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Mmangoana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng (The child's mother grabs the sharp end of the knife - old Setswana proverb)

The word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ..., but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own - MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, ‘Discourse in the Novel’.

Perhaps all one can really hope, all I am entitled to, is no more than this: to write it down. To report what I know. So that it will not be possible for any man ever to say again: 'I knew nothing about it’ - ANDRÉ P. BRINK, A Dry White Season.

One of the major fronts in the war against colonialism is the writing of our own history - DABI NKULULEKO, ‘The right to self-determination in research’
Wherever and whenever there are the oppressed and the oppressor, the sombre fact is that the oppressed are often party to their own oppression. In teaching the literature of the Afrikaners as was expected of me by the education authorities, I may have unconsciously collaborated in manipulating the minds of our children in the direction the oppressor demanded. This study is therefore

DEDICATED TO

the thousands of high school pupils and college students who became the victims of another injustice but who nevertheless provided me with so much pleasure while teaching them.
Preface

‘But what is there to say about the black woman as a character in the Afrikaans novel?’ ‘Are there enough black women characters in the Afrikaans novel to warrant a dissertation? If so, are they functional characters?’ These and similar questions were put to me by well-intending (and also not such well-intending) people, black and white, female and male, South African and non-South African. For example, Dr Helize van Vuuren, academic and literary critic, asked such questions and before I could reply, remarked: ‘Thank goodness for Poppie Nongena!’ (informal conversation, Amsterdam 1989); Prof. Dr Jakes Gerwel, Rector of the University of Western Cape and literary critic, asked the same questions in an informal conversation in Amsterdam 1990. It is significant that these South Africans, one white and female, the other black and male, both implied and acknowledged by their questions that the black woman as character in the Afrikaans novel is largely an absent unit, which indeed she is. For a long time she has been a non-entity and non-visible, at best a ‘filler’ with no function other than giving an indication of the socio-political milieu of the South Africa of the Malans, Strijdoms, Verwoerds, Vorsters, Bothas and De Klerks.

Apartheid with its concomitant racism, sexism and class-consciousness is an emotional issue - it cannot be anything else. Apartheid has spread through our physical, mental and spiritual being like a slow-combustion fire, threatening to destroy us in its enveloping flames; the literature of a dominant class created by apartheid policies collaborates in this process of destruction. While I have tried to contain my anger, it may rear its ugly head from time to time in the ensuing pages. To try and look at apartheid and its artistic products in a detached manner would be a denial of our right to predicate our existence and experientiality.

Why have I entitled this dissertation ‘Impaired Vision’? Human vision can be impaired by different factors which may leave one temporarily blinded or which may have a permanent effect upon the afflicted. More often than not, impaired vision is the result of congenital disease. White Afrikaners' vision of blacks has been almost irreparably impaired by the congenital disease of early European prejudice. How does one cure defective genes?

The translation of quotations from the novels is mine, except in the case of André P. Brink's novels Looking on Darkness and A Chain of Voices and Elsa Joubert's Poppie Nongena.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my promotor, Prof. Dr Mineke Schipper de Leeuw, for her patient direction, encouragement and stimulating thoughts about my work and for never being too busy to listen or comment. I am especially grateful for her insight into and understanding of the several anomalies of my situation. Special thanks go to Prof. Dr Jakes Gerwel and Prof. Dr Elrud Ibsch for agreeing to act as co-promotor and referee respectively, despite their heavy academic responsibilities and busy schedules. Their comments were of much value indeed.

Prof. Dr Vernon February has not only been a friend and brother but a pillar of strength when I found it difficult to cope with the realities of living and studying in a foreign country. Penny Parker-Shaw of Petersfield, England, carefully proofread my work while at the same time offering valuable suggestions. I wish to acknowledge the continual support and encouragement of the South African community in the Netherlands, especially my comrades in the African National Congress. My sincere thanks and appreciation go to Olga Rees-Loff for her supportive role. When we were dreaming our dreams and hoping our hopes in those pre-fabricated asbestos classrooms in the searing heat and freezing cold of the Karoo summers and winters in the mid-1950s, did it ever occur to us that our paths would cross again in Amsterdam nearly forty years later? I wish to thank Mathieu Derckx for translating the ‘Stellingen’ and ‘Samenvatting’ into Dutch.

The group of promovendi under Prof. Schipper's direction provided me with many valuable insights during our animated discussions. Thanks go to them as well as to the Faculteit der Letteren of the Vrije Universiteit and the Rijksuniversiteit of Leiden.

The support and encouragement from family and friends in South Africa never failed to lift my spirits. Warm and special thoughts are of my mother who, like Ma-Rose, is ‘always there to return to’, even in flights of the imagination and our uncanny telepathy.

Due thanks go to the EOC-Vrije Universiteit Fellowship Programme and the functionaries concerned for enabling me to undertake this research in the Netherlands; the Africa Educational Trust in London and the United Nations Educational Training Programme for Southern Africa (UNETPSA) in Geneva for additional financial assistance.

Amsterdam
September 1991
Chapter 1
Introduction

This study pertains to a specific and regional field which is determined by a specific set of material and ideological conditions and produced in a specific historical period. The purpose is to examine how black women are portrayed in the Afrikaans novel after 1948, i.e. how they are perceived in an apartheid society by authors who are sometimes the very proponents of the apartheid ideology. This study has been born partly out of a concern about women's oppression and marginalisation which often assume covert forms, one of which is the artistic products of a society. While it is true that several studies have been done about ‘race’ in South African literature and that socio-political research about the black woman has been and is undertaken, it is also true that, to my knowledge, no comprehensive study has been undertaken about the black woman's status in the Afrikaans novel. It therefore becomes imperative to look into this area of the black woman's situation, to examine how her zero status in society is either reflected or abrogated in the Afrikaans novel.

I have already mentioned in the Preface how underexposed the black woman is in the literature of the Afrikaners. As far as selection of novels for this study is concerned, the truth of the matter is that I had very little to choose from - the novels more or less selected themselves. I have tried, however, to include at least one representative novel from each specific historical period, even though the black woman as a character in some of these novels has a peripheral role. The justification of my choice of novels shall be made clear in the chapters dealing with them.

The first forty years of apartheid rule (1948-1988) covered in this study is broadly divided into three historical periods:

1. 1948-1959, i.e. the beginning of institutionalised apartheid to the beginning of the end of the old rural order in the Afrikaans literary tradition;

2. 1960-1975: The period of severe repression by the government, as well as the period of the Sestigers and a new awareness about the greater Africa in the Afrikaans novel.
I have tried to deal with the novels chronologically. However, the pattern is somewhat disturbed by dealing with Brink's novel *A Chain of Voices* (1982) in Chapter 5 and Elsa Joubert's novel *Poppie Nongena* (1978) in Chapter 6. The reasons for this discrepancy are: (i) Since I deal with the Sestigers in Chapter 4 and since Brink is the key-figure of this movement, it is expedient to place a discussion of his work in that particular slot; (ii) I am dealing with male authors first, as they were the first to incorporate into their stories the black woman as a character - women novelists are discussed in a separate chapter and are left for last, mainly because of the intransigence on the part of Afrikaner women authors to portray black women in their works.

A considerable part of this study is devoted to the South African context, for example, I am devoting an entire chapter to the situation of black and white/Afrikaner women and introduce contextual information in the other chapters as well. The South African reality cannot be divorced from its literary products; the socio-political views of a person/group can be related to its/their literary products.

In the biological sciences, it has long been recognised that ‘race’ is a fiction. Gates (1985:5) posits:

> Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which - more often than not - also have fundamentally opposed economic interests. Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so arbitrary in its application ... we carelessly use language in such a way as to will this sense of natural difference into our formulations. To do so is to engage in a pernicious act of language, one which exacerbates the complex problem of cultural or ethnic difference, rather than to assuage or redress it (author's emphasis).

Rex (1986:18/19) reiterates this view and explains why the notion that ‘race’ could be used to justify unequal treatment was rejected. It would therefore seem that I am engaging ‘in a pernicious act of language’ by introducing the concept of ‘race’ so frequently in my study. The truth of the matter is that the Afrikaans literature abounds with racial stereotypes and even racist attitudes; racial difference is expressed explicitly, even by some of the progressive authors. In the hierarchical structure of South African society and in the hierarchical descriptions in the literature of most Afrikaners, it is difficult if not impossible to avoid the concept of ‘race’.
1.1 Literature as discourse

Robert Hodge (1990:viii) defines literature and/as discourse as follows:

[L]iterature is seen as a social construct, sustained at particular times by particular groups to serve particular interests: an ideological machine concerned with legitimation and control, working through a system that excludes or privileges certain kinds of text (literary texts and the ‘canon’) and specific readings and modes of reading (literary criticism and its exemplary works) ... [The concept ‘discourse’] emphasizes literature as a process rather than simply a set of products; a process which is intrinsically social, connected at every point with mechanisms and institutions that mediate and control the flow of knowledge and power in a community.

A few pronouncements in this regard by South Africans about South African literature would not be amiss:

Writing, no matter how mediocre or excellent, becomes a mirror reflecting the tapestry of our fibre as a people (Wally Mongane Serote, in an address read on his behalf to the Oxford Literature Conference, 20.03.90).

Our literature, in all its articulations, mirror the community. Perhaps therefore inevitably it will show us a broken image, a partial vision: historically we are a cracked society (Breyten Breytenbach, paper read at the Victoria Falls Conference, 1989).

The Afrikaans literature as a whole can be read as a political discourse. The main literary trends and the most influential works are directly or indirectly determined by political, social and economic relationships (Ampie Coetzee 1988:1).

The Afrikaans novel reveals an unusually explicit convergence between the political-ideological and literary discourses, and offers a wide range of examples of this kind of ‘embedding’ in literature. If we accept that discourse is both interpretive and pre-interpretive and that the literary work can never have one single central identifiable ‘meaning’, then we must also accept that different readings are possible. In my examination of the selected novels, I shall of necessity assess how they ‘reveal a determinate absence and resort to an eloquent silence’ (Macherey 1978:76) about the black woman but also how they, by means of various manipulative strategies, overemphasise and reinforce myths and stereotypes attached to the black woman by the colonisers.

In view of the fact that a literary work is constantly engaged in a process of communication, it follows that it will have a manipulative influence, which is partly of an ideological nature, on the reader (Bal 1983/4:266). Bal suggests that this influence can be neutralised by criticism of the ideological suppositions in the text.
In order to do this, it is important not only to establish who narrates, focalizes and acts but also who does not narrate, focalize and act. As a result, I have focused
mainly on the narratological devices of narration, focalization and characterisation in the selected novels to establish the level of discourse and the pictures emerging of the black female characters.

1.2 Myth and stereotype

If the Afrikaans literature ‘can be read as a political discourse’, then it becomes necessary to examine how myths and stereotypes about black women have fed the political ideology of the Afrikaner.

The function of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction. According to Barthes (1973:109), myth is ‘a system of communication, that is a message ... a mode of signification, a form whose main function is to give to a historical intention a natural justification’. Myth functions to produce ideological effects, because it is the form taken by ideological interpellations to seek assent to the propositions of ideology. Myth and ideology are then interdependent, for myths provide a moral basis for a social system; they imply that a given system is just and right.

Mieke Bal (1983/4:266) defines myths as ‘fictional representations of unconscious or sub-conscious ideologies for which certain groups of people want to provide a justified origin. A myth attempts to change a historically nurtured and certainly not a universal vision into a valid, even “eternal” one. The myth in fact proves that “it has always been like that”’ (my translation). The concept of myth then becomes theoretically fruitful when it is seen as structurally necessary to the ideology in whose cause it is articulated, for example the colonial settler myth of land previously unoccupied which was necessary to the justification of the settler presence.

Mineke Schipper (1984:23) posits:

Myths are assumed to be true; the dogmas and pronouncements which they contain are not to be questioned within the community to which they belong. In fact, of course, myths have often been modified and manipulated by those in power to serve their own aims. Myths confirm and explain how man created order out of chaos, and how, by means of culture, he succeeded in imposing his will on nature.

It would seem, then, that there is general consensus about the interdependency of myth and ideology, that myths are utilised by the ruling class to justify its ideology.

Similarly, the concept of stereotype is necessary to the ideology in whose cause it is employed. February (1981:vi) states that ‘stereotypes function as a means of
social control and repression’. He continues by stating that one of the direct consequences of colonialism and racism was that the colonised or the discriminated invariably became the dupe of a series of rationalisations whereby ruling classes justify their dominant position in society. ‘The stereotype facilitates the task of the power-holder and makes it possible to stipulate a code of conduct for the blacks on the basis of characteristics imputed to them by whites. This process is nowhere more apparent than in South Africa, where blacks are allowed upward social mobility only within the institutionalized and ascribed pattern’ (February 1981:vii).

An attempt will be made in this study to show that colonial/Afrikaner myths and stereotypes about the indigenous peoples of South Africa, especially the indigenous woman, shaped not only Afrikaner ideology but also found ready propagation and perpetuation in the novels of the Afrikaners.

I may be criticised for my ambivalence in expressing sympathy with the black women characters on the one hand and harshly condemning the very authors who created them on the other. How am I to justify this ambivalence? My sympathy for those characters is fed by an identification with their situation; my criticism of the authors is generated by their ambivalence in trying on the one hand to paint a sympathetic picture of the black woman while on the other never neglecting to highlight and even emphasise her deviance according to their value systems. It is incumbent upon me to try and expose this colonisation of the black female body and mind by white male (and also more recently, female) power.

**Eindnoten:**

2. Ibid.
Chapter 2
Fact and fiction about South African women

A discussion of the literary response to legislation and events in South Africa during the period 1948-1988 would be incomplete without a discussion of the political, legal, social and economic position of South African women - black and white - and the literary response or non-response to their situation. Rather than give an explanation of the situation of all white women in South Africa which is not as uniform as it would appear on the surface, I shall confine myself to the situation of the Afrikaner woman, since the white female characters in the novels by Afrikaner writers are almost invariably Afrikaners. Although this study concerns itself with the portrayal of the black woman character by Afrikaner authors, I nevertheless find it imperative to include an overview of the portrayal of the Afrikaner woman by these authors in order to explicate the similarities and/or differences between the portrayal of black and white female characters, in addition to finding possible reasons for the dissimilarities, if any, in their portrayal. By juxtaposing the positions of these two groups of women, I hope to present a clearer perspective of the situation of the black woman in an apartheid society, reinforced and entrenched by the writers of Afrikaans novels.

In present-day South Africa, through the system of apartheid, the white minority denies the cultural and linguistic variety amongst themselves and emphasises their being one single group. However, in reality the Afrikaners see themselves as a distinct group while the rest of the white population is broadly referred to as the ‘English-speaking’ sector, irrespective of the fact that this sector comprises British, Jews, Greeks, Portuguese, Italians, smaller groups of Western and Eastern Europeans, and the Japanese who are accorded ‘honorary’ white status by the government. Because of the specific divisions created by apartheid, the position of South African women is far from uniform. The enormous economic, political, cultural and racial cleavages between black and white women form the context in which these women must be studied and in which they are projected by white writers.

To what extent does the literary work capture or reflect the mood and spirit of the authors' own social environment? How are black and white female characters
depicted by Afrikaner authors and how ‘true’ to real life are these characterisations? What further insights can be gained from this picture in respect of women's contemporary position and their attitudes to it? How explicitly do these authors expose women's situation and can these expositions provide us with a key to a critique of South African society?

In an attempt to arrive at possible answers to the above questions, it is necessary to examine briefly South African women's political, legal, social and economic position before the Afrikaner authors' response to those positions can be examined. Although some parallels exist in the position of white and black women, their status in South African society, their oppression and their struggles for liberation are widely divergent. Of necessity, then, these two groups will be dealt with separately, not least because of the separateness of their situation engendered by the system of apartheid. In dealing with the position of Afrikaner women more extensively than with that of black women, an attempt is made to illuminate more poignantly the inequalities between white and black. In any case, the position of black women in South African society will be revealed from time to time in the ensuing chapters.

2.1. Afrikaner women

Although in many instances it is virtually impossible in the South African context to make a clear distinction between ‘white’ and ‘coloured’ when that distinction is based solely on physical features such as complexion, nose-shape, eyes and hair, I nevertheless use this term as applied in South Africa, i.e. those South Africans of European extraction who have no ‘dark blood’ in their genealogy and who have been classified as ‘white’ according to the Population Registration Act of 1950.

According to the 1985 census, there are 4.5 million whites in South Africa, who constitute 15.6% of the entire population. They are a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-linguistic and multi-religious group and the only binding factor among them happens to be their ostensibly white skins and Caucasian hair. This is an extremely dubious basis for classification, since the swarthiness of many Jews and southern Europeans as well as the crinkly hair of many a Jew fly in the face of such a classification. Notwithstanding, of the 4.5 million whites, 2.7 million are Afrikaners and since women form about 50% of the country's population, one can safely assume that Afrikaner women form 28% of the white population and only 4.7% of the entire South African population. It is with this tiny fraction of the South African population that I concern myself in this part of the chapter, since, as I have already stated, the white women characters in Afrikaans novels are more often than not Afrikaners.
2.1.1 Calvinism and Afrikaner women

To understand fully the Afrikaner woman's position in society, it is necessary to include here a brief explanation of the religious doctrine on which the entire Afrikaner ideology is based.

Stolid Calvinists who were isolated from the great Enlightenment of the 18th century in Europe, the Boers believed themselves to be the Chosen of God and based this belief on Deut. 14:2: ‘For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth’ (quoted from Crapanzano 1986:70). In their harsh frontier existence the Afrikaners developed Israeli-like visions of a civilising mission by a chosen people with a destiny in a sea of primitive heathen natives. So fanatical were some of them in this belief and so convinced were they that they were God's Chosen people, that they firmly believed they were led out of Egypt to the Promised Land when they reached a tributary of the Limpopo River and named it Nylstroom. Such ideological fixations were to permeate Afrikaner life and society and ultimately the apartheid regime's policies.

The Afrikaner, W.A. de Klerk, playwright and author of such novels as Die Wolkemaker (1949), Die uur van verlange (1953) and Die Laer (1964), bases his popular book The Puritans in Africa (1975) on the premise that ‘the key to the Afrikaners is Calvinism’ (p. xiv). In the Afrikaner perception, according to De Klerk, apartheid is less of an oppressive tyranny than the necessary result of the divine task ‘to restructure the world according to a vision of justice’, the vocation of ‘a separate nation called by God to create a new humanity’ (p. 233). This familiar reasoning, obfuscating even the profit motive behind the forced labour system, does not explicitly state that it is religion which has provided the Afrikaner with the necessary vision of the black person as fit only for labour. The frontier isolation in which the early Afrikaners found themselves and which led to individual Bible interpretations fostered their unique race attitudes. Unlike the other mainline Christian churches in South Africa (Anglican, Methodist, Catholic) all of which strongly oppose apartheid, the Dutch Reformed Churches have sanctioned apartheid. To support their own position and the government's policy of apartheid, the DRC has sought biblical justification, e.g. I Cor. 12: 12-30; Rom. 12: 4-5; I Cor. 15: 39-41.

From the beginning of the 18th century, white racism has been a constant factor in Afrikaner history, reinforced by discriminatory practices by English-speaking white South Africans. This white racism has been expressed in terms of an ideal segregation and a reality of white domination and black labour. The dichotomy between ideal and reality was reflected in the very Biblical imagery used by the frontier farmers. On the one hand, the black South African was a Canaanite and

thus subject to the ban; on the other hand, he was a son of Ham and thus destined to be a hewer of wood and drawer of water for his white compatriot.

Throughout the period, in public speeches, in parliamentary debates, in press statements and articles, in fact whenever the opportunity presented itself, Afrikaners expressed fears of miscegenation. For example, a cabinet minister, N.J. van der Merwe, stated in a parliamentary debate in 1936 that the Afrikaners' struggle was not to oppress the native or to trample on the ‘coloured’ people but that their struggle was rather to maintain the existence of the white race in South Africa. Political equality, according to him, would inevitably lead to economic and social equality and ‘if you have social equality, you subsequently get mixing of the blood, and the ruin of the white race’ (cited by Moodie 1975:246). This sexual component of white anxiety was expressed through the theme of the Afrikaner woman and her moral purity, a theme exploited by Nationalist policy to instil racial prejudice and even hatred.

However, the Calvinist two-class distinction of the elect and the damned, which supposedly provided the justification for the exclusion of the children of Ham from Afrikanerdom and its myriad of sacred cows, is not the only basis for the racist ideology of the Afrikaner. Rigid racial outlooks are transmitted and reinforced by a religiously justified patriarchal family system. According to Jan J. Loubser in his article ‘Calvinism, Equality and Inclusion’, conformity pressure of authoritarian socialization accounts for the fact that ‘repressed aggressiveness to the strong Afrikaner authority figure could be displaced and projected on the African’. On the part of the Afrikaner woman, this ‘projected aggressiveness’ towards the black man is overshadowed by a profound fear of the black male as a potential rapist, a fear instilled by her menfolk through the glorification of the Afrikaner woman's moral virtue and their obsession with ‘purity’ of race. For this reason, white women on the one hand fear and despise the black male, while on the other, white men wish to annihilate the black male. Paul Hoch states:

> Defence of manhood demanded, above all, the defence of the white goddesses of civilisation against the dark, sex-crazed barbarians at the gate, and such fears provided the most explosive fuel for interracial hatred, lynching and war. (Hoch 1979:47)

In the early 1980s, Vincent Crapanzano, an American professor of Anthropology and Comparative Literature, lived among and interviewed several whites, both English- and Afrikaans-speaking, in the Western Cape area where the most ‘verligte’ or liberal Afrikaners are to be found. In his discussions with Afrikaners, the father's position in the family was emphasised time and again and led him to conclude that the head of the family is ‘an authoritarian father who was never to be questioned’ (Crapanzano 1986:74). In his interviews with the Afrikaner
Hennie van der Merwe (not his real name), this issue again surfaced. Hennie told him: “In the Afrikaner tradition you do what your dad tells you... You don't question him. You were to be like him. There is a tremendous identification between father and son. The son puts on a show of masculinity. We have a special word for it in Afrikaans: kragdadigheid... The son must show his potency, his kragdadigheid, before his father. He must show it, but he can't question the father's kragdadigheid” (p. 74).

