the kind of oppression that usually happens to the minority ethnic groups where these minority groups are seen as inferior. They are often labelled with stereotypes and unfairly treated by the superior ethnic groups because they have no power to stand up on their own. Crenshaw's notion will also be used to examine the representation of class in a white dominant society and patriarchy within middle-class black families. Double oppression is a durable description of two forms of dominance, patriarchy and racism and of women's status. Due to the way Matlwa represents cultural mingling, the racism that exists in the novel leads to imperialism. Both forms of dominance, patriarchy and imperialism, are comparable and overlapping in a country that was once a colony and shows persisting coloniality of power along with patriarchy.

Coconut is a diary of two teenage black girls narrated through their different viewpoints on issues of beauty, culture, identity, economic imbalances, family relations and desires. The two female protagonist-narrators, Ofilwe and Fikile, live two separate lives in post-apartheid South Africa. Both girls suffer oppression under the treatment of white people in a white dominated space and are forced to change their names to Fifi and Fiks. While they have resemblances, they come from different places and have different experiences within a post-colonial country. Their stories are told a decade

after independence. Matlwa uses an oxymoronic plot to present two contrasting characters of the same era and race. The two girls have created artificial identities which do not align with the colour of their skin. The novel opens up with Sponono', a young girl that Ofilwe uses to recap what she used to go through as a child through a hair related incident at church which Ofilwe highly disapproves as the little girl is wearing unnatural plaited hair. This incident tells the reader how Ofilwe has grown through the pain and learned about the existing oppression imposed through Eurocentric ideologies. According to Quijano (2000), Eurocentrism is a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledge, as much in Europe as in the rest of the world.

The novel is divided into two parts in a non-chronological form as it has a break in the middle where a different story is told by a different narrator. As the two protagonist-narrators recount the days of their lives, the accounts are littered with flashbacks and asides to emphasize what they have already experienced. Ofilwe narrates the story of not fitting in as a young black child who moved into a white community. Her deep desire to fit in socially, is contrasted with her resistance to her Pedi culture. Fikile narrates the story of growing up in a township and desperately wanting to attain and be all that her glossy fashion magazines advocate. The two young ladies meet at the Silver Spoon Café, where Ofilwe and her family are customers and Fikile is their waitron.

Ofilwe lives a lavish lifestyle at Little Valley Estate in Sandton because of her father's (Mr Tlou) benefiting from the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) system established after apartheid to bring balance to the racial economic inequality. Her father owns a communication company which makes him afford the life he wants for his family, while her mother, Gemina, is a retired nurse. As a result of wanting a better life for his family, Mr Tlou moved from the township to a white dominated estate and took his children to private schools. On the other hand, Fikile lives in a township filled with crime and poverty. As an orphan, Fikile shares a room with her sexually abusive uncle at Mphe Batho Township in Mabopane and works at Silver Spoon Café, a white-owned business, where she is often reminded of her blackness. Ofilwe has a brother, Tshepo, who helps her realise how much she praises whiteness over blackness and oppression. Fikile on the other hand, has no one to share her problems with, and as a

result she designs what she calls her 'box of treasures' where she stores her tools for whiteness and wish list.

Ofilwe's mother suffers emotional and verbal abuse from her husband. Her husband accuses her of not being an adequately literate mother and coerces her to resign to take care of Ofilwe and Tshepo when the children were still young. While Ofilwe and Fikile narrate radically different life stories, their experiences intersect at various points with regard to their outlook on South African white culture versus divergent neo-traditional South African cultures, with language at the centre. While Ofilwe's father thought moving from the township was best for his family and most importantly his daughter, Ofilwe had to deal with being a black girl at a white private school soon after the end of apartheid. Ofilwe felt guilty for being a black privileged child and felt unwelcome in the new environment.

Fikile, on the other hand, is hands-on and ambitious with the belief that she does not belong in the township but a better place and **dis**tastes everything and everyone from the township along with black people. She wants no association with the township and blacks. She wakes up every day with a goal of getting as far away as possible from "blackness" that she associates with poverty, savagery and illiteracy and is drawn towards "whiteness" that she admires and praises because she associates it with progress and everything good. Matlwa makes use of Ofilwe and Fikile to explore identity, belonging, racism, class and colonized consciousness. Lynda Spencer (2009) contends that "by having two narrators the author succeeds in providing the different perspectives of two characters located on each side of the socio-economic fence while struggling to negotiate self-identity in post-apartheid South Africa" (68). This is evident in the way Matlwa presents the narratives as the narrators face the same struggles but different economic backgrounds.

Matlwa's narrative portrays black women who are discriminated by Western ideologies that brutalize their minds. Ofilwe and Fikile's challenges substantiate Ogunyemi's (1985) observation that black women's struggle is more intense than that of white women because in addition to fighting against patriarchy, they are also racially, culturally, economically and politically excluded. Unlike conventional feminist articulations that largely confront oppressive patriarchy, Matlwa's *Coconut* is keen on exposing the racial and cultural challenges faced by young South African females.

3.2. Effect of Colonialism on African Aesthetic Views and Oppression of Black Women

Matlwa's narrative is set approximately a decade after the end of apartheid. The novelist uses this time setting to evaluate the country's progress regarding the liberation of women. Matlwa uses the time frame of the transition from apartheid to democracy to expose how colonial/western views continue to affect the African perception of women's beauty, where black women are desperate to fit into western standards of beauty while also dealing with patriarchy. Through Ofilwe, while she is still a high school teenager, the narrative reveals that Western ideologies of beauty have negatively infiltrated black women's lives. The novel shows that notions of beauty are socially constructed. Jenna Marco (2012: 3) notes that "beauty has been imagined as part of people's social and psychological lives in various ways since antiquity". This outlines that beauty is built on social constructs and not specifically nature, which is why Ofilwe gets ridiculed at her white private school by white teenagers.

The construction of Ofilwe and Fikile contests the non-African ideologies that are normative in postcolonial South Africa. Women are shown to be the main victims of such ideologies due to their urge to impress men and the desire to fit in. Matlwa's narrative portrays a society described by Bell Hooks (1995) as black acceptance of assimilation where "politics of representation affirming white beauty standards were being re-established as the norm" (122). To use Hooks words again, the narrative depicts a social milieu where "the needs of children who suffered various forms of discrimination and were psychologically wounded in families and public-school systems because they were not the right colour" are not addressed (122). *Coconut* explores the discrimination that exists within the educational sphere. The characterization of Ofilwe and Fikile exposes some of the underlying problems that affect black women which are noticed but ignored by the nation. Black women are expected to go through pain to be identified as beautiful. The pain is expressed through Ofilwe's remembrance of her experience as a child and Matlwa emphasizes that these are the experiences of a very young child. Ofilwe remembers how she could swing her legs while sitting on a stool in the salon as her hair was being straightened. Ofilwe remembers her experience when she sees Sponono suffering from the same fate she suffered as a child. Ofilwe recounts:

She would hide her reddened hands under a ten-year-old bottom as she shut her eyes tight, refusing to let out the tears that wrestled violently within. The hair straightener caused a painful exothermic chemical reaction. (Matlwa, 2007: 4)

Through Ofilwe's hair straightening experience, Matlwa's narrative emphasises the pain that the character experienced as well as reveals that Ofilwe did not construct her appearance out of her own will, rather her parents introduced her to painful western values. Murray (2012) argues that for a “woman to be properly feminine or considered beautiful, she must manipulate her appearance to conform to very specific ideals of beauty” (2012: 91). Matlwa uses Ofilwe to explore the way her mother has been victimized by apartheid and its ideologies where for a black girl to be beautiful, her hair has to approximate that of white girls. Through Ofilwe, Matlwa protests the way mothers inadvertently abuse female children by enforcing on them western beauty standards. The narrative shows that Ofilwe's mother has internalized colonialism and coloniality of power as she believes that being like white girls means being beautiful. This ideology unwittingly makes parents make their children go through great pain to fit into white women standards of beauty.

Ofilwe's mother reveals how black parents unwittingly influence their daughters to resemble white women. Malesela Edward Montle and Mphoto Mogoboya (2018) argue that colonialists championed Eurocentric notions that still menace Afrocentric identities notwithstanding their dethronement from power. Such notions eliminate others which can be seen through the idea of black women straightening their hair. This notion degrades the value of afro/African hair while promoting white women's hair. This idea lowers the standard of Africans and also traumatizes children who are made to believe that they are not beautiful until they have straightened silky hair. Matlwa's narrative reveals that black female children continue to endure the pain of straightening their hair because they do not want to be perceived as ugly according to the prevailing notions of beauty. This is because despite the horrific incident of burning her scalp as a child, little Ofilwe still continued with the process. She reports: She wanted every last tiny weenie curl straight (Matlwa, 2007: 34). Zimitri Erasmus (1997: 11) argues that the racial hierarchies and values of colonial racism have left a deep mark on our conceptions of beauty, and that this legacy is keenly felt in women's relationship with their hair. Through Ofilwe's burning incident as a child, Matlwa shows that white women's beauty is nothing but pain for black women. Matlwa uses satire by depicting

little Ofilwe's delight in burning until every curl is straight as she thought that was the only way to becoming beautiful.

Coconut's setting at Ofilwe's school exposes how a white school is a platform of coloniality of power where beauty ethics are indirectly taught as whites continue to oppress and discriminate black women even in postcolonial South Africa by discriminating their curly hair, while embracing their own. For example, The Guardian (2016) reported an incident at Pretoria High School where black pupils were forced to "chemically straighten their hair and not have afros that were deemed untidy". Colonizers used different methods and platforms to misrepresent Africanism and uphold Eurocentrism. Such platforms demonized and presented African values as inadequate and evil. Malesela Edward Montle (2020: 111) note: "African identity has been epitomised by natural hair that portrayed African women in short hair. However, the colonial intervention has eroded this African understanding of beauty through Eurocentric hairstyles by making Africans believe that this age-old hair-style tradition of growing short hair is backward and barbaric". The narrative uses a synecdoche by placing Ofilwe in a white private school to show how a black woman is forced to adapt to white values and perceptions, and how she is perceived by white people as inadequate due to her race.

Matlwa expresses ironic resentment in depicting Ofilwe's flashbacks about her painful hair experience as she relives it through the little girl who is about to go through the same ordeal. These depictions protest how African aesthetic views are undermined in favour of the European ones. Montle (2022) states that Africans understood beauty in their own terms until the advent of colonialists which resulted in African culture being slowly replaced by the European one. This colonial triumph led to the trivialization and inferiorization of Afrocentric identities. Rose Weitz (2001) states that women's hair is central to their social position, and they can use it to access power regardless of how limited such power might be. Kate, for example, Ofilwe's white classmate with long silky hair that is believed to be the most beautiful hair at school, does not get bullied at school, while her seniors suffer from the hands of bullies each day. She exercises power in her relationships with her teachers and class mates who glorify her due to her hair. Kate is glorified for her long and silky hair by her fellow white people as she represents their definition of beauty.

Coconut also constructs Fikile's character through irony whereby she applies skin lightening creams to be seen as white while the white community knows exactly that she is black as she works in their environment. Through dramatic irony, the narrative exposes the way Fikile has been influenced to hate her skin colour as she associates it with ugliness and poverty. Consequently, Fikile invests her hard-earned money on make-up and beauty products to try and fit into the white people's environment and class. Through Fikile, the narrative ridicules the desire to be white by revealing Fikile's poor background and her obsession with the 'box of treasures' where she keeps her coloured contact lenses, blond hair extensions, skin bleach and various make up items, instead of investing for a better home. Matlwa reveals the pain behind what Fikile is going through, as she continually gets consumed in the white lies which keep her locked up in poverty as she still lives with her abusive uncle. As Imani Perry (2005: 589) notes, "rational individuals will reasonably make attempts to lighten their skin to achieve social benefits in a society and world where a darker skin makes one less valuable-as a mate, as an employee". Fikile is not only ashamed of being black but also wisely recognizes the economic and social benefits of a light skin. She therefore tries hard not to relapse into blackness as she strives to attain white standards of beauty to impress her customers at her workplace. The novel shows that Fikile's obsession with whiteness is because blackness was constructed as non-valuable during the racist colonial and apartheid regimes.

3.3. Impact of Colonial Language on Black Communities, and the Patriarchal System

In his book *Decolonising The Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that language carries cultural values and advocates the use of African language in literature. Through her characters, Matlwa emphasizes how English interferes with African culture and black people's attempt to connect with their roots. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986: 9) states that "language was the most important vehicle through which power fascinated and held the soul prisoner". Thus, Matlwa's novel suggests that Africanism constitutes language in different cultures and norms, which makes one who does not speak the language of his or her own roots not to understand the world of his or her people. The application of one's language creates the first sense of belonging which is what makes Ofilwe realize that she does not belong within the African circle due to her inability to speak Sepedi. Ironically, her brother Tshepo speaks Sepedi. As illustrated through Fikile and

Ofilwe, the narrative suggests that females are the worst affected by European cultural imperialism. Tshepo, although affected by racism, is portrayed as more balanced because he is not intrigued by the use of the English language. The narrative suggests that Tshepo is shielded by patriarchal ideologies when it comes to languages. He is comfortable in speaking Sepedi. Frantz Fanon (1967:9) remarks that, a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language, this explains why Tshepo who embraces his language seems to understand his culture and background better than his sister because of her inability to speak her mother tongue, Sepedi.

Ofilwe and Fikile are portrayed as doubly vulnerable to racism and gender oppression as they feel a stronger need to speak in English and perfect it while ignoring African languages. Matlwa is keen on exposing how colonial languages are still enforced on young Africans thirteen years after democracy. This shows how colonialism through English continues to be enforced through educational institutions such as school as well as in the work place. Ofilwe is forced to speak English at school, while Fikile is forced to speak English at work to accommodate her white clients. However, Fikile is in a more pitiable condition because she continues to reject her own language even as she becomes a young adult. On the other hand, the narrative holds some hope for Ofilwe because in the end she vows to learn every word of her mother tongue. Matlwa blames Ofilwe's family, especially her father, who insists on using English at home and her private school which foster a Eurocentric culture by insisting on the use of the English language. Ofilwe's father is an unconscious victim of Eurocentrism because he forces Ofilwe to adopt Eurocentric manners which he hopes will improve his own image as a powerful black business man. Ofilwe's father's stance is informed by the realisation that the English language has economic and social power as observed by Mary Becker' (1999). Consequently, Ofilwe's father, just like the school, unintentionally oppresses Ofilwe. Ofilwe's father, like Fikile, holds a single ideology that English is superior to African languages. Ofilwe's father and Fikile see English as a language that guarantees success, and thus are disinclined to learn native languages because they associate them with poverty.

Early in the novel, Ofilwe and Fikile undermine anyone who speaks native languages, while they hold themselves high as English speakers. In the case of Ofilwe, her urge to speak better English is an attempt to survive her father's control and to avoid

disappointing him. He is depicted as being very patriarchal, demanding absolute obedience from his daughter because he believes that he knows what is good for her.

According to Becker (1999), patriarchy as a social system that is male-identified, male-controlled, male-centred and will inevitably value masculinity and masculine traits. In such a system, men (and women) will be encouraged to regard women as beings suited to fulfil male needs, which is why Tshepo was allowed to choose his own path and Ofilwe was not. Sadly, Ofilwe developed an inflated sense of her own importance due to her ability to speak English better than many of her relatives and people from the township just as her father dictated. Her sense of importance was sparked by preferential treatment that she received from relatives during family gatherings. Thinking about one such event, she states:

It is because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently. I knew from a very young age that Sepedi would not take me far... What has Sepedi ever done for them? Look at those sorrowful cousins of mine who think a brick is a toy. Look at me. Even old people know I am special. At family reunions they do not allow me to dish up for myself. (Matlwa, 2007: 54)

Ironically, although Ofilwe has a sense of superiority over her extended family members, at home, she and her mother are disregarded because they are female. For example, Mr Tlou verbally abuses his wife due to her poor command of the English language. This drives Ofilwe away from her mother tongue because she fears that she will be embarrassed like her mother if she is not fluent in English. To show that patriarchy is at work in Ofilwe's situation, Tshepo her brother, is not put under the same pressure to only use English.

Tshepo interacts with black friends who do not stay at an estate like him and embrace their languages unlike Ofilwe who does not have anywhere to draw inspiration as she does not belong in the male sphere. Ofilwe suffers due to her gender and colour as a black woman who is always beneath a man. Kimberly Springer (2002) argues that black women deal with stereotypes of being a woman and of being coloured. They are told by society to meet certain beauty standards women "should" meet, which are difficult for any woman to begin with, but even more for a black woman when the standards are to be white. On one occasion, when party goers intentionally use of African languages at the party, Ofilwe feels isolated and guilty for neglecting her Pedi

culture. She senses a lack of belonging among her own people just as she is rejected by the white society. This creates a deep sense of loss and identity crisis.

