NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 In his doctoral thesis ‘Ideology and Form in South African Autobiographical Writing: A Study of the Autobiographies of Five South African Authors’ (UNISA: 1996, 3) Thengamehlo Harold Ngwenya argues that:

Selfhood is achieved with only a degree of accuracy through locating the writers within broader categories to which they belong by virtue of their material circumstances, values, interests and aspirations.

2 William Spengeman (1980, 188-189) emphasises that the growth in such scholarship is not fortuitous:

The displacement of critical emphasis from life to text in the study of autobiography can be attributed partly to the development of literary criticism as a whole, which has shifted its interests along the same lines over the past half century.

3 See for instance Gita Rajan’s article ‘Subversive-Subaltern Identity: Indira Gandhi as the Speaking Subject’ in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (eds). De/Colonizing the Subject – The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography, 197-222.

4 As quoted by Thengamehlo Ngwenya (1996, 19). Watts writes:

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

5 Others would include Georges Gusdorf, Janet Varner Gunn, Sidonie Smith and John Sturrock.
Here I refer specifically to Judith Coullie, Thengamehlo Ngwenya, and Lynda Gilfillan’s doctoral works.


Recent findings show the longevity of black settlement in the country, a favourite subject of the current president, Thabo Mbeki. In his state of the nation address on February 08, 2002, he observed:

Remarkable new finds by South African archaeologists at Blombos Cave in the Eastern Cape indicate that the prehistory of Africa and its people now needs rewriting. Blombos Cave has produced evidence that African people were producing exquisite bone tools and delicately made stone spear points more than 70 000 years ago. But the most spectacular find is a slab of ochre engraved with abstract designs 77 000 years ago

(‘President Mbeki’s State of the Nation Address’: website: http://www.iol.co.za).

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO


17 As quoted in Olney. After a philosophical discussion of considerable length and of great interest on the ‘logos’ in fifth-century Greece, Guthrie says of the word Heraclitus uses it in Fragment 50 (“Listening to me the Logos is wise to agree that all things are one”): The Logos is (a) something which one hears (the commonest meaning), (b) that which regulates all events, a kind of universal law of becoming, (c) something with the independent existence in him who gives it verbal expression’. G.S. Kirk & J.E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge, CUP: 1966:18) hold that ‘logos’ is ‘the unifying formula or
proportionate method of arrangement of things, which might almost be termed the structural plan of things both individual and sum'.

18 For the purpose of the arguments being advanced, it is important to take Smith's terms universal, essential and metaphysical as synonymous since they point to the conception of the human being as a phenomenon separable and beyond the ideologically/culturally constructed. The term self points to an understanding of the human being as metaphysical, essential, and universal. Subject, on the other hand, has modern theoretical currency and implies the culturally constructed notion of 'selfhood'.

19 Challenged on the notion that women were not equal to men, Sojourner was unremitting in her criticism: 'Well, children, whar dar is so much racket must be something out o’ kilter. I tink dat ’twixt de niggers of de Sout and de women at de Norf all talking ’bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all dis here talking ’bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have the best places ... and ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! ... I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ain’t I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ain’t I a woman? I have borne five children and I seen ’em mos all sold off into slavery, and when I cried with a mother’s grief, none but Jesus hear – and ain’t I a woman?'


22 Bergland, ‘Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject’, 163, n.4.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE


26 Kunene and Alverson’s comments reflect a practice that is common across many or most parts of Africa.

27 Liz Gunner, ‘Songs of Innocence and Experience: Women as Composers and Performers of Izibongo, Zulu Praise Poetry’. Cherry Clayton (ed.)


31 It is noteworthy to realise that at the time of the Nationalist Party triumph in 1948, the South African flag was layered with symbolism: it included a miniature British Union Jack and banners of the two Afrikaner republics on a backdrop of the
colours of Holland. See Anthony Marx, Making Race and Nation, 81.

An interesting point about Dr Verwoerd is offered by Alan Paton in Journey Continued (110 ff.) where he asks quite seriously whether Verwoerd was just mad, or mad and evil. See also Z.K Matthews’ letter to his wife Frieda dated March 11, 1957 in Frieda Bokwe Matthews’ Remembrances. Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1995, 121.

The same example can be taken from Mattera’s lineage discussed above (pp. 120-121).

See for instance Slovo’s Slovo – The Unfinished Autobiography (89), where he writes about how Ruth First, as a journalist, exposed this labour practice: ‘For a few days Ruth and I watched the departure of these mobile cages packed with wretched men who had ventured forth into the white streets of Johannesburg without the right piece of paper. For this ‘crime’ they labour 12 hours a day in the hot sun, dressed in sacks and feel the boss-boy’s sjambok.’

See for instance this writer’s review of Afrocentric or Eurocentric? Our Task in Multicultural South Africa; Quest: Philosophical Discussions, XI No. 1-2, 1997).