In addition to transmitting and reinforcing rigid racial outlooks and establishing the father's unquestionable position of authority, the patriarchal family system, one of the cornerstones of Calvinism and Scripturally founded, makes the woman the minor, acquiescent, compromising and subordinate figure in the family structure. An Afrikaner woman, Caroline du Preez (not her real name), told Crapanzano: “Women are subordinate to their husbands, and although there is some talk about feminism, no one takes it particularly seriously” (p. 162). The Afrikaner woman's role is clearly defined, her perimeters fixed and her morals prescribed by a religion which has become irrelevant and impracticable in the present circumstances of South Africa and the world at large. Apart from her biological reproductive function which must ensure the survival of the Afrikaner nation, it is expected of her to be a ‘good’ wife at all times, to behave herself with decorum according to Afrikaner criteria and to honour the pledge she has made in the marriage vows to ‘honour and obey’ her husband without the latter being expected to do the same.

It is therefore not surprising that the Afrikaner woman was completely by-passed and left out of politics and economics and that she, for her part, was quite content to leave such matters in the able hands of the menfolk. She was quite happy to be the mistress of the household with a number of black servants to rule over in her microcosm. Until quite recently, her only political role was to serve koeksisters (almost like doughnuts but dribbling with syrup), melktert (milk tart) and boeretroos (literally ‘farmer's comfort’, i.e. coffee) at party political rallies or on election day, to churn out metres and metres of boerewors (literally ‘farmer's sausage’) - or rather her domestic servant(s) would - for the celebratory braaivleis (barbeque) afterwards and to pin buttonholes on the aspiring party candidate. The resultant sloth created by her marginalised position and by delegating most of the housework to her servants even inspired someone like Olive Schreiner, who was no adversary of the Afrikaner and less so of the Afrikaner woman, to write of her in The Story of an African Farm (1883) as someone of ‘listless inactivity’ who ‘seems fixed to the chair like a piece of furniture’ and that even ‘the young girls sit with their hands before them as listless as their mothers’.

Because of women's childbearing ability and their ‘traditional’ role of rearing and teaching their children, it is generally accepted that as such they are the bearers [Judy H. Gardner, Impaired Vision. Portraits of Black Women in the Afrikaans Novel 1948-1988]
of their culture. In the case of the Afrikaner woman this role is emphasised and even extended: she is not only the bearer of her culture but more importantly, the carrier of light and civilisation to and in the ‘dark’ continent of Africa. She must therefore at all times be chaste, honourable and be honoured, in short, she must be the epitome of virtue. Matters affecting women worldwide, like the right of women to choose whether they want to have an abortion or not, are not debatable - they are simply excluded from the agenda of the Calvinist churches to which most Afrikaner women belong.

The Calvinist doctrine among some segments of Afrikanerdom does not manifest itself only in the race issue. Racial prejudice is but a facet of a bigot syndrome that includes other outgroups. In this vein, Dutch Reformed Church circles still refer to the Catholic Church, in analogy with the ‘swart gevaar’ and the ‘Rooi gevaar’ (black threat and Communist threat), as the ‘Roomse gevaar’ (Roman Catholic threat). Synods regularly express alarm over statistics that the Catholic Church, comprising approximately 6% of the total population, could become stronger through Southern European immigrants. As recently as 1975 the Cape Synod of the DRC without dissent adopted a motion making an ‘urgent call’ on its members to have more children as a means of ‘combating the growth of the Catholic Church’. Church members are urged not to frequent Catholic institutions such as hospitals, in order to keep uninfected. Women's rights and feminist emancipation have not even become issues of synodal pronouncements.

2.1.2 Afrikaner women's struggles and heroism

Despite the bonds of patriarchy and the limitations imposed upon them by their religious doctrine, Afrikaner women nevertheless have a long history of struggle and heroism. However, it must be emphasised that their struggles were not directed at liberating themselves from the pervasive patriarchal oppression or from a repressive regime. Rather, they aspired to fight side by side with their menfolk to ‘tame’ the wild land, to claim it for themselves and their descendants and to preserve their ‘pure’ Afrikaner identity. Afrikaner women's struggles and heroism are most succinctly expressed by two events in South African history which even today are the bases for the sanctification and glorification of the Afrikaner past: the Great Trek, specifically the Blaauwkrantz massacre and the Battle of Blood River (1838) and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), both of which will be dealt with in some detail. Moodie states:

> The sacred history [of the Afrikaner] is made up of two cycles of suffering and death - the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War. The suffering and death of women and children at Blaauwkrantz foreshadowed the agony of the concentration camps. (Moodie 1975:12)
Among the many reasons put forward for the Afrikaner farmers' decision to ‘quit the fruitful land of [their] birth’, the best known are those as expounded by Piet Retief, the Voortrekker leader, in his famous ‘Retief Manifesto’ published in the Grahamstown Journal of 2 February 1837. The most important of these reasons are:

1. ‘...those evils which threaten the colony by the turbulent and dishonest conduct of vagrants, who are allowed to infest the country in every part...’

2. ‘...the severe losses which [the Boers] have been forced to sustain by the emancipation of [their] slaves...’

3. ‘...the continual system of plunder which [the Boers] have ever endured from the Caffres and other coloured classes...’

4. ‘...the unjustifiable odium which has been cast upon [the Boers] by interested and dishonest persons, under the cloak of religion...’

(Adapted from Van Jaarsveld 1971:54)

It is interesting to note that three out of the four most important reasons for the migration of the Boers concern the indigenous peoples of South Africa who have not only been robbed of their land but who have also been systematically eliminated, if not by the Boers' firearms then by epidemics brought into the country by immigrants from Europe, for example the smallpox epidemic which virtually wiped out the San. It is ironic that the Boers should have complained about the ‘severe losses’ which they had been ‘forced to sustain by the emancipation of [their] slaves’, since those very slaves, bought for anything between 60 and 100 riksdalers, had paid for themselves over and over by supplying the Boers with unlimited free labour; yet the Boers expected to be compensated for the loss of such free labour. The fourth reason is directly connected with the indigenes, since the ‘dishonest persons under the cloak of religion’, the missionaries of the London Missionary Society, tried to make them aware of their humanity, to the chagrin of the Boers.

According to De Klerk (1975:33), the worst of the new British colonial policy was ‘the way it interfered with the already generations-old relationships between master and servant’. When the British talked of equality in the Colony and put strict limits on the masters' authority over their servants, the Boers found it abominable as the servants were neither white nor always Christian. Retief's niece, Anna Steenkamp, was so outraged by these British attitudes that she wrote:

And yet it is not so much their [the slaves’] freedom that drives us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and colour, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdrew in order to preserve our doctrines in purity.'
So, with about 9% of the colony’s total white population, i.e. about 6000 people, having joined, the Trek took off in an attempt to establish an independent Boer republic somewhere in the north, far from the jurisdiction of the British. The Great Trek, in itself insignificant when compared to other mass migrations of people, encountered the usual dangers that any expedition into an unknown and unexplored territory would encounter but in the case of the Voortrekkers - as these migrants became known - these were somewhat minimised because they had among their ranks indigenous people as *spoorsnyers* (trackers), *touleiers* (wagon-leaders), *agterryers* (batmen) and a host of other servants, estimated at about 4000 in all, to make their passage less hazardous. The women and children were transported in wagons while the men went on ahead on horseback. Therefore, to suggest that the Voortrekkers made it all on their own across the treacherous Drakensberg is a myth which only Afrikaner history books try to perpetuate.

It was inevitable that the Voortrekkers would encounter on their trek into the interior black tribes who had inhabited the land long before the white man set foot in South Africa. The first of such encounters culminated in a skirmish at Vegkop in Transorangia (the present Orange Free State) on 16 October 1837 when the Voortrekkers attacked the Ndebele. In this battle, Afrikaner women played their part by loading alternate guns for the men. The Boers thought they had defeated the Ndebele but in fact the latter made off with many thousands of the Boers’ sheep, goats and head of cattle. A few months later, a commando under Hendrik Potgieter launched a ‘remorseless’ attack on Mzilikazi’s Ndebele, killing about 200 of his tribesmen, including many Ndebele women. A year later, once again under the leadership of Potgieter, the Ndebele were once again attacked and defeated, forcing Mzilikazi and his remaining tribesmen to settle beyond the Limpopo River where he founded his new royal kraal and named it Kwa-Bulawayo.

The Voortrekkers could not reach consensus as to the ultimate destination of the Trek. Hendrik Potgieter and Andries Pretorius decided to settle on the highveld of the Transvaal, while Retief and Gerrit Maritz opted for crossing the Drakensberg to settle on the fertile plains of Natal. In Retief’s bid to acquire land from the Zulu king, Dingane, threatening him with the wrath of God if he should engage in double-dealing and thus further provoking the Zulu king, Retief and his party of negotiators came to grief when they were overpowered by the Zulu warriors at Mgungundlovu, the royal kraal of the Zulus. The rest of the party was waiting below the Drakensberg between two tributaries of the Tugela River, the Blaauwkrantz and Bushmans Rivers, on Retief’s return, unbeknown to them that Retief and his party were killed. In the early morning of Saturday, 17 February 1838, the Zulu *impis* attacked the Voortrekker *laagers*. In all about 300 Voortrekkers - men, women and children - and about 250 servants were killed.

The scene is described in terms of martyrdom by various Afrikaner historians, for example:

The earth swarmed with thousands of enemies. No human help was possible and even tiny children cried to the Lord and the voice of the people came up to God (Du Plessis n.d.:104)

and

The grass was matted with the noble blood of women, girls, and tiny babes. The wagons were smashed and burned, the earth white with feathers from the bedding. Infants nursing at their mothers' breast were pierced with tens of assegai - so that both bodies were fixed together. Children were seized by the legs and their heads smashed against wagon wheels. Women's breasts were severed, their bodies mutilated and ravished. Vultures circled over the laager of yesterday; among the dead and the still-smouldering ashes wild animals prowled around - presently to gorge themselves on human flesh. (Preller 1909:152-153)

On Sunday, 16 December 1838 the Voortrekkers took their revenge under the leadership of Andries Pretorius. The Zulus were defeated at the Ncome River which became a river of blood from the fallen bodies of Zulus, and renamed Blood River by the Voortrekkers. South African history books rarely make mention of the pivotal role played by indigenous people who fought on the side of the Boers in securing their victory. Many acts of brutality against the defeated Zulus are reported, resembling in many aspects the brutal acts perpetrated by the security forces against blacks in contemporary South Africa. The Voortrekkers established their Republic of Natalia which was short-lived, for in 1843 the British annexed the territory, thus placing the Voortrekkers once again under British rule. Rather than endure this new abomination, they chose to trek back over the Drakensberg, to Transorangia and Transvaal. The anger and bitterness of the Afrikaner community in Natal resulted in one of the most defiant statements ever made by an Afrikaner woman. Four hundred Voortrekker women, led by Susanna (Johanna?) Smit, wife of the Voortrekker predikant and sister of the Voortrekker leader Gerrit Maritz, presented a petition to the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Cloete, an anglicised Afrikaner. At this famous encounter Susanna Smit listed their grievances, and ended by saying:

We would rather go barefoot back over the Drakensberg to meet our independence or our death, than bow down before a government which has treated us as the British have done.\(^*\)

As proof of the Afrikaner woman's robust constitution, capacity for work and suffering and unwavering determination, the myth of Afrikaner women having actually crossed the Drakensberg barefoot is maintained and perpetuated in Afrikaner circles. In the late 1970s the Afrikaners of Northern Natal raised

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a statue to Susanna Smit on the very edge of the Drakensberg escarpment at the spot where Retief had led the Boer wagons down into the promised land. Her feet are bare, her face is turned away from Natal; and that is where three-quarters of the Boer settlers went in 1843, back over the mountains - the way they had come.

As an example of male attitudes towards women in the 19th century, the outcome of the Susanna Smit delegation warrants mentioning: these Voortrekker women asserted that they regarded themselves to be as eligible for involvement in the political future of the territory as their men. Cloete subsequently reported to the Governor at the Cape: ‘I endeavoured (but in vain) to impress upon them that such a liberty as they seemed to dream of had never been recognised in any civil society, ... and that however much I sympathised in their feeling ... I considered it a disgrace on their husbands to allow such a state of freedom’ (cited by Walker 1982:10).

So back over the Drakensberg the Voortrekkers went, only to be afflicted by the British once more. Diamonds and gold were discovered at Kimberley and the Witwatersrand respectively, giving rise to an unprecedented influx of European but mostly British adventurers and fortune-hunters. In 1877 the British annexed the Transvaal Republic, but the Boers won back their freedom in the First War of Liberation (Eerste Vryheidsoorlog) of 1880-1881, ‘by armed force and the might of [their] God’ (Moodie 1975:8). When gold was discovered in 1886, British imperialism once again triumphed. British gold-diggers in the Transvaal Republic demanded the right to vote, Britain intervened on their behalf, but negotiations failed and the Boers took on the might of the British Empire when they declared war on 11 October 1899. By June 1900 both the Orange Free State and the Transvaal had been declared British territory.

The Anglo-Boer War or Second War of Liberation (Tweede Vryheidsoorlog) as it became known, marked the second cycle of suffering and death endured by the Boers. Afrikaner women and children who were found on the farms were driven to the British concentration camps, others fled in agony from the British, only to be rounded up and taken to the ‘murderous women’s camps’ (Smit 1917:133). Over 26 000 Afrikaner women and children died in the concentration camps during this war that lasted less than three years. The main causes of death were famine and disease, although there are ostensibly authentic reports that the women and children were fed ground glass by the British in their efforts to ‘wipe out the Boers’ (Smit 1917:133). He continues his description of the suffering of women and children thus: ‘It was as though the people had been forsaken by God ... The moaning and weeping of sick mothers, the crying and pleading of little children dying of hunger in cold tents mounted up to heaven. But in vain’. Moodie (1975:10) states that it was the sufferings of their families alone that caused the Boers to give up the fight and surrender at Vereeniging in 1902.
The suffering was not yet over. When the First World War broke out in Europe (1914), two of the Afrikaners' most illustrious generals, Botha and Smuts, defected to the British imperialist cause. South Africa was brought into the war on the side of Britain. Afrikaners were expected to join ranks with the people who had been their bitter enemies only fifteen years earlier. A rebellion under the leadership of Generals De Wet and Beyers started with renewed bloodshed not only between Boer and Briton but also between Boer and Boer. The Afrikaner citizen force was called up to crush the rebellion, and the result was much enmity between Afrikaners in the North and those in the South, the latter having largely contributed to the failure of the uprising. One of the martyrs of the rebellion, Jopie Fourie, died before a firing squad on the orders of General Smuts. For Moodie (1975:11), this reaffirmed the theme of Afrikaner suffering, and the 'sacred period of Afrikaner history' was brought to an end.

Afrikaner women not only suffered during the Anglo-Boer War, but were engaged in acts of heroism from time to time. The 'Petticoat Commando' was a contingent of Boer women spies during the war and must take the credit for some of the victories the Boers gained over the British. After the surrender of the Boers, one of its leading members, Johanna Brandt, declared openly that the struggle had only begun. During the 1914 Rebellion, Gen. De Wet and other leaders were arrested and detained in the Johannesburg Fort. By the middle of 1915, 3000 Afrikaner women gathered in a solemn procession in Pretoria to petition the Governor-General, Lord Buxton, for their immediate release.

Both the 'Petticoat Commando' and the 1915 procession by Afrikaner women had one bizarre repercussion in present-day South African history. It was revealed in July 1981 that the former HNP leader, Dr Albert Hertzog, was funding an extreme rightist group with neo-fascist tendencies, the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), and an equally rightist women's group, the Kappiekommando (Bonnet Brigade) in 1982. Dr Hertzog's action was seen as part of an effort to unite the various right-wing groups. Growing right-wing alarm at the way government policy was developing could also be seen emerging in this period by the short-lived, small protest movement among Afrikaner housewives in Pretoria. Incongruously dressed in the boiling Pretoria sunshine in the full regalia of Voortrekker women, replete with large bonnets and full-length skirts, all their costumes were pitchblack. Their most notable protest involved carrying a coffin to the Union Buildings to symbolise what they saw as the murder of the Afrikaner traditions. The invocation of Voortrekker imagery and the use of the term 'kommando' were particularly significant. This group has been incorporated into the AWB where they are determined to continue their militant action in order to preserve Boer hegemony and 'purity'.
2.1.3 Images of the Afrikaner woman

The Afrikaner woman was the martyr and hero of the Afrikaner ‘sacred’ history. Without wishing to demean or minimise her heroism which all women in all ages have in common when having to protect their children from peril, one has to point out that her woes were the direct result of a situation of war, which came about not entirely without provocation on the part of Afrikaner men. In all conflicts the innocent, invariably the women and children, suffer most. In the case of the Afrikaner woman the suffering was exacerbated because her religious doctrine required or even demanded of her to accept almost passively her husband's decisions, no matter how wrong or right they were. In the dynamic and formative periods in the history of South Africa, women and even less so Afrikaner women, seem hardly to have featured in the surge of events. Those heroes who appear in the history books written by men are all men; the wars fought over land were between men; the decision-makers, the politicians, were all men.

The Afrikaner woman's suffering and heroism were not more significant, more extraordinary or any worse than those of women in other war situations. Yet the mind boggles when one considers the absolute ambivalent position Afrikaner men take towards the woman. On the one hand she is subordinate and banished to the periphery of important events in the Afrikaner political and economic life; on the other hand she is glorified, sanctified and honoured as a prized symbol of Afrikanerdom.

The Afrikaner ‘civil faith’ as Moodie calls it, reserved a very special place of pride for the figure of the Afrikaner woman. ‘If the Afrikaner man was indeed the instrumental agent who worked out God's will in Afrikaans history, the woman provided a deep well of moral fortitude which complemented and even surpassed her husband's more practical exploits’ (Moodie 1975:17). In the struggle against the English, her strength of courage buoyed up the wavering will of her husband, urging him on to further feats. The Calvinist ‘father’ of the Afrikaners, Ds. J.D. Kestell, was reported in Die Burger of 17 December 1929 as having said about the Afrikaner woman:

If we take note of all that the woman has meant in our people's history, then we cannot but recognise that undergirding it all lay a great moral principle. Her influence was consoling and uplifting. The sheer power of the life of our people had its roots in the pure life of the woman. Her influence kept the man from despair.

She not only comforted and sustained her husband in times of crisis, it was because of her willingness (read subjection) to accompany him into the wilderness that the racial purity of Afrikanerdom had been preserved, according to this civil faith. It was to the woman that God had entrusted the task of bearing and raising
Afrikaner children in the true civil faith. She held the future in trust on behalf of God and her people. Hers was the responsibility of inspiring the younger generation - the hope of Afrikanerdom - with deep love for their language and culture.

The Afrikaner woman in her faith and purity took on certain attributes of the Holy Virgin in Catholicism. She was a symbol of God's grace and intercession in the life of His people. Throughout the bitter Afrikaner struggle for freedom, she provided a haven of gentleness and renewal. The innocence and purity of Afrikaner women and children made the tales of their suffering, at the hands of the Zulus and English alike, all the more atrocious. The suffering of these innocent, righteous victims not only enhanced the analogy to the Passion, the patience and enduring faith of the women in the concentration camps carried a further message for every Afrikaner. According to the Afrikaner eschatology, the coming republic would result from divine, not human action. Thus the role of the faithful Afrikaner demanded patient suffering and watchful waiting in anticipation of the republic which God Himself would call into being. Thus by example the Afrikaner woman taught one of the deepest truths of the civil religion.

Afrikaners gave concrete expression of these images of the Afrikaner woman, specifically in the two monuments in the two capitals of the former Boer Republics. The Voortrekker Monument on ‘Monumentkoppie’ in Pretoria, is the holiest of holy shrines for the Afrikaner, and the ground on which it stands is revered as almost holy. The foundation stone was laid in December 1938, the centenary of the Voortrekkers' victory over the Zulus, and the building completed in 1940. This monument is a vast granite temple visible for miles around. Broad steps lead through a bas-relief oxwagon laager to the main hall. Halfway up, the steps divide to make room for a huge Van Wouw statue of an austere pioneer woman with her two children. Significantly, the two sets of steps lead to the ‘Hall of Heroes’, from which the statue of the Voortrekker woman is excluded. Nevertheless, according to the guide-book, the place of honour is given to the woman because she made everything possible by trekking with her husband, by giving up her home, by bringing her children, by being ready to face sickness and danger in order to bring civilisation to the heart of this black continent. Also, according to the guidebook, the woman suffers but she does not look down. She looks straight ahead. The children do not look back. They look up. Carved on the wall behind this bronze statue, are four black wildebeest, also symbolic. ‘The statue of the Voortrekker Mother and her children symbolises white civilisation while the black wildebeest portray the ever threatening dangers of Africa. The determined attitude and triumphant expression on the woman's face suggest that the dangers are receding and that the victory of civilisation is an accomplished fact’ (the official guidebook).

Just outside Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State is the ‘Vrouemonument’ which bears the simple inscription: ‘Aan onze heldinnen en lieve kinderen; Uw wil
Geschiede’ (‘To our heroines and beloved children; Thy will be done’) and which was erected in honour of those women and children who died in the concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War. Within a circular enclosure stands a sandstone obelisk. At its foot is a statue by Anton van Wouw of a bareheaded woman holding a dying child. Another woman in Voortrekker clothes stands beside her staring resolutely out across the Free State veld. On either side of this group are two bas-relief panels. On the left panel, under the caption ‘Voor Vrijheid, Volk en Vaderland’ (‘For Freedom, Volk and Country’), we see women and children entering a concentration camp, herded together and clutching a few paltry possessions. On the right panel is depicted an emaciated child dying in a camp tent with his mother by his side, while the life of the camp carries on around them. Ironically, within the circular enclosure of the monument lie the graves of Pres. Steyn, Gen. De Wet and Ds. Kestell - the ideal Afrikaner statesman, warrior and churchman respectively - and the grave of the English woman, Emily Hobhouse, who concerned herself with the plight of the women and children in the concentration camps.