Becker (1999) observes that in patriarchy, men are men to the extent they are not women: masculine, independent, invulnerable, tough, strong, aggressive, powerful, commanding, in control, rational, and non-emotional. Due to her father's aggression towards her mother, Ofilwe does her best to impress him in order to protect herself from his violence. She is traumatised by witnessing her father bash her mother. Mr Tlou is disrespectful and condescending towards his wife. Ofilwe recalls his insulting words:

Don't give me that rubbish, Gemina. You understand nothing of the real world.
You could not even finish high school (Matlwa, 2007: 81).

As a result of wanting to live up to her father's expectations, Ofilwe loses the ability to speak her mother tongue and loses her cultural identity like many black girls in her situation living in the post-apartheid South Africa. Ofilwe and Fikile's urge to be white resulted in their being victims of double oppression due to their gender which alienated them from their language and culture. Becker (1999) argues that the issue of language is a "significant one in postcolonial feminism since the bulk of postcolonial studies has been mainly in English. The third world writings used in western universities are primarily those written originally in English, even though translations from indigenous to dominant languages and vice versa have recently provided a wider reader circle. Postcolonial theory has enabled third world intellectuals to participate in global discourse" (390). Ironically, Matlwa attempts to address the lack of use of indigenous African languages through recourse to the English language in her novel.

Ofilwe's inability to speak her mother tongue shows how South Africa's private education system is weaponized to destroy vernacular languages disguised as progress and success. Ofilwe's situation results in a conflict with her family and society because she cannot fully integrate with her own people. Walter Mignolo (2005) states that coloniality describes the "darker side" of modernity that should be unmasked because it exists as "an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone" (111). Ofilwe's lack of mother tongue robs her of her people's past,

her history, aspirations, dreams, future, and self-respect. Ofilwe is aware of her untenable situation as she asks herself in disbelief:

My own tongue escaped me completely? That cannot be. Mama and Daddy speak it all the time, although not to me nor to each other, but surely my eardrums filters some of that. (Matlwa, 2007: 57)

Matlwa also shows that English is used to denigrate African cultures and exalt colonial ones. As we have seen, Ofilwe's father encourages her to speak only English because he assumes that it will help her create relationships with teenagers from rich families. Mr Tlou sees the adoption of English as an achievement or social upgrade. Becker (1999) argues that women, as well as men, can oppress those in more vulnerable groups. How much privilege a person has depends on the social positions she occupies and how those positions are valued in her society. Fikile tries to achieve a higher social status which would give her privileges of a middle-class life. Fikile sees English as a means to the comfortable life she desires and she tries to perfect her accent every day. Commenting on her attempt to achieve what she thinks would be a perfect English accent, Fikile states:

People don't realise how much their accent says about who they are, where they were born and most importantly what kind of people they associate with. (Matlwa, 2007: 154)

Oyekan Owomoyela (1996: 7) observes that one language can become dominant over others in situations where language use determines social status, the language habitat of the dominant class becomes standard or unmarked, and any deviation from it is regarded as substandard or marked. Since power is associated with 'unmarkedness', members of subordinate groups feel pressured to breach the boundary between them and the in-group, for doing so constitutes their only hope for obtaining advancement and acquiring a share in power. Based on Fikile's views, one cannot be privileged if he or she does not reflect or rather approximate the English accent used by models on television. Matlwa satirically exposes how Fikile's desire for an unmarked English accent and her striving for whiteness are indicative of her dissatisfaction with her economic class.

Matlwa satirises Ofilwe's parents for trying to make English their daughter's mother tongue. This satire is captured in an incident when men came to Ofilwe's school for

statistics. The men are in disbelief when Ofilwe claims that English is her mother tongue. These men assume that every black person should have a mother tongue other than English. Despite Ofilwe's insistence that English is her home language, the man collecting statistics tick her under Zulu speaking individuals.

3.4. Transculturation, Patriarchy and young Women

Matlwa's narrative suggests that patriarchy shields Tshepo and Mr Tlou from vulnerability to Westernism and gender oppression. For example, Tshepo resists following the career of white pupils. However, his resistance makes him a problem to his father who has long been obsessed with whiteness. Coloniality of power is shown to be gendered as Tshepo and Ofilwe are affected differently by pressures of Eurocentrism. However, coloniality is aligned to patriarchy as Mr Tlou's case shows. Tshepo's resistance aligns with Nelson Maldonado-Torres' (2016: 2) observation that under conditions of coloniality, the youth is expected to aspire to bring about a future that is an extension of the present and a future that affirms and redeems the present and the past. In societies with a segregationist or colonial past and with a present of systemic inequalities, youth are expected to play a major role sanctioning the present order and continuing its existence in the future. Since Tshepo is dissatisfied with the present, and has a different perception of the past, and has different ideas about the future, he is perceived by his father as a problem.

Tshepo defies his father because he is a boy while Ofilwe is expected to obey because she is a girl. Marilyn Frye (1992: 82) states: "Real women" (that is, middle- or upper-middle-class white women) are dependent, vulnerable, pliant, weak, supportive, nurturing, intuitive, emotional, and empathic in patriarchal culture". As a middleclass girl, Ofilwe is expected to be submissive to her Pedi culture and to Eurocentrism. Her bedroom wall is full of white faces and at the same time she is expected to obey her father explicitly. Later, Ofilwe reflects on her teenage ignorance:

In his eyes I saw what was only to hit me many years from then. I think it was on that day that Tshepo saw me for what I really was. I wish I had then too; maybe things would have worked out differently. (Matlwa, 2007: 92-93)

Coconut criticises coloniality for its hold on the minds of South African parents and all those who suffer from it. Ofilwe's parents are a case in point because although they have just come out of apartheid and fought for racial equality, they still worship

whiteness and want their children to speak English fluently like native speakers. The narrative confirms Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986: 3) statement that "the biggest weapon wielded and daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves, for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubt about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams." Thus, Ofilwe's parents, especially Mr Tlou does not want to completely go back to his roots as he believes this would drive him backwards to the villages and make him regress into poverty.

Fanon (1967) also offers a remarkable insight on the relationship between the psychology of the oppressed, cultural imperialism and language. He points out that colonialism possessed the mind of the colonised, emptied it of all its sense of the native culture's appreciation and content by denigrating it and casting it in terms that would relegate it to the margins. This is evident in the Tlou family where Mr Tlou and Ofilwe get embarrassed when Ofilwe's mother cannot speak fluent English instead of being proud that she can speak her Sepedi fluently as she should. By being embarrassed, Matlwa uses their sarcastic tone which always mocks Ofilwe's mother to reveal how they are trying to empty their nativeness and adopt the white culture.

For example, Ofilwe tries to assimilate into the world of her white classmates by choosing a party at a friend's place over a funeral in the township where her family used to live. Through Ofilwe's decision, Matlwa interrogates the various ways in which cultural tensions created by the historical legacies of apartheid as well as a western global power produce a cultural hegemony that privileges whiteness over others. It shows how much those who experience colonality fly the white flag so high and drag other races down beneath western values. Matlwa's narrative indirectly indicates how Ofilwe's decisions of choosing her white friends was influenced by her father's persuasiveness. This aligns with Springer (2002) who argues that women are also told

to behave in a certain way because they are coloured, for example to stay strong and in control in every situation.

Ofilwe's depiction reveals the pain associated with having a culture imposed on the individual instead of accepting the one a person is born into. Ofilwe's parents use English as a home language when speaking to Ofilwe instead of her mother-tongue. Ofilwe's aunt warns her about the lack of belonging she would suffer as an adult due to her neglect of her own culture:

You will find Ofilwe, that the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you pretend you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too, you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognise the thing you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much you have changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both.
(Matlwa, 2007: 93)

This is sobering advice to both parents and children against embracing colonizing cultures while rejecting their own. Ofilwe later bitterly realises the cost of adopting a western culture and frantically tries to correct her ways. The narrative heavily sanctions Ofilwe's father because he should have known better and encouraged his daughter to be grounded in the culture of her people. Unfortunately, Mr Tlou convinced Ofilwe that white is better and forced his daughter to delve deeper into the western culture. Matlwa's narrative can be read as a cautionary tale to middle-class black South Africans against glorifying former colonial culture to the detriment of their own ways of seeing and living in the world.

3.5. Female Identity Crisis and Racism

Matlwa shows the persistence of colonialism in a country with thirteen years of democracy through her depiction of modern body beauty products. She exposes how European values are enforced on black women popular culture just as colonialism did through violence. These products are sold to black women for them to attain a false whiteness. Fikile's portrayal reveals everything that was created to destroy a black woman's identity. Fikile goes through identity transformation and loses her African customs. For example, she buys a pair of blue contact lenses and long fake blonde hair because she believes it is the only way she would get job opportunities and

promotions. Lester Davids, Nonhlanhla Khumalo, and Nina Jabionski (2016: 1) argue that the motivation driving the practice of skin lightening “is often the desire to lighten one’s skin because of a perceived notion of increased privileges, higher social standing, better employment and increased marital prospects associated with lighter skin”. This is perceived through Fikile who lightens her black skin with the idea that it is beneficial in her white environment.

By changing her skin pigmentation, Fikile detaches herself from everything which associates her with blackness and tries to transition into a new culture, a white culture. Von Rosenberg (2008) observes that in the face of racism and attempts at social exclusion, many are forced to negotiate between cultures. For women, it can be even more difficult than for men. Fikile's intense dislike of blackness is a sign of self-hatred that emanates from her associating blackness with poverty and suffering. As a small child, Fikile chooses whiteness over her own race. Her choice of identity surprises her teacher who asked her what she wants to be when she grows up, Fikile gladly but ignorantly answers: White, Teacher Zola, I want to be white. (Matlwa, 2007: 135). Painfully, the young Fikile assumes that whiteness is a career choice. When she becomes an adult, she gets a job at a restaurant. When white customers leave tips for her, Fikile assumes that they love her. She associates black people with stinginess and abuse that she suffered at the hands of her uncle. This childhood abuse drove her to stereotype all black people. Her childhood abuse made Fikile to view every black man as a savage who could at any time physically attack her. Her futile attempt to forget the existence of her blackness and fellow blacks is a trauma reaction to her experience of social exclusion and abuse. In the words below, Fikile expresses irrational disgust at all black men:

The men disgust me. All of them are a bunch of criminals. A bunch of uneducated criminals. They look at me like they want to rape me and I know they would do it if there weren't so many people around. (Matlwa, 2007: 129)

Fikile's distorted and generalised view about black men emanates from her painful experiences with her uncle. Matlwa's narrative uses Fikile's portrayal to condemn the way some men treat children, and especially girls under their care. On the other hand, Ofilwe's view of the world is shaped by the magazines and television content that she is exposed to during her childhood. Ofilwe mimics the language used on television and

sees no value in African languages. Montle (2020) notes that colonialists sought to internalize among black people the perception of African as ugly and European as beautiful. These notions of beauty that are represented by white women as standards of beauty are mainly communicated through magazines and television programmes that Ofilwe consumes.

Fikile's bitter tone is used to expose the white racism in postcolonial South Africa. Fikile desires to be white and so she adopts white behaviour and mannerism. Fikile's white surroundings condoned her racism by allowing her to scold blacks in their presence. She decides to stand with a white person who offended her black co-worker, Ayanda. Fikile uses a very harsh tone towards Ayanda, saying:

Don't Ma'am me, I can read, thank you very much. If it wasn't for us you wouldn't be able to read so don't you patronise me. Just take it back and bring me a cheese sandwich without dairy products, please!. (Matlwa, 2007: 150)

These words reveal what Fikile has learnt at her workspace; the racist treatment of blacks by whites in the area of work. Her treatment of Ayanda shows how blacks are divided by the power perpetuated by white racism and the difference in who they intend to be. For example, Fikile sees Ayanda as an outsider because she does not have any desire to be white like Fikile.

3.6. Conclusion

Coconut depicts the dual oppression of black women in South Africa and the way coloniality pushes black men into oppressing black women. The novel reveals how South Africa still suffers oppression many years after the attainment of black majority rule. The middle-class men lead the society with values aligned to their image and status which are influenced by their desire to enter European modernity. However, those represented by Tshepo and others, align themselves with African values. *Coconut* displays the way black women negotiate the mix of cultures in a globalized and media-saturated world. The media is depicted as a propaganda machine used to shape blacks into coconuts, making black women victims of the western-oriented, and patriarchal systems. Through Ofilwe, Fikile and the Tlou family, Matlwa presents different forms of cultural transitions which exist 13 years after South Africa's attainment of black majority rule. The novel also shows that there is still racism in the educational system and residential areas which blocks African cultures from

developing on an equal basis with former colonial cultures. Black children born in the transitioning South Africa are exposed to deracinating western. This leads to cultural and identity crises, and females seem to experience double oppression; from coloniality of power and patriarchy. The next chapter picks up and expands on some of these issues by examining the trauma that is experienced mainly by females in township black families in contemporary South Africa. The novel that best illustrates these issues is Cynthia Jele's *The Ones with Purpose*.

CHAPTER 4

Township Black Family as a Site of Trauma in Cynthia Jele's *The Ones with Purpose*

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the challenges faced by young female characters in post-apartheid South Africa as depicted in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*. It engaged with how Matlwa's novel depicts how young female characters negotiate identity crises in a South Africa experiencing transculturation after the end of apartheid. This chapter extends the insights gleaned in the previous chapter through its analysis of the depiction of challenges faced by young girls and female characters in *The Ones with Purpose* by Cynthia Jele. Unlike Matlwa who characterises young women who suffer from identity crises due to persistence of coloniality of power after the end of formal apartheid, Cynthia Jele pursues a radical feminist agenda by deliberately constructing strong female characters who take up roles that are traditionally associated with men. This chapter weaves some of the themes raised through the analysis of *Coconut* in the previous chapter. Both novelists suggest that in post-apartheid South Africa, the female crises derive from either dysfunctional families or families that experience oppressive patriarchy. It can thus be concluded that, the two novels depict similar challenges from different perspectives.

The Ones with Purpose is structured as a memoir of Anele, a young woman who recalls the way she lost her sister and the pain and suffering she went through in arranging her funeral. The novel revolves around Fikile and her sister Anele who is the narrator-protagonist of the novel. Fikile is a mother of three who is married to Thiza, an irresponsible promiscuous man. The novel opens at the moment of Fikile's death and then Anele tells the story of her sister's fight against cancer and a womanizing husband in a series of flashbacks. Anele herself has one child with a live-in partner, Sizwe, who towards the end of the narrative is exposed to be a liar because he concealed that he is a married man who abandoned his wife, who subsequently had his child in his absence.

Just like *Coconut* which mainly highlights the experiences of three women including Ofilwe's mother who go through mistreatment by her own daughter and husband, *The Ones with Purpose* revolves around three women who are mothers going through

trauma as they try to provide emotional support for their children and siblings. Anele goes through trauma after losing her sister to cancer while providing for her own daughter and taking care of her alcoholic mother. Fikile dies from breast cancer after living with it for a long time. Fikile goes through trauma after being abandoned by her womanizing husband when she fell ill. Anele's mother Mrs Mabuza turns to alcohol after losing her husband in a fatal road accident.

Makholwa deliberately uses flashbacks to portray how the female characters got to be traumatized. Anele steps in to take care of her alcoholic mother and her sister Fikile after she (Fikile) falls ill. The change of responsibilities becomes the root of Anele's trauma as she struggles with multitasking by herself while heading her family. She suddenly faces a severe trauma when her sister passes away. Her sister's death leaves her in shock and disbelief, which immediately makes her numb. Mrs Mabuza goes through trauma immediately after losing her husband to a traffic accident. She struggles to accept her husband's death and end up distancing herself from her children. Her emotional and psychological absence made Fikile to step in and head the family as the oldest child. Fikile on the other hand goes through trauma immediately after her father's death.

The trauma displayed by Jele is shared differentially by these characters as they each take turns to head the Mabuza family. The novel displays how women play the most unexpected roles in the family as men fail to effectively deal with loss. *The Ones with Purpose* reveals what leads to the collapsing of average township black families and exposes their multiple vulnerabilities. The novel reveals the lack of financial and psychological support from government and all relevant bodies which result in the crises experienced by the main female characters in the novel. The turmoil that is experienced by the main characters is a microcosm of the current South Africa national crises that has left many individuals and families financially and emotionally exposed.

Unlike Matlwa's *Coconut* which exposes the trauma that black women go through because of their blackness and sex which gets ridiculed by those adopting Eurocentric ideologies, Jele's novel exposes the trauma that black South African families experience when they lose their loved ones, either through death or spousal abandonment or neglect. Jele constructs her female characters to take up what are normally male responsibilities to challenge the traditional family hierarchy and to

expose the lack of support that women experience when their breadwinner husband dies or when they are abandoned by irresponsible husbands. The narrative largely celebrates Fikile and Anele's courage and self-sacrificing spirit when their father dies unexpectedly, and their mother descends into chronic depression.