See Carl Niehaus, Fighting for Hope, 42 and 110; and Ruth First, 117 Days, 138.


NOTES TO PART II: INTRODUCTION


Monica Wilson, Freedom for My People, 234.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR


42 Writing on the coat of arms, written in the San language, worded as !ke e:/karra //ke – unity in diversity.


44 It is difficult, in all honesty, to determine when all the texts were written, in part because some were published abroad and some within South Africa. I can only be certain of the Modisane text (first published 1963), Mphahlele (finished in Nigeria, at least the second half of it, around 1958), Abrahams (written on England when he was in exile 1949). Plomer’s text was written in the early 1970s, Campbell’s around late 1940s and Mary Benson in the mid-1980s. The retrospective view that autobiographers take makes it rather difficult to know when they actually started their books. Only Slovo makes it a point to note that, with a life lived in exile, he started making notes about his life by the mid-1980s.

45 This may not be seen as a generic form by which the autobiographies came into being. A similar though different autos emerges from Helen Joseph’s Side By Side: An Autobiography of Helen Joseph (1986). Joseph spent a number of years in British India as a schoolteacher before journeying and ultimately settling in South Africa.

46 Plomer is being willfully blind to the truth here pertaining to the pass system. In practice, there were many passes forming a very difficult obstacle course for any
'native' wishing to work and live in the city and its locations. From being a villager to a townsman, the following order of passes had to be procured: to leave the village, there was the Trek Pass. This allowed the person to travel to the city. On arrival in the city there was to be the Identification Pass and the Six-day Special Pass. The Six-Day Special Pass was protection while the holder searched for work, failure in which would have the holder picked up to and spend two weeks in jail as a vagrant. After securing work, the person had to have a Monthly Pass, which was regarded as a contract of service subject to it being renewed every new month without fail by the employer. If on his free days he wished to visit anywhere within the vicinity of the city, he would have to acquire a Travelling Pass from his employer. Visits to mainly black areas necessitated the acquisition of Day Special Pass from his employer, and a Location Visitor's Pass from the superintendent of the location where his friends lived. To lodge in the location nearer his friends meant that location superintendent checked first with the Pass Office to establish if he had a 'clean' record. If so, he got his Lodger's Permit. To travel without fear after nine at night meant he had to have a Night Special Pass.

47 I am indebted to Judith Coullie for these observations and how they are used by Campbell to construct a textual personality. 'Self, Life and Writing in Selected South African Autobiographical Texts', Chapter Three, note 8.


50 Sophiatown was not completely razed to the ground. The Church of Christ the King for instance was left intact, and a good number of perfectly adequate houses were taken over by the state, without compensating the owners. Such houses were bought at bargain prices by civil servants, and the suburb re-named Triomf (triumph). See Marlene van Niekerk's eponymous and prize-winning novel (Jonathan Ball Publishers 1994, English translation by Leon de Kock, 1999).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE


NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX


58 In his ‘Introduction’, Mackenzie writes: ‘As a South African-born ‘Coloured’, Bessie Head was subjected to all the brutalities meted out to those citizens not born white, and she, as a ‘first generation’ child of a bi-racial origin, bore the full brunt of South Africa’s discriminatory legislation. Her place of birth, foster childhood, adolescence as an orphan, her failed marriage and experiences as a ‘non-white’ in the various ghettos around the cities of South Africa form the
background to the first phase in which this volume is divided’ (x).


60 Here Head anticipates the perceptive essay by Steve Biko in I Write What I Like

61 Mackenzie, ‘Chronology’, 104.


63 Mackenzie, ‘Chronology’, 105.

64 Mphahlele here anticipates, in action, what Foucault theorises. As Foucault observes:

The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he [sic] do so? … The work of an intellectual is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblemazation (in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as a citizen to play) (Foucault, in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed), Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984. Trans. Alan Sheridan et al. New York and London: Routledge, 1988:265).

65 This section initially appeared in its original form as a review article for MASA, the newspaper of the University of the North titled ‘De Klerk: Of Old Grudges and Wives’, 19 April 1999.

66 Chief Albert Luthuli, South Africa’s first Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1961, was the president of the African National Congress and had a very moderating influence on its activities. His autobiography, Let My People Go (1962) records in minute detail the various means that the Congress took from the 1940s to 1960 when it was banned, to negotiate with successive governments for a political dispensation accommodating all South Africans.
In a strange way, in order to survive, the immigrants will do anything to acquire a South African identity document since it secures them social security, medicinal benefits and access to housing. If a woman loses an identity document, for instance, she might find herself ‘married’ to a man she never met, totally messing up her official life. It is a pity that the state has not passed a legislation similar to that of the United States, the Identity Theft Act of 1998.