The Afrikaner woman was similarly honoured on various occasions. During the Day of the Vow celebrations in 1916 at Senekal in the Free State, all the speakers dealt specifically with the topic ‘The Afrikaner Woman’, extolling her virtues and appealing to the modern Afrikaner woman to emulate those sterling qualities of the Voortrekker women. The symbolic Ossewatrek (Ox-wagon Trek) of 1938, the centenary of the Battle of Blood River, likewise honoured the Afrikaner woman. The wagons were baptised at historically significant points en route and given names appropriate to the major themes of the sacred history. Five wagons were named after the legendary Trek heroes: ‘Piet Retief’, the martyr; ‘Andries Pretorius’, the victor of Blood River; ‘Louis Trichardt’, the first Trekker; ‘Hendrik Potgieter’, the early Transvaal leader; and, of course, ‘Sarel Cilliers’, author of the Covenant vow. The other four wagons, celebrating the importance of women and children in the sacred saga, were named: ‘Vrouen Moeder’; ‘Dirkie Uys’, after the 14 year old boy who chose to be martyred alongside his father rather than flee from the Zulus; and ‘Johanna van der Merwe’ and ‘Magrieta Prinsloo’, after the two girls who survived the Blaauwkrantz massacre largely because their mothers had hidden the children beneath their own bodies.

2.1.4 Suffrage

To what extent did the above perceptions of the Afrikaner woman influence the decision to give the vote to white women in South Africa? None!

Given the general situation of women, it is not surprising that the scope for women in political work was very restricted. Until 1930 no women in South Africa had the vote and their participation in political parties, both white and black, was very
limited indeed. Most people accepted that women were first and foremost mothers and, furthermore, that motherhood in some way set women apart from a full and equal participation in all spheres of society.

Until women became a more prominent and active part of the country's labour force, there was little public debate on established assumptions of male superiority. Thus, throughout this time (the early 20th century), none of the major political parties regarded women as an important area for political work and propaganda. In the early years of the 20th century most politicians accepted without much thought that it was 'unnatural' for women to meddle in politics. The handful of women who took up the question of women's suffrage were regarded by almost all white politicians as eccentrics at best, dangerous subversives or lunatics at worst.

Much inspired by Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), with its outspoken rejection of women's inferior standing in society, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was established in 1889 which established a Franchise Department in 1895 to champion the cause of women's suffrage. In March 1911, suffragists met in Durban to establish a national women's suffrage society, the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU) to lobby their cause. Their conference drew forth the following editorial in the local newspaper, the *Natal Mercury*:

> We hope the women suffragists have enjoyed their picnic in Durban, but we do not think the political effect of their visit can have rewarded their endeavour, and we cannot pretend that we have any regrets for their non-success.

The white women's suffrage movement was one of the main political campaigns by women in the early 20th century and throws light on their general position in society at the time. Although it stood apart from the great mass of black women, its history has much to tell about the nature of women's organisations in South Africa, as well as the different priorities that have divided white women from black and white English-speaking women from their Afrikaans-speaking counterparts. It illustrates clearly how class and colour divisions have interacted to shape the political consciousness of South African women.

But Afrikaner women played virtually no role in the suffragist movement. The WCTU's Franchise Department was followed by a number of tiny, separate societies that established themselves in all the main urban centres of the country in the first decade of the 20th century. Their membership was small, exclusively white and almost entirely English-speaking. These were to remain the dominant features of the movement throughout its history. The majority of the suffragists were drawn from the privileged strata of society; they had both the education and the leisure to query their restricted role in society; they were energetic and capable.
women, restless for all the opportunities that society offered to their class but denied to their sex.

In 1911 the various local suffrage societies affiliated to form a national body, the WEAU. For the next twenty years this was the premier suffrage organisation in the country, campaigning and lobbying for support through public meetings, press articles and letters, deputations to the authorities, petitions and public statements. Compared to the suffrage campaign being waged by Emily Pankhurst's Union, the South African campaign was a timid affair.

The National Party was prompted in the 1920s to adopt a more flexible attitude towards the question of women's suffrage, mainly because of the sudden influx of Afrikaner women into the cities and into new areas of work. The granting of the vote to women was, however, plainly a political manoeuvre. Unlike in other Western countries where women had to fight a hard and long battle before obtaining the vote, white women in South Africa had the vote practically foisted upon them by the authorities.

In the Cape, the introduction of a ‘non-white’ franchise did not, in the first place, come immediately after the emancipation of the ‘coloured’ population from slavery but had to await the granting of representative government to the colony as a whole. When it was finally granted in 1854, it was on the condition that the franchise be nonracial. A relatively low property qualification was established that applied to whites and blacks alike. The colonists accepted a political arrangement that gave former slaves and indigenous dependents a potential voice in government, not so much from egalitarian conviction but rather because they saw no threat to their social and political dominance from a colour-blind franchise. By the 1850s, the master-servant laws and the conditions of economic survival had firmly locked most of the emancipated slaves back into their ‘traditional’ role as labourers and servants.

In the 1880s, the low franchise qualifications came under increasing attack, mainly because of the vast increase in the potential African vote resulting from the incorporation or annexation of new territories to the east of the old Cape frontier. For example, the region between the Keiskamma and the Kei River (known today as Ciskei), annexed by Britain in 1848, was incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1865; the Transkei was annexed piecemeal by the Cape Colony in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

Since British politicians representing a minority of the white population were more successful in controlling the African vote than those speaking for the Afrikaner majority, and were allegedly using it to help them dominate the responsible cabinet form of government that had existed since 1872, a new Afrikaner political party - the Afrikaner Bond - provided much of the initial support for
suffrage restriction. But English-speakers were also becoming anxious about the potential of Africans to outvote the whites; and, with relatively little white opposition, the voting qualifications were raised and tightened in such a way as to deny the ballot to all but a small fraction of the African population within the expanded borders of the colony.

Legislation of 1887 and 1892 increased the qualifications, required that the necessary property be held in severalty rather than communally (thus denying the vote to ‘tribalised’ Africans) and imposed a literary test. But enough blacks were left on the voters' roll to give them the balance of power in several key constituencies. There were no further attempts by Cape colonists to limit the franchise, for with the rise of a genuine two-party system in the 1890s, each party found that its hold on certain key seats depended on African or ‘coloured’ votes.

While the white electorate was broadened in the 20th century, the traditional qualifications or restrictions remained in effect for ‘coloureds’. The first act of overt political discrimination against ‘coloureds’ occurred when the National Convention of 1908 and 1909 not only failed to extend the non-white franchise of the Cape to the other provinces as it had done in the case of whites, but explicitly barred ‘coloureds’ from sitting in the central parliament.

Finally, women's suffrage became a weapon with which the National Party of Gen. Hertzog, which came to power in 1924, could attack the limited black franchise that still existed. The elimination of the black vote in the Cape had been one of Hertzog's major aims when he took office as prime minister in 1924. The franchise clause had, however, been entrenched in the Union constitution and could not be amended without a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament. Although Hertzog had a majority of seats in parliament, he did not control sufficient votes to achieve his aims of amending the constitution. Repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to secure a majority, Hertzog then turned to women's suffrage to launch his attack from another direction. In 1930 he piloted a Women's Enfranchisement Bill through parliament that applied to white women only. The outcome was never in question and the bill became law. The following year, property and educational qualifications were eliminated for all whites in the Cape and Natal, thus making it possible for more rural and working-class Afrikaners to obtain the vote. Thus, virtually without having had to lift a finger to gain the vote and without having had the qualifications to vote, Afrikaner women became enfranchised. With this act, Hertzog managed to double the white electorate at one stroke and thereby drastically reduce the importance of the black vote in the Cape.

Although the demand for the enfranchisement of women was an explicitly feminist one, the suffrage movement was a racist movement that ignored three-quarters of the women in the country. The great majority of suffragists placed the protection
of their privileges as members of the ruling class before the elimination of sexual discrimination. One of the few Afrikaner suffragists, Aletta Nel, made the following comment when asked by the select committee hearing on women's suffrage in 1926 if she favoured extending the vote to black women: ‘As a woman, sir, yes ... but as a South African born person, I feel that it would be wiser if we gave the vote to the European woman only’.

2.1.5 Contemporary position of the Afrikaner woman

After obtaining the franchise in 1930, the Afrikaner woman remained relatively dormant on the political and economic scene. Possessing all the comforts of white, enfranchised, privileged South African women, either she did not feel the compulsion to become involved in politics, or she was so conditioned to being left out that she did not have the confidence to venture into the political and economic arena. As proof of this, one can mention the thin sprinkling of Afrikaner women who were elected to parliament after 1930. The first Afrikaner woman member of parliament was Mrs Denys Reitz and even she suggested in 1936 that women's domestic role should remain paramount in their lives. It was not until September 1989 that the first woman, Dr Rina Venter, an Afrikaner, was appointed to the cabinet, her portfolio being a ‘traditional’ women's area, health.

But in a capitalist, multi-racial society such as that in South Africa, one not only finds the divisions between black and white, but also between black and black, white and white, Afrikaner and Afrikaner. Capitalism engenders a class system, and the emergence of industrialists, economists, entrepreneurs and politicians - encouraged and actively initiated by that bastion of male domination, the ‘Broederbond’ - among Afrikaners created the big divide between the Afrikaner elite, a strong middle class and the working class. As the economy became more sophisticated, the range of subtleties of class membership became more extended.

It was, as incongruous as it may seem, the working-class Afrikaner woman who became politicised. The great majority of women in the clothing industry in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, were young, white Afrikaner women. They were part of a huge townward movement by rural Afrikaners - indigent farmers, sharecroppers, farmworkers and their families - who could no longer make a living out of agriculture. The ‘poor white’ problem had become a major political issue by this time. With their poverty, lack of education and marketable skills, as well as their reasons for migrating to the towns, the ‘poor whites’ did not differ markedly from the thousands of blacks who were making a similar trek from country to town at that time. But as members of the ruling white group, they occupied a wholly different place in the minds of white politicians, town planners, churchmen and welfare organisations. Their poverty, the degraded living conditions, their fraternisation with blacks in makeshift housing schemes on the edge
of town, were all seen as a direct threat to white hegemony. In 1932 the Carnegie Commission, set up to investigate the ‘poor white’ problem, commented:

Although sexual intercourse between white and coloured exists to a greater degree now than in the past, it is still on the whole the exception, even among poor whites... Signs are however not wanting that this racial barrier is being broken down, especially where the standard of living of some Europeans is approximating more and more to that of natives. (cited by Walker 1982:62)

The Garment Workers’ Union (GWU) grew out of an organisation of garment workers that was formed in 1918. Most of the union's members were young Afrikaner women and some of them went on to become key figures in its organisation, e.g. Katy Viljoen, a prominent organiser in the GWU, and Johanna Cornelius, who became president of the GWU in 1934. What did this spell for the ‘Afrikaner woman’, that hero and martyr of the sacred history? She was now often working in factories side by side with black workers and was being successfully organised into non-racial unions. The Dutch Reformed Churches had to intervene and made a nationwide appeal which urged all ministers ‘to save white civilisation and pure Protestant Christendom; to help our mothers and our daughters who are placed on equal footing with coloureds; to fight the outspoken principles and practices of the GWU which believes in equality between white and non-white (decidedly in conflict with the principles of the Church grounded in God's Word)’ (cited by Moodie 1975:253).

The centenary celebrations of the Voortrekkers' victory at Blood River were being planned at this time and Solly Sachs, General Secretary of the GWU, asked the organisers if a delegation from the union might attend the celebrations in Pretoria. As already stated, most of his members were Afrikaner women who wanted to form part of the various processions in Voortrekker costume. Sachs himself was a Jew and had once been a Communist although he had been expelled from the party in 1931. What also offended Nationalists was that his union was non-racial. The letter he received in reply from the organisers of the centenary celebrations drew attention to ‘the mockery of our national traditions your participation in the Centenary Celebrations will mean’ and continued:

The Afrikaner nation is busy uniting, to mobilise its forces against you and your sort. The thousands of Afrikaner daughters whom you have in your clutches will settle with you ... Our people do not want anything to do with Communists and Jews, the high priests thereof, least of all. The day we Afrikaners begin to settle with you Jews, you will find out that Germany is a Jewish paradise compared with what South Africa will be ... You and Johanna Cornelius, who all day long organise and address kaffirs, will you dare to bring them to the celebrations? They are your fellow workers and ‘Comrades’. We challenge you to come to the celebrations...
It is significant that the title of Sachs' book, from which the above quotation is taken, is *Rebel's Daughters* (1957), referring to the young Afrikaner working-class women who rebelled against the sacred history of the Afrikaners by being prepared to share the workplace with all women in South Africa.

South Africa had to wait until 1975 for another Afrikaner woman to have her name written into the history books of the Afrikaners. Adele van der Spuy, chairperson of ‘Aksie 1975’, formed in 1975 to promote full legal and economic status for all South African women, along with two dozen other women, ‘stormed’ the government buildings in Pretoria to try and present a petition on women's rights. She was knocked about in the effort, vilified and ridiculed by the Afrikaans press, notably *Die Vaderland* and *Rapport*, by Afrikaner politicians *and* a great many Afrikaner women. Many Afrikaans-speaking men referred to her only in pejorative terms. She was chairperson of the National Party branch in the Brandeis constituency of Johannesburg and was put forward by her branch as the party nominee for parliament in the election. Her nomination was overridden at a higher party level, no doubt instigated by the ‘Broederbond’, and she did not stand.

Although Afrikaner women have in recent years become more involved in politics, economics and the judiciary, their numbers remain negligible, given their privileged position and sixty years of enfranchisement. A great number of young Afrikaner women go to university and achieve considerable academic success, only to be confined to the household once they get married and have children. Even today, the ideal Afrikaner woman is the one who keeps a spotless, gleaming home (kept spotless and gleaming by the black domestic servant), is a perfect hostess who excels in the culinary art and presents her guests with the most delicious dishes (prepared by the black cook), who involves herself in Afrikaner cultural, religious and social organisations (while the black nanny minds the children) and who adheres to the codes of the Afrikaner civil religion.

### 2.1.6 The literary response to the Afrikaner woman's position

Having thus considered the position of the Afrikaner woman, the next step is to assess how she is portrayed in the literature of Afrikaans and whether her portrayal is a reflection of the mood and spirit of the authors' own social environment, in this case the social environment of the Afrikaner. Afrikaner authors, men and women, have responded to the position of the Afrikaner woman either by overtly and explicitly portraying that position or, by neglecting to portray that position, implying what the real situation of the Afrikaner woman is.

In a paternalistic society such as that in South Africa, it is to be expected that this paternalism will permeate the artistic and creative projects of the Afrikaners, of which their literary products are the greatest manifestation of patriarchy.
The majority of Afrikaner authors are men, their central characters are mostly men. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, as shall be illustrated later, but it can be argued that patriarchy in South Africa has found a very loyal ally in the literature of the Afrikaners, entrenching and encapsulating the inferior position of women as propounded by their Calvinist-based civil religion.

Since the Afrikaans language gained recognition as a fully-fledged and official language in 1925, the early writers in this medium portrayed the Afrikaner woman in an extremely peripheral role, very seldom making it possible for her to move toward the centre of the events. The strong authority figure of the father dominates, the conflict is usually between father and son, thus sketching a completely male world. Even in the few early novels where the female character features prominently, the woman is seen as an appendage of the man, rather than as an individual in her own right. A case in point is Jan van Melle's novel, *Bart Nel*, in which Francina is continually referred to as ‘Bart's wife’ or ‘the wife of Bart’. Early female authors, for example Audrey Blignault and M.E.R., sketch the daily activities of the woman, the events within her family, thereby emphasising the woman's position in society.

The Anglo-Boer War and the reactions to it formed an important stimulus for literature immediately after 1900. True enough, the poets of that period, in particular Jan Celliers, Totius and Leipoldt, paid tribute in their poetry to the heroism and suffering of the Afrikaner woman during the war. For example, ‘Die Kampsuster’ (Celliers) tells of the sorrow of a dying Afrikaner woman; Totius' anthology *By die Monument* (1908) is elegiac-epic in tone and form and also deals with the grief of women and children. Perhaps the best exponent of this genre is Leipoldt and his anthology *Oom Gert Vertel en Ander Gedigte* (1911) uses irony to emphasise the tragic consequences of the war for women and children. The images Afrikaners have formed of the Afrikaner woman are forcefully reflected by these poets. A novelist who also glorifies the Afrikaner woman, is F.A. Venter, especially in his saga about the Great Trek. The heroism and suffering of the Afrikaner woman during the Blaauwkrantz massacre and the Battle of Blood River are extensively depicted by Venter. Throughout the tetralogy the Afrikaner woman's role of bearer of civilisation is emphasised and portrayed. This role is extended in the novel *Dark Pilgrim*, where the Afrikaner woman is also portrayed as the carrier of the Christian message to the blacks, thus continuing her civilising mission.

It is, however, in the ‘plaasroman’ (farm novel) that the Afrikaners, their culture and their values, are depicted most succinctly, while at the same time depicting the images and status of the Afrikaner woman.

The ‘plaasroman’ was a direct result of the economic situation which prevailed in South Africa at the turn of the century and the consequences this held for the
Afrikaners. Under the custom of inheritance that was prevalent in South Africa into the twentieth century, every son of a white farmer might expect to inherit a portion of the paternal farm. But families were generally large and the practice of dividing the land would result in inheritances too small to be viable farms. The social problem of the emergence of a class of landless farmers was made more acute in the 1930s by years of poor rainfall, low wool prices and general economic depression. The Afrikaans novel of this period naturally gave extended coverage to the phenomena of strife over inheritance (brother against brother, father against son, widow against children), conflict between farmers and land speculators, the hardening of class boundaries between the landed and the landless, the migration of impoverished rural Afrikaners to the cities, competition between black and white labour on the mines and diggings or on the railways, and the threat to traditional values posed by the city (with its liquor, gambling, prostitution and foreign ways) and by the penetration of novel forms of gratification into the countryside. Faced with what was more and more clearly an epoch in the history of the Afrikaner, Afrikaans novelists responded in diverse ways: they celebrated the memory of the old rural values or proclaimed their durability or elaborated schemes for their preservation; they tracked the forces of change to their origins in history (capitalism), society (the Jews) or the cosmic order (God's will, the indifference of the universe); they denounced the rapacity of the new class of speculators; they satirised the pettiness, selfishness and lack of family feeling of the *verengelste* (anglicized) urban Afrikaner.

The ‘plaasroman’ portrays almost without exception, primitive figures with strong, earthy emotions, severe religiousness and hardiness; there are strong bonds of attachment between them, the soil and the seasons; their love of the soil borders on almost religious reverence. The ‘plaasroman’ is an uncomplicated genre in which much attention is given to farming activities - the sensuous aspect is relegated to the background; it generally has a chronological structure; for the most part it portrays an idyllic reality in which the cruelty of life does not often feature; political engagement (specifically the racial problem) plays no significant role.

An important aspect of the ‘plaasroman’ is the patriarchal community which it describes: not only is it a community in which the father figure dominates but also in which certain values connected to the father figure dominate, e.g. tradition and the traditional, inheritance and the succession of generations, norms and values which continue to exist and against which the younger generation, in particular, rebel. In this hierarchical community there is no space for the idealistic dreamer because man/woman is delivered to the struggle against cosmic forces. For this reason the main character is often a hero type who is portrayed in a mythical manner. It is therefore not surprising that the woman in these novels has an extremely peripheral role, is oppressed and is doomed to a life of drudgery.
Of the numerous farm novels written during the period 1920-1940 (those by D.F. Malherbe, Jochem van Bruggen, Johannes van Melle, Mikro, C.M. van den Heever and Abraham Jonker), I wish to refer to only one, *Laat Vrugte* (1939) by C.M. van den Heever because of its so-called ‘feminist visions’ (Van Coller 1987) and also because the women characters can perhaps be considered as prototypes of the images of the Afrikaner woman in the novels of Afrikaans.

In this novel Sybrand is the main character. He occupies the central position in the action and also in respect of thematic elements. Although initially still subjected to his mother’s ‘lewensreg’ (usufruct) of the farm, he soon rules with an iron fist so that almost all the other characters are affected. In the feudal set-up which exists on the farm *Boskloof*, he gradually alienates all his relatives whom he treats like subjects, especially his lonely wife and his natural heir, Henning.

The women in Sybrand’s life are Willa his mother, Betta his first wife and mother of his two children, Maggie his second wife, his daughter Annie, the only female character to whom he shows affection and Maria, his sister, hewn from the same hard rock as Sybrand. Of these women, Willa, Betta and Maggie are perhaps the most representative of Afrikaner women in fiction. Willa, the imperious and uncharitable matriarch, exercises her legal power of the farm with an iron fist. Strong in will and precise in action, she clings obstinately to life and to the farm despite her debilitating illness. Not surprisingly, this brings her in conflict with Sybrand who wishes to run the farm without interference. Bequeathed life-long usufruct over the farm, she exercises her rights mercilessly to claim half of whatever the farm produces. She justifies her refusal to yield up parental authority over a middle-aged son on the grounds that parents who treat their children leniently make them idle and useless and ‘not careful enough of what they have inherited’. This lesson of harshness she learned from her own parents, but its ultimate origin is attributed to the pioneer ancestors: ‘For people who had to clear stretches of bush, build endless *kraal*-walls, plant stone fenceposts..., there was no time for ... softness’ (p. 38). She is able to justify autocracy on the grounds of duty to the farm and to the ancestors who built it up. She sees herself as the repository of the true values of the ancestors, and sees everyone else as *pap* (soft). In her own eyes her virtues are hardness and industry, and her great fear is that the farm will fall into the hands of lazy people who will *boer agteruit* (lose ground). She bears her illness with characteristic Calvinist acceptance of suffering without complaining, hers is a naive belief in the Bible, rigidly adhering to the letter of the law as expressed in the Old Testament.