By implication, the novel condemns the post-democratic South African government for neglecting vulnerable township families during moments of crises. It also exposes how the neglect has been existing in a democratic dispensation. The novel suggests that because of this neglect, women are compelled to take up the emotional and economic burden which weighs them down in many ways. Since women have been victims of oppressive patriarchy, the added economic and emotional crises make them susceptible to trauma.

This chapter explores the multiple problems that lead to the near collapse of the Mabuza family to argue that what the Mabuzas experience reflects a bigger national crisis, which is the same crisis reflected in the previous chapter although under different circumstances. The reflection of the Mabuza family in *The Ones with Purpose* displays the current challenges of black township families in a democratic country that claims to provide equality and equal access to public services to citizens. The chapter discusses how Jele depicts the problems of an average South African township family. Specifically, the chapter explores how female characters deal with the trauma of losing loved ones to death in a South Africa that lacks support systems for average township families that suddenly lose those who would have been providing material and emotional support.

The chapter uses Sheila Rowbotham's (1992) notion of radical feminism to explore Jele's portrayal of the Mabuza family. The chapter also examines how Jele interrogates the achievements and failures of the South African democratic dispensation as measured by the condition of average township black families during moments of economic and psychological crises. Furthermore, the chapter explores how township black families are treated by the masses and government when they experience serious problems.

Rowbotham (1992) defines radical as feminism advocating female power to counter the power of toxic masculinity. Through Fikile's condition, Jele emphasizes female resilience under adversity and the power that females have in dealing with challenging

situations. The centrality of the female character is seen from the fact that the novel opens with Fikile's death and then uses flashbacks to recount Fikile's life up to the point of her death. Thus, the novel can be read as Fikile's biography and Anele's autobiography.

4.2. Township Black Family: A Microcosm of the South African Nation

Jele's portrayal of the challenges faced by the Mabuza family and the way they barely cope is used to explore the state of an average contemporary black township family in South Africa. South Africa has been struggling with a high rate of unemployment, deteriorating health system and failing electricity infrastructure. Similar problems are portrayed in Matlwa's *Period Pain* and I analyze this novel in Chapter 6. Through Mr Mabuza whose death severely affects his entire family, Jele's novel figuratively shows the lack of leadership that afflicts the country. Through Thiza and Mbuso, the narrative mirrors how the country's leaders abandon people as they pursue selfish ends.

The Mabuza family can be read as a microcosm of the struggling political system of today's South Africa as well as the dysfunction of the country. Through lack of services in the townships which leads to the trauma faced by the Mabuza family, Jele meditates on the failures of the post-apartheid South African government and how the democratic government betrays ordinary people. Jele uses the Mabuza family to suggest that their vulnerability as a group comes from their powerlessness as they cannot do anything on their own without the government which seems to violate their rights. Peter Chappell (2003:83) states: "Vulnerability and causation are the tools of the irritation and pain that create suffering, crisis, and the possibility of consciousness-raising, apparently the main purpose of life." Like democratic South Africa, the Mabuza family starts off on a promising note before the death of the father and quickly descends into chaos when Mrs Mabuza is overcome by depression. The narrator says:

Chaos followed in our household. Ma shut down for days and weeks afterwards, barely eating and talking and only wanting to sleep; Fikile tentatively took over our household. I look back at this moment as the beginning of the end of our lives. (Jele, 2018: 184)

Jele's use of Fikile and Anele as heads of the collapsing Mabuza family suggests that South Africa can do better with self-sacrificing female leaders. By contrast, as seen in *Coconut*, Matlwa uses Fikile and Ofilwe to highlight a post-apartheid generation that

fails to adapt to their roots due to the identity crises that was more evident among young female South Africans in the first decade of black majority rule. Fikile heads the family from an early age, and Anele takes over the headship of the family when her sister gets sick. Ibekwe Chinweizu (1990) argues that females have an invisible power and run the world but have been denied that status. In the novel, this invisible power is shown through Fikile who took care of the family when their mother began to struggle with alcohol after the death of their father. With her ingenuity and strength, Fikile raised both Anele and Mbuso until they became adults. After Fikile's death, Anele steps in to take care of her mother, her child, nieces, and nephews.

By contrast, the narrative reveals how Mbuso abandons his family when his time came to take over headship and leadership. The depiction of Mbuso exposes how men betray their own families, which extends to how they do not work for the country but their own selfish needs. Jele's portrayal of Mbuso reveals how women always come to the rescue, suggesting that is what today's South Africa needs. Through the construction of the women's resilience, the narrative implies that women would carry the country forward even during unbearable circumstances. Anele describes her unbearable situation:

Ma's eyes are sunken in their sockets as if Fikile's illness is also hers. 'Do you blame me too? Do you? Because I know your brother hates me, your sister too, though she tries to hide it. I know deep down in her heart I know I'm nothing to her.' Ma begins to tremble in her seat. 'You do,' she says, hurt when I do not respond. 'My children hate me.' 'We don't hate you, Ma.' 'Then why does it feel that way? I should have followed your father a long time ago.' (Jele, 2018: 15)

The narrative highlights the unbearable situation faced by the family, especially Mrs Mabuza, who had just lost her husband. The pain inflicted in her by the loss and responsibility that she is left with makes her wish she was dead. Instead of Mbuso taking over as his mother crumbles, the weight is felt and carried by Anele. Rowbotham's (1992) argues that female power counters masculine power domination. Similarly, Jele's novel suggests that women could better rule the country as they are selfless, caring, and accommodative while men are selfish and abuse their power. Anele's provision of emotional support to Mbuso challenges the stereotypes that women are the weaker gender.

4.3. Vulnerabilities of the Township Black Family

Just like Matlwa exposes Ofilwe's mother's vulnerability brought by her husband's abuse, Jele uses female characters to expose the way black township families become vulnerable after losing their breadwinners. In *Coconut*, Mr Tlou loses the respect of his family when he becomes Eurocentric and fails to protect his wife. Instead of being protective, Mr Tlou becomes part of the problem and adds to his wife's vulnerability by ignoring his role as a supportive and loving husband. Similarly, Jele's representation of the family suggests that it is the primary cause of women's psychological problems. Fikile, Anele and their mother all experience traumas because of the family. Rowbotham (1992) criticizes the family as a source of women's oppression and exploitation. This is captured in Jele's narrative which criticizes family, specifically men for being the source of women's trauma. By contrast, female characters (Anele and Fikile) go through trauma but find strength to provide support to others. However, male characters neglect their families. For example, Mbuso, Fikile and Anele's young brother is traumatized by his father's and his mother descent into alcoholism that he becomes irresponsible. On the other hand, Thiza abandons Fikile his wife when she gets sick.

Mrs Mabuza experiences trauma and depression due to not receiving any counseling after losing her husband in a tragic road accident. However, Mrs Mabuza's husband's death was not the beginning of her trauma as she also had postpartum stress. As in her case, when traumatic events are not managed adequately with sufficient intervention, the trauma remains unresolved. Mrs Mabuza failed to cope with the gap created by the death of her husband. She failed to take up family headship by providing for the emotional, psychological and material needs of her children. Peter Levine (2005) states that unresolved trauma can potentially have effects such as altering people's habits and outlook on life and taking its toll on family, as well as interpersonal relationships. Anele explains the roots of her mother's trauma:

There were times when I caught Ma looking at baby Mbuso in a way that made me feel intense sadness for him. I wanted to protect him. By then I had decided that I did not wish to be my little brother. Auntie Ntombi, Ma's youngest sister, had said Ma was suffering from trauma of having another boy and was afraid to

lose him. Fikile was not our parents' first child, Auntie had said, Mbuso was not the first boy in the family. (Jele, 2018: 90-91)

The novel traces Fikile's struggles characterised by poverty and fatherlessness to reveal the sacrifices she made to reveal her selflessness as a young black woman. Jele's narrative highlights Fikile's selflessness to show that South African women are the pillars of their families. Memela (2020) argues that despite all the negativity and labelling of black women, they have remained determined. Lerato Legoabe, (2006: 144) also argues that black women "are not voiceless, their voices can be heard through the many channels opened up by those who came before them, and they can now say they have some means and access to justice as well as the power to exercise their rights". Through childhood flashbacks, Jele reveals how Fikile's trauma began because of not knowing what to do as the oldest child when her mother suffers psychological break down. Anele explains how Fikile was burdened by responsibilities:

Fikile queued for hours at the hospital each month to collect Ma and Mama Dlamini's diabetes and high blood pressure medicines, took Mama Dlamini to the bank to draw her pension money and to the shopping plaza to buy groceries and occasionally shop for underwear and a skirt, a shirt, a jersey at JetMart. (Jele, 2018: 114)

The Ones with Purpose praises Fikile and Anele while criticizing Mbuso to expose the weaknesses of patriarchy. In the previous chapter, Matlwa exposed the weakness of patriarchy by showing how Mr Tlou equates progress with whiteness and the English language. Similarly, Jele's narrative blames the weaknesses of men in the family structure for most of the problems females go through and blames the patriarchal government system for the trauma that exists within black township families. In the case of the Mabuza's family, the death of Mr Mabuza sent the family on a downward spiral. Fikile felt compelled to date Thiza who promised to support her family. Jele's narrative shows how Fikile's decision was due to lack of governments social and economic support to vulnerable families. As Fikile did not receive any service from the government, she chose to stay with an irresponsible husband. Levine's (2005) insight that unresolved trauma effects people's interpersonal relationships help us see that Fikile's childhood trauma caused her to make poor decisions. Jele's narrative is

sympathetic to Fikile because it shows that had she been in a better social and economic position, she would have made wiser choices.

Jele's portrayal of Fikile as she takes over the headship of the Mabuza family reveals that the government does not care about the challenges of child-headed families in the townships. Her depiction is used to highlight the way young girls are oppressed by patriarchy and expected to provide for their families regardless of their pain and immaturity. First, Fikile lost her father and then had to watch her mother break down and become an alcoholic. With all these traumatic events, the government did not take the Mabuza children for counseling until Fikile prioritized the family over her dreams which had a negative effect on her. Peter Levine & Maggie Kline (2006) point out that the longer the period that elapses between traumatic activation and the resolution thereof, the longer the recovery period becomes. Fikile did not get help to deal with her own trauma, which may have resulted in her health condition deteriorating leading to her premature death.

Jele's narrative also reveals the way Fikile became vulnerable economically after the death of her father through her relationship with Thiza who adds to her problems. The portrayal of Fikile's relationship with Thiza while still a teenager shows how economic vulnerability affects the girl child. Fikile's relationship with Thiza also shows how family and government cause vulnerability to the girl child through lack of investments and public services. Chappell (2003) claims that family life history and parental conditioning are the causes of vulnerability. Jele espouses radical feminism to expose how the government has left out many social problems upon the citizens. She does so by characterizing female characters as strong and fierce when it comes to heading families and providing emotional support to family. Through the sacrifices of Anele, Jele reveals the resilience of South African black women under challenging situations. Anele singlehandedly arranges the funeral of her sister although she is grieving. Anele's strength under difficult conditions proves Ayanda Borotho's (2019) claim that black women are born of power, clothed in strength and rooted in love, with wisdom.

Although the novel shows that women are resilient victims of oppressive patriarchy, it also acknowledges that boys are traumatized too by the sudden death of a father and the psychological breakdown of a mother. For example, the narrator sympathizes with Mbuso because he loses a loving father and is left with a mother who experiences a

complete psychological collapse. Mbuso harbors great animosity for his mother and ends up beating her up and then abandoning his family for many years. Mbuso's abandonment of his family can be understood through Eric Kandel's (2006) observation that fear can easily become associated with neutral stimuli through learning which is associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Kandel indicates that such fear can easily be reactivated by various stressful circumstances.

4.4. Women and Girls Dealing with Trauma and Economic Challenges

Jele uses the diverse construction of the Mabuza family to expose the democratic state of the failing government and the portrayal of the government as contributing to the breakup of black South African township families. Jele advocates female power to counter masculine power domination. She portrays women's trauma to condemn the patriarchal system and the negligence of vulnerable families by the government. Jele advocates the recognition of female roles in the South African polity.

The Mabuza's economic vulnerability exposes the abandonment by the South African government of today's township black families. For example, once her husband dies, there is no indication of governmental intervention to help Mrs Mabuza either financially or psychologically. Due to her lonely struggles, Mrs Mabuza, who is already emotionally fragile, becomes an alcoholic. Her condition can be understood through Leo Peichl's (2007b) definition that trauma is a toxic condition, a mixture of intense anxiety, absolute helplessness, and a loss of control. Mrs Mabuza's lack of counseling led to her isolation, which drove her into depression. Indicating the trauma that Mr Mabuza's death brought to the family, Anele relates:

I was eleven years old when my father died after the truck he was driving collided with another truck on the highway. By the time the paramedics arrived at the scene, the bodies of both drivers had burned beyond recognition. Ma's employers, the Hopkinsons, brought her home. Ma's lifeless body was strapped in on the back seat, Mrs Hopkins, face red like a tomato, holding her like a baby. Chaos followed in our household. (Jele, 2028: 184)

Jele's narrative also uses Mr Mabuza's death to indicate how rare it is for black township children to grow up with a father figure. The narrative suggests that the responsible fathers die prematurely. The novel shows that Mr Mabuza was one of the

remaining few men who provided for and protected their families. After her husband's death, Mrs Mabuza is faced with new responsibilities of caring for the emotional and financial needs of her family alone. Levine (2005) states that there are many possible effects of trauma that can be evident in cases of particularly severe trauma or in individuals with vulnerabilities. Mr Mabuza's fatal accident was traumatic for his family. The horrific nature of the accident indicates how deeply painful this event was to the surviving family members. It is no wonder then that Mrs Mabuza was traumatized by the accident and loss. Unfortunately, as already pointed out, the narrative indicates that the government did not offer Mrs Mabuza and her children counselling after her husband's tragic death.

Mrs Mabuza's trauma results from her vulnerability as a parent who was supposed to start raising children alone. Due to her already existing vulnerability to poverty, Mrs Mabuza did not know where to begin in her new role of assuming the responsibilities of both a 'father and mother.' Her situation worsened at the realization that everyone expected her to be strong for her children as a mother when the patriarchal system had not prepared her for such a role. Anele describes her mother's psychological collapse in touching terms:

Ma was acting strange, and had stopped being Ma, and had turned into someone I didn't recognize. She had also developed a temper we hadn't known before. We were all scared of her. (Jele, 2018: 186)

The narrative shows that Mrs Mabuza had no access to proper healthcare and hence she resorts to alcohol for relief. Jane Liebschutz (2006) states that trauma and PTSD in primary care are associated with substance misuse and pain. This suggests that Mrs Mabuza is a victim of trauma who turns to alcohol for solace. Despite her alcoholism, Jele's narrative empathizes with Mrs Mabuza by showing that she is a victim of forces that are beyond her control. For example, Anele tells Mbuso not to be too harsh with their mother, saying:

Don't forget we also got the raw end of the deal, all of us, including Ma. You can't be hard on her. She is an old woman who has had a shitty life, self-inflicted or not. Imagine waking up every day feeling inadequate and worthless. She can't sleep, has these dreams that have been tormenting her for years involving Baba.

In her dreams, he is unkind and snubs her. You see, Ma believes that she and Dad would meet and resume their lives again. It's awful. (Jele, 2018: 203)

Anele's words show that Mbuso, the remaining man in the family is unsupportive to his mother and does not understand her situation whilst he is supposed to head the family and offer both emotional and financial support just like his father. Ironically, it takes a female figure, Anele, to tell him about the struggles of his mother after he had become rude and angry at her when he was supposed to be understanding. Aminata Sow Fall (1998) argues that women should be esteemed for having legitimate needs, aspirations, and desires. Motherhood ideologies have typically required women to sacrifice themselves for their children and husbands and have viewed other alternatives as not viable or as morally reprehensible.

Mrs Mabuza also experiences ostracism for her alcoholism from her over righteous church members, close friends, and the community and this increases her isolation and mental anguish. The patriarchal society expects Mrs Mabuza to remain unshaken by her tragedy. Anele expresses her disappointment about the way her mother is treated because of her struggle with alcohol:

She returned to society, the same society that had chewed and spat her out and left her in a black hole for years ... They told Ma how proud they were of her for tackling the devil by his horns. They denounced alcohol and in their high-pitched voices declared a new war on this destroyer of families. (Jele, 2018: 12-13).