Betta is quite the opposite of Willa and the true product of the patriarchal society. Her marriage to Sybrand has developed into a loveless union with little communication and intimacy between husband and wife. She is often told to shut up when she ventures to voice an opinion. Her life of lonely household drudgery, oppression, lovelessness and her treatment by her husband as a mere domestic servant,
result in her premature aging. The narrator suggests that her role of house servant is probably the fate of many Afrikaner women. Betta has lost all interest in life, except in her son. The spiritual oppression and hard work have broken and tamed her, like a tired animal in a yoke. The struggles of the years have stripped her of will power. She is extremely forbearing and compliant and her one significant role is that of conciliator between her husband and son. Like true Afrikaners, she is a committed Christian and longs for spiritual communion with fellow Christians, to the chagrin of her husband. But she is tired of life, she does her work with the silent acceptance of a domestic servant and rebels only when her husband threatens the sole anchor in her life, her son. Her premature death therefore comes as no shock. Betta's weak social position, her oppression, represents the general negation of the Afrikaner woman (p. 69) who has to work, bear children and is doomed to silence.

Maggie's un-Afrikaans name already suggests that she is different, also as far as her morals are concerned, from the other typical Afrikaner women and their rigid value systems. She is portrayed as a conniving, scheming and mercenary woman, one whose chief objective is to inherit the farm once she is married to Sybrand and so dispossess the rightful heir. While she was still married to Buks who tragically came to his demise, the gossip-mongers in the district had a field day when there was talk of an adulterous affair between her and Sybrand. Likewise, her adultery with a policeman while she is married to Sybrand, sets the tongues wagging and results in Sybrand's crippling stroke. The field is clear for her to inherit the farm but this is not to be. If the living cannot prevent such an abomination, then the spirits of the ancestors must intervene. The following passage clearly illustrates this:

The dead of Boskloof who had laboured here without cease, whose handiwork stood all around, whose bodies were intergrown with the soil of the farm, shuffled invisible through this house, they were about on the farm, they wanted to preserve it for their blood, they wanted continuity, they wanted to endure in their descendants (p. 302).

For this reason Maggie feels that

the heavy stillness of the farm lay like a motionless reptile on her thoughts, and would slowly drive her to madness. The great farm-stillness in which these people had lived in safety, was outside her, awoke fear in her. She was the intruder who would have to give herself over entirely to the forming forces at work here, or else flee (p. 316).

And flee she does. The silence of the farm has come to be associated no longer with the silence of nature but with the silence of the living dead. The dead want continuity, not because the son is a ‘good’ heir and the new wife a ‘bad’ one but
because a takeover of the farm by a line of intruders will mean the end of the dead's vicarious life.

The inability and powerlessness of the women, even Willa, to stand up to Sybrand, is time and again illustrated when all they can do is to invoke the wrath of God by the words ‘God slaap nie’ (literally ‘God does not sleep’). Betta utters these words when Sybrand maltreats their son (p. 27); Willa threatens Sybrand with these words when he insists that she moves to town to give him a free hand on the farm (p. 43); his sister Maria likewise threatens him when he refuses to assist her and her husband financially (p. 144); even his daughter, the only person he treats with some regard, threatens him with these words after he had changed his will in favour of his new wife (p. 240).

The ‘plaasroman’ of the 1920s and 1930s exercised a clear influence on some novels of a later period. Echoes of events, motives and characters are found in succeeding Afrikaans farm novels. Etienne Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (1962) and especially *Een vir Azazel* (1964) are subtle variations on the characteristics of this genre. Much of their impact is made by thwarting precisely the expectations of the readers. Also Anna M. Louw's *Kroniek van Perdepoort* (1975) and Wilma Stockenström's *Uitdraai* (1976) are thematically and structurally a renewal of this genre; the conflict with concrete forces, e.g. drought, is extended to a conflict with forces in the individual psyche, while the noble love relationship of the old farm novel is perverted (see Chapter 6). Although André Brink's novel, *Rumours of Rain* (1978), can in no way be categorised as a 'plaasroman', much of the action centres around the Afrikaner businessman and entrepreneur, Martin Mynhardt and his attempts to persuade his mother to sell the family farm. Her initial obstinate refusal is based on the fact that she cannot leave the graves of the ancestors.

It goes without saying that the portrayal of the Afrikaner woman by Afrikaner women authors will differ markedly from that by Afrikaner male authors (see Chapter 6).

In this overview of the portrayal of the Afrikaner woman, mention has to be made of André Brink's white heroines, for he is one of the few Afrikaner male authors, if not the only one, to give significant prominence to the woman in his novels. He has often been criticised for creating 'stereotype' white female characters, but the truth of the matter is that these so-called 'stereotypes' are often juxtaposed with Afrikaner female characters to make the differences between them all the more poignant. His female characters are more often than not non-Afrikaners (e.g. Jessica Thomson in *Looking on Darkness*; Nicolette Alford in *The Ambassador*; Bea in *Rumours of Rain*; Melanie in *A Dry White Season*), while somewhere in the background lurks the figure of an Afrikaner woman. In *The Ambassador*, for example, the ambassador's Afrikaner wife, Erika, is portrayed as a morally and
spiritually sterile person, while his lover, Nicolette, provides him with all the excitement he needs away from his dreary work. It is not only sexual excitement that she provides, but she leads him on various journeys of discovery, including that of himself. The impression is gained that Brink nevertheless has a deep reverence for the Afrikaner woman's value systems. In *Rumours of Rain* Elise, the wife of the main character, Martin Mynhardt, is house-proud and has impeccable taste; when she is alone with her childhood sweetheart in very favourable circumstances for an ‘affair’, her strong Calvinist upbringing permits her to resist the temptation; on their wedding night she persuades Martin to pray with her for blessings on the imminent consummation of their marriage.

Brink also acknowledges the rebellious nature of the Afrikaner woman who is prepared to defy her father in order to marry the man of her choice, only to be oppressed for a second time by a husband (cf. Alida in *A Chain of Voices*; Elisabeth in *An Instant in the Wind*). Another rebel is Hester in *A Chain of Voices* who, despite the norms and values of her people thrust upon her, still has a deep admiration for the slave Galant. She is effectively contrasted with a prototype of Afrikanerdom, Cecilia, who prays for forgiveness each time after she and her husband had made love (there is hardly any question of ‘making love’ in their relationship - see Chapter 5).

In the above very cursory overview of the images of the Afrikaner woman in the Afrikaans novel, I could of necessity refer to only a few novels, my basis for selection being older and modern works of fiction, male and female authors, the ‘plaasroman’ and those set in the urban areas.

### 2.2 Black women

The collective term ‘black women’ here refers to African, Asian and ‘coloured’ women who were thus classified by South Africa's Population Registration Act of 1950 (abolished in 1991) which made a further classification of Africans into Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, etc. ‘Black’ is not so much a colour but a concept which perverts the traditionally negative connotations of this colour. Since, according to the 1985 population census, blacks form 84.4% and women about half of the South African population, we can assume that black women form about 42% of the entire population.

It is not my intention to give a comprehensive view of black women by using headings which would correspond to those used in the first part of the chapter. Some of those headings simply do not apply to black women (e.g. ‘suffrage’); some will need several dissertations to illustrate the full extent of the black woman's struggles and heroism and others, e.g. images of the black woman and
the literary response to her situation, shall be dealt with in the ensuing chapters. What follows here is a discussion of merely a fraction of the laws which governed the lives of black women for several decades.

### 2.2.1 Legislation affecting the lives of black women

While it is true that apartheid legislation had devastating effects on *all* black people, my main concern is its effects particularly on African women in view of the discussion of the novel *Poppie Nongena* in Chapter 6.

So much has already been written about the effects of South African legislation on African women that to try and repeat all that here would be a futile exercise and an impossible task. A plethora of apartheid laws with all their subsequent amendments and amendments of amendments had as their main purpose the maintenance of white domination. While the full impact of these laws on South African society will take many years of intensive research to grasp fully the damage they have inflicted not only on blacks but on the entire infra- and super-structure of the country, their effects on African women were exacerbated by the inferior or even non-status to which African women were relegated.

The migrant labour system is perhaps the most diabolical when considering how it breaks up family life and reduces women to virtual noughts. The phenomenon of migrant labour is not confined to South Africa - in may parts of the world guest workers leave their country to work in another for a specified period. In South Africa, too, there are workers from other Southern African countries. However, in South Africa migrant labour exists also primarily in a special form as an integral and basic part of the apartheid system. All Africans working outside the bantustans are officially considered to be migrants who leave their own ‘country’ to work in ‘white’ South Africa, a different country.

A division of the family is imposed by migrant labour but it goes even further: the township system is both part and an extension of the migrant labour system for it, too, imposes a divided life on African people. Its adverse effect on family life and social development resides in the fact that men and women who should be playing their part as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers and as members of the community are absent for long periods, some workers being permanent migrant workers.

The callousness of the government and other Afrikaner institutions towards the effects of migrant labour is illustrated by the following statements:

G.F. Froneman, Nationalist M.P. and later cabinet minister in 1969:

‘Migrant labour is in fact the entire basis of our policy as far as the white economy is
concerned ... the African labour force must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children and dependents who could not provide service’ (my emphasis).

The then prime minister, B.J. Vorster in 1968: ‘We need them [black people] to work for us but the fact that they work for us can never entitle them to claim political rights. Not now, nor in the future ... under any circumstances’.

A resolution passed at the 1973 Congress of the Afrikaanse Studentebond (Afrikaans Student Federation) demanded that ‘all black women and children in the white areas be shipped back to the homelands and only the men should be left in the white areas for as long as we need them’.

An M.P. in a parliamentary debate, 1964: ‘We do not want the Bantu women here simply as an adjunct to the procreative capacity of the Bantu population’.

The NGK (Dutch Reformed Church) in reply to a letter from the Black Sash in which it was requested to protest against official policy since the church preached the sanctity of marriage and family life, 1974: ‘That families in many cases cannot live together is true but it is also true that they are granted the opportunity to visit each other - provided of course they are willing to comply with the relevant regulations and they do not disregard this privilege’.

The migrant labour system makes it virtually illegal for many African women to live with their husbands and a mockery of family life. Other social effects of the system include illegitimacy (N.B. It is a serious indictment against society to call children born out of wedlock ‘illegitimate’), bigamy, prostitution, homosexuality, liquor abuse, breakdown of parental authority, malnutrition and sexually transmitted diseases.

Closely linked to the migrant labour system and introduced to maintain it are the influx control and pass laws. The system depended on keeping as many women as possible in the reserves. If the whole family becomes part of urban industrial society then the claimed rationale for setting the payment of the male worker at the level of a single man falls away. Thus African women were until recently denied access to the new skills and new relationships of developing capitalism except in insignificant numbers. When they did become wage-earners it was primarily in domestic service and agriculture, where they were not part of the organised labour force.

The only way of trying to make women and their families remain in conditions well below the poverty line was to make it difficult for them to move to the urban areas. For this reason the pass laws were extended to women in 1952 despite courageous efforts by thousands of women from all population groups to make the government change its mind. These laws bore more heavily on women than on men, for women
did not only need male consent (consent of the commissioner of the district defined as ‘home’ and consent of the father, male guardian or husband) to leave home or to work in another place, but since 1964 a total ban
was placed on the further entry of women into the urban areas outside the bantustans except on a visitor's permit.

The official policy of forced removal resulted in more than three and a half million people being forcibly moved in South Africa since 1960 and another 1.7 million still under threat of removal in 1984. The mass removal of population takes various forms. In rural areas tenants have been evicted from white-owned farms and communities forced off land which had been theirs for generations. In towns and cities existing black residential areas have been destroyed and their residents moved into larger, more sharply segregated townships further away from the main centres of employment and often inside bantustan boundaries. People living in unauthorised residential areas (the so-called squatter camps) established in towns and cities in defiance of influx control are under almost constant attack and threat of removal to bantustans.

Also relevant is the government's policy on birth control which in effect is population and fertility control, described in some circles as ‘another kind of genocide’. The position of the NGK, theological and ideological power base of the apartheid regime, was that ‘it is the duty of whites to multiply on the earth’ while ‘the bantu ... could be given the pill with an easy mind ... the morals of the blacks have already sunk so low that promiscuity could not be any greater’. The Minister of Health, Nak van der Merwe, in 1983 blamed ‘uncontrolled breeding’ for the high infant mortality rate among black children and the Director-General of the Department of Health and Social Welfare proposed in 1981 that sterilisation and abortion among black women should be done ‘both on demand and by command’. The family planning drive on which the State embarked since 1974 was called ‘preventative health’, but Barrett e.a. (1985:169) point out that ‘practice shows the concern is not health but politics’.

The Land Acts which were responsible for cramming more than 80% of the population into 13% of the land placed a heavy burden on women. Traditionally the producers of food, they found it increasingly impossible to provide in the needs of their families and extended families. It resulted in many going in search of employment in urban areas or becoming farm labourers on white-owned farms, thus becoming vulnerable to the severest form of exploitation of the workforce. They have few rights, and almost no legal protection against the harsh conditions, are paid starvation wages and often have to suffer the brutality of their bosses.

2.2.2 Patriarchy

The impact of imperial power on an indigenous culture resulted in inferiority being imposed on black people. For the black woman this burden had been trebled by imposing a three-fold ‘inferiority’ on her: her race, class and sex. In addition,
she suffers under a double patriarchy which has arisen from both the traditions of
the old society and the doctrines of the new.

The destruction of precolonial social structures and the denigration of traditional
culture were effected by colonialism, giving rise to patriarchy as it exists in
contemporary black society. Added to this are the numerous laws of the apartheid
regime which condemned African women to the status of perpetual minors, regardless
of their age and marital status. Until recently, women could not own property in their
own right, enter into contracts without the aid and consent of their male guardians
or act as guardians of their own children, and therefore always subject to the authority
of men. Thus aided and abetted by the legal system, black men, however powerless
themselves against the law, took it upon themselves to assert their authority in all
spheres of women's lives.

Yet this was not always the case in traditional society. Women had more rights as
regards both their person and property than have been conceded to them by alien
courts, as pointed out by H.J. Simons (1968:187). Initiative and the right to act rested
with the family rather than the individual. There were clearly defined positions for
each member, but the household constituted an integral whole. Neither man nor
woman could normally exist outside a domestic group, and the activities of the sexes
were complementary and not in conflict. While it is true that women occupied a
subordinate position, it is also true that they were not oppressed. Women did not
contend with men for power, rank or office because their roles were not competitive.
Simons states:

A woman shared her father's or husband's rank. She undertook much of
the laborious work in the home and fields, not for an employer but for a
family to which she and her children belonged. What she produced or
acquired did not become the ‘property’ of her husband. It formed part of
a joint family estate which he managed, not in the capacity of ‘owner’,
but as head and senior partner (Simons 1968:187/8).

2.2.3 The ‘coloureds’

Of all the black peoples of South Africa, the ‘coloureds’ feature more frequently
than the rest in the Afrikaans literature. Afrikaans authors, critics and sociologists
will no doubt argue that this is so because the ‘coloureds’ are almost akin to the white
Afrikaner as far as their language, religion and culture are concerned; many will
profess to have intimate knowledge of the ‘coloured’; few will admit that they share
the same ancestry. Be that as it may, the true reasons for their preoccupation and
almost paranoic obsession with ‘coloured’ become abundantly clear when the
Afrikaans literature is studied and age-old stereotypes applied to the Khoi are
persistently appearing with regard to the present-day ‘coloured’.
For the white establishment it is important that the ‘coloured’ is portrayed in the way it is done in the Afrikaans novel; the mixing of blood produces a degenerate sub-human species; the products of such admixtures inherit only the weak and negative characteristics of the parents; only white people who are weak of character will consort with black people who are equally weak of character to produce an even weaker ‘coloured’. Therefore, miscegenation should be discouraged at all costs, even making it a punishable offence, with no regard for whether the parties involved display a genuine affection or love for one another. With this kind of indoctrination the actual sinister reason for miscegenation is concealed, viz. fear that the white race in South Africa shall dwindle into insignificance or become extinct and the country taken over by a breed of half-castes. What appears to be indicative and symptomatic of the society we live in, is the complete absolution of the (white) male, while all the blame is apportioned to the black woman for bringing about this breed of half-castes.

It must be stated categorically that the term ‘coloured’ is as unacceptable to this writer as it is to the vast majority of black people in South Africa who have been thus categorized. The term is neither neutral nor descriptive, is loaded with negative and political connotations and implies at best impurity and contamination; at worst bestiality. Jakes Gerwel (1988:19) articulates his abhorrence of the term thus:

... the term ‘coloured’ is highly controversial. Especially among intellectuals and para-intellectuals who, according to the law are allocated to this category, there is a continual debate about the existence of such a group. On the other hand, there are those who, even if the existence of an identifiable group is conceded, find the term ‘coloured’ as such unacceptable and even abhorrent ... ‘coloured’ is simply an ugly word. In contrast to other terms, e.g. Xhosa, ‘coloured’ has no cultural content. It actually refers to the breeding history of people: a member of this and that sub-species mated and in the event a ‘coloured’ emerged ... ‘coloured’ is a crude term. The basis of rejection, however, is the whole idea of categorization.

I am using the term ‘coloured’ under duress, mainly to make a distinction between the categories of black as espoused by the apartheid regime, because these groups of people are also treated and described differently according to this false statutory categorization. The term ‘brown people’ (‘bruinemense’) is equally a misnomer, since it refers to skin colour - the entire spectrum of human skin colour manifests itself in the black people of South Africa.

Several sociological, political, cultural and economic studies - regardless of whether they are scientifically sound or not - by white South African and Western researchers have been made of the ‘coloureds’ of South Africa. These range from a sympathetic approach to absolute bias against and censure or condemnation of
In his study, *Segregeer of sterf* (*Segregate or die*), H.J.J.M. van der Merwe (1961:4) explains the genealogical composition of the ‘coloureds’ thus:

The most important contribution to the origin of the coloureds is made by the admixture of Hottentots and the slaves who were mostly of Eastern origin. A section of these bastards migrated into the interior of the country and formed the core of the group which is now known as the Griquas. There are actually four components in the formation of the coloureds: first of all, then, the admixture of Hottentot and slave, then the European admixture and thirdly a thin stream of Bushman blood. In the meantime, more European blood was continually added, mainly from visiting sailors. Fourthly, a considerable amount of Bantu intermixing took place in recent years.

J.S. Marais (1962) similarly identifies four elements which combined to produce the ‘coloured’ people of today, but unlike Van der Merwe, he does not include the ‘Bantu intermixing’. According to Marais, the present-day ‘coloured’ population descended from slaves, Hottentots, Europeans and Bushmen. In all research reports there seems to be consensus about the slave, Hottentot and European strain in the ‘coloured’ people but no consensus about the strength of the various strains. White, Western researchers tend to minimise the strength of the European strain while emphasising the slave and Hottentot strains. Some researchers, notably Afrikaners, even go as far as to view the ‘coloureds’ as descendants mainly of the Hottentots, with a very thin sprinkling of European blood in their veins. Marais (1962:31), however, concludes that ‘it is safe to say that in the Coloured population of today the slave strain is more important than the Hottentot’ and further states that ‘... a considerable amount of “new” European blood has been infused into the Coloured population of the Cape Peninsula by foreigners (soldiers, sailors and others) who for various reasons visited its shores’. It is noteworthy that both Van der Merwe and Marais emphasise the ‘visiting sailors’, thereby not only launching a vicious attack on the ‘coloured’ woman's morals but also reinforcing the stereotype of the black whore who would sell her body to anyone who is willing to pay. Little or no mention is made of the exploitative role of the European male or of the fact that strong and lasting marriage relationships between white men and black women existed before the Immorality Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act put paid to such unions.

Since most researchers emphasise the ‘Hottentot’ element in the origin of the ‘coloured’ people and some even go as far as to suggest that the ‘coloureds’ have inherited only the Hottentot traits, I consider it necessary to include here a brief account of the way these indigenous people were perceived by the early European visitors to the shores of South Africa and how these perceptions have shaped white attitudes and policies towards the ‘coloured’ people of today. Let it be said
at once that the term ‘Hottentot’ is equally unacceptable to the black people of South Africa as is the term ‘coloured’, for ‘Hottentot’ and its syncopatic derivation ‘Hotnot’ - originally an onomatopoeic word coined by the Dutch for someone with a speech impediment and transferred by Dutch explorers to the Khoi because their language with its numerous implosive clicks sounded like stuttering to the ignorant eurocentric ear - has become an abusive, invective word applied by white Afrikaners to ‘coloureds’, containing in it all the negative images and stereotypes those early explorers passed on to the colonists and which tenaciously persist until the present day.

The tragedy of the modern world is that these and other indigenous peoples could not preserve their observations of the interlopers for posterity by means of the written word, for it would have been more than interesting to compare their and the European perceptions of each other. It is also tragic that the Khoikhoi (‘People of People’ - for that is the name of this race) have virtually been wiped out by the colonisers, if not by their firearms during the wars of dispossession and having been driven into the inhospitable wastes of the semi-desert, then by the genocidal smallpox epidemics brought into the country by seamen and colonists. Never having been confronted with this disease and therefore not having built up a natural immunity against it, the Khoi quickly succumbed, so that what they could orally hand down to their descendants has largely been lost forever. However, through the efforts of historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and other human scientists, the little that has been preserved as well as some oral evidence, are carefully pieced together so that a picture gradually emerges which gives a lie to much of what is commonly accepted as veracious. Another factor which contributed to this one-sided view of the Khoi is the language question. European explorers in general did not deem it necessary to acquaint themselves with the language of the Khoi - or any other indigenous race for that matter - either because they perceived this language to be of an inferior quality and usually compared it to animal sounds (see below) or because they found it too difficult to assimilate. It was left to the Khoi to create a kind of lingua franca, containing English, Dutch and French expressions, to be able to communicate with the Europeans, where such communication existed. Then again, the accounts of such communication must once more be viewed with circumspection, since a one-sided interpretation, misinterpretation and even misrepresentation are not excluded.