Through Anele, Jele is satirizing the society's hypocrisy for the way people acted self-righteously and distanced themselves from Mrs Mabuza when times were hard for her, and then came back to her when she recovered like they were there for her all the time. The same hypocrisy can be seen in the white community in *Coconut* which allows Fikile to ridicule a fellow staff member because she is black. This exposes the hypocrisy of society when it comes to deep and saddening issues, as well as mourning. It also exposes how society members feel entitled to be praised for results they did not contribute to. Due to the pain brought onto her by social stigmatization, Mrs Mabuza even thought that her own children also despised her. Sigmund Freud (1939: 79) observes that trauma and the reactions to trauma have a great psychical intensity and argues that the possibility of psychosis exists when psychical reality takes precedence over external reality. Revealing patriarchy's strong hold on Mrs

Mabuza, she insists that Anele calls Thiza her brother-in-law, even though he had abandoned his sick wife. She says:

You should call your brother-in-law again. It is not right that he has not been to see his wife for so long. (Jele, 2018: 17).

Thiza, a husband of a sickly wife is not concerned about her state, and Mrs Mabuza seems to tolerate Thiza's callous behaviour. Showing the strong hold of oppressive patriarchy, Mrs Mabuza begs Anele to call Thiza instead of casting him out for his negligence and irresponsibility. Memela (2020) states that it is apparent that men view women as weak individuals who will not attempt to challenge their power. Thus, Thiza knows that his wife's family will look for him despite his abandonment of his sick wife and children.

Mrs Mabuza's alcoholism also reveals how people are quick to judge a black woman without understanding the depth of her challenges. The portrayal shows that most people are not well-informed about trauma, and that is why they judge a person who experiences it. Mrs Mabuza is judged by her fellow church members and friends for being an alcoholic and even scolded at some point instead of being given a chance to share her pain.

The Ones with Purpose also shows how the patriarchal society expects older female children to take care of families amid crisis through Anele's role as a provider after Fikile gets sick. This is revealed in Anele's conversation with Sister Luthuli when she explains to Anele that the hospital is not good for Fikile. Sister Luthuli suggests that the public healthcare system is dysfunctional and might do damage rather than provide help:

'She won't get better, not here anyway.' Sister Luthuli said, not impolitely, that there was nothing the hospital could do for my sister at that stage ... 'She's not breathing properly, I can't take her home, not like this,' I protested. 'We don't know what to do'. (Jele, 2018:10-11)

Through Sister Luthuli's story about her late husband, the novel reveals that most women are traumatized by the government's failure to provide a good health system for the majority of South Africans. Sister Luthuli says she had to take her husband from the hospital to die at home. Mary Becker (1999) states that patriarchal culture is deeply

misogynistic and valorises masculinity. In such a culture, women are seen as less than fully human and as less than trustworthy. Jele's narrative counters this misogyny by portraying women as the carers of sick siblings and relatives when government institutions fail.

4.5. Absent and Missing Men and the Township Economy

Jele's narrative adopts radical feminism to protest the negative behaviour of men towards women by indicating that men contribute to women's mental breakdown. This is seen when Thiza cheats on Fikile and blames her inability to cook for his behaviour. Becker (1999) argues that the oppression of women is an important part of patriarchy. In such a system, men and women regard women as existing to fulfill male needs. Thiza did not care about Fikile's emotions because he is only concerned about his lustful desires. Anele explains her sister's endurance:

In the early years of their relationship, Thiza had complained about Fikile's lack of domesticity, the absence of rich meat stews and pap and Sunday's seven colours at the table, and when it was clear that Fikile was not yielding to his pressure, he had told her jokingly that she shouldn't be surprised if he went somewhere to be fed like a man should be. Fikile had snorted and said she would bet a cow that even if she cooked the whole day for him, he would still go and poke his penis in other women's vaginas. (Jele, 2018: 31)

Due to patriarchal entitlement, Thiza had left his first wife for Fikile who was a schoolgirl at the time. However, he was still not satisfied as he continued to cheat on Fikile. Fikile's response to Thiza's promiscuity reveals that women are expected to remain strong and stay in toxic relationships and marriages which slowly break them down.

In this regard, as Magar (2003) argues that females are not valuable to men for the usefulness of their nature, but in terms of their value relative to other females or rather relative to the abstract scale of equivalence, which enables them to be exchanged like any commercial commodity. While most women remain faithful and confined to their families, men leave their families and this contributes to the development of child-headed families. Fikile did not leave Thiza even with her childhood trauma and his unfaithfulness, but Thiza left her along with his children when she fell ill. Thiza's lack of love for his wife is even questioned by his child:

I don't think Dad cares that Mom is gone. He didn't love Mom. He told her many times to her face. He once said he wished she was dead. Ma laughed and brushed it off the way she always dismissed things like they were not true or unimportant or would go away. (Jele, 2018: 229)

Fikile is portrayed not only as powerful and selfless, but as smart and courageous. However, Thiza's behaviour and treatment degrades her image because he emotionally abused Fikile and tried to reduce her to nothing. Becker (1999) states that women are seen as less than nothing particularly when they accuse men of sexual misconduct. Aggression against women is justified by women's choices and natures. Fikile knew that Thiza was cheating on her but could not leave because of patriarchal expectations that a woman should keep it together. Fikile's situation made people question her decision to marry Thiza as he took advantage of her situation as a schoolgirl. The narrator observes:

"I have always wondered if Fikile truly loved Thiza," Eunice says. "Beyond the allure of the teacher-student affair. Beyond Thiza playing the saviour, the obvious exchange, Fikile's youth for money-though one could argue that the age gap between them wasn't so big, Thiza couldn't have been older than twenty-three, - four at the time- was there true love between them or was it a transaction, a sacrifice on her side? Would she have chosen him under normal circumstances had she not felt she needed his mercy? (Jele, 2018: 131-32)

The vulnerability of the female characters in Jele's novel is also brought about by the assumption of new and unfamiliar responsibilities. Jele presents Auntie Maria who took care of her sick husband and made better decisions for her family until he passed away to prove that women fare better when faced with the sickness of a spouse. Relating this incident, Anele says:

We learned that Aunt Maria had moved to the house next door after her husband's forgetfulness became too much to bear. He had forgotten small, insignificant things at first, but soon he couldn't remember how to tie his shoelaces, would pause mid-sentences in the middle of a conversation before continuing on an unrelated thread and once looked at Auntie Maria steadily and said, 'Gogo where have you been? We've been looking all over for you.' That's

when Auntie Maria had taken him to the mental hospital for assessments. (Jele, 2018:5)

Jele uses flashbacks to portray women's resilience when it comes to taking care of their sick relatives and siblings. Aunt Maria's experiences show the power that lies within the character as a woman who stayed with a husband who sometimes forgot who she was. Regardless of the challenges, the woman stayed with her husband and cared for him, just as Fikile stayed with her cheating husband. Jele uses flashback to highlight the resilience of the female characters.

Jele's narrative also presents Mbuso's detachment from his family and the breakdown of his marriage to show how children who are traumatized by losing their fathers have a higher chance of detachment and isolation. Such traumatic experiences can have the same results just as portrayed on Fikile in *Coconut*. The narrative suggests that Mbuso's fatherlessness alienated him from his family as he was left with women with whom he could not relate as he had done with his late father, while Fikile's isolation from the black community was brought by the abuse of her uncle. Froma Walsh (2007) recommends that children with trauma should be exposed to open communication where caregivers help them make meaning of negative events, feel more connected to their community, or find hope in the wake of a disturbing situation. Walsh argues that all these factors may contribute to positive post-disaster outcomes. However, as the Mabuza family did not receive any advice or guidance from the governmental institutions, Mbuso only received what his sisters thought was best support. Pauline Boss, Lorraine Beaulieu, Elizabeth WIELING, William Turner, Shulaika LaCruz (2003) state that examples of beneficial communication strategies include teaching the caregiver how to more effectively listen to the child's concerns and find hope and optimism in the wake of a traumatic event. The lack of such strategies led to Mbuso's marriage collapsing as he could not openly communicate with his wife. This is seen when Anele explains her family history to Mbuso's wife. She reports:

I was careful not to add that it was possible Mbuso was simply being selfish, holding onto ancient grudges like he was the only one with a wounded childhood, like Fikile had not sold herself to provide for us. (Jele, 2008: 194)

Thiza's portrayal shows how men become absent fathers while they are still alive. He stops caring for Fikile and he eventually leaves the family. Jean Redpath, Robert

Morell, Rachel Jewkes and Dean Peacock (2003) assert that the presence of a father or father figure has a positive effect on the child's life such as academic achievement physical and emotional health, as well as cognitive development. After being abandoned by Thiza, Fikile is left without a husband and her children are left without a father figure. Heise (1994) believes that females are given less value and are objects of contempt where they are consistently portrayed as vulnerable in literary texts written by men. To counteract these negative depictions by male writers, Jele uses radical feminism to show women's strength and resilience. Anele's thoughts about Bafana, Fikile's son, when she saw Thiza's mistress with a child indicate Fikile's resilience:

I turn to my right and spot Nolwazi. She has brought her son, same age as Bafana and Khanya's spitting image. Fikile knew about the child. She had just started her first course of chemotherapy when she discovered Thiza's affair ... Nolwazi nods and mimes something resembling an apology one shares with the aggrieved. I stare at her while I draw Bafana closer and kiss the back of his head. You're not the only winner, Fikile was not a fool after all. I want to scream at her. (Jele, 2008: 248-49)

Jele also uses internal dialogue to reveal how Thiza, a man who made women clash by cheating both of them, while being disloyal to the woman he is married to Fikile suffered about a lot of abuse at the hands of Thiza. The presence of Thiza's mistress and her child during Fikile's funeral reveals the competition between the two women for the abusive man. The clash also reveals how Thiza had always been unfaithful to women just as he was cheating with Fikile when she was still a learner. The narrative reveals how society has shaped women to sacrifice themselves for marriage regardless of the conditions. Anthony Chima (2015:21) notes that "when little margin is left for alternatives, and any form of contrary expression beyond the pre-established norms are repressed, people accept the stereotypical perceived status quo as the standard of living, which in turn become a popular habit that is hard to break away from". This observation can be seen in the way Fikile clashed with Thiza's mistress as the only way she could deal with the matter, which was shaped by the stereotypes in the society.

4.6. Conclusion

Set in the contemporary post-apartheid South African moment, Jele's novel depicts how more than men, women are overburdened by life's challenges. These challenges lead to trauma for some women but the novel also shows that women are strong and resilient more than their male counterparts in the face of life's problems. Advancing a clear feminist agenda, women are portrayed as important and in control within families. The way women deal with their challenges disclose their strengths because they often have to deal with issues without the emotional support from men. Jele's novel is a protest of oppressive patriarchal systems, dysfunctional healthcare system and the way the government has neglected the welfare of township residents. The narrative praises women for their resilience and generosity of spirit while condemning men's irresponsibility and selfishness. However, like many feminist writers, Jele portrays women as victims, but her construction differs from masculinist depictions because she portrays women as protectors of family and fighters against patriarchy despite their vulnerability to poverty and emotional abuse. When it comes to disappointments, women are blessed with forgiving hearts and this enables them to stay focused and not fall apart. When grieving, women do not make anyone feel bad nor do they blame others for their trauma. They also do not neglect their siblings and family. Unlike men who run away when they face challenges, women look for coping mechanisms and strategic ways to recover. Men on the other hand, abandon their families when faced with challenges. Women are also depicted as supportive and as keeping families together unlike men who abandon their families. While female children and women head families, men run away from their responsibilities. The next chapter analyses Angela Makholwa's *Blessed Girl* a novel that is set almost about the same time as Jele's. Makholwa's novel also pursues a clear feminist agenda through the use of an unreliable young women narrator who tries to pursue self-economic empowerment through unconventional means. At the centre of Makholwa's protagonist's emotional turmoil and seemingly irrational decisions, is the dysfunctional family life as also depicted in Jele's novel.

CHAPTER 5

Parenting and Young Adults' Challenges in Contemporary South Africa in the *Blessed Girl*

5.1. Introduction

Similar to the previous one, this chapter examines how parenting influences children's lifestyles and the challenges they face through the analysis of Angela Makholwa's *Blessed Girl*. Unlike Jele's novel, *Blessed Girl* moves from the generation of child-headed families and breadwinners to children under their parents' care to show how parental styles contribute to the crisis that children experience as they try to live up to the capitalist dream of economic success of post-apartheid South Africa. The novel was published 23 years after the attainment of black majority rule in South Africa and seems set around about the same time. Through the title "*Blessed Girl*", Makholwa sarcastically describes how the post-apartheid generation is blessed by having choices and rights that were not available during the apartheid period. However, instead of positively taking advantage of their changed political, social and economic situation to gain true economic freedom, the generation of blessed girls chooses to depend on men for their economic success. Advancing a clear feminist moralist agenda, Makholwa suggests young woman should celebrate their freedom by making choices that will set them free from male dependence. This chapter employs feminist theory as expounded by Sally Lloyd, April Few and Katherine Allen (2009) to explore the way parenting styles have a strong bearing on the children's decisions when they become young adults.

Lloyd, Few and Allen (2009: 4) argue that "an important conceptual tool of a feminist analysis of families is deconstructing a binary notion of agency and structure by recognising that both human actions and social structures are characterised by tensions and ambivalence". This means that within a structure such as a female-headed household, single mothers can possess agency despite structural constraints. Thus, feminist perspectives recognise both the structural limitations placed on women and the ways that they are disempowered through patriarchy, as well as recognizing and valuing their agency in challenging and navigating the gendered norms within which they operate. Elizabeth Sharp and Shannon Weaver (2015) state that feminist theory seeks to disrupt patriarchal assumptions of families and encourage a more

nuanced understanding that recognises the strengths and forms of support that are present in non-nuclear family structures. In *Blessed Girl*, Makholwa depicts the norms applied by female headed households comparing them with nuclear families to highlight the difference between these families. This strategy showcases values carried by families with present and absent fathers. In the novel, the absence of the father is depicted as having a huge negative impact on young adults. The presence of both parents is portrayed as having a positive effect in the development of children.

Blessed Girl is a fictional diary of a black young woman narrated through a first-person narrative revolving around issues faced by young adults, parenthood and the taking of responsibility for one's actions. The main character, Bontle Tau, who is in her late 20s, is an ambitious young woman who engages in overtly transactional sexual relationships with men. As a young woman who was raised by a single mother, Bontle suffers the effects of single parenting. As a fatherless child, she ends up suffering the same fate as her mother and becomes a mother to a baby boy named Loki with an absent father. Even though Bontle suffers the same fate of parenting as her mother Gladys, the two characters come from different eras of South Africa's political scene. Gladys became a young adult during the apartheid era while Bontle comes to sexual awareness in post-apartheid urban South Africa.

This chapter draws on Myles Munroe's (2008) idea of fatherhood to examine the impact of absent fathers on South African black township families. Munroe (2008) argues that the root cause of many socio-economic problems and challenges is the absence of fathers within families. Kopano Ratele and Mzikazi Nduna's (2018) research shows that fathers are generally absent in South African township families. However, Sangeetha Madhavan, Nicholas Townsend, and Anita Garey (2008) argue that fathers are often stereotyped, both socially and within academic spheres, as being disinterested in being involved and present in their children's lives. Thus, the chapter uses *Blessed Girl* to understand the emotions portrayed through the voice of the narrator as presented in a first-person narrative in order to capture the mind-set and perceptions about nuclear and non-nuclear families.

The novel explores the effects of fatherlessness on teenagers and 'husbandlessness' on adult females within black communities in post-apartheid South Africa. *Blessed Girl* revolves around Bontle who is psychologically and emotionally affected by her father's

absence. She was pushed to have a sexual relationship as a child with a man twice her age and became a victim of teenage pregnancy, which forced her to take a break from school and hide her child. Through Bontle's character, along with her husband, Makholwa reflects on the possible lives of black men and women in townships and well-off black families if fathers took the responsibility they are supposed to as expected in a patriarchal system. Makholwa also exposes the corruption in post-apartheid South Africa and how young women are forced to participate in the moral decadence of the times. Makholwa celebrates Bontle's street ingenuity but also uses her to show the darker side of young women's use of transactional sex for economic advancement.

The views of most characters are told through the main character in a dark humorous manner which calls for non-judgemental empathetic views from readers. Bontle's husband, Ntokozo provides a contrast to Bontle because he is brought up in a nuclear family in a middle-class environment. Just like his parents, Ntokozo eventually becomes a medical doctor. The novel opens up with Bontle's lies about her age and her false claims that she owns an apartment and other assets. Later, the reader discovers that Bontle lives in a rental house and is entirely dependent on the benevolence of rich married men. Later, the reader also finds out that Bontle has created a false social media profile of a rich woman with assets and big businesses. Bontle is steeped in a 'blesser-blessee' life.