The Amsterdam publishing house of Jodocus Hondius must be held largely responsible for the perpetuation of the many existing stereotypes attached to the Khoi and passed on to the ‘coloured’ people of today. Hondius compiled from travellers' reports and published a little book entitled Klare Besgryving van Cabo de Bona Esperança (translated by L.C. van Oordt as A Clear Description of the Cape of Good Hope) in 1652, the same year the Dutch arrived at the Cape to establish a refreshment station. From the mass of impressions these travellers received at the Cape, they already have selected only the most ‘remarkable’ ‘facts’ about the
Khoi and Hondius in turn went about as selectively by including in his book only those which would have the most striking impact on the European public. One should bear in mind that many of these so-called travellers never set foot in the Cape but merely copied information from one book to another.

The following observations of the Khoi appear in Hondius' book:

The local natives have everything in common with the dumb cattle, barring their human nature...They are handicapped in their speech, clucking like turkey-cocks ...Their food consists of herbs, cattle, wild animals and fish. The animals are eaten together with their internal organs. Having been shaken out a little, the intestines are not washed, but as soon as the animal has been slaughtered or discovered, these are eaten raw, skin and all ... A number of them will sleep together in the veld, making no difference between men and women ... They all smell fiercely, as can be noticed at a distance of more than twelve feet against the wind, and they also give the appearance of never having washed (Van Oordt 1952:26-28).

Since then, officials and travellers with one accord reinforced these observations. Christopher Fryke, who visited the Cape in 1685, had this to say about them:

...I saw a parcel of them lying together like so many hogs, and fast asleep; but as soon as they were aware of me, they sprang up and came to me, making a noise like turkeys ... I made haste to be gone, because of the nasty stench ... Moreover, some I found at their eating, which made the stink yet more unbearable, since they had only a piece of cow-hide, laid out upon the coals a-broiling, and they had squeezed the dung out of the guts, and smeared it with their hands over one another.16

Van Riebeeck referred to them as ‘stinkende beesten’17. ('stinking animals') and other 'remarkable' facts about them are repeated again and again in the early records, for example their turkey-gobbling speech, their eating of unwashed intestines, their use of animal fat to smear their bodies, their wrapping of dried entrails around their necks, peculiarities of the pudenda of their women, their inability to conceive of God but most of all their incorrigible indolence.18 The following are but a few of such descriptions and denunciations:

Jan Nieuhof, 1654: ‘They are lazier than the tortoises which they hunt and eat’.

Volquart-Iversen, 1667: ‘They are a lazy and grimy people who will not work ...
They are idle, and like to sit without doing anything’.

O.F. Mentzel, 1787: ‘They are lazy, idle, improvident’.19

‘Idleness’, ‘indolence’, ‘improvidence’, ‘sloth’, ‘laziness’ - these are terms meant to define a Khoi vice. These observations were based mainly on the fact that the Khoi
did not practise agriculture. It did not occur to the observers that a lifestyle differing from theirs was unfolding before them; it did not enter their
eurocentric thinking which was fortressed against the new, the unique and the different that the Khoi were living in an environment which provided for their physical needs, that their traditional diet of milk, meat and veldkos (forage food) was sufficient for them and their ancestors; neither were they particularly interested in the fact that the Khoi were pastoralists and hunters par excellence, by no means activities to be associated with idleness. Nor did it occur to them that the half-naked state of the Khoi was an expediency against the sometimes unbearable heat of the country (imagine the Khoi's amazement at the settlers' heavy, cumbersome clothing!) and smearing their bodies with animal fat and dung was probably their version of modern-day lotions to protect the skin against the ravages of the sun.

In addition to the Khoi's so-called idleness which the present-day 'coloureds' purportedly inherited, their appetite for strong drink, for which they acquired a taste only after the white man had set foot on South African soil, is another stereotype persisting until today. The Khoi readily succumbed to the temptation of strong drink. Never having been confronted with alcohol and its effects, it is not difficult to understand that they must have been curious, bemused and much impressed by a liquid that gave them a false sense of bravado, not realising then that brandy and arrack were the chief inducements offered to chicane them out of their cattle, sheep and land. As late as 1774 the Landdrost of Swellendam was asking his government for 388 cans of arrack to be used in the Hottentot trade. The ‘tot system’ which remains in force until the present day, especially on the wine farms, has its origins in the early days of the settlement. The masters supplied liquor to their servants ‘in part payment of wages... according to the usual practice of the country’. This ‘part payment of wages’ is a misrepresentation. What happened in fact was that these servants were paid entirely in kind: liquor on an empty stomach after a hard day's toiling; a daily meal which the farmers considered suitable for their labourers; a hovel where they could live and from which they could be evicted at the master's whim. Money was seldom if ever considered as payment for their services.

Sympathetic observers of the Khoi and quasi-scientists often blamed their debilitating diet for their 'sloth' and inability to think. Peter Kolb, for example, described them in 1719 as: 'They are, without doubt, both in body and mind, the laziest people under the sun' and Anders Sparrman said of them in 1783: 'A dull, inactive ... disposition ... is the leading characteristic of their minds'. In 1823 the Rev. H.P. Hallbeck, Superintendent of the Moravian missions at the Cape, defined the chief weakness of the Khoi character as ‘want of energy of mind by which every good impression, every laudable resolution, is but too soon effaced and forgotten, and he is rendered unable to go through undertakings which require steadiness, perseverance and independence of character’, hence the necessity of missionary stations ‘where he is sure to find good advisers and gradually acquire more strength of mind’.
Khoi's nomadic, easy-going existence and the inability of the European mind to conceive that a people could have no fixed abode. Being pastoralists is a country where grazing and climatic conditions are erratic to say the least, the Khoi were constantly, under threat of drought, in search of better grazing and waterholes for their fat-tailed, hairy sheep and long-horned cattle.

Perhaps the most persistent stereotypes created about the Khoi by these European observers, concern the Khoi woman. The vicious attacks launched against her sexual mores and character are matched only by those made against slave women both in South Africa and other parts of the Western world where slavery was practised. Admittedly, some of these observers make mention of her industry, for example, Francois Valentijn remarked in 1726: ‘The men ... are ... the laziest creatures that can be imagined, since their custom is to do nothing or very little ... If there is anything to be done, they let their women do it’ and C.F. Damberger (1801) said of them: ‘Perhaps the laziest nation upon earth ... However, the women are very industrious in household affairs’. But for the most part she is described in bestial terms; she is denigrated and verbally abused, while at the same time made the laughing stock of humankind and considered the worst possible insult to womanhood. Van der Merwe (1961:3-4), for example, writes about intermarriage between white colonists and Khoi women in the early days of the settlement:

... these things were tolerated but not encouraged. The involved parties were actually shunned; they were just not persona grata in the social life, and a few of these mixed marriages failed so dismally through the degeneration of the man, for example Rijck Overhagen, that they together with wife and children were packed off to Java. These failures must be ascribed in the highest degree to the lower level of civilisation of the non-white woman who debased her husband to her level (Van der Merwe's emphasis).

Not only were the ‘peculiarities’ of her pudenda and her steatopygic physical form ridiculed, caricatured and denounced, but in these reports she is also depicted as someone with the breeding capacity of no other animal on earth. Her essential female sexuality is bestial in comparison to that of the European woman; as mother she is likened to those animals who abandon their young soon after giving birth to them. Sander L. Gilman (1986:231) comments on the perceptions of the Khoi woman by European observers as follows:

The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot. The physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed, the central nineteenth-century icon for sexual difference between the European and the black ...
Gilman continues by citing from the work of the French race biologist, J.J. Virey, who postulates that the black woman's 'voluptuousness [is] developed to a degree of lasciviousness unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites'. Virey then cites the Hottentot woman as the epitome of this sexual lasciviousness and stresses the relationship between her physiology and her physiognomy (her ‘hideous form’ and her ‘horribly flattened nose’).

In Hondius' book not much mention is made of the Khoi woman, except to emphasise that she is ‘zeer lelijk van aangezicht’ (‘of extremely ugly countenance’, p. 28) and from the report of P. van Kaarden who visited the Cape in 1608, we learn that ‘daar werede ook vrouwen gevonden met groote borsten en hebben zwart en lelijk hayr’ (‘there are also women with large breasts and ugly black hair’, p. 28). The Khoi woman's breasts - or rather the manner in which they are depicted by these observers - have become objects of much ridicule and a metaphor to emphasise her bestiality, as shall be illustrated in the ensuing chapters. A case in point is a drawing included in the ‘Wit over Zwart’ (‘White on Black’) exhibition held in the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam in 1990 in which a breast-feeding Khoi woman is depicted: the infant is carried on her back, her overlarge, elongated breast is thrown over her shoulder so that the nipple can be within reach of the infant's mouth.

The Khoi woman's sexual mores also come under attack which, together with the emphasis on her breasts, serve as indicators of her essential role, i.e. that of breeder. According to the reports of Matelief and Z. van Regter who visited the Cape in 1608 and 1629 respectively, the Khoi ‘Will sleep together in the veld, making no difference between men and women, their legs crossing one another's bodies...’ (Hondius 1652:30). Yet, although these observers ostensibly had a clear view of the Khoi woman's breasts and pudenda, they also mention in their reports: ‘There are also women with ugly skins tied round their upper bodies and also one skin tied round their lower parts’ (Hondius 1652:30). It is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that these observers must have had more intimate knowledge of the Khoi woman's body than they dared to admit.

2.2.3.1 ‘Try-for-white’

When one considers the previously mentioned stereotypes about the Khoi which were transferred to the present-day ‘coloureds’, it is not surprising that the peculiar syndrome of ‘try-for-white’/‘passing for white’/‘play white’ reared its head in South African society. By a concerted and persistent process of indoctrination, propaganda and brain-washing, blacks, in particular ‘coloureds’, were made to feel ashamed of their humanity, their ancestry and the colour of their skin. Some even went so far as to curse their ‘colouredness’, as can be observed in the poetry of, for

example, S.V. Petersen and the fictitious Derk Booysen in the novel *Die Koperkan* (see Chapter 3). As stated before, the ‘coloureds’ of South Africa display a remarkable variety of hues and colours, ranging from whiter than white to ebony black. When legislation was introduced in 1950 to separate the various races and ‘coloureds’ categorised as a separate ‘race’ with none of the privileges reserved for whites but still not as badly off as the Africans, it seemed logical for some of the lighter-skinned ‘coloureds’ to have themselves either reclassified as white or to ‘play white’. One should remember that in most cases this was done for purely economic reasons, i.e. they could procure better-paid jobs and transcend the racial barrier to be employed in positions reserved for whites. In a country where upward economic mobility for the black majority is virtually impossible, it is difficult to condemn those ‘coloureds’ who saw ‘passing for white’ as the only means to uplift themselves economically.

It must also be mentioned that most of those who could easily pass for white, chose to remain ‘coloured’ out of political loyalty to their compatriots.

Of course, an additional reason for the phenomenon of ‘passing for white’ emerges. In wanting to become like those who have dominated, despised and rejected them, the ‘coloureds’ of South Africa have been behaving like members of many other dominated, despised and rejected groups. It became part of the common experience of certain sections of the colonised peoples during the Western imperial epoch. For some ‘coloureds’ the solution seemed to be ‘passing’ into the white population. But to ‘pass’ is preferable only for relatively few. More generally people have to find other ways of assimilating the dominant view of themselves and of expressing the self-rejection and self-hatred that follows from this. Among black South Africans the forms and modes of this process are endlessly varied. One of the most pervasive of these has been the institution of colour caste which raised ‘whiteness’ to the highest value in all aspects of life. This meant everything pertaining to civilisation, culture, religion and human worth. It became among blacks an intricate system of social, group and personal relationships based directly on degrees of relative darkness and other degrees of physical blackness, i.e. the shape and kinds of features, hair texture, lips and nose which were ‘good’ if they resembled those of whites; ‘bad’ if they did not. In coming to terms with him-/herself, every black person has had in one way or another to cope with the infinity of ways in which ‘white’ is elevated above ‘black’. The association of white and black with light and darkness and the translation of these qualities of light into polarities of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’ have taken place in the conventions and languages of many cultures, but in few has this conversion of physical facts into religious and aesthetic values been worked harder than in the South African case.

The process of passing for white is made feasible, in the first place, by the fact that the cultures of the white and ‘coloured’ peoples are very similar; in the second place, by the fact that there are infinite gradations between white and ‘coloured’
skins and physiognomies, so that it is often not possible to tell from physical features alone to which ‘race’ a particular person belongs. Graham Watson (1972:459), though relative progressive in his thinking about racial assimilation in South Africa, nevertheless deems it fit to mention certain attributes - ostensibly primarily ‘coloured’ traits - which make it difficult for them to pass for white: their ‘rumbustious way of life, ... loyalty to a coon troupe ... and a taste for dagga’. It is clear that Watson bases these assumptions on existing stereotypes about the ‘coloureds’, without taking the trouble of proving the veracity of his sweeping generalisations and without admitting that these self-same traits are characteristic of many whites.

The arbitrary nature of racial classification demonstrates how different members of the same family can be classified disparately for the purposes of legislation and how each member may act over time and in varying circumstances as a member of more than one ‘race’. For many ‘coloureds’ who could pass for white, it meant a schizophrenic situation of being employed during the daytime as a white and living as a ‘coloured’ after working hours. The psychological effects of such a double life are difficult to visualise - the uncertainty, the fear of discovery which would surely lead to dismissal and shame, the deliberate disowning of family and friends in public places. (See Chapter 3 for the ‘futility’ and ‘tragedy’, according to Mikro's novel, of trying to pass for white.)

It would be sorely amiss not to acknowledge the pivotal studies done by Jakes Gerwel and Vernon February on stereotyping in the literature of Afrikaans. Both these scholars have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the way literature has influenced the political ideology of the Afrikaners. In Gerwel's study one is made aware of how the early Afrikaans novel indirectly but undeniably helped with the ideological conditioning and preparation for apartheid. In his study, Literatuur en Apartheid (1979), he identifies mainly three stereotypes applied to the ‘coloured’ in the early Afrikaans novel: (a) the ‘coloured’ as the ‘jollie hotnot’, image of the sorrowless, comical servant-figure; (b) the ‘coloured’ as coincidental background figure in an agrarian set-up with strong feudal characteristics; (c) ‘the “coloureds” are still children’ where the ‘coloured’ is portrayed as a so-called complete human being but who remains the ‘idealised child’. In Mind your Colour (1981) February focuses on the ‘coloured’ stereotype, but whereas Gerwel concentrates on the Afrikaans novel only, February incorporates different genres - prose, poetry and drama - in the different languages of South Africa into his study. It is about the creation and maintenance of a cultural stereotype and deals with the image forced upon the ‘coloureds’ by South African society, an image which reflects and reinforces the political subordination of the group. His thesis is that literature in South Africa serves as a means of social control and repression.
While I have gleaned much from the insights of these two scholars, their respective studies reveal two shortcomings: (i) little or no attention is given to the portrayal of the black woman in the works they have studied and (ii) both concentrate on the stereotyping of ‘coloureds’, thereby excluding the portrayal of the other oppressed people of South Africa. There are, however, profound reasons for these omissions: the black woman as a character in the Afrikaans novel prior to the 1950s has never been a factor, except where she fulfilled the one-dimensional role of nanny or domestic servant; characters from the African and Asian population groups likewise did not feature in the Afrikaans novel, except as incidental background figures, until 1958 with *Swart Pelgrim* and very sporadic after that. Hopefully this study will rectify one of those omissions, viz. the portrayal of the black woman character in the Afrikaans novel *after* 1948.

### 2.3 Concluding remarks

The above is merely a very general and broad overview of the situation of white/Afrikaner and black women in South Africa today to give an indication of their widely divergent positions but also to illustrate that both groups are victims of strong patriarchal structures. Even with regard to patriarchy, the motives behind it for each group differ: Afrikaner women must accept and adhere to the authority of the male for that is part of their religious doctrine; black women must accept the authority of both the white and the black male, for it is a political strategy to keep them in positions of servitude.

I have gone into some depth about perceptions of the Khoi and especially the Khoi woman to illustrate in the ensuing chapters that the Khoi/‘coloured’ woman, where she does feature as a character in the Afrikaans novel, cannot and does not escape the treatment meted out to her part-ancestors.

### Eindnoten:

1. All gradations of skin colour, all hair textures - classified into ‘Negroid’, ‘Asiatic’ and ‘Caucasian’ - all nose-shapes and all eye colours are found among the ‘coloured’ population.
2. Research by for example H.P. Heese (*Groep Sonder Grense* - 1984) has produced conclusive evidence that a considerable portion of white Afrikaners have ‘mixed blood’ in their veins. Some were so incensed by these findings that they instituted legal proceedings against the researcher, only to be advised by legal counsel that they have no case.
3. Antjie Krog in her anthology *Jerusalemgangers* (1985) satirises this fanaticism in some of her poems.
6. C.F.J. Muller (1969:451) provides a table of conversion from Dutch guilders and riksdalers into South African rands and cents. According to this table 60 riksdalers = R24 (plus-minus five pounds sterling) and 100 riksdalers = R40 (plus-minus eight pounds sterling).


8. The colonised's systematic subjugation was effected by among others the colonisers' continual threats of God's wrath coming down on the colonised. Bearing in mind African people's reverence for supernatural powers, it was easy for the colonisers to coerce them into belief and co-operation.


10. See for example the studies done by Bernstein, Meer, Simons, Alexander, Barrett e.a., Cock, etc., all of them non-African.

11. All cited by Hilda Bernstein (1985:14/15).

12. Cited by Bernstein, p. 49.

13. Of the sixteen studies on 'coloureds' I could find, only four are by English South Africans or other Westerners, the rest by Afrikaners which to me is an indication of their obsession with the 'purity' of their race.

14. For example, the Afrikaans author F.A. Venter writes in his novel *Die middag voel na warm as* (1974) about the 'coloured' labourers on the farm of the white narrator: 'The [the Hottentots], the “most miserable of the human race”, with a speech like the clucking of turkey-cocks, are the ancestors of Pieter Adonis and the others who are helping me today to till the river soil' (p. 11). He further describes them as 'the descendants of a race who inhabited the Olifants River valley centuries before the white man came' (p. 8) and as 'the pure-bred descendants of their ancestors' (p. 9 - my emphasis).

15. Hondius himself never set foot in South Africa.


18. Little mention of Khoi idleness occurs in R. Raven-Hart's summary of travellers' accounts of visits to the Cape before 1652. Only three of the approximately 150 reports mention idleness, deduced from the fact that the Khoi did not practise agriculture.

19. See J.M. Coetzee for an excellent account of the purported Khoi idleness.


25. If one is to believe what is written in the reports of these observers, then one must find it strange that they could write about her genitalia since, according to these reports, the Khoi woman's lower extremities were covered by a kind of skirt made of skin. Can one then assume that they must have had knowledge of the 'peculiarities' of her pudenda through sexual intercourse? Or did they base their assumptions on reports of the autopsy performed on Saartjie Baartman?

26. A case in point is Saartjie Baartman who, because of her steatopygia and 'peculiar' pudenda, was displayed in many Western European countries, ostensibly for scientists to study these syndromes but more especially to exhibit her to the public, to be stared and gaped at like a zoo animal. A second Khoi woman, also called 'the Hottentot Venus' like Saartjie Baartman, was a prize attraction in the nude at a ball given by the Duchess Du Barry in 1829 (see Gilman 1986:232).
Chapter 3
‘Half the solution’: the period 1948-1959

A dialectical relationship exists between literature and society. Literature does not exist in isolation but is brought about in the context of a society. Similarly, society is not an entity existing in isolation. Solzhenitsyn stated in 1970: ‘The writer is not an outside judge of his compatriots and contemporaries, but an accomplice in all the evil perpetrated in his country or by his people’.

Legislation and events in South Africa have evoked a response in the literature of a particular period with either positive or negative reverberations in the literary world, depending on who the authors and the literary audience are. Literature reacts to social and political conditions by either accepting or rejecting the ideology contained in them. However, the opposite is also true: literature had been used by legislators to justify legislation and to shape political attitudes, for example the Prohibition of the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act were justified by the then cabinet minister, Dr E. Dönges, by citing extensively from the works of Sarah Gertrude Millin (God's Step-children) and Regina Nser (Kinders van Ishmael), both of whom wrote about the ‘tragic’ consequences of miscegenation, of ‘blood taint’, ‘blood flaw’ and ‘mixed blood’.

In this chapter, I do not wish to give an exposition of the chronological history of the Afrikaans literature but rather my perspective of that literature's response or non-response to legislation and events in South Africa during the period under review.

Periodisation in literature is very often a thorny issue, for it is never easy to ascertain exactly when there are indications of a specific period, trend or genre in literature. Like life itself, literature is an evolutionary process, exhibiting continual shifts in literary phenomena from the centre to the periphery and vice versa. It seems logical to choose 1948 as a point of departure, not so much because it indicates a new trend or new themes in the literature of Afrikaans or because a shift in emphasis had taken place, but for the following reasons:
i In his study, *Literatuur en Apartheid*, Jakes Gerwel points out how the early Afrikaans literature up to 1948 had unmistakably aided and abetted the ideological preparation for apartheid;

ii The National Party came to power after the general election of 1948 and immediately passed a series of laws which institutionalised apartheid;

iii Although the literary themes remained virtually unchanged after 1948, a new trend does emerge in certain sectors: literature is now used to espouse the merits of apartheid legislation;

iv 1959 indicates an end to this particular literary era since certain Afrikaner authors started to rebel against the stagnant nature of the Afrikaans literary tradition.

3.1 Literary trends

The general election of 26 May 1948 in South Africa brought to power the Nationalist Party, which set about a programme of racial and repressive legislation whose model was the legislation of Nazi Germany. Very soon after assuming power the N.P. rushed through parliament with almost indecent haste the bulk of its apartheid legislation. With these legislations apartheid was firmly established and institutionalised and every attempt was made to create a white South Africa and to crush any resistance. However, these measures were not left unchallenged by the mass of the people and numerous protest actions took place in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The government's response was to introduce even more legislation, e.g. the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), giving it extensive repressive powers.