A 'blesser-blessee' life **is** refers to transactional sexual relationships which are complex, ambiguous, and highly contested (Priya Ranganathan, Pramesh & Rakesh Aggarwal, 2017). Ranganathan et al., (2017: 2) **obs**erves that there is a tendency within social science to portray the categories of prostitution, sex work and transactional sex as having self-evident meanings. These writers argue that this oversight has resulted in the conflation of transactional sexual relationships with sex work or prostitution and has led to conflicting meanings of the term 'transactional sex.'. Kari Kesler, (2002: 19) states that the term prostitution is gendered so that it exclusively refers to the female condition under patriarchy. Radical feminists such as Millet (1975), Barry (1995, 1979), Pateman (1988), MacKinnon (1987, 1990), and Dworkin (1987) regard prostitution as violence against women, violence not only in the act of prostituting but also in the idea of 'buying sex' which is related to the system of heterosexuality and male power and signifies 'the absolute embodiment of patriarchal

male privilege' (Kesler, 2002: 19). Sheila Jeffries (1997: 2) notes that prostitution is viewed as the ultimate reduction of women to sexual objects that can be sold and bought, thus creating the basis of female subjugation.

Makholwa's characterization simultaneously subscribes to and contest the patriarchal understanding of prostitution. Bontle elicits sympathy from the reader by constructing herself as a young and fatherless girl from the townships, the daughter of a single mother who runs a shebeen which eventually leads her to becoming a teenage mother.

Bontle, and in English her name means beauty, indicates that her beauty even as a little girl turned men's heads. Bontle relates that her mother was showered with compliments because of her beauty. Bontle depicts herself as an ambitious young woman who moves from the township to the city of Johannesburg because she envisioned a better life for herself. Bontle confesses to the reader that as she moved from the townships, she lives as a media influencer by portraying a curated flashy and classy side of her life. She later portrays herself as a victim when she claims that her mother sold her to her male customers. She subsequently marries her high school boyfriend Ntokozo but could not be completely accepted by her in-laws due to her mother's profession as a shebeen queen. On the other hand, Bontle indicates that her husband, Ntokozo, uses drugs due to the pressure of being a medical doctor, a career that was chosen for him by his parents.

5.2. Child Prostitution in townships

Makholwa's narrative uses situational irony through Sizwe, a man twice Bontle's age, sleeps with her instead of protecting her. When the rest of Gladys' customers let it happen, it shows how men, along with the rest of the society, are responsible for the way Gladys and Bontle live. Gladys broke down after Bontle's father left her when their daughter was only three years old. Gladys started to have multiple male partners and the narrative voice blames Bontle's father for Gladys' behaviour. Makholwa's portrayal of Gladys and Bontle shows that little has changed for most black women in South African townships 23 years after attainment of black majority rule. As in the previous chapter where Mbuso and Thiza abandon their families, *Blessed Girl* reveals through Bontle's father that men still abandon their wives and children even though political oppression has ended. Nhlanhla Mkhize (2006) states that African fathers epitomise strict patriarchal head of families. Desmond Lesejane (2006) also states that an African

father is not just the head of the household, but also carries many responsibilities that exhibit good fathering. These responsibilities include enforcing moral authority and guidance for the family and children; becoming a leader and being responsible for the affairs of the family; being the primary provider of the family's material needs such as food and shelter; being a protector of one's family and children against any perceived threats; and becoming a good role model especially for their sons so they in turn can embody the values of good fatherhood. However, Bontle's father left his masculine roles and responsibilities to be filled by Gladys. This suggests that had Bontle's father stayed as head of his family, things would have turned differently for Bontle and her mother.

Without a husband, Gladys opens a shebeen selling alcohol to feed her family and the community labels her a prostitute. Makholwa condemns such stereotypes by showing that they contribute to low-self-esteem and many negative decisions in life. Similarly, Mrs Mabuza in the previous chapter is treated the same way by the community when she fell into depression after the death of her husband. As a result, Mrs Mabuza felt worthless and is disliked even by her own children. Although Gladys is socially stigmatized, instead of feeling worthless, she adopts the things the community say about her. For example, Gladys started prostituting her daughter as she internalized the stereotypes about herself.

Makholwa shows that black township men prey on fatherless little girls. For example, the older men who come to drink alcohol at Gladys' shebeen view Bontle as a potential sexual partner although she is still a child that deserves their protection. Makholwa shows that the township has resulted in predatory rather than protective patriarchy that once characterised African black communities. The ideal African patriarchal system subscribes to the ideology that it takes a village to raise a child. Mkhize (2006) points out that African cultures see fathering as the responsibility of the community as a whole and not the sole responsibility of the biological father. Makholwa's narrative shows that in the townships, men are now preoccupied with their sexual gratification and not with the protection of young girls. Unfortunately, even when she was still very young, Bontle was pushed to spend time with men who sexually harassed her. Bontle states her mother was proud of the attention she was getting from men. About her mother, she says:

So you want to know how Gladys was as a mother? Gosh. When I was in my teens, her shady customers started taking an unsavoury interest in me and she never really discouraged them. In fact, she was proud. ‘Darling, beauty runs in this family!’ she would say. ‘Every dime I’ve ever made, I’ve made directly or indirectly because of the way I look. If a woman knows how to work her charms, and she is smart enough to use her brains ... then that woman rules the world, baby. Watch and learn from your mom, my sweetheart.’ If I complained to her about one of her customers groping me, she’d want to know which part of my body they’d ‘messed around’ with. If I told her that they touched my breasts or squeezed my bum, she’d say something like; ‘Ag, don’t worry too much about that, my baby. That’s just men being men’. (Makholwa, 2017: 32)

Gladys comes across as a vain woman who fails to protect her daughter from sexual predators. The fact that Bontle does not have a father makes her vulnerable to sexual abuse. Out of economic desperation, Gladys exposes her daughter to dangers that she should have protected her from. As a result of her mother’s irresponsible behaviour and the abandonment by her father, Bontle grows up with childhood trauma. Mkhize (2006) indicates that notions of fatherhood in African cultures used to be linked to the philosophical foundations of *Ubuntu* which encourage the collective social responsibility of the community. Bakena Lefa (2015) says *Ubuntu* refers to the capacity in the South African culture that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring. It is an African principle meaning humanness in community life. Unfortunately, the treatment of Bontle by her mother’s patrons show that *Ubuntu* no longer obtains in the townships. Andrea Doucet’s (2006) argues that parental responsibilities should extend between and beyond households and into community settings and across multiple institutions of work, state policies, community, education, and health. However, the South African black township community depicted by Makholwa stigmatizes Gladys instead of trying to show her the right path as their African sister. Bontle observes:

The men around my neighbourhood have a love-hate relationship with her. A lot of them are her customers, a few are her ex-lovers, and some made the mistake of taking booze on credit with no intention of paying her back. My mom is not shy about whipping out a sjambok at the drop of a hat and beating the living daylights

out of anyone who's dumb enough to face her wrath. She's notorious in the neighbourhood. She's been called everything from a whore to a home-wrecker to a gangster. (Makholwa, 2017: 32)

Bontle's mother is stigmatized by her community but the narrator shows that she had to be strong and live on her wits as a single mother, just like Mrs Mabuza in the previous chapter who had no other option but to heal and be there for her children. Significantly, in the above passage, the men who have sex with Gladys are not condemned by the community. Thinking in patriarchal terms, the community assumes that it is all Gladys' fault that the men behave irresponsibly. Similarly, it becomes Gladys' fault that Bontle becomes a victim of childhood prostitution, and the father who abandoned her and older men who sleep with her are not held responsible. Bruce Ellis, John Bates, Kenneth Dodge, David Fergusson, John Horwood, Gregory Pettit and Lianne Woodward (2003) argue that fatherless female children are prone to teenage pregnancy before the age of 16 as compared to their counterparts whose fathers are present. The tone of Makholwa's narrative suggests that Bontle's turn to prostitution happened because she was a fatherless girl from the age of three. Zoe Bogan and Franklin Krohn (2001) discovered that those who grow up without a father end up being desperate for a father figure. Similarly, Lisa Mancini (2010) discovered that daughters who grew up without a father are emotionally wounded and show promiscuous behaviour. Viewed in the light of the above studies, Bontle's behaviour is due to the trauma she suffered as a fatherless child. Therefore, the father bears the greater blame than the mother for Bontle's behaviour.

Makholwa's narrative suggests that what happened to Bontle as a child influenced her adulthood behaviour. Bontle's interaction and relationships with her many older men sexual partners was as a result of the trauma she suffered as a child. Barry Schneider, Christine Tardif & Leslie Atkinson (2001) observe that a history of pathogenic care can interfere with secure attachment and disrupt healthy development in children. Due to Bontle's childhood prostitution, her relationship with Ntokozo could not survive as she had been used to relationships with older men from a young age. Bontle was also used to sleeping with older men for money. Carol Horton (2003) states that a child who has experienced a traumatic event or events early in life may develop patterns of behaviour that, in the long-term, may impair his or her ability to form positive relationships with others. Children who have not processed their emotions from

traumatic events run the risk of bringing their experiences into their own families, thus continuing the vicious cycles. When it comes to Bontle, her relationship was hindered by her experience of exposure to older men as an impressionable teenager. Bontle's trauma is well described by Horton (2003) who states that early childhood traumas, such as abuse, neglect, and other emotionally harmful events, have a negative effect on early attachment relationships, especially if the abuser is the caregiver. When children experience relationships as rejecting or unsafe, these experiences can alter a child's perception of self, trust in others, and perception of the world, which might be the reason Bontle was not loyal to anyone in Johannesburg. By contrast, Ntokozo wanted to build a life with her and not shower her with money for her body and hence their marriage collapsed.

5.3. Parents' Contribution to Substance Abuse in Black Communities

As in Matlwa's *Coconut* where Ofilwe's father expects her daughter to achieve success in his own terms, Makholwa condemns parents' control over their children's lives by forcing them to pursue what they view as a prestigious career path. Ntokozo's parents ignore their son's feelings about not wanting to be a medical doctor in order to boost their own egos. Ntokozo ends up depressed due to parental pressure.

Makholwa's narrative uses Ntokozo to reveal how being controlled as a child may have negative effects on an individual when they become adults. Since they are both medical doctors, Ntokozo's parents pushed their son to follow their own career paths. Similarly, in *Coconut*, Mr Tlou forces his kids to befriend white kids and speak their language. Ntokozo's parents wanted him to study at the University of Cape Town, far away from home, because they considered it as the most prestigious university. They only allowed him to study at Medunsa in Gauteng when he threatened to take a gap year. Ntokozo ended up using drugs to cope due to work pressure. The family trauma is also witnessed in *The Ones with Purpose* where Anele is expected to arrange the funeral by herself while relatives watch. Andrea Danese and Jessie Baldwin's (2017) found that trauma and maltreatment endured in early childhood may have lasting effects on individuals. Physical changes in the brain and body, along with behavioural changes, and developmental impacts can be the cause of ongoing toxic stress early in life. Many individuals who have experienced trauma early in life later experience mental health concerns such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and

addiction. Seemingly, Ntokozo's early childhood trauma due to being forced into a specific career path by his parents led him to drugs later on as a young adult.

Ironically, Ntokozo's parents blamed Bontle for Ntokozo's addiction. They did not even bother asking him why he was using drugs. As shown in the work of Danese and Baldwin (2017), Ntokozo seems to have experienced mental health problems because he never wanted to be a doctor in the first place. Moreover, when he started work, he endured long exhausting hours and did not have quality time with his wife. Bontle explains how she was blamed for Ntokozo's addiction:

It took me six months to speak to his mother, who was instantly alarmed. The drama! You should have been there. His parents called a family meeting and interrogated us about our daily routine. Naturally they somehow found a way to blame his addiction on me by implying that it would never have happened if I was a more supportive person, if I could manage things better, if I paid more attention to him. They booked him into a rehab centre and continued to treat me like I was the guilty party in all the mess. (Makholwa, 2017: 21)

Gladys, Bontle's mother, also blames her teenage daughter for getting pregnant from one of her clients. Gladys says the pregnancy was due to Bontle being too forward. However, as discussed above, Bontle was still too young to consent to any sexual relationship, making it her mother's responsibility to protect her from male predators. Gladys' words below show how she tries to evade responsibility for Bontle's pregnancy:

Loki, when your ... when Bontle was fourteen years old, she met a man that she got involved with. This man was much older than her. Your sister was just a teenager. She was too forward, she didn't know anything about life. She made some choices that a child should not have had to make. Loki, Bontle fell pregnant at fourteen ... and had a baby. (Makholwa, 2017: 144)

Moreover, *Blessed Girl* shows how difficult it is to break the vicious circle of absent fathers. Bontle grows up fatherless and becomes a teen mother. Loki her son also grows up without knowing his father and becomes a drug addict. Similarly, Fikile in the previous chapter loses her father to a tragic accident and starts to date her teacher for financial stability. Jelani Mandara, Carolyn Murray and Toya Joyner (2005) note that boys who grow up without a father figure involve themselves in criminal activities and

show destructive behaviour. Loki's situation is worsened by the fact that for a long time, Bontle lies to her son by telling him that he is her little brother. Meryl Yoches, Janko Summers, Linda Beeber, Brenda Harden and Neena Malik (2012) argue that children need a consistent adult in their lives, especially during traumatic events, to assist them in processing their experiences and making them feel safe. If there is an adult to help regulate and guide a child through this time, symptoms of trauma are typically less severe. Many times, it is difficult for a parent or caregiver to help a child process a traumatic event because the adult may have experienced the same traumatic event as the child and is processing their own experience. This was the case with Bontle who was focused on processing her own trauma of fatherlessness and teenage motherhood.

However, the one to blame the most for Loki's breakdown is Vusi, the father who refused to take responsibility and support Bontle throughout the pregnancy and in raising their child. Had Vusi effectively fulfilled his fatherly role, Loki would have grown up with both parents and Bontle would not have experienced high levels of trauma as a teenage single mother. Many times, low-income families suffer increased exposure to stressful circumstances, which include economic disadvantages. Margaret Briggs-Gowan, Alice Carter and James Ford (2011) state that younger children exposed to a traumatic event along with a combination of socio-demographic factors such as poverty, minority status, single parenting, teenage parenting and limited education, are at a greater risk for mental illness. Bontle and Gladys hide the truth from Loki hoping to give Bontle a fresh start as they were already underprivileged.

Makholwa's narrative portrays how single parenting is associated with poor decision making and trauma through Bontle's situation as Loki's mother. James Garbarino (1997) argue that boys need their fathers as male models and objects of identification. Makholwa's novel reveals how Loki's drug problem was caused by the lack of a father figure. Bontle relates:

The counsellor said there was a void in Loki's life that my brother was replacing with drugs. I had never seen any sign of this. Clearly it was something he felt he could not talk to me or Mom about. I wonder if it has anything to do with the fact that he has never really known who his father is. Boys seem to feel the lack of a father figure more than girls do. (Makholwa, 2017: 66)

This reveals that should both Loki's parents and Gladys have been honest to Loki about his biological mother and father, Loki would not have fallen into drugs but would have known about his parents and made better decisions. As a result of having an absent father, Loki did not have anyone to talk to as a man to show him the way, however, he was surrounded by women whom he felt different from and could not talk to about his manhood and transitions. This is a sign that reveals poor decision making of Loki's elders which affected his livelihood. Fazel Freeks and George Lotter (2011) argue that many children are uncertain and confused and deeply feel the need for a father's attachment, presence, and a lifestyle characterized by good values received from their fathers. This is revealed through Loki who had no male figure available for him for a father attachment, which opened a gap that he closed with drug usage. The same gap is evident in Mbuso in the previous chapter who felt empty and hated his mother after losing his father. Due to the gap, Mbuso left home and distanced himself from his family, just as Loki left home to live with drug addicts.

5.4. Social Media Deception and Corruption in South Africa

Unlike Jele, Makholwa's narrative foregrounds how contemporary South African black women ruin their lives because of their obsession with social media usage. Due to many of them growing up in broken families, they have no one to look up to and they try to find a place and role models outside their home. Bontle is obsessed with posting fancy trips and expensive items on social media. The narrative suggests that Bontle would have been a successful business woman if she focused on her dignity, marriage, and health. Bontle resorts to an existence that depends on pleasing her followers on social media because she suffers from an identity crisis. Jeffrey Ford, David Nalbone, Joseph Wetchler and Philip Sutton (2008) indicate that children need a platform of certainty, something that Bontle lacked as a child. Bontle is not satisfied with patiently running a business. For example, her hair business had enough customers and it had a potential to grow. However, Bontle chooses to invest her money on implants to impress male sponsors and her followers on social media.