What was the literary response to legislation and events in South Africa between 1948 and 1959? On the Afrikaans literary scene there was a deafening silence about what was happening in the political arena. One should bear in mind that, as staunch Calvinists, white Afrikaners believed (still believe?) unwaveringly that the white races were destined to rule the world and subjugate the dark peoples; that their rulers were chosen by God, ruled by this divine right and that their decisions should therefore never be questioned. Moreover, the measures taken by the apartheid regime safe-guarded them and guaranteed their privileges, supplied them with the opportunities for self-fulfillment and created space for them to accrue material wealth to the detriment of the black masses. By their silence one can therefore conclude that they condoned apartheid legislation.

As before 1948, Afrikaans authors continued their preoccupation with the immorality of urban life, the pernicious effects of urbanisation on Afrikaner morals and the 'poor white' question, which gave rise to concerted efforts by the government to eradicate this social problem from white society. The farm novel of the first half of the twentieth century continued to be the favoured genre even
after 1948, a genre which perpetuated the myth of natural right. The literature of this period is also characterised by the glorification of the Afrikaner past, their heroic struggles against the so-called black barbarians, their untiring efforts to tame this perceived wild land, and their undaunting courage against the British in the Anglo-Boer War. In short, the Afrikaans literature of this period consisted of parochial or local art, small realisms and social issues affecting the Afrikaner.

However, a few Afrikaans authors of this period did venture into the realm of the black peoples of Southern Africa, mainly focusing on their folklore in numerous sketches and short stories. The particular life-style of black people, their history, origin, myths, stories and hunting habits, albeit from a white perspective, became the themes of authors such as Minnie Postma, P.J. Schoeman and G.H. Franz. Minnie Postma focused especially on the tales of the Basotho, involving cannibals, monsters, animals, princes and princesses with love, revenge and death as motives. Schoeman collects a series of widely divergent tales and sketches, among them hunting adventures in Zululand, Swaziland and East Africa, he portrays Zulu and Swazi figures and records legends, fables and moments in their history from their story treasures. He portrays for example in Mboza, die Swazi a young black man who strays from the ancestral path and becomes uprooted as a result of the civilising influence of white schools. In Rook of die horison (Smoke on the horizon) published in 1949, he portrays the pernicious influence of the city of gold on the detribalised black man. Franz too records stories told to him by wise old Basotho men. Perhaps his most important contribution is the novel, Moeder Poulin (1946), in which an old Basotho woman, Mother Poulin, tells by means of flash-backs the story of her life on an idyllic farm where she raises white children, but this peaceful existence is shattered when the Anglo-Boer War breaks out. In the work of these three writers, however, the black person remains a noble savage not to be exposed to white culture as this will have a devastating effect on him/her. What is also striking about their work, is that they have chosen to write about black people beyond the borders of South Africa. It makes one wonder whether this is a conscious attempt to dismiss the blacks of their own country as of little consequence and whether they employ this strategy to circumvent the injustices perpetrated by their own people.

Few white Afrikaans authors responded directly to legislation during this particular period. F.A. Venter portrays in Swart Pelgrim (1958) the negative effects of the ‘white man's cities’ on the black person and delivers an unmitigated plea for the institution of bantustans. In Die Koperkan (1959), Mikro responds to the Prohibition of the Mixed Marriages Act by making an undisguised plea for the retention of this and other apartheid laws. In Ons, die afgod (1958), Jan Rabie tells the story of a ‘coloured’ man who, after spending many years at sea, returns to his birthplace, tries to purchase a piece of land on which to farm because of his love for the place of his origin but is resisted in his attempts to do so by the white farmers of the area. In contrast to Venter and Mikro, Rabie does not plead for more apartheid.

legislation but rather attempts to condemn the effects thereof on the entire population of South Africa. However, the novel abounds with stereotypes about the ‘coloured’, his drunkenness, loose morals, untrustworthiness and dishonesty. Significantly, the literature of this period is marked by the absence of the black woman as a meaningful character.

3.2 F.A. Venter

3.2.1 Venter's oeuvre regarding blacks

In emulation of his predecessors, Venter continues in the Afrikaans literary tradition by choosing an agrarian set-up in which to portray his characters. This also holds true for his black, mostly ‘coloured’ characters, all of whom are utilised as ‘stofferingsemente’ (‘fillers’, Van Rensburg 1987:84), i.e. peripheral figures, those who do the work in the novels.

Venter's entire oeuvre consists of children's stories, short stories, sketches and novels. In contrast to the most important narrative authors of the late 1950s and early 1960s, he does not experiment with new techniques or new material; rather, his work is a continuation and refinement of that which authors before him attempted. This association with older authors also has a bearing upon his later work in which he explores the farming life and the life of the ‘coloureds’ in that milieu, for example Werfjoernaal (Journal of a Farmyard - 1965), an anthology of sketches; Die Rentmeesters (The Stewards - 1969), a novel; Die middag voel na warm as (this title is taken from N.P. van Wyk's poem, ‘Klipwerk’ and can be literally translated as The noonday feels like embers - 1974), a novel in which the author's observations of the life and personal exigence of ‘coloured’ farm labourers are depicted; and Kambro-kind (Kambro Child - 1979), an anthology of sketches.

However, one of Venter's early novels exploring the life of blacks, specifically the African, is Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim), published for the first time in 1952. This novel is about the experiences of a Xhosa in Johannesburg. Some critics see a similarity between this novel and Alan Paton's Cry, the beloved country (1948) which also deals with the South African ‘colour’ question. Kannemeyer (1983:51) is of the opinion that with this novel together with Die middag voel na warm as, Venter makes his most important contribution to the Afrikaans literature and diverts from the simplistic handling of the subject-matter by most authors before him with his particular approach and the opening up of new areas of human relations for the Afrikaans narrative.
3.2.2 Swart Pelgrim (Dark Pilgrim) - 1952/1958

3.2.2.1 Introduction

Swart Pelgrim originally appeared in 1952 but a revised edition was published in 1958 in which Venter omits many adjectives, unnecessary imagery and sensational scenes, while the concluding chapter has been rewritten in such a way that the future of the main character and his family becomes bleaker and more problematic. For the purpose of this study, I am using the 1958 version.

One should perhaps include here a brief account of the reception of the novel by white critics at the time of its second publication and even later. My own comments in the ensuing paragraphs shall then determine to what extent they are in agreement with or a direct contradiction of those views.

At the time of its revised appearance, the novel was widely acclaimed by white critics as ‘the kind of book which enriches one's life’ (Die Burger) and ‘a novel ... which rises above the level of present-day literary art’ (G.S. Nienaber). The literary critic of The Cape Times had this to say: ‘Mr Venter's knowledge of Native conditions in the reserves and his understanding of the Native way of thinking make his book at once moving and convincing’. The Star's critic wrote: ‘... the best book that has appeared in Afrikaans with colour as the theme is F.A. Venter's Swart Pelgrim. Venter has no chip on his shoulder. He just gives us what is happening right now - the tragedy and conflict of the Native driven into the big city of the White man’. The reception of the novel further includes opinions such as: ‘The remarkability of Swart Pelgrim lies in the sober articulation of the narrative facts. The writer never chooses sides’ (Die Suidwes-Afrikaner); ‘... the word regains its evocative power... [Venter] masterly succeeds in revealing the essence with single salient strokes’ (Die Volksblad); ‘... Swart Pelgrim is a spectacular milestone on the road of the development of the black man to a multidimensional individual’ (F.I.J. van Rensburg) and J.C. Kannemeyer posits that Venter opens up new areas of human relations for the Afrikaans narrative with this novel.

However, the work is also criticised for its ‘external dramatics, theatrical effects, shallow characterisation and a much too ornate style’ (Kannemeyer 1983:51). Van Rensburg (1987:84) considers it as ‘still stereotypic’ but only as far as the strong graphic language - which is supposedly characteristic of black language usage - is concerned. Significantly, no mention is made of the numerous stereotypes about blacks which are found in the novel.
3.2.2.2 Title, ‘topicality’ and story

Symptomatic of South African society, the author finds it imperative to give an indication in the title of his novel that it deals with the ‘colour’ question, or at least part thereof. As in Die Koperkan by Mikro but even less subtle, the title of Venter's novel marks and foreshadows colour and its related connotations. The reader, especially if s/he is South African, will immediately relate the title to either a black person or a person/pilgrim to whom all the negative attributes of the colour black is ascribed. The fact that the pilgrim is described as ‘black’, also suggests a certain duality or opposition in the meaning of the title, for a pilgrim is usually one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion. If ‘black’ then connotes ‘sin’, ‘evil’, ‘barbarism’, etc., the person referred to in the title cannot possibly be a pilgrim. In addition, the narrative text which follows the title clearly tells of Kolisile's (the pilgrim's) journey to and sojourn in Johannesburg where he is confronted with degeneration and decadence.

Moreover, a pilgrim undertakes his/her sacred journey with the aim of bringing about change for the better in his/her life and in the lives of the people, society or ideology s/he represents. Since the title is usually an ‘empty’ sign which has to be ‘filled in’ by the narrative text following it, the reader expects that the promises made in it shall be fulfilled, ironised or proved wrong.

On the level of discourse, another sombre fact pertaining to South African - and even universal - society at large emerges from the title: the addition of the adjective ‘black’ implies that a pilgrim is usually white (cf. ‘Black Messiah’, ‘Black Prophet’, ‘Black Saviour’, etc.) and that a clear distinction should be made between a ‘pilgrim’ and a ‘black pilgrim’; it implies the vast difference not only between the pilgrims but also between the pilgrimages undertaken: the one elevated and spiritual, the other base and material. According to Ampie Coetzee (1990:26), the ideological message of the novel has never been spelt out by literary critics, viz. that there could be no black pilgrims to the land of the white people in the Verwoerdian era when the novel made its appearance.

The novel is also hailed as ‘topical’, since it deals with ‘controversial’ material, i.e. the colour question in South Africa. A.P. Grové (1961:201) defines ‘topicality’ in literature thus:

A topical novel deals with ‘hot’, often controversial material; it is a book which concerns itself with contemporary (usually sociological, political and religious) problems, problems which fill the newspapers and consequently occupy the thoughts of the readers, problems which can be viewed as a danger spot (‘gevaarkol’) in society.
A statement such as the above generates questions such as: Is ‘colour’ necessarily controversial and problematic? If so, who or what is or has been responsible for making it controversial and problematic? Does it of necessity have to be a ‘danger spot’ in society? Nevertheless, the novel is described as ‘topical’ insofar that it deals with a black man from the bantustan and his experiences in the ‘city of the white man’. If it is topical, then the author must, in the course of his narrative, choose sides and suggest possible solutions to the ‘problem’. In the course of the discussion in the following pages, we shall have to ascertain whether in fact the author chooses sides (cf. what the critic in Die Suidwes-Afrikaner states) and suggests solutions to the ‘colour problem’.

The story, briefly, is about Kolisile, the young, strong black man who is forced to leave his ‘homeland’ (bantustan) against the wishes of his aging father, to seek employment in Johannesburg and to look for his long-lost brother, Mfazwe, who has also left the bantustan in search of employment, but never returned to his wife and children. In this sense, Kolisile becomes a pilgrim. After the anguish of his first train journey, he arrives with other migrant workers in the ‘white man's city’ and is confronted with the agonies and fears of working deep down in the bowels of the earth to extract gold for the mining magnates. But his main purpose is to find his brother in order to honour the solemn promise he made to his father, and in this strange city he has to undergo the most horrifying and humiliating experiences in his quest to do so. He is for instance mauled and almost killed in a brutal attack by a vicious dog set upon him by its white mistress who sees Kolisile as a potential robber, rapist and murderer when all he wanted was employment ‘on the land’ instead of working in the dank darkness of the mines; he experiences the devastation of a Highveld thunderstorm on a squatter camp, he is confronted for the first time with the effects of the ‘white man's liquor’; he is cheated and shot at by an Indian shopkeeper; he is forced to become involved in gang activities; he loses a leg in a mine accident while trying to save the life of a white man, and many more, which lead him to believe that the ‘white man's city’ is not meant for him and the likes of him; that his place is back in the bantustan where it is ‘safe’. The story clearly is an undisguised plea for apartheid and the ‘homeland’ policy of the government in South Africa.

3.2.2.3 Language

A well-known feature of Venter's prose is the superfluous use of imagery. However, Kannemeyer (1983:53) contends that in this novel it is used functionally to suggest the idiom of the Xhosa and to contribute to a well-knit structure brought about by the circulation of the imagery. On the other hand, as previously stated, the very language used makes the novel stereotypic since it is presented as characteristic of the language of black people (Van Rensburg 1987:84).
Nevertheless, what is remarkable about the language usage is that Kolisile speaks to members of his own group in his own language precisely as he speaks to Afrikaners in their language. One gains the impression that the author first listened to a Xhosa speaking Afrikaans to Afrikaans-speakers and deduced from his observations that s/he necessarily speaks in the same manner in his/her own language to fellow Xhosa-speakers. Nowhere in the novel a single sentence appears in the original Xhosa, with the result that it is difficult to test whether in fact the speaker uses the same peculiar syntax and ungrammatical use of the definite article when speaking both Xhosa and Afrikaans. Cf. for example the following:

(Kolisile to Afrikaner woman):
I look for the work, Missus; I look for the work here by the soil. By my own land I work also by the soil by the mealie (maize), by the corn ... yes, Missus (p. 33).

It is unrealistic, even far-fetched to expect Kolisile to speak Afrikaans to the other black characters in the novel. Yet, when such conversations take place, the same mistakes occur as when he speaks Afrikaans. Cf. for example the following conversation between Kolisile and the blind man, Mafasoe:

(Mafasoe is the first speaker):
- Kolisile is the rich man ... he wears the new clothes.
- I wear the new clothes, Mafasoe?
- Yes, Kolisile wears the new clothes...Mafasoe he smels the shop in the clothes of Kolisile.
- Mafasoe speaks right ... Kolisile wears the new clothes from the shop.
- The old heart he is glad Kolisile is back. The rushes are finish, and they take Jackson away by the jail. Now Mafasoe does not buy the rushes for the baskets.
- Kolisile buys the rushes for the baskets, Mafasoe. Kolisile works by the soil and he gets the lots of money.
- Kolisile works by the soil?
- Kolisile works by the soil, Mafasoe ... by the big house where there are trees. Kolisile he ploughs again with the ox. Kolisile he ploughs for the rich man by the big land where the mealie is a lot and where the trees stand with the fruit. And there is also the lots of water. And the plough he has the red wheels and the shiny share. He cuts the soil like the knife.

In the two extracts above the author tries to create the impression that a transfer from Xhosa had taken place. This can be seen most clearly in the phrases ‘the work’, ‘the new clothes’, ‘the lots of money’, etc. With regard to Zulu, Coetzee (1988:127) points out that Zulu speakers speaking English (or Afrikaans for that matter) often have difficulty with the definite article, since Zulu has no corresponding lexical form. The same applies to Xhosa as a member of the Nguni family of languages. It is a mistake to conclude that Xhosa and Zulu speakers
cannot make the semantic distinctions for which English and Afrikaans rely on the article. ‘The work’, ‘the new clothes’, etc. merely reproduce a common mistake made by Xhosas and Zulus speaking Afrikaans or English; it says nothing about Xhosas speaking Xhosa or Zulus speaking Zulu.

In the conversation between Kolisile and Mafasoe it is not unrealistic to assume that it takes place in Xhosa. Yet one notices several features of a Xhosa's speech when speaking Afrikaans. Firstly, the speakers refer to themselves in the third person, Kolisile refers to himself as ‘Kolisile’ and Mafasoe refers to himself as ‘Mafasoe’, instead of the customary first person singular pronoun ‘I’. A certain inconsistency on the part of the author can be discerned, for in the previous extract and once in the above Kolisile refers to himself as ‘I’. Secondly, the third person is reinforced by the use of the third person singular pronoun ‘he’, e.g. ‘Kolisile he ploughs ...’. Thirdly, the second person singular pronoun, ‘you’, is never used, although both first person and second person singular exist in Xhosa. Fourthly, the definite article is once again used ungrammatically. Fifthly, the incorrect use of the preposition ‘by’. Sixthly, what ought to be a statement, is turned into a question, e.g. ‘Kolisile works by the soil?’. This is not an uncommon feature of several languages, where a statement is turned into a question merely by voice inflection, even though the impression is created here that Xhosa speakers do not know how to convert a statement into a true question. Seventhly, the words of the previous speaker are continually repeated by the second. This can be explained by the fact that Xhosa speakers generally have a great respect for those they are speaking to and repeating the previous speaker's words is a confirmation and acceptance of what that speaker has said. Likewise, a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to a question is considered discourteous, with the result that the entire question is often repeated in the answer, e.g. lines 2 and 3 above. It is not an indication of nonsensical repetition.

Another significan aspect emerges. when a white person speaks in his/her own language to a black, the former tries to emulate the speech of the latter. Cf. for example the white woman whose house Kolisile tries to burgle:

‘But you must not take the money by the white people. It's not right. The Big Man up there shall strike you down ... This money is for the blind man to make me the big basket ... Now you must not come again in the night by the white people ...’ (p. 174).

The speaker has already accepted in her mind that the black man cannot understand a different kind of syntax or semantics other than the one he is using when speaking a foreign language. This presumptuousness is fed by the stereotypic image of the black person as having a limited intellect and conveys a certain naiveté, even childishness which reflect on the quality of mind of its speaker.
3.2.2.4 Focalization

The narrator in this novel is an instance outside the presented world who besides can be categorised as a superior, white narrator from different traces in the text, for example the use of language as explicated above. The character, Kolisile, through whose eyes, mind and reason the story is being observed, is the seat of the novel's focalization process. He is first of all the focalized object by an external focalizer who perceives Kolisile as a model of what the black man ought to be: physically strong, innocent, humble when dealing with whites, gullible, laughing with white teeth when approaching whites and somebody who knows his place.

But Kolisile is also the focalizing subject, or so it appears. The reader is duped into believing that the perceptions of the other black characters are those of Kolisile. This is a case of where the external focalizer (EF) seems to ‘yield’ focalization to a character-bound focalizer (CF), where the vision of the CF is being given within the all-encompassing vision of the EF. Kolisile's (CF's) focalization is embedded in that of the EF and he once again becomes the object of focalization. Focalization here becomes a device of manipulation. This is especially true where the two black women, Miriam and to a lesser degree, Kamala, become the objects of Kolisile's focalization. One gets the impression that the EF watches along with Kolisile, but it is the EF who focalizes through Kolisile, thus making him the focalized object, the focalizing subject and the medium through which it focalizes. Miriam and Kamala, then, conform to the image the dominant race have of black women. At the same time, the real author absolves himself from any blame of being a racist and sexist because, after all, these are a black man's perceptions of black women!

3.2.2.5 The ‘noble savage’ theme

The ‘noble savage’ is usually an African or other aborigine, not quite human but at the same time also not entirely beast, and more often than not male. His outward appearance includes nakedness or near-nudity, splendid physical proportions, virility and brute strength. As far as his personality - if it exists - is concerned, he is usually docile unless provoked, subservient, laughs with white teeth to indicate his willingness to serve, knows his place, cannot articulate his thoughts and feelings save through periodical emotional outbursts and can easily be corrupted when brought into contact with Western civilisation. The idea is that he should remain in his ‘natural’ habitat to protect himself from corruptive influences, which is also the denial of his right to broaden his horizons. Invariably the noble savage who becomes exposed to Western civilisation (religion, culture, education, etc.) finds himself not equal to the task and consequently makes a complete mess of his life. His ‘nobleness’ resides in the fact that he remains docile and subservient; his ‘savagery’ in his inability to absorb the different culture and to adjust to it.
With regard to South African literature, the ‘noble savage’ theme began with the arrival of the British Settlers in 1820. English writers like Thomas Pringle generally came from the liberal tradition of nineteenth-century England and one expression of liberal thought was the clamour for the emancipation of slaves. According to Es'kia Mphahlele (1987:49), it was also this liberal mind that conceived the ‘noble savage’ whose nakedness suggested innocence and a clean morality.

One of the earliest novels in Afrikaans dealing with the theme of the ‘noble savage’, is Booia (1931) by Jochem van Bruggen, a story of the disappointing life of a black man, Booia (note the significance of the name!), under the influence of the bad elements of white culture. This theme has also been taken up by P.J. Schoeman and G.H. Franz in Mboza die Swazi and Kobus respectively. Both portray the tribal black man who is simultaneously proud and self-conscious but who experiences everything too passively and who cannot interpret his experiences or see them in a wider context. Elsa Joubert, author of The long journey of Poppie Nongena, also exploits the ‘noble savage’ theme when she portrays the young black man, Bonga, in a novel with the same title. In the Afrikaans literature Venter's Swart Pelgrim takes this theme to its pinnacle.

Closely linked to the ‘noble savage’ theme and particularly South African in origin and content, is the ‘Jim comes to Jo’burg’ theme. Sympathy with the uprooted black man in the city is reflected in this theme, for example Peter Abrahams' novels, Son of the city (1945) and Mine Boy (1946). In present-day literature of the African languages this theme is exploited further. Venter's handling of this theme, however, differs markedly from that by black writers, many of whom have actually experienced the traumatic effects of migrant labour or who have been closely associated or influenced by them.