Bontle ends up deceiving her followers and herself through her social media postings. Instead of empowering herself, Bontle's excessive use of social media ends up disempowering her. By contrast, Bontle's friends, Iris and Tsholo empower themselves

by striving towards university degrees. Bontle even brags about her friends' academic profiles:

Iris and I are very similar in our attitudes towards men, although Iris is more academic than I am. She's doing her BCom Hons and Tsholo is pursuing an LLB. Yep. I have a friend who'll be a lawyer one day. With my dramatic life, I can only see this as a good thing. (Makholwa, 2017: 13)

By contrasting the way Bontle strives for success with that of Iris and Tsholo, Makholwa offers a moral evaluation of Bontle's life. However, the novel suggests that Gladys' example had a huge bearing on how Bontle made decisions as a young adult. Bontle is obsessed with a lavish lifestyle and is willing to degrade her body to attain the things she desires. She rationalises her choices saying:

If I were given the option to spend a lifetime as Albert Einstein or as Marilyn Monroe, I'd choose Monroe every time, drugs and all. In spite of some bad choices, she still had a much better quality of life. I love girls who know how to make the most of their looks. Marilyn Monroe was the original blessee – and you can quote me on that. (Makholwa, 2017: 2)

The above also reveals how social media influences Bontle's mentality and not only lifestyle. *Blessed Girl* also reveals how social media engenders competition on the South African youth and lead many to greed and obsession and this destroys their minds through depression. Just as she compares Albert Einstein and Marilyn Monroe, Bontle spends a lot of money on clothing and holiday getaways so as to impress her social media followers. Bontle engages in wasteful expenditure even when she gets a lot of money. For example, she steals one of her boyfriend's share of the tender payment because she wants to live like her idols who trend on tabloids. Bontle becomes a dishonest and abusive individual because she achieves her goals at the cost of others and cannot tell when a man truly loves her as she did not grow up exposed to a man's love. Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown and Elizabeth Gilchrist (2006) claim abusers may "groom" their victims by manipulating them with activities or gifts intended to make them feel special. For example, Bontle plans to manipulate Teddy through sex so that she could make him feel special and less worried about the missing money. Bontle reveals her strategy:

I'll give him a blow-job to make him feel better, I decide. Judging by all the deals he's got going on, the missing R300K should not be a major issue. We go through starters, then the main course ... still no discussion about the shortfall in the transfer. By now, he's telling me about all the things he's going to do to me in bed later tonight. Eish. My nerves. I decide I'm being stupid and should focus on the sex talk. That way, I can raise the money issue in bed, post-coitus. Yes. That will work. I will give him the best night of his life, then tell him about the missing R300K. By that time, R300,000 will sound like a mere R30. In fact, I will make it feel like a mere R30. I'll even highlight the advantage of my owning the penthouse: he can spend weekends there when he's in town, (Makholwa, 2017: 30).

While the above passage seemingly celebrates Bontle's ability to live through her wits by manipulating her rich sexual partners, there is also an implied moral judgement that the author is making against Bontle. This view is supported by the fact that by the end of the novel, Bontle can no longer use her hypersexualised body to make a living because she becomes a wheelchair bound paraplegic. Bontle's words also expose the corrupt way that South African government officials conduct business. Through her confessions, Bontle exposes the corruption and nepotism in the South African government tender system. Although Bontle makes a lot of money through her connections in the government tender, her mental health deteriorates because the money gets into her head and she does not use it in a responsible manner. Nthabiseng Motsemme (2007) found that a high percentage of today's youth have sex in exchange for money, gifts, and favours, which is how most females get government jobs, just as Bontle got the tender. Due to lack of knowledge about the construction industry, Bontle admits that she could not deliver on the mandate of her tender. Her situation explains why South African service delivery is poor and the economy is falling. Bontle admits:

I know this is a great opportunity but at the same time I'm not sure if construction is really the business for me. It's complicated. A News Café sounds so much more manageable. (Makholwa, 2017: 39)

The above exposes how unqualified Bontle is and the nepotism process that took place for her to get the tender, which is why she has no idea what she is doing and doubts that she can succeed. This interconnects with the depiction of Mama Sophia

(Bontle's tender partner who has been collaborating with Teddy) which also reveals how corrupt people in South Africa manage to hide the money they steal or earn illegally by keeping a low profile to avoid being investigated for the fraudulent tenders they get awarded. Her image is an example of how money is hidden through dressing in cheap garments in order to be perceived as hardworking, dedicated and not interested in money. Bontle describes Mama Sophia in the following words:

Teddy Bear introduced me to a woman by the name of Sophia Makgaba; the BEE woman with an accredited construction business. Eish. I don't know if I'm going to work well with this mama. She's one of those basic people who go around with a German-cut hairstyle, short nails, no name brand jeans and promotional T-shirts. I mean, there're people who still go around wearing promotional T-shirts. (Makholwa, 2017: 8)

The imagery used in describing Mama Sophia is used by the author to mock the way Bontle is clueless about the corruption in the construction industry. This is used as a double entendre which is used to also reveal the experience and discipline found in Mama Sophia to hide the money she accumulates through the corruptive tenders.

5.5. Infidelity and Dealing with Sickness

Bontle seems not to have any moral qualms as she happily keeps multiple sexual partners so long as they help finance her expensive lifestyle. She does not see her behaviour as infidelity but she sees herself as an astute business woman who is able to use opportunities that are available to her.

Bontle explains how she contracted HIV from Mr Emmanuel when she agreed to have unprotected sex with him. While Mr Emmanuel is condemned for deliberately infecting Bontle with HIV, Bontle's case serves as a warning to young women who prioritise money over their sexual health. Unlike Jele who characterised Fikile with a house-heading responsibility and abject poverty after the death of her father when her mother fell into depression where she decided to be in a relationship with an older man to provide for her family, Makholwa characterises Bontle with a present and providing mother, and give her HIV to reveal the consequences of chasing a fancy lifestyle. The two narratives reveal that Fikile had few to no choices while Bontle had a choice to further her studies and focus on her growing business over men.

Motsemme (2007) observes that what complicates these notions of intimacy is that many of these young women often have a sense that even though they are choosing to have sex with their partners 'skin-to-skin', they remain aware that their partner may have other sexual partners. This normative acceptance of multiple male partnering within heterosexual relationships appears to be a deeply woven one within township women's subjectivities and tends to be mediated by a combination of a choice 'not to know', a form of 'denial', or to consider 'knowing as poisonous'. Although Bontle knows very well that Mr Emmanuel was in a sexual relationship with Iris and many other women, she has unprotected sex with him because she wants his money. This is a huge problem faced by many South African young women from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. Motsemme (2007) notes that in some communities subjectivities were being formulated which, amongst other things, were characterized by material lack; an acceptance of multiple partnering for men and, in more hidden ways, multiple partnering for women; a refusal to engage the pleasure of sex, especially for women; daily hustling and survival, they were also enacting survival strategies that might potentially transcend these very social environments that were structured to numb them and make them not feel. Iris describes her relationship with Mr Emmanuel and what Bontle has reaped from it:

That beast you want so badly you will step all over our friendship ... he's not only an abusive, violent bastard, he's also made me pregnant. Yes,' she says, nodding as if to affirm the statement to herself. 'And you know what else, bitch? He's got AIDS. He's given me HIV, so welcome to Emmanuel's wonderful world. I hope you enjoy it. And I am sure as hell hope it was worth it,' she says, before stalking out. (Makholwa, 2017: 158)

Iris' words to Bontle are used to add on to the portrayal of the competition of the youth due to social media. This is also used as a lesson to Bontle and her followers to exclaim that people should not envy their friends as they do not know what their friends are going through.

5.6. Conclusion

The *Blessed Girl* absent husbands and fathers make their families economically and psychologically vulnerable. The novel shows that fatherless children are exposed to sexual and other abuses. The novel also denounces men for failing to take their

responsibility as providers and protectors seriously. Since she grows up without a father or father figure, Bontle develops a distorted view of men. As a result, Bontle prefers rich older men suggesting that in addition to the financial rewards that come with such relationships, she also longs for fatherly love. The reader sympathises with Bontle because she is a victim of abuse from an early age and she is taken advantage of by men. The novel condemns rich old men for taking advantage of vulnerable young women when they should consider them as their own children. Just like Mrs Mabuza, Bontle is also a victim of oppressive patriarchy as she is expected to be supportive to her husband Ntokozo and protect him from the misfortunes of the world. She is expected to do this despite the fact that she has been traumatized her whole life and no one protected her or offered therapy.

Makholwa's narrative portrays the trauma experienced by both genders but shows that although females experience trauma, they still engage in survival tactics that ensure that they take care of their economic needs and those of their loved ones. Women are shown to be resilient as they independently work hard to achieve their goals. Makholwa depicts women who withstand hardships and carry out their responsibilities of raising children even without the support from men. The novel indicates that males turn to drugs when they get traumatized. For example, both Ntokozo and Loki become drug addicts in the face of life's pressures. The next chapter uses Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain* to discuss challenges that the novelist imagines as exclusively affecting women. The novelist suggests that two decades after the attainment of black majority rule, South African women still leave in constant fear of rape and other forms of physical and emotional violence.



CHAPTER 6

Convergence of Women's Challenges and Fear in Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain*

6.1. Introduction

This chapter closely follows on the previous one in that it examines the challenges faced by South African women in an environment that is supposed to be free and democratic. After her revealing how women are struggling with identity in a democratic South Africa in her debut novel *Coconut*, in *Period Pain* (2017), Kopano Matlwa fictionalises the gruesome treatment of women living in a so-called free and democratic country. This chapter does not follow the analysis of *Coconut* because like the previous chapter on Makholwa, it looks at how society, an external force, contributes to the trauma of women and how women face many challenges that do not affect men to the same extent. Matlwa and Makholwa's novels are connected by their suggesting that in post-apartheid South Africa, family is the cause of the many challenges that women face. The novel is a fictional biography of Masechaba, the female protagonist who is a medical doctor in South Africa. Incidentally, Kopano Matlwa is a South African medical doctor who knows the daily challenges of the health care system in the democratic South Africa.

The South African women's traumatic experiences are portrayed vividly in a social realistic mode along with the ill-treatment of African female immigrants. Even with the high unemployment rate and academic dropouts along with crime, South Africa is a democratic country with a better developing economy in sub-Saharan Africa. This accounts for women's social need for independence and many African immigrants coming into South Africa to seek better jobs and sustainability. Since attaining democracy, South Africa incorporates gender and economic equality within its human rights laws. However, such ethics are ignored by entrenched patriarchal thinking along with the misaligned economy and distribution of national resources which favour men. Matlwa's novel is a concise commentary on how the struggle for resources leads to patriarchy taking a toll on women by abusing and silencing them in order for men to access and control resources.

The novel is published 23 years after the attainment of democracy and the formal gender equality. The narrator, Masechaba, discovers her agency when she becomes a doctor. This is a profession that is still dominated by men despite the fact that South Africa attained black majority rule in 1994. Matlwa's depiction of the narrator who cares for humanity and is subsequently gang-raped and then lives in fear, is indicative of how women are silenced through rape. The time setting and characterization allows Matlwa to destabilize the idea that women are free and African female immigrants with work permits are welcome to seek economic refuge in South Africa. Although Masechaba academically makes a breakthrough and earns respect within her community, her attempt to start a campaign and file for a petition against the ill-treatment of migrants from other parts of Africa makes her a target as she is raped, and in the process gets pregnant.

Similarly, although Masechaba's friend Nyasha, a fellow doctor who works at the same public hospital, she is discriminated and ridiculed even by Masechaba's mother because she is Zimbabwean. Due to xenophobia, Nyasha decides to migrate to Canada, and Masechaba is deeply disappointed with this development. This chapter employs Gqola's (2015) notion of female fear factory to examine how Masechaba is affected by her ordeal and how the fear of rape is used as a patriarchal tool to deny women freedom and full participation in most spheres of South Africa's life. Gqola argues that as a product of patriarchy, men use fear of being raped to police women bodies and maintain oppressive patriarchal relations. Gqola argues that rape is not just a sexual act, but a representation of both power and sexual violence which men use to curtail women's freedom. Gqola terms this phenomenon the 'female fear factory'. In examining *Period Pain*, I concur with Gqola's assessment that South Africa is an example of a former "slave and racialized societies which constructed the stereotypes of African hyper-sexuality" (43). Gqola indicates that South Africa's discriminative past sought to justify and legitimize the rape of slaves and black women. Matlwa's novel shows that this mentality has spilled over to the democratic state as evidenced by the ubiquitous violence against women. The novel further shows that shortage of resources and jobs produce a dangerous social and economic structure which causes competition and leads to women's abuse by men.

Gqola argues that rape has a genealogy which can be traced back to the "architecture of slave-ordered Cape Colony" (Gqola, 2015: 40). *Period Pain* shows the recalcitrant

nature of this logic by depicting incidents where women are gang-raped by black men and not white men or men in general. Masechaba, the narrator and victim of gang-rape, is a black South African woman. She also witnesses the ill-treatment of her female Zimbabwean friend and also attends to a white female patient who was raped and shot, and her boyfriend killed. This suggests that South African women of all races are under siege as different kinds of violence is perpetrated against them.

Notably, Matlwa is a black South African doctor, and the novel is largely set in a public hospital. This increases the temptation of a rigid racial patriarchy classification. However, through the nurses at the hospital and Masechaba's complaints about the shortage of resources to help patients, Matlwa troubles and challenges the leadership and power of black men, and also questions the economic freedom of South Africans. Through Masechaba, Matlwa also reveals the natural feminine challenges that separates women from men and shows how oppressive patriarchy exacerbates women's challenges. Nonhlanhla Dlamini (2015: 134) asserts that "*Period Pain* is episodic, relies on the stream of consciousness and the diary modes of narration, and also poses as a self-help book and a novel of maturity". The novel strategically highlights and denounces the prevalence of rape in a patriarchal society. The novel takes a diary form to trouble both the existence of patriarchal societies and economic imbalance that impede the freedom of women in democratic South Africa. The story is narrated in four parts that interlink Masechaba's lived experiences as a black female medical intern in a public hospital. Each part of the journal entry opens with a Bible verse which ties it to the themes of the section.

The novel takes a social realist mode. Part one opens with a narrative from the fifth chapter of the book of Mark in the Bible about a woman who had an issue of endless flow of blood. This narrative is weaved into Masechaba's menstrual problems that rob her of her youth. Her life-threatening menstruation motivates her to become a medical doctor. She later suffers a mental breakdown due to the uncontrolled poor state of the public health system which makes it hard for her to carry out her duties. The continuous deaths that occur at the hospital, suffering and poverty cause her to despise her job and curtail her empathic feelings towards patients. The second part opens with a narrative from the book of Jeremiah which reflects on the attacks on immigrants. Part three of the journal graphically narrates Masechaba's rape ordeal and her ambivalent love and attitude towards God. The last part concludes the

narrative, though a flicker of hope for Masechaba in the form of her baby girl whom she conceived through the rape incident.

6.2. Women's Protracted Misfortunes in South Africa

Masechaba is aware that women face many misfortunes due to menstruation challenges that prevented her from enjoying her youth. Ironically, she was not aware that her decision to become a medical doctor would make her even more vulnerable as a woman. Depicting black South Africans as self-hating people, Masechaba reveals how women's challenges beyond physical nature are all man made. She states: "We know we hate ourselves as black people" (Matlwa, 2017: 50). She finds it puzzling that despite the end of formal racial segregation, black men seem determined to unleash violence, particularly on black women. On the other hand, Masechaba's flashbacks of her menstruation problems suggest that in addition to dealing with social problems caused by men, women have to contend with other biological challenges that men do not experience.

Furthermore, Matlwa uses the period pain of the title of her novel as a metaphor of the cycles of violence that women experience in democratic South Africa. The narrator says that the South Africa she in is "growing pains like period pain" (Matlwa, 2017: 65). Further, just like Makholwa who draws the similarities of patriarchal discourse attacks on Gladys and her relationship with her community in the previous chapter, Masechaba draws similarities between the patriarchal discourse attacks and her own period cramps. Like these attacks, her menstruation is violent, life-threatening, messy and bloody to the extent that during her menstrual cycle, she sits at home in fear. Dlamini (2022) argues that the novel's use of the female body and its leakiness counters phallic post/colonial metaphors of "penetration" and "emasculatation" that sought to rehabilitate African masculinities whilst normalizing violence and essentializing feminine subjectivities in contemporary South Africa. The pain felt by women in postcolonial South Africa is symbolized through period cramps to reveal the immense pain that women experience before they even deal with men's oppression. Gqola argues that regardless of explanation, men can never understand women's pain, which is why they add to it in a brutal manner. The narrator, in contrast, represents an idealised vision of a nation that truly values women, granting them the recognition and unrestricted freedom they deserve.

Masechaba's experience of pain drove her to become a medical doctor. However, the poor state of the healthcare system and patriarchy results in her mental breakdown. She despairingly admits:

I'm not a saint, I'm not like Mother Teresa, Florence Nightingale, Albertina Sisulu. I'm not like those people. I don't know how to be like them. I don't know how to wake up every day and have patients cough MDR-TB into my face, and not mind. I mind. I want to be some kind of hero, but I don't have it in me. (Matlwa, 2017: 56-57)

Her words show that the lack of resources at public hospitals cause her a lot of emotional and psychological struggles. In Gqola's (2021:38) theorisations, what happens to Masechaba is evidence of the female fear factory in operation. In the case of Masechaba, she fears that she cannot be a hero under the appalling public hospital conditions, her fear takes up publicness as a performance of legitimacy. The causes of her fear are visible to all to witness. Spectators are affected by it in one way or another either recognizing it, to later perform in similar ways, or understanding the threat in the performance of who can be harmed in public. In this case, Masechaba is afraid of going the extra mile and report the matters that affect her job because she knows her vulnerability as a woman.

Through her feminine appropriate exercise of inhabiting a national doctor's worldview, Matlwa tries to overcome racial and national boundaries. In the acknowledgements, the narrative mentions at least two women, namely Nyasha and the shot white woman who when combined share the same experiences and ideologies as her as she states that "We should know better, what with apartheid and all" (Matlwa, 2027: 41). Through arrogating women's various challenges, the novel problematizes the limiting understanding of feminine literature. Although the bulk of the story is set in a South African public hospital, making Matlwa's a South African story, through a series of experiences and comparisons, Matlwa draws the illusion of the South Africa that is expected to be truly democratic.

Matlwa's linguistic and literary strategies both question and illuminate Kwame Appiah's (1992: 53) observation that "language and literature are central to the articulation" of the struggle to constitute different nations. Her grasp of Nyasha's experience is not only feminine but signifies her rejection of narrow nationalistic literary classifications.

Unlike the fixed period pain marking a woman's pain in the abdomen, the novel's title exposes the fluidity and precarity of black patriarchy for women living in South Africa. In fact, *Period Pain* is one of the feminine novels in the transition of democratic South Africa that stands as a decided reminder that there is a long way to go before the expectations of post-1994 are fulfilled every inch (Mamadou Ngom, 2019). The novel engages in an open agenda of disrupting gender-based violence and oppression as a fiction classificatory system. Like her heroine who transgresses patriarchal rules, firstly; literally as a desperate female doctor obsessed with bringing change; and subsequently as an immigrant's friend, for Matlwa, the novel signifies experimental possibilities of a world without patriarchy and idealistic fiction without inequality. Thus, her novel becomes feminine, in that it defies but remains caught up in patriarchal insights and norms.

6.3. Patriarchal Attacks on Female Immigrants

The narrative also tells a Zimbabwean woman's story and to a certain extent the story of other women coming to South Africa. The illusion that the story is being told by a South African is achieved by Matlwa's background on South African female doctors and exposure to xenophobia in public hospitals. The author extensively uses xenophobic attacks and threat patterns throughout the narrative. Female immigrants suffer economic challenges under patriarchy like nationals but are also embarrassed and stereotyped in public spaces. These individuals have a sense that while they are economically excluded, they are treated differently in public spaces, especially where they provide and seek public services. Thus, a novel that portrays stereotypes about female immigrants creates the impression within its community of readers that an unfair treatment and generalization of female immigrants possess a spectacular manner on them.

Period Pain creates, in the prologue and the epilogue, and then destabilises Benedict Anderson's (2006) idea of meanwhile or national imagination through the use of an all-seeing narrator. In the prologue, the female narrator talks of "blood thirsty men calling for foreigners to leave the country" (Matlwa, 2017: 1) and in the epilogue Masechaba says to herself that everything that has happened gives a sense of hope, she declares:

We all know this xenophobia thing will blow over. It won't last. Yes, from time to time there's an incident here and there, but it's definitely on the decline. Things are getting better (Matlwa, 2017: 153).

The above explains how femininity and foreign nationality are limitations to Masechaba's friend Nyasha and other immigrants. Laura Winstanley (2018: 64) disagrees with Masechaba's hopeful outlook and argues that "the contradictory events and inconclusive outcome of the novel give little reason to incline towards the hope that Masechaba refers to. Nyasha flees South Africa, exactly where she goes remains unclear due to the breakdown of her and Masechaba's relationship. The novel's hopeful new start is troubled by Nyasha's disappearance and doubts regarding who will be able to become part of a future South Africa". Meanwhile, a Nigerian doctor still reports to work even after being referred to as a "cockroach" (Matlwa, 2017: 79) by a South African patient in need of help. Due to such treatment, Nyasha could not even work in peace due to the insults she received from the nurses and the hatred directed to her by Masechaba's mother. Apparently, despite her education and contribution to the society as a health worker, Nyasha fails to escape the constraining nostalgic logic of national belonging.

The fear that is revealed through Nyasha shows how her education could not protect her even though the country needs her for her profession. Due to her nationality, Nyasha lives in fear. The fear that is instilled by the community is shown to be non-ending. Masechaba uses a soliloquy and states:

I remembered laughing at them myself in first-year varsity when Zanele called them all "oorkants" and refused to share a dorm room with one because she said they smelt of "menstrual blood" (Matlwa, 2017: 74).

The above reveals how South Africans have given themselves control over immigrants and public services which make them suppress immigrants living in the country. Gqola (2021: 38-39) insightfully argues that female fear factory "marks public space as belonging to those who perform ownership over others. The repetition is authorized and sets up a series of uncertainties: that the harassed will retreat, and the harasser will remain unchallenged". Masechaba indicates that the ill-treatment of Nyasha was because she comes from a poor African country, as such, causes are locatable in strong sentiments of exclusionary national belonging triggered by poverty and

perceptions of being excluded from the national economic bounty. Gqola further indicates that like a real factory, female fear factory takes up public physical space, requires bodies and different components to work. Matlwa's novel reveals that poor national background of female immigrants is inseparable from destructive social, economic and political inequalities that afflict her main character's friend.

Matlwa's narrative places women at the centre of fear to reveal how they are underprivileged and oppressed by their own society through being silenced just like Gladys in the previous chapter who has no control over the stereotypes and rumours the public spreads about her and treatment. Additionally, Nigel King (2004: 30) argues that "the female body is the body of the condemned. When a man targets a woman, he does so because she is "discursively constructed (condemned) as inferior yet also threatening to him, thus in perpetual need of containment, control and subjected (condemned) to particular disciplinary techniques". Once the woman reaches this decision, the patriarchy has won; it has succeeded in "retaining its grip on the imagination long after the encounter has passed" (Gqola 2015: 78). Similarly, nation enabled xenophobia and the economic desperation that it spawns devalue human life and structure patriarchal ideologies that are depicted in *Period Pain*. This explains the atrocities that are perpetrated against those labelled as "oorkants" and smelling of menstrual blood. Significantly, Masechaba's description of those involved in the mocking of immigrant women indicates that they think of themselves as performing patriotic acts. This therefore gives them a justification that the immigrants are part of the problem and therefore prohibit the country from advancing. Masechaba states:

Sometimes I want to tell her to go back to her own country and fix her own problems and stop meddling in ours, though in reality, she insists: "I'd never say that. It's not a nice thing to say". (Matlwa, 2017: 42)

Therefore, instead of the ill-treatment of female immigrants being interpreted as a punishable criminality, insulting them and denying them equality could be patriarchy's final blow to their mission of getting them to leave the country. Significantly, King (2004) adds to Gqola's female fear factory by explaining how women are driven by the fear instilled by men to great effect, leading to forced decisions that put them at the edge of choosing their lives over righteousness in mistreat of female immigrants. The novel indicates that there are no legal consequences against perpetrators of such violence

against immigrants. Female immigrants suffer double oppression; they suffer because of their gender and also they are foreigners.

Matlwa also employs strategies that reveal a strong sense of her supporting character's entrapment by notions of national belonging and identity in South Africa. She juxtaposes the national tragedies that brought the migrants to South Africa and disasters that occur in their countries to highlight the transition of these events with the attainment of the South African democracy. Gqola (2015) argues that the manufacture of female fear requires several aspects to work: the safety of the aggressor, vulnerability of the target and successful communication by the aggressor that has power. Masechaba and her college friends mock Nyasha because they are safely in their country and feel blessed to have been born in it. Masechaba indicates how fortunate she is to have been born in South Africa and not in Zimbabwe like Nyasha, saying: I was blessed to be born South African. It's not her fault she wasn't (Matlwa, 2017: 42).

The abuse of female immigrants results from their being looked down upon by the South African women who feel they are superior. Winstanley (2018) asserts that Masechaba exposes a feeling of superiority where being South African is better than being from another Southern African nation. Despite being aware of the links between her own actions and the injustices of apartheid, she is unable to see beyond Nyasha's difference. In his "Master-Slave Dialectic" George Hegel (1967) describes this treatment as self-consciousness which "does not see the other as essential being but sees itself in the other" (146), and conversely, self-identity is or better yet originates in the "exclusion of everything other outside itself" (147) and that "other" is unessential. This is an inherent reference point that Masechaba's society has been perpetuating since before her birth and which she is unable to transcend, despite her efforts to think in a different way. The marking of difference is not based only on nationality but also on a perception of the difference and inferiority of those who are not from South Africa. This is not a national inferiority based on culture but something more inherent to the immigrant group.

6.4. Curative Rape as Oppressive Patriarchy's tool for Inflicting Fear

From Masechaba's experience and struggles as a doctor, it is evident that the society has not only intimidated her to change her perception about immigrants, rather she has been instilled with fear by being gang-raped which was done as a punishment for her behaviour. Reporting her ordeal, she says: They said I was lucky they didn't necklace me, like they did to the likes of me during apartheid (Makholwa, 2017: 113). This threat is meant to ensure that Masechaba does not behave the same way again fearing the worst that could happen if she repeats her actions. Throughout the narrative, Gqola's idea of female fear factory is evoked at a national level and not just at a social scale, suggesting that "both fear and violence are necessary for control and women are supposed to work themselves to death avoiding fear and violence as women, even if it is futile." (Gqola, 2021: 184). The form of rape which she incurred was used as a tool believed to correct Masechaba from siding with foreigners as the society call them after she protested against the treatment and everything that has been happening around her. **trau**matises women and with Masechaba made an example, it makes women to toe the line dictated by masculinity to avoid being gang-raped. Many years before Gqola, Susan Brownmiller had articulated an idea close to fear factor when she defined rape as "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (Brownmiller, 1975: 15). This explains discrimination emotions which push Masechaba and her university friends into mocking the female immigrants, along with Nyasha's decision to leave the country. These actions are connected by nationality and are also entangled in unrelenting patriarchal forces. **Wh**ere in Gqola's observation the construction of a national imagination, patriarchy simply controls women by constructing social behaviour, unconstructed female behaviour has life threatening consequences as Masechaba's situation proves. In the case of female fear, it is the stereotypes mediated through rape and brutality which bring together this collective discrimination and treatment. Thus, the use of curative rape is not to correct women's behaviour but it is meant to suppress and silence and control them so that they never challenge men.

Period Pain shows that leading up to and even during democratic transition, there was an intensification of viewing women as powerless and controllable beings. These depictions reinforce Gqola's (2015) observation that rape "is an exercise of power that communicates that the man creating fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention, it also teaches women who witness it about their vulnerability either

through reminding them of their own previous fear or showing them that it could happen to them next. It is an effective way to keep women in check and often results in women curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner” (79). Similarly, Zarina Zain (2012:132) argues that “rape is part of gender-based violence which can be defined as an extreme manifestation of gender inequity, often targeting women and girls because of their vulnerable position in society, which is reinforced and perpetuated by structural patriarchy. In collective, the violence can take many forms, including psychological, physical, or sexual abuse, and has lasting impacts on the survivor’s physical and psychological health”. Suggesting that rape is another manifestation of patriarchy, Matlwa shows the toxic and divisive nature of heightened feelings of gender discrimination during the time of perceived economic scarcity provoked by unequal distribution of resources and unemployment further entrenched by precarity of marginal populations. As such, the construction of democracy as an opportunity for the improvement of the lives of black women simply becomes patriarchal obedience.

As a way of instilling fear in Masechaba, she is told where she has crossed the line and the worst that would happen if she continues to be disobedient. This ensures that she gets a clear message and never thinks about acting against oppressive patriarchy. She states:

They said I was a disappointment that instead of helping my own people, I was running around with kwere-kweres, the very kwere-kweres that were ruining our country, stealing our jobs, using up grants. ... Spoilt, foolish, children like me needed to be taught a lesson, so others would see that the community didn’t hesitate to discipline traitors. (Matlwa, 2017: 113)

Masechaba indicates that it is difficult for her to forget her rape ordeal when a fellow doctor gives her words of support that she should verbalise the incident in the past tense to help her overcome the trauma, Masechaba says:

Dr Phakama wants me to say it. She says it will help. She says by putting it in the past tense I can overcome it. But still when it’s your own life and you’re living it, there is never so clear a distinction. I’m still being raped even now, even when I’m not. (Matlwa, 2017: 118).

Masechaba's expression is used to emphasise how her rape incident will remain a scar throughout her entire life and that she cannot escape from the trauma it has caused. It also reveals the coincidence of men's obsession with brutal control of women with the responsibility of patriarchy in the national arena, which shows that notions of equality and freedom in the democratic South Africa are an impediment to the development of democratic South Africa. Masechaba eventually realises that women are enslaved by patriarchy. She observes:

We're exposing this dark strain of self-hatred on our race. We are giving them evidence that we are indeed a foolish, self-loathing people. A thing to be pitied. ... These girls have only been working a few months and already they're enriching the industries that strive to oppress us instead of building our communities. (Matlwa, 2017: 50)

Masechaba's expression can be attested through Gqola's view that "fear is exhausting, and exhausted women may not have enough energy left to revolt." (Gqola, 2021: 184). Therefore, the women who are not revolting against their oppression might be because they are tired of fighting a losing battle against men and patriarchy as a whole.

Matlwa's novel produces a strong sense of temporal female connectedness as outlined by Gqola and a simultaneity at a national level where there is a categorization of women as controllable through death threats and rape without repercussions. Matlwa uses Masechaba's feeling of betrayal by Nyasha when she leaves the country, which allows us to understand Matlwa's novel as plotting on the same threats and rape situations that although disparate, result in catastrophic consequences for populations represented by Masechaba. Indicating this connection as the country deals with transition, Masechaba expresses what the terrible treatment of immigrants will do to the democratic South Africa. She says:

It will give white people more ammunition, so they can scoff at us and say, you see, we told you your people are animals. Our country was still growing, and adjusting, and these things would settle with time. ...I should rise above it and be like the forefathers of the nation, who denied themselves for a greater cause. (Matlwa, 2017: 127)

These words capture Masechaba's feelings about the treatment and the way she thinks it is not helping black South Africans, rather it takes them back to white men's oppression. It only proves that they are indeed horrible beings who want women and foreigners to live in fear. The irony lies in the connection of the women's suppression and men's possession of power. These seemingly dissimilar processes are connected by Masechaba's witness to Nyasha's experience of discrimination and her own tragedy of gang-rape.

The portrayal of Masechaba's bodily experiences or curative rape and the introduction of her forefathers of the nation in the narrative is executed through an illogical analogy to reveal how men living in the democratic South Africa are trying to write African women out of history by silencing them. The analogy glosses over male and female sexual and gendered differences in broad strokes that refuse to acknowledge that she was raped because she is female, which is something her forefathers did not go through. According to Dlamini (2022: 14) "no forefather could possibly undergo the same experience as Masechaba. Therefore, Masechaba mimes a language of radicalism because it is in tandem with the times within which she lives, and it helps her to create relations, though these are not reciprocated by the hospital staff." On the contrary, Matlwa's presentation of Nyasha's point of view concerning Masechaba's rape "accords colonialism a huge significance in the lives of African men and the choices they make; it marks a refusal to challenge masculinism and the sexism of black men. Instead, it pushes focalisation on white men and colonialism while leaving African men's misogyny and violence intact." (Dlamini, 2022: 14).

The alignment of colonialism and violence allows falsity to pervade the political realms, thus disabling the principles of accountability. Masechaba's mother and the nurses in the hospital adopt the same stance. They fail to mention and refer to her rape as sexual violation. Instead, they use the term "condolences" to refer to it. This naturalizes rape and equates it with death. Dlamini (2022) argues that their empathic concern for Masechaba is not aroused by the need to challenge male violence towards women, but it is animated by their fears of being raped in the hospital. Therefore, their reaction is an attempt to persuade Masechaba to confess that she was raped because of the petition, because of what she wore on call, because she threw caution to the wind, because the security guards were absent. This does not problematize rape or the

rapists, but it serves as an assurance that the good choices and behaviours of women will exempt them from sexual violation.

6.5. Contemporary Failure and Hope in the next Generation

Unlike in the previous novel where there is no hope in the future generation using Loki's drug problem as an example, Matlwa aligns the fourth part of the novel to represent the denouement of the narrative. However, the novel proffers no solutions to the problems that the author presents in the story. It ends with a flicker of hope for Masechaba in the form of what she considers a gift, the baby girl (Mpho) whose birth heals the protagonist and provides her with a fresh start in life. Dlamini (2022) argues that Matlwa's novel contributes towards private and national circuits of transformation that mainly focus on the economies of affect and empathy. The focus on the lack of empathy and psychological fatigue of the doctors and the numerous social problems are subtly linked to apartheid and post-apartheid politics of othering. Thus, Masechaba lays her hope on the next generation with the hope that they will know better and therefore do better than them. This, however, reveals the failure of women living in contemporary South Africa to bring an end to the discrimination and abuse, as well as the hope of equality.