3.2.2.5.1 Race and ethnicity

In contrast to the numerous explicit references to race and ethnicity, especially the physiognomies of the characters in Die Koperkan, we find that Swart Pelgrim's author is more subtle in his handling of this issue and the description of physical racial features is very sporadic indeed. It is significant that when the villains, especially Jackson and Mfazwe, are depicted, racial features such as ‘thick lips’, ‘broad nose’, ‘protruding eyes’, etc. are invoked to reinforce their roguish nature. None of the black characters has a surname (except Miriam, whose surname only emerges when she as the accused is called by the court orderly to take the stand), in keeping with the South African racial pattern according to which blacks are known to their white employers only by a first name. A few references to ‘kaffir’ appear, for example the young white child tells Kolisile that ‘kaffirs’ had stolen their chickens (p. 75) and Kolisile refers to himself as the ‘bad kaffir’ who cannot help himself (p. 94). Towards the end of the novel the miners are described as
'swart skepsels’ (‘black creatures’ - pp. 193, 194). If the ‘noble savage’ theme is handled by white writers, it is only logical to expect that issues of race and ethnicity will be brought into play.

Many of the critics lauded Venter for his ‘sympathetic’ approach to the racial issue and Kannemeyer (1983:52) asserts that ‘Venter's novel largely gives a portrayal of a specific black man's reactions to the foreign milieu, while the white man only features where the main character comes into contact with him’ (my emphasis). Kannemeyer continues by stating that the novel consequently acquires a more homogenous character and a more taut line in the portrayal of tribal life as well as life in the squatter camp and of particular individuals, especially Kolisile, within those worlds.

Despite these assertions, the reader is never ever allowed to forget the role of whites in the ‘upliftment’ of black people, in guiding and directing their lives. The paternal white man/woman is ever-present in the story; its authoritative voice and presence cannot be ignored. The manipulative role of the author is once again apparent when he tries to show that the black person - irrespective of how good and talented s/he might be - can never make it on his/her own, has neither the intellect to organise his/her life efficiently, nor is in a position to make wise choices.

It is particularly significant that the advice and guidance given by whites to blacks in this novel do not take cognisance of the fact that the blacks' unenviable position is largely attributable to government policy. The reader is given the impression that blacks are solely responsible for their situation. For example, the following passage tends to ignore the abject poverty brought about by the Land Act of 1913:

He [Kolisile] once again hears the words of the white man: ‘Kolisile, your land is being washed away; the rain ravages your land; you want to harvest too much from your land; you are ploughing in the wrong manner; you are far too many on this land; you will harvest less and less; your people shall face starvation’. He knows the white man is speaking the truth ... he understands the white man's words (p. 8).

Given the fact that the Bantu Education Act of 1953 made provision for separate education and separate educational standards for the different population groups, and given the fact that the most poverty-stricken and disadvantaged people, the Africans, were required to pay for their schooling while free schooling was provided for more affluent people, one finds it particularly incongruous that the following advice is given by a white woman to Miriam:

When Mfenda and Nofenti were still small, the white woman who takes care of blacks said to Miriam: ‘Miriam, you must send your children to school. You must
let your children learn. You must not allow your children to become bad. You must promise me that you will send them to school until they have gone far’. Miriam stood with her hands folded in front of her and promised that she would (pp. 46-47).

The manipulation and indoctrination of the reader as well as some of the characters is done in such a way that black people actually believe they are bad and unworthy, that their situation is entirely due to their ‘decadent’ way of life. The character, Mafasoe, blinded and crippled at his work place when the dynamite exploded too soon, becomes the mouthpiece for these ideas and endeavours to indoctrinate Kolisile, Jackson and others as he had been indoctrinated. First of all, he is deeply grateful and indebted to the white man who saved his life by rushing him to hospital and the white woman who taught him to weave baskets after he had lost his sight. He tells Kolisile:

‘If the white man had not been good to me that day, Mafasoe would have been dead. If the white woman had not shown Miriam [how to help me], Mafasoe would have been unable to do anything today. Then Mafasoe would have lain here like a fly without wings. But now Mafasoe makes baskets’ (p. 52).

His gratitude and indebtedness lead him to believe that all whites are good and superior and all blacks are to remain in their position of servitude. In his conversation with Jackson, the only dissenting voice in the story, Mafasoe expresses these views. On Jackson's assertion that schooling is a waste of time and money since the white man only teaches black children that he is boss and that black people must work for him, and his further assertion that Mafasoe wants to remain a slave, Mafasoe replies:

‘The white man is boss, Jackson ... I am not a slave, Jackson. The hawkchicken is not the slave of the golden eagle, but the golden eagle is bigger and stronger than the hawkchicken ... The Great Book says we must work for the white man and the white man must look after us. We are all born equal, but we live differently. When the calf is born, it is stronger than the child, but when they are big, the child is cleverer than the calf ... We do not know as much as the white man does, Jackson; therefore we cannot become boss. We make the building bricks, but the white man makes the big house. Can you make the big house, Jackson? No, you can't. But the white man can’ (pp. 68-69).

Mafasoe had been converted to Christiandom and taught by the white man that it had been destined by God that the blacks shall remain in their subservient position and that their wrongs are punishable by God and the State. Furthermore, he is led to believe that it is unnecessary to find ways and means to improve one's own life, for God shall provide in all our needs. When Kolisile, in a fit of rebelliousness, wants to know why Miriam had been arrested, Mafasoe replies resignedly:
‘The white man takes Miriam away because she did wrong’ (p. 90). On a further question as to how they would cope financially without Miriam, Mafasoe replies in true right-wing religious fashion:

‘I listen to the white man who reads the Great Book, Kolisile. The white man says the Big Man above shall help us. He gives food to the birds. He also gives food to Mafasoe en Kolisile’ (p. 91).

After Kolisile had joined his brother's gang of robbers, his conscience troubles him continually. Time and again he remembers what Mafasoe had told him about the Great Inkosi:

Now he hears again the soft words of Mafasoe: The big lightning and the hail and the rain came because the Inkosenkulu wants to punish the black people for all the things they do wrong, for murdering, for stealing, for the bad beer they are drinking (p. 171).

These words are echoed by the white woman Kolisile tries to rob when she says to him: “The Big Man above shall strike you down”. Apparently the wrath of God is aimed only at black people and Kolisile, who is portrayed as having difficulty in conceiving of God [cf. for example: ‘He (Kolisile) so much wants to understand as Mafasoe understands, about the Great Inkosi and the Great Book from which the white man reads, but he can't’ (p. 91) and ‘His (Kolisile's) attempts to understand these things are like shooting stars, one moment bright but then dead in the darkness of things he does not understand’], soon becomes convinced that white people's prosperity is due to their 'high morality' while black people are doomed to a life of poverty because of their 'immorality'.

Not only Mafasoe but also Kolisile has a great admiration for the white man whose very presence instills a sense of security. Kolisile's first experience deep down in the mine is traumatic; he is filled with fear and apprehension when it appears to him that he is travelling to 'the heart of the earth' (p. 24) in the ‘round thing that is so small’ (p. 23). He feels like a caged animal in the narrow closeness of the mine tunnel. It is only when the two white supervisors appear that his fear somewhat abates:

Two white men look with torches at the round poles that support the layer of rock. Kolisile sees them from the corner of his eye, and he is grateful for their presence, the white men and the strong poles of bluegum. They look so solid and indestructible (p. 24).

Towards the end of the story, Kolisile's gratitude is increased when he is trapped in a rockfall, loses a leg and is rescued by the white doctor:
His heart is so grateful that he forgets about weeping women, about rocks, about pain. He is very grateful to the white man who has given him life again, life in the sun, on the land where there is grass, life in the light (p. 195).

As already stated, Jackson is the only dissenting voice among the black characters and has to be silenced (he is arrested for inciting the people with his ‘subversive’ ideology). His radical views are in direct conflict with those expressed by Mafasoe: he contends that the country belongs to the workers, that the profits emanating from their labours should be distributed fairly, that the country belongs to the black people and that they therefore should be boss. Mafasoe counters these arguments by asserting that whites have the knowledge, skills and expertise to be boss. His arguments cause Jackson to be silent, because ‘the things the white man taught him to say have now dried up’ (p. 69 - my emphasis). The ‘white man’ in this case is obviously a ‘communist’, the ‘pale white man’ (p. 135) who has been restricted in terms of the security legislation of the country (p. 134), bearing in mind the Afrikaners' fear of and paranoic obsession with communism at the time of the publication of this novel and ever since. What is once again implied here is that the black man is not equipped to think and speak for himself; whatever views he happens to have are a parrot-like repetition of the white man's views. It is also implied that the black man, who daily experiences the humiliations of apartheid, is quite satisfied with the way things are until he is made aware of his position by the white man. The inability to think, to observe critically and to articulate is concomitant with the image of the ‘noble savage’ as projected by the early English writers in South Africa.

3.2.2.5.2 Blacks trying to enter the ‘white man's cities’: ‘futility’ and ‘tragedy’

The story begins and ends with the ‘futility’ and ‘tragedy’ for blacks trying to become part of the urbanised proletariat. Constantly the city Johannesburg is referred to as ‘the white man's city’ (pp. 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 29, etc.) by the black characters themselves as if to concede that they do not belong there but go to the city to earn some money so that they may return home ‘before the rain falls’ (p. 25), ‘secure in the knowledge that they, before the next harvest has ended, shall return to the hills of their fathers, shall again see their wives and children, shall be able to pay lobola (bride-price) for the woman with the dark eyes’ (p. 23). Already by calling Johannesburg ‘the white man's city’, these characters passively accept the difference between themselves and white people and consequently the policy of segregation which forces them into the bantustans.

Furthermore, every single urban black in the story, with the exception of the disabled Mafasoe, is decadent, evil and corrupt, to suggest that the black person is not equal to the rigours, harsh competition and demands of urban life: Mfazwe, Kolisile's long-lost brother, is a gang leader, owns a brothel and shebeen under the guise of a ‘tearoom’, defrauds his fellow black men and women, assaults, robs
and kills people to make money; Kaloeti and Mafakoe are two fugitives from the police and depend for their survival on robbing the ‘Koelie’ (Indian) shopkeeper; Jackson is portrayed as a caricature who incites his people to revolt against their poverty, homelessness and third-class status; Miriam is a prostitute and shebeen queen; Kamala is a prostitute; and the main character, Kolisile, soon succumbs to the evil life led by his fellow blacks - he has his first taste of the ‘white man's liquor’; he is trained by his brother's gang to rob and steal; despite the deep love and respect for his wife, Nomosi, he becomes involved in a relationship with Miriam and even sires a child, etc. In addition to suggesting that blacks are unable to cope with urban life, it is suggested that they have neither the mental attributes nor the physical prowess and skills to earn a living other than by committing crime.

The story begins with Kolisile's concern about the deterioration of his land, the poor harvests year after year which cannot supply the needs of his extended family and the puny condition of his cattle. He resolves to go to the ‘white man's city’ to work in the mines so that he and his family may have an income while the land is given time to recover. Like the good son he is, he informs his aging and wise father, called Mbanjwa, of his intention. It is then that the sage reminds him of the tragic consequences for the black man who goes to the city. He himself has lost his youngest son, Mfazwe, to the city and grief has torn him apart. He has seen other young and strong men return broken in body and spirit after a spell in the city. He cites the examples of Zondani's son who had returned minus one eye and one arm lost in a dynamite blast in the mine; of Bikani, who returned with the ‘big cough’ (phthisis) contracted in the mine. When Kolisile appeals to his father that he would not become like that, the old man retaliates:

‘What are you against the city of the white man? You are like the greycat fighting against the tiger. The big city of the white man catches you and strikes you down. Where are all those who lived here? Where are those who were children when you were a child? Where are they? They are gone. And those who have returned, are broken men, like the tree beaten by the hail’ (p. 15).

Nevertheless, Kolisile convinces his father and very reluctantly the old man gives his permission for Kolisile to go. Once in Johannesburg, his ordeal begins, culminating in the mine accident in which he loses a leg. Like the others before him who have returned, Kolisile returns a broken man, both physically and spiritually. His ‘pilgrimage’ to the ‘white man's city’ was futile and tragic, his return devoid of joy: he failed in his mission to bring his brother home; he has to endure the discomfort of walking with an iron leg; his land is even more ravaged than before and his cattle thin and lack lustre; he is a stranger to all those who knew him before he left, even to his own wife and children; he sees how thin everybody had become and his wise old father is no longer alive.
His disillusionment about the city is exacerbated, because before his departure from the bantustan, he was

... full of expectations about the lots of money and the big lights which turn night into day there in the city where you don't have to lie awake at night and worry about the size of the maize crop and the condition of the cattle (p. 197).

But his different horrific experiences, especially the callous shooting down of protesters by the police, make him ‘yearn for the hills where he was a child and where hatred lies far beyond the horizon’ (p. 152). Once back home and filled with deep gratitude, Kolisile comes to the conclusion that ‘he is back with those who need him’ (p. 199).

In a subtle but nevertheless unmistakable way, the message of this novel is that blacks do not belong in the ‘city of the white man’; that it is safer for them to remain in the reserves set aside for them by the authorities; that although their labour is needed in the city, they should not become urbanised as dire and tragic consequences await those who attempt to become part of the urbanised proletariat.

3.2.2.6 The women

3.2.2.6.1 Peripheral status

Each peripheral character in a novel stands in a particular relationship to the central character, and this relationship determines how far each character stands from the ‘character centre’ of the novel. Among others, it will be connected to factors such as the degree of involvement of such a character in the course of the action, to what extent it determines the development of the central character by influencing his/her decisions and course of life, and the narrating time allocated to it. The relationship may vary from almost equalisation where the interaction is unusually great - where a character can even achieve its own right of existence without having to perform a function only in respect of the central character - to characters who only fill the space. In between these two extremes a whole scale of characters is possible. Those farthest from the character centre will be the characters who, for example, only summon parallels or contrasts to other more important characters, those who only function in side-intrigues and those ‘ficelle’ figures who exist primarily because they perform a certain function and not because they in themselves are important or attain a significant degree of independence. Figures who only fill the space are often to a large extent atmosphere-determining and are only a factor in the course of the adventures of the central character to the extent in which the space plays a role. As such, these spatial figures become part of the intrigue. The further a character moves away from the character centre, the less narrating time is accorded to it and consequently the possibility of
communicativeness becomes less. If one considers a scale of peripheral characters which may vary from degrees of nearness to degrees of distantness, one must realise that it is a scale that is purely ad hoc for each novel.

Purely on the grounds of the fact that peripheral characters are accorded less narrating time than central characters and their opportunity for reasonably extensive communicativeness consequently less, the chances of ‘roundness’ for these characters are smaller than for the central character. They are often inclined to remain ‘flat’, even to swing to types or caricatures. But the possibility of fullness is not only created by the amount of narrating time and the character's degree of communicativity. It is closely related to the manner in which such a character is integrated in the action and how it reacts to the central character. The nature of its contact with and involvement in the central character plays an important role.

A peripheral character is often involved in the adventures of the central character and sometimes even gives crucial direction to the course of his/her existence, but does not feel itself involved in the experiences of the central character. When, however, it feels itself involved, it gives an indication of a considerable emotional response: another facet of its personality is shown and consequently a possibility for greater fullness. This second kind of involvement, which primarily concerns human relationships, does not imply a more objective role in the intrigue. Certain characters have a determining influence on the central character and are therefore also involved in his/her fate, but they reveal little of that involvement. A certain stratum of their character, of their whole personality, is therefore not revealed, which means that they necessarily forfeit a dimension of their personality.

Women as central characters in the Afrikaans novel have always been a rare phenomenon, if not non-existent. When they do occupy a position near to the centre of the events or the character centre, it is more often than not at least one step behind the central male character. In the case of black women characters, their role has always been even more peripheral than that of white women. One can hardly speak of them as ‘characters’; they can rather be classified as incidental background figures who only appear to serve some function beyond themselves, e.g. representing the social and political milieu in which the main character acts. The status of women characters in the Afrikaans novel can be attributed to (i) the patriarchal society of South Africa; (ii) the political and social divide between black and white and (iii) the capitalist mode of production.

The women in this novel, both white and black, have extremely peripheral roles, with the exception of Miriam. This is Kolisile's story, but because Miriam occupies so much of his thoughts, because so many of his actions are motivated by his love for her and because she has such a pivotal role in his very existence and experiences in the city, a fair amount of narrating time is allotted to her.
3.2.2.6.2 Miriam, the shebeen queen and prostitute

The satellite story of Miriam and Kolisile is briefly as follows: After Kolisile's horrendous experience with the dog set upon him by its white mistress, he accidentally stumbles in a state of stupor upon the ruin where the two black men, Kaloeti and Mafakoe, hide from the police. After resuscitating him somewhat with liquor, they insist that he cannot stay with them because he is in no state to flee from the police in case their hide-out should be discovered. He is directed to Miriam in the squatter camp where he is sure to find help. On arriving there in such a weak state through loss of blood, he can only stammer the word ‘Miriam’ before losing consciousness. Miriam nurses him with endless patience and care until he is fit enough to work but then she and her blind husband, Mafasoe, invite him to stay with them. Very soon Miriam and Kolisile become attracted to one another and a relationship develops between them. Meanwhile, in typical ‘noble savage’ innocence, Kolisile fails to comprehend Miriam's clandestine movements until much later, when he learns that she brews and sells traditional beer (skokiaan) to augment her income. When she is arrested, he promises that he will take care of her husband and see to it that her children remain at school. It is this promise which Kolisile wants to honour that drives him to earn more money, even by resorting to gang activities in order to pay Miriam's fine and keep her children at school.

The author goes about in a very traditional way in characterising Miriam, that is to say, he uses the strategies of *explicit* and *implicit* information. Explicit information is supplied on three levels: by the narrating instance, by other characters and by Miriam herself. Implicit information is exclusively supplied through Miriam's actions and conduct from which the reader has to infer certain character traits according to a process of nomination. In addition to her actions and conduct, information can also be inferred from a description of her appearance and from the presentation of her environment.

Our first acquaintance with Miriam is through another of the peripheral characters, Kaloeti, when he refers the injured Kolisile to her for treatment of his wounds. At this stage, nothing is actually said about her character, except that she also helped Mafakoe when his arm was shot off by the police. One can therefore conclude that Miriam is a kind of Samaritan, is in a certain sense a traditional healer. But already a darker side of her character can be inferred - she is prepared to aid and abet fugitives from the police, thus making her an accessory to the crimes committed.

Then the narrating instance takes over for a considerable time, since Kolisile in whom the novel's focalizing process is seated, loses consciousness. Miriam's environment is the first to be described by the narrating instance. In the squatter camp, with its ‘hideous shelters of hessian and tin and corrugated iron’ (p. 43),

Miriam's neat hut of reeds and clay is the exception. The squatter camp is furthermore described as 'lying like a bank of flotsam which has been cast out by the stream of the city - disorderly, filthy, hideous ... Everything lies thrown together in thick chaos as if a corrupt giant tried to build something here' (p. 44). Not only the living conditions of the dwellers are described but also their activities: drinking beer and making merry; a woman screaming in ecstasy along a footpath; a child crying out his protest against life; an old man dying in a tin shanty without the world knowing about it; men congregating to discuss their criminal activities for the night. With these descriptions the scene is set: the squatter camp and its inhabitants embody all the ills of the world, all the decadence from which the ‘city of the white man’ purged itself, thus implying that the city would be a good place to live in but for the ‘flotsam’ which has entered its sacred portals. Amidst this chaos and decadence Miriam lives: neat, orderly and elevated above the rest. Although one can infer something about Miriam's character from the description of her environment, i.e. the strength of character to maintain her lofty standards even amidst such degradation, one has to question the inconsistencies appearing in these descriptions. First of all, if Miriam is held in such high regard by all and sundry in the squatter camp (see below), then surely her lifestyle would be emulated by those living in close proximity to her! Secondly, as mater familias of her community, she seems to exercise very little influence upon their lives in respect of the neatness, cleanliness and orderliness she values.

The next description by the narrator is of Miriam's external appearance. We learn that she is ‘big and strong; not excessively obese like most women of her race, even though she nears middle-age’ (p. 45 - my emphasis). She has an open, attractive face, she laughs frequently and when she does, it is hearty and joyful so that dimples appear in her full cheeks and her pure white teeth become exposed. She walks with a stately rhythm, she wears a pure white shawl around her shoulders and a brightly coloured headscarf. Men look at her, some curious, others grateful, still others respectful as if she is the goddess of the rain. They whisper among themselves about ‘Miriam, the Samaritan, Miriam the seductive woman, Miriam, the mysterious one’ (p. 45).

The narration is continued when the reasons for Miriam's move to the squatter camp are outlined. Previously she led a decent and contented life in the township in her neat house of bricks and mortar where she and her family could live in relative safety, where she ‘and her kindred race could live in tidy orderliness’ (p. 45). The move to the squatter camp was necessitated by the accident in which her husband lost his sight and was crippled in the lower parts of his body. She had made a solemn promise to the white woman that she would send her children to school; in order to execute that promise, she had to make a decision. She was forced to relinquish her job as domestic servant in a white suburb where she was ‘happy’ (p. 46); she had to leave her children in the care of her brother, Jackson, so that they could attend school in the township; she had to devise ways and means which
would guarantee a regular income to be able to pay for her children's schooling, while at the same time caring day and night for her disabled husband. To save money on rent, she gave up her home in the township and moved to the squatter camp where she did not have to pay rent.

Here she became the centre of the community. Men and women congregated at night around her fire; deep in the night she is summoned when an old man dies, when a child is in pain, when a young woman goes through the agonies of childbirth, when somebody has been shot by the police, when a child has been beaten up by thugs, etc. In short, she became the heart and soul of the deprived, the degenerate and decadent, a pillar of strength for the masses under hessian and iron.

This is the picture painted of Miriam by the narrator, a picture which in no way can be described as negative; in fact, a very positive picture of Miriam emerges, depicted with sympathy, insight into and understanding of the circumstances which forced her to live as she does. But at this point the external narrator/focalizer yields focalization to Kolisile and the other black characters, so that a different picture, refuting the one painted by the 'objective' narrator, emerges. It is more than interesting to note that the narrator, who we have already established as being white and superior, introduces the positive aspects of Miriam's character, while it is left to the black characters to highlight her negative attributes. What can we conclude from that? The external narrator, it seems, wants to retain his ‘objectivity’, wants to give the impression that the black characters' perception of Miriam is not necessarily his, that the “omniscient” narrator does not after all have ‘inside knowledge’ of the lives of another racial group and that this can best be provided by members of that group themselves. This is an attempt to absolve the narrator from any blame of being a racist and sexist.