Moreover, gender discrimination and abuse through patriarchy are trends that come to the fore in the novel as portrayed by Matlwa. This is similar to *Blessed Girl* analysed in the previous chapter where young female adults date older men for money; both trends are national crises that threaten mainly young South African women. Matlwa's novel illuminates that the new South African patriarchy has a similar racial economic structure to the apartheid regime. She highlights the similarities between the abuse towards women living in South Africa and the racism of the slave and racialized societies, and architecture of slave-ordered Cape Colony as coined by Gqola (2015). The narrator, Masechaba, who is constantly questioning her own behaviour, is very much aware of the link. This leads Masechaba initially to compare her attitude to the conditions she witnesses to the white liberals who opposed apartheid yet took no real action against it. This presentation of mixed emotions tells that Masechaba's generation has failed against the existing brutal patriarchal dominating discourses and therefore feel guilty. She therefore justifies the discriminatory behaviour of her colleagues at the hospital and does not challenge their prejudice. She admits that

instead of telling them what they are doing is wrong, and possibly illegal, I do nothing. I'm a coward. If this were apartheid, I'd be one of those quiet white people who just stood by and watched it happen. (Matlwa, 2017: 49) Masechaba is complicit in many of the hypocritical behaviours until she befriends Nyasha and got raped. Therefore, Masechaba might have been unaware of the hidden agendas that were pushed by patriarchy which resulted in the mocking of Nyasha and her fellow country women. The implication is that Masechaba's fellow country women are also unaware since they have never been raped or befriended an immigrant. Therefore, the generation does not realize what is happening around their femininity and womanhood, which is something Masechaba might be planning to teach her daughter about, hence the belief that her daughter is the light at the end of the tunnel. Gqola (2021) asserts that "although agents of patriarchy and the state may attempt to silence and bankrupt those who rise against it, hundreds of thousands more will sprout and amplify the project of disrupting patriarchy, interrupting the female fear factory, and unlearning its influence everywhere" (190-191). Thus, regardless of the misfortunes that Masechaba's generation of women suffers, the next generation might be equipped to end and tackle the matters with urgency and be free in the future. Masechaba quotes her mother saying:

Mpho is like those flowers, those night-time flowers that only bloom when the sun is long forgotten, like the evening primrose with all its healing powers (Matlwa, 2017: 156).

Period Pain paints a picture of a society whose failure to live up to the promises of its liberation from decades of race-based oppression has spawned a general sense of malaise, an atmosphere of disenchantment. Due to their long history of subjection to oppression, black South Africans ought to develop empathic feelings towards their women, on the contrary, the horrors of the past are still lingeringly repeated against women due to the hold of oppressive and violent patriarchy. Ngom (2019: 2065) asserts: "Kopano Matlwa's book stands as a decided reminder that there is a long way to go before the expectations of post-1994 are fulfilled every inch". Ultimately, Matlwa teaches us that in the face of a national crisis, women are far from hope in that they are not considered as equal because of their vulnerability which gives rise to the failure to voice their opinions.

Additionally, one of the most important takeaways from the agency and portrayal of her lead character encourages cultivation of love and tolerance as well as forgiveness as ways to rise above hatred of any hue. By submitting that “there is goodness in all of us,” despite the threat posed to humanity by bigotry and gender-based violence, Masechaba appeals to everyone’s better self to mediate a world free from evil. Her praxis rules out a constant digging up of old memories in that it, from a post-colonial vantage point, has the potential for seriously crippling efforts towards general and multicultural harmony, especially in a country coming out of decades of racial oppression. Ngom (2019) argues that Masechaba’s consciousness about the insignificance of living with the traumatic memory of apartheid justifies her all-out drive to push for forgiveness, and to strike a blow for the triumph of universal values of peace and dignity.

In contemporary South Africa as portrayed by Matlwa, illegality is still associated with gender and sex. As Gqola explains, women are “rendered as socially female, and therefore safe to violate” (Gqola, 2021:19) on the basis that they are too weak to be entitled as equal to men. However, the introduction and description of Mpho lays a different purpose and a promising future since she is conceived by a woman who knows right from wrong and who has learnt a lot from her misfortunes as a woman, and also as a woman living in a democratic South Africa. Even though Matlwa reveals that the weight of history hangs heavily on democratic-era South Africa, she admits that decades of domination have had lingering effects on every aspect of life in the Rainbow Nation. The seemingly intractable culture of gender-based violence and rape that has eaten so deeply into South African social fabric doubtlessly stretches its roots to the oppressively weighty yoke of subjugation under which South African black population had lived from the moment of colonization to the end of apartheid.

6.6. Conclusion

Matlwa’s depiction of the tragedy that befalls her heroine and other women in a democratic South Africa allows her to explore and expose the problematics of identity as it relates to sex and gender. Through the portrayal of Masechaba who suffers oppression and is raped because of her gender and acceptance of immigrants, Matlwa shows that femininity social constructions often have tragic consequences during this period of economic transition and black empowerment where black men are in control.

Furthermore, Matlwa reveals that black patriarchy or black men subjugate women living in South Africa. In this regard, curative rape and fear of the female characters, signifies the triumph of advanced racial patriarchy's ability to interpenetrate all aspects of contemporary life in South Africa. Contrary to the globalized constructions of patriarchy, *Period Pain* suggests that democratic South African society is saturated with destructive principles of inequality against women. The novel indicates that in South Africa, the dissociation of humanity as seen in Masechaba and other women in *Period Pain* will intensify as long as black men still consider themselves superior and remain in power serving their selfish interests. The next chapter provides a conclusion to the study by drawing out some of the major convergencies and divergencies in the four novels analysed in this research.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

This research demonstrated and discussed the similar and different ways black South African female novelists depict and represent cultural and racial aspects that give rise to female patriarchal oppression in South Africa. It demonstrated the challenges faced by mostly black South African women. The research explored the nuanced and multifaceted ways in which black South African female novelists engage with the pervasive issues of female oppression, patriarchy, and the intersecting challenges of race and culture in a post-apartheid context. Using Steady's theory and Du Bois' concept of double consciousness, the characters struggle to reconcile their African identity with the constraints imposed by a Euro-centric and patriarchal society, impacting their sense of belonging.

It is clear that the selected authors do not only give voice to the specific struggles of black women but also highlight the resilience, agency, and complexities that shape their experiences. Though useful to a certain degree, the concept of double consciousness has its pitfalls when applied to the South African social setting. The novels discussed in this study show that the concept is flawed in that in South Africa, triple consciousness is evident in some aspects. This is because as represented, patriarchy exists in most aspects of the country mostly with discrimination of immigrants regardless of their sex or gender centred by social ideologies and eurocentrism. Therefore, some of the characters in the narratives are not discriminated because of their sex and race only but due to their nationality as well. The aspect of nationally then involves men who are also discriminated. Matlwa's *Period Pain* depicts a scenario where due to being a woman, Masechaba is raped by men who see her as a threat and sell out because she is a South African woman who befriends a foreigner. This represents the complexity of ideologies and social constructs of patriarchy and its use of force. The use of masculine force upon male immigrants demonstrates the co-existence of patriarchy and xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa.

Research in African feminism show that certain levels of sexual dominance exist in certain parts of the continent. However, historically, and using Chioma's insights, such dominance was not deemed oppressive, rather it was a norm that both men and women accepted. Thus, pre-colonial African cultures tolerated these different forms of

male dominance and exercise of power on women. The dominance was considered normal and natural with women not taking it as abuse or oppression. However, this did not shield women from the oppression that prohibited them from equality and getting the same treatment, education, job opportunities as men. It was only the acceptance of oppressive forces that kept women silent. It is this normalisation of oppressive patriarchy that the study's selected novels. *The Ones with Purpose* shows a distrust in masculine rule as outlined in patriarchal relations because of the way men are a disappointment by running away from their responsibilities. Men expect women to juggle with motherhood as part of their responsibilities while men do not carry out their fatherhood responsibilities. Consecutively, black South African women face patriarchal oppression which often leads to their emotional fatigue.

Coconut, Chapter 3 showed that women juggle with a sense of belonging and identity due to double oppression emanating from race and gender. The chapter demonstrated that women living in the democratic era are faced with western social constructs which negatively affect their lives. The chapter explored western beauty ethics to demonstrate how the black females lost their identities when white people did not recognise them as equals even when they spoke the same language and adopted the same lifestyle. Ironically, fellow black people viewed these coconuts as a disgrace because of speaking the white man's language and adopting the western lifestyle. The chapter demonstrated how the western culture brought an imbalance as seen in Ofilwe who suffered from a sense of unbelonging when her white friends criticised her skin colour and her brother pointed out that she had abandoned her Pedi culture and Africanism.

Coconut subliminally uses the moving of the Tlou family from the townships to the suburbs to depict conditions and change in black families which lead to cultural displacement. This cultural displacement mostly affects black women who are socially defined by their beauty and skin colour. Unlike the other novels, *Matlwa* depicts the main characters' challenges through their desire to be white. This desire leads to many social challenges and even loss of identity as the characters abandon their own culture and embrace western values. The chapter highlighted identity crises and also showed how the transition of the characters into a western lifestyle emotionally affected those that were close to them. Ofilwe's mother was mocked by her own husband because of her poor command of the English language, while Fikile sided with a white patron

at the café and embarrassed her fellow black sister. Fikile also criticised black people and even called them names. This self-hatred is a sign of identity crisis which afflicts these characters.

In *Coconut*, the treatment of Ofilwe's mother by her father was examined and it was evident that Mr Tlou used his masculine power to physically abuse his wife and used his patriarchal advantages to cause her emotional pain. This was evidence of oppressive patriarchy that still dominates South African matrimonial relationships today. Mr Tlou's lack of sympathy and empathy for his wife's lack of command of the English language shows that he is caught up in Eurocentric thinking which measures one's intelligence by the extent of one's fluency in European languages. Ofilwe's father's attitude and behaviour shows what happens when Eurocentrism converges with oppressive African patriarchy.

Moreover, the same masculine power is run through ideologies in Chapter 4 which demonstrated that the representation of women in literature has been dominated by domestic responsibilities which confine women to social inequality. Moreover, confining women to such roles and responsibilities leaves them with no knowledge on how to carry out responsibilities and roles that were supposed to be taken by men when the men are unavailable at home due to different reasons. Chapter 4 examined *The Ones with Purpose*, a novel that depicts the way social constructs and family in general traumatise women because they are not socialised to fend for themselves but are expected to carry heavy social responsibilities when men fail. The chapter demonstrated that black women are traumatised by trying to cope with the principles laid out by a patriarchal society which expects them to silently endure problems brought by men. The domestic expectations are linked to masculine dominance shaped by patriarchal rules which view men as superior. Steady (1981) states that African feminism focuses on female autonomy and collaboration, prioritises nature over culture, and emphasises the importance of children, shared motherhood, and kinship. According to Steady, African feminist literature is dedicated to the liberation of all African people. While it draws from the global feminist movement, African feminist discourse carefully distinguishes the issues unique to the African context. It also critiques certain aspects of traditional African cultures without devaluing them, recognizing that these elements may be perceived differently by women from various social classes. A growing area of interest for theorists like Steady has been the role of

men in this movement. The reasoning is that, for African feminism to succeed as a compassionate reform effort, it cannot endorse separation from men. Rejecting male exclusion is thus a key characteristic of African feminism, setting it apart from Western feminism. Although *The Ones with Purpose* is not precisely a novel that broaches the theme of patriarchy, it does so in an indirect way through its use of feminism and centralising female characters. It criticises patriarchy as the main alignment of the family structure and the cause of loss of sense of belonging and also shows that the structure of the family along with who takes which responsibilities and social constructs cannot be reduced to the question of nature and abilities.

Similarly, Makholwa's *Blessed Girl* reveals how patriarchal social constructs isolate Gladys and blame her for the misfortunes that would have been prevented by the society had they offered her support and guidelines throughout the process of raising Bontle by herself. The chapter also reveals the dangers of social media in the hands of young female adults who aspire for perceived Western urban comforts. Bontle, the main character, tries to make a living through transactional sexual liaison with rich old men. She also lives a lie trying to impress people by posting what seems to be a glamorous life on social media. The fact that she ends up as paraplegic on a wheelchair infected with HIV and eventually commits suicide serves as a warning to young women who neglect their education in pursuit of a life that is meant to impress men with physical appearance. By depicting other young women such as Tsholo who empower themselves through education and not by having sex with rich old men, Makholwa admonishes young women to find less destructive ways of gaining financial independence.

Blessed Girl suggests that men are weak and they avoid facing their challenges whereby they abandon their responsibilities. By contrast, women are shown as courageous and willing to shoulder their responsibilities. For example, both Bontle and her mother were willing to walk away from home for an independent and better life. Despite her destructive lifestyle, Bontle's role in her son's life reveals that women are always ready to take care of their children. On the other hand, Vusi, Loki's father, abandons the responsibility of caring and providing for his son only to come back when Loki was already a teenager. Similarly, Ntokozo, Bontle's husband, turns to drugs when he cannot cope with the pressures of his job. The teenager Loki also becomes a drug addict in an attempt to deal with his emotional and psychological problems.

Despite courageously taking care of their loved ones, *The Blessed Girl* also shows that some women are naive as demonstrated by Bontle's generation misuse of social media to try and impress her followers and her refusal to do disciplined hard work for her upkeep. Similarly, Matlwa's *Coconut* depicts the negative influence and pressure of social media on young black women. *The Blessed Girl* also shows that parents and grownups have the duty of caring and protecting young people, especially girls. For example, Gladys, Bontle's mother, fails to protect her fourteen-year-old daughter from sexual predators. The narrative suggests that this results in childhood trauma that affects Bontle for the rest of her life. Furthermore, Bontle's mother does not report to the police what is essentially statutory rape of her daughter by Vusi who was twice Bontle's age when he had sexual relations with her.

Finally, Chapter 6 examined Matlwa's *Period Pain* demonstrating that rape was used to silence Masechaba from speaking up against the abuse of immigrants by the community. Black men adopt destructive masculinities to control women and get what they want in life, which includes oppressing women and ganging up against those that speak up by raping them. The use of rape to silence women in democratic South Africa has not turned the country into a state that protects all its citizens. Both *Blessed Girl* and *Period Pain* show that rape is a social aberration that harms victims physically and psychologically and also dehumanises the perpetrators.

Largely, the chapter on *Period Pain* argued that the novel demonstrates the failures of the rainbow nation as South Africa has become more gender unequal due to oppressive patriarchy and destructive masculinities. The novel also exposes the discrimination that exists among women themselves as seen through Masechaba's initial attitude towards migrant women. The novel further shows that black leaders who have taken the reins after the end of apartheid are corrupt, leading to the decay of public institutions such as hospitals where Masechaba is a doctor.

Overall, the novels examined in this dissertation suggest that black women should unite in sisterhood to overcome oppressive patriarchy and violent masculinities in the democratic South Africa. In *Coconut*, Ofilwe comes to a realisation that her adopting Eurocentric worldview contributes to her father's oppressive and cruel patriarchy against her mother. *The Ones with Purpose* portrays strong female characters such as Fikile and Anele who prove that women can overcome problems brought about by

irresponsible men. In *The Blessed Girl*, although Bontle's life ends in tragedy, she has come to a deep realisation that there are other ways for women to be financially independent other than allowing themselves to be sexual prey of rich old men. Similarly, *Period Pain* emphasises that Masechaba's problems would have been alleviated if she got support from her fellow black sisters. Instead of emotionally supporting her after her rape ordeal, other women insinuate that she deserved to be raped because of her rebellious feminine attitude. The dissertation established that South African black women suffer double oppression and exploitation; first as black individuals and secondly as women.

Furthermore, the dissertation also established that the nation in the narratives is in crisis, firstly as per family with its own ideals, and secondly as a country afflicted by oppressive and violent patriarchy. As families, the Tlous in *Coconut* are faced with a male provider who forces the family to adhere to his Eurocentric views which leads to the daughter losing her sense of identity while her mother experiences mockery and criticism for failing to fit in. In *The Ones with Purpose*, the Mabuza family loses a male bread winner and becomes a female child-headed household but tragically loses the same provider to cancer at a later stage. In *The Blessed Girl*, Gladys and Bontle as a family turn into women who strive for a better life by sleeping with men they do not love. In *Period Pain*, Masechaba is faced with working and staying in an environment where patriarchal thinking is forced upon women to hate and mistreat immigrants with the threat of being brutally attacked and raped should they rebel.

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