How do the other characters perceive Miriam? For most of the men who have the pleasure of knowing her, she is beautiful and desirable. When Kolisile regains consciousness after a long time, the first face he sees is that of Miriam, making a pleasing impression on him. It is not long before he desires her with all his heart. Kaloeti calls her ‘Miriam, the beautiful woman’ (p. 97) and experience a strange yearning for her, for the allure of her full body (p. 101). Likewise, the decadent brother of Kolisile, Mfazwe, calls her ‘the beautiful woman’ (p. 113) who seduced him and then cast him aside, although he, too, still desires her.

Both Miriam's husband, Mafasoe, and her lover, Kolisile, have the utmost admiration for her spiritual and emotional strength. For Mafasoe it is natural for her to take care of those in need, for it is an integral part of her character. His trust in her is unshakeable, and even when Kolisile asks him pertinently whether he is not afraid that other men will take her away from him, he replies:
'The men here are good. They do not take Mafasoe's wife. They know Mafasoe cannot see. A man does not take a blind man's wife ... Mfazwe, the son of Mbanjwa, wanted to take her, but Miriam said: “No, I am the wife of Mafasoe, the blind man”' (p. 65).

Despite these positive perceptions of Miriam, she is nevertheless portrayed as the stereotyped black shebeen queen. Some justification is given for her resorting to this activity as a means of supplementing her income, but then one wonders whether those reasons are valid, i.e. she had to give up her job to look after her husband; after his accident he was no longer a wage-earner. If Miriam could spend so much time taking care of others without remuneration, if she could go out into the streets trying to sell - often unsuccessfully - the baskets Mafasoe makes and staying away practically the whole day, then surely there was no need for her to give up her job?

The emergence of the ‘shebeen queen’ in the urban areas is a direct result of government policy. From the black perspective, Miriam provided a much-needed service as well as earning some money. It is therefore significant that two of the people closest to her, her husband and her brother, do not take kindly to her activity: Mafasoe condemns her and believes she must be punished for violating the laws of the country; Jackson despises her. We learn that she had been arrested several times before on the same charge but was released each time upon paying a fine; this time, however, she is sentenced to six months imprisonment without the option of a fine.

By brewing and selling skokiaan, Miriam is accused of causing men to become ‘mad’, to scream and fight and stab each other (pp. 65, 127). By selling skokiaan, she also invites men and women to congregate at her place and form adulterous relationships with those they meet by chance, i.e. she runs a brothel as well, although it is never stated explicitly. Being desirable and seductive herself, she makes it easy for the men in their drunken state to make advances which she exploits to the full.

Miriam, then, is also portrayed as the stereotyped black whore. Several characters refer to her nocturnal activities, Miriam herself confesses to Kolisile that she paid Mfazwe with her body when he gave her money to keep her children at school. In his innocence, Kolisile is oblivious of the reasons for Miriam's nocturnal disappearances, but still wonders where she goes to at night and where the money suddenly comes from when she returns (p. 53). Later we learn from Mafakoe about ‘the other men who sleep with Miriam’ (p. 99) and from Kamala, Mfazwe's concubine, about Miriam's way of life. When Kolisile approaches his brother for a loan to pay Miriam's fine, it is Kamala who forbids him to do so. She asserts that all those men who sleep with Miriam should come forward to pay her fine.
Kolisile appeals to his brother that Miriam's and Mafasoe's children have also to be kept at school, but Kamala suggests that the children are probably not even Mafasoe's but those of other men (pp. 115-117).

Then, as previously mentioned, a relationship develops between Miriam and Kolisile, culminating in Miriam carrying Kolisile's child. The fact that the relationship continues in the presence of the blind Mafasoe (the three of them share Miriam's one-roomed hut), is a serious indictment against both Miriam and Kolisile, especially in view of Mafasoe's implicit trust in Miriam and the high regard he has for Kolisile. Taking into account the assertions of both Mafakoe and Kamala - if they are true - as well as Miriam's mysterious disappearances at night, the reader may well wonder whether Kolisile is in fact the father of the child Miriam is expecting.

Once more, Miriam's strong moral fibre as initially espoused by the narrator, becomes questionable. How can the reader reconcile her tender care of and love for Mafasoe with such treachery and callousness? How is it possible that a woman who is sacrificing so much to look after her disabled husband, can betray him so deeply? What does it say about Mafasoe - whose other senses are so much sharper after being blinded, who believes in the ‘Great Book’ and who must have been aware of his wife's and Kolisile's complicity - for allowing these goings-on? Is this action not a direct contradiction of the ‘noble savage’ image projected of Kolisile? One is also bemused by Kolisile's action after being told by Miriam about the child. He leaves Miriam and Mafasoe to return to the mine and ultimately home, without a second thought for the child he has sired.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the portrayal of Miriam. The author obviously has very little knowledge about black society and gives his views about black people as he had been indoctrinated to view them. Despite his ‘sympathetic’ approach to the question of the uprooted black man in the city, he nevertheless manipulates the characters in such a way that the reader cannot but believe that their values are not comparable to those of white people, that they in fact remain bestial in spite of their contact with ‘civilisation’ (cf. the unbridled fornication of Miriam and Kolisile in the same room where the former's husband is present; Kolisile's indifference about the child).

If Miriam, who is described by the narrator as being among the best of the squatter community, reveals herself as a devious, conniving whore, what must be said about the rest of the women in the camp? Obviously, Venter aligns himself to the general Afrikaner/white view that black people in general and black women in particular have neither the skills nor the intellect to earn a living other than by prostitution and ‘criminal’ activities. In addition to trying to prove that they do not belong in the ‘white man's city’, the novel also attempts to show that black women can make no meaningful contribution to the country's economy by entering the labour
market and can therefore never participate in the democratic processes of government. In this sense, the novel reinforces government policy of keeping blacks in a position of servitude and black women on the bottom rung of the ladder of political, economic and social hierarchy.

3.2.2.6.3 Kamala, the shrewish whore

Kamala, concubine of the gang leader, shebeen and brothel owner, Mfazwe, appears only once in the story, i.e. when Kolisile visits his younger brother for the first time. She is never mentioned by any other character and the observations the reader has of her are those of Kolisile.

She is slim, half Zulu and half Indian, with a beautiful face, shining black hair and large, bright eyes. It is incumbent upon South Africans to notice and describe in racial terms, for it is race and ethnicity which would determine an individual's position in the hierarchy of the country. Being presented as 'half Zulu, half Indian' (p. 115), Kamala is immediately categorised as a 'half-breed' with its supposedly corresponding decadent nature. Her name, her 'race' and her actions characterise her as the outsider or alien in urban black society.

Her open demonstrations of lust and her coquettish ways already embarrass Kolisile, and with disgust he notices how she drinks brandy from the bottle with long and deep gulps. Her 'alien' nature - alien to South African patriarchal society - is most clearly visible in her 'proud rebelliousness' (p. 119) and the manner in which she dominates Mfazwe's life. The latter admits to himself that her beauty has a hold over him, that he cannot let her go because she satisfies his needs, even though she can never be a wife to him. She fights like a tigress, while her vitriolic tongue is a further indication of the vast difference between her and the way South African women are expected to be.

Being the possessive kind, Kamala lays claim not only on Mfazwe but also on everything he owns: "Mfazwe's money is Kamala's money," she says to Kolisile when he asks his brother for money to pay Miriam's fine (p. 116). Her greatest transgression is when she abuses Kolisile's family, his father for whom he has such a deep love and respect, and Nomati, Mfazwe's wife in the bantustan. With vicious derision of Nomati, who she calls 'the ugly woman with the thick legs and big feet' (p. 117) and contempt for Kolisile's father, she displays her bitchy nature and contravenes the moral code of not verbally abusing the relatives of one's adversary. All this becomes too much for Kolisile and he slaps her across the face and punches her in the stomach.

Kamala's most important function is to supply information about Miriam, to further reinforce the picture of Miriam as a prostitute. She must be aware of the earlier relationship between Miriam and Mfazwe and of the latter's continued
desire for Miriam. She is driven by jealousy to disclose to Kolisile that Miriam ‘sleeps with other men’ and that her children are probably not even Mafasoe's (p. 116).

With the introduction of Kamala into the story, the author tries to kill two birds with one stone. Firstly, he needs the evidence of other black characters to prove that Miriam particularly and black women generally are devious and immoral. Secondly, as a character, however peripheral, Kamala shows herself to be typical of the existing image of the black woman but even more so, for being a ‘half-breed’, she also represents the ‘weaknesses’ in the blood of such people, as explained in Chapter 2.

3.2.2.6.4 Nomosi, the ‘ideal’ black woman

The idea that black people should stay in the reserves where they shall remain undefiled of urban influences, is clearly illustrated in the figure of Nomosi. She is Kolisile's wife and the mother of his children, and portrayed as the direct opposite of the urbanised Miriam and Kamala.

We are left in no doubt about Kolisile's high regard and love for his wife, about his concern for the future of his family and about the pain of parting from them, especially from Nomosi, ‘for whom he had paid with the big lobola and who is now so close to his heart that he can hear her breathing, even when she is far away from him; the beautiful woman with the strong arms, the woman who is quiet and good like a flame that burns brightly’ (p. 9 - my emphasis). This is the charactertrait of Nomosi that is invoked several times: her quietness, calmness and tranquillity.

During Kolisile's agonising first train journey to the ‘white man's city’, it is Nomosi's presence he yearns for, the security of her nearness, Nomosi ‘who had been beside him over the years when he awoke during the night’ (p. 19). In his agony, he finds reassurance when he visualises her, he sees ‘her calm eyes when they talked around the fire ... he yearns for the quiet voice of Nomosi’ and remembers her ‘wordlessness ... and the tranquillity in her eyes’ when he took leave of his family (p. 19). Once in the city, he is plagued by longing which finds expression in his dreams at night and in which he often sees 'how his Nomosi stares wordlessly across the wide world” (p. 31). Even in his delirium after having been attacked by the white woman's dog, he is aware of Nomosi, of her eyes which ‘glow vaguely from afar, and he hears the tranquil sound of her voice as if she speaks to him through the rustling of the rain’ (p. 49).

But then Kolisile's adventure with Miriam begins and Nomosi gradually recedes to the periphery of his thoughts. At first ‘he fought against it for the sake of his father and Nomosi and his children, but it did not help. Nomosi is far away and
Miriam is here with him ... He feels ashamed when he thinks of Nomosi ... but Miriam laughs in the empty space between him and Nomosi ...’ (p. 55). When he returns home and sees Nomosi after a long time, he realises that she is ‘so different from Miriam ... she looks at him with her soft eyes’ (p. 199).

Nomosi never utters a word in the story, neither is she an actor or focalizer. Nevertheless, with this image of the rural black woman, the message becomes clear: in the end, man prefers his wife to be quiet, passive and subservient, although he can sow his wild oats as often as he wishes with more exciting women; for this reason, the black woman should remain in her ‘natural habitat’, lest she becomes corrupted by urban influences; the contrast between Miriam and Nomosi serves to highlight the decadence of the urban black woman while placing her rural sister on a pedestal, according to patriarchal precedents and South African ideology; it is expected of woman to be silently long-suffering, forgiving and supportive of her man, without the latter having the same commitment.

3.2.2.6.5 The white women

All the white characters/figures in the novel remain anonymous, with the exception of the mine engineer, Vermaas. One may argue that this anonymity is due to the fact that the story concerns urbanised black people and their experiences in the city, which therefore makes it unimportant to name the white characters. However, we have already established that these white figures are portrayed as the dominant group, the ones who guide and direct the eternal child, the black person.

Anonymity of characters can be related to the ‘death of character’ (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:29). With reference to the Balzac story, Sarrasine, Barthes concludes: ‘What is obsolescent in today's novel is not the novelistic, it is the character; what can no longer be written is the Proper Name’ (Barthes 1974:95). He continues by saying that when we speak of a character with a proper name, we in fact speak about its figure and not its person, ‘an impersonal network of symbols combined under the proper name. We do not undertake an investigation into the character, but develop connotations; we are not searching for the truth about the character but for the systematics of a (transitory) site of the text’ (p. 94). Hélène Cixous (1974:387) questions the stability and unity of the self, because the ‘I’ is ‘always more than one, diverse, capable of being all those it will at one time be, a group acting together, a collection of singular beings that produce the enunciation’. In connection with the anonymous character, Brink (1987:75) posits that we should be able to speak about ‘a conscious strategy which is used to replace the weight of the character more obviously in the direction of the “mythological” (or the “general”, or the “universal”)’.

In view of the above pronouncements, it is safe to say that the two white women figures, however peripheral their roles are, remain anonymous to function as
a collection point of white traits, as espoused by the Afrikaner. There is a ring of myth, generality and universality about them.

The circumstances in which Kolisile meets these two women, differ widely but certain similarities can also be extracted. In the first case, Kolisile approaches the white woman for work 'on the land' where he shall be more at ease than in the claustrophobic atmosphere of the mine tunnels. He does so willingly, and his approach is friendly, humble and sincere. It has not even entered his mind to harm the woman or her child; all he wants to do is to earn a living in an honest manner. Yet this woman sees him as a potential rapist, robber and murderer and sets her dog upon him. In the second case, Kolisile is forced by his gang boss to burgle the house of the white woman, to kill her if necessary. Kolisile does this with much reservation, but he has to pay off a debt to his brother. The woman awakes to find the burglar in her bedroom and, although her revolver is within her reach, she chooses rather to persuade Kolisile to lead a more honest life.

Both these women represent the wider white community, specifically the white women in general and Afrikaner women particularly. It is, for example, also significant that Kolisile's direct confrontation with whites should be with white/Afrikaner women, if one bears in mind the Afrikaners' protection and elevation of their womenfolk (see Chapter 2). In the case of the first woman, the narrator deems it necessary to justify her irrational action - her husband had been attacked by black men and she remembers the case of the two pensioners brutally murdered by blacks. Nevertheless, this justification is superfluous, for the general white view of blacks is that they are barbaric, brutal and know only the law of the jungle. The Afrikaners' experiences in the frontier wars and at Blaauwkrantz, irrespective of their own brutality, exacerbated their preconceived fear of the black man. For the Afrikaner woman, particularly, the black man is not to be trusted, since he is in a position to rape and flaw her 'pure' white blood. It is her duty to keep the white race 'pure' and she has been lauded for doing exactly that. Linked to this, is the theory by some Western feminists that the black man suffers from the Oedipus complex by wishing to marry his 'mother', the white woman (see Firestone 1979: chapter 5).

In the case of the second woman, the visions of a civilising mission by a chosen people with a destiny in a sea of primitive heathen natives are invoked. The Afrikaner woman is the instrument with which this mission can be accomplished, she is the bearer of light in this dark continent of Africa and it is up to her to instil into black people the fear of God's wrath for their misdemeanours. It is no wonder that Kolisile afterwards speaks of this woman as having supernatural powers, as having an aura about her which places her far, far above the level of the black man.
3.3 Mikro (pseud. of C.H. Kühn)

3.3.1 Mikro's oeuvre regarding the ‘coloureds’

Mikro is perhaps best known for his Toiings trilogy, entitled respectively as Toiings (1934), Pelgrims (1935) and Vreemdelinge (1944). The central character is a shepherd who, in the true tradition of slavery, is given the name Toiings (Tatters) by his master, Baas Fanie, thereby relinquishing his very identity and humanity. In fact, with this naming a process of dehumanization and emasculation is set in motion and continues throughout the trilogy, so that the superiority of the other may be established. With regard to this naming, Gerwel (1988:137) points out: ‘Already by naming, Toiings is being typed as an inferior and apostate figure; he himself provides the interpretation of his name (in style indirect libre): “He is a bad hotnot (slegte hotnot)... They have given him a suitable name - Toiings. He is as bad as a dishrag or an old, old tattered rag on the rubbish dump” (Toiings, p. 28). The entire Toiings chronicle revolves around the containment of this “slegte hotnot” in him which periodically breaks loose and dominates’. In true Afrikaner and Mikrolian tradition, there is no place in the scheme of things for the dissenting voice. When Toiings' son, Dawid, attempts to break loose from the servitude to which his parents are condemned, he is killed off. Dawid makes a break with the spell of the master and the farm; after an initial reckless lifestyle in the town, he rehabilitates himself in order to acquire honour and independence away from the master, but Mikro apparently cannot grant the descendants of Toiings this emancipation, because in a completely unmotivated and non-functional manner, Dawid meets his demise.

In 1942 Mikro published a further novel of farm life entitled Huisies teen die heuwel (Cottages on the hillside) to which he adds, to the list of enemies of the old rural order identified in the Toiings trilogy - irreligion, lax morals, unbridled use of liquor by both men and women, as well as the impersonal forces of economics and climate - a new and subversive ideology. This ideology arrives on Baas Gert's wine-farm through the agency of a trouble-maker named Moos, the jailbird son of respectable working parents. ‘Every time they let him out of jail he was a harder communist ... back on the farm he lounged about and blew all kinds of ideas into the volk's ears’ (p. 41). The conflict that threatens between Moos and Baas Gert is not allowed to come to a head. Moos is killed in a drunken brawl, the critique of feudal relations he promises to articulate never finds its way into words and by the end of the novel Baas Gert is able to conclude that the failings of ‘his’ volk - mainly work-shyness - are the failings of children, to be corrected with a kindly but firm paternal hand. The killing off of Moos is another example of the baffling and silencing of any countervoice to the voice of the father/farmer.
3.3.2 Die Koperkan (The Copper Urn) - 1959

3.3.2.1 Introduction

With this novel Mikro makes a complete break with his usual agrarian set-up and focuses his attention on the urban 'coloured'. As if he discovers for the first time that the Toiings-type he has created is not the only 'type' of 'coloured' to be found in South African society, he makes an attempt to prove that basically there is no difference between the rural and the urban 'coloured'. The same traits he ascribes to Toings can be found in Derk Booysen, especially the 'Ja-Baas-hoed-in-die-hand'-trait (Yes-Boss-hat-in-hand-trait), although not as overtly discernable as in Toiings; the 'coloured' who 'knows his place' and the 'coloured' who needs the strong, paternal hand of the white man to give guidance and direction to his life. Both Toings and Derk are symbolically castrated. In addition, as in Toings and Huisies teen die heuwel, there is no place for the dissenting voice; like Dawid and Moos in the two earlier novels, Frankie in his opposition to apartheid must be killed off. Similarly, as in the Toiings trilogy, Mikro uses the same strategy, i.e. the style indirect libre, to characterise Derk in order to justify the white person's perception of the 'coloured', since both Toings and Derk think of themselves as the white person thinks of the 'coloureds'.

Mikro has not only been widely acclaimed by white literary critics as the best exponent of literature regarding the 'coloureds', but with the publication of this novel he has also been lauded by both the English and Afrikaans press for handling a prickly issue with so much aplomb. The English press had this to say about the novel: 'The Afrikaner is by and large on the threshold of another way of thinking in South Africa, and it will be books like these that will be remembered as monuments along the road which will ultimately end in a better understanding among the various races in our multi-racial country' (The Friend); 'It is a well-knit story, excellently written and told with delicacy and sympathy towards all concerned in it. The views expressed have obviously been arrived at as the result of deep and penetrating thought' (The Pretoria News); 'Die Koperkan should be read by every White South African who knows nothing about the tragedy of the Coloureds within a White community' (The Star); 'It is significant because it is compassionate. That is half the solution' (Zionist Record).

The Afrikaans press praised the novel as '... a meaningful broadening of our prose, compassionate and poignant at the same time' (Die Transvaler); ‘The usual complaint is that our writers do not have the courage to embody our country's true problems in the novel. Here we have an honest and sympathetic attempt in that direction’ (Die Huisgenoot); ‘This work pushes the thought to far-off unknown horizons, because even if everybody does not agree with the characters' opinions, everybody will sense and appreciate the topical value of this
honest novel’ (Dagbreek en Sondagnuus); ‘Mikro has written the book ... with great sincerity, with greater respect for reality than most English novelists and dramatists who have dealt with the same or related themes’ (Die Burger).

This reception of the text by white critics is to be expected, since it subscribes to the ideas of most whites in the 1950s and a fair percentage in contemporary South Africa. Narratologically, however, it is a feeble attempt, a strongly didactic novel which makes a pro-apartheid statement at the expense of a feasible storyline, effective characterisation and functional, motivated action. Many of the events are so unrelated and loose, with only the apartheid message as interconnecting line, that one can hardly speak of a ‘well-knit story’ as the critic in The Pretoria News does.

3.3.2.2 The title, symbolism and story

The title, Die Koperkan, belongs to the author's text as well as to the story text, because this is also the title of Derk's anthology of poems which has the recurring theme of apartheid, more specifically the 'copper coloured' people's place in an apartheid society. This double marking is supplemented by the actual copper urn in the display window of a store and which becomes the most important code in the story. It is this copper urn which inspires Derk to name his anthology after it. ‘Copper’ in the title is a very explicit reference to the copper tone of the ‘coloured’ skin. This becomes clear in the very first lines of the story text:

Derk Booyse, the coloured teacher, suddenly stops. The copper urn is still in the display window. In the window mirror of Du Plooy and Van Graan he can see his reflection. He looks at it not because he wants to look - there are surely enough big mirrors in his own home - luxury and ... Derk looks at his big belly, the waistcoat, tie, shirt and then at the copper colour of his skin (p. 7).

We also read in the first few paragraphs of Derk's fascination with the old copper urn which is 'more brown than yellow' (p. 7) and which no one apparently wants to buy, for it has been in the display window since the day that Du Plooy and Van Graan opened their store. We can therefore conclude that the author's title refers to the copper urn in the display window and to Derk's anthology, but to what or to who does the title of Derk's anthology refer? Derk equates himself with the copper urn, so does the implied author and so does the real author. The fact that the title belongs to two different texts - prose and poetry; an author's text and a fictional text; one written by white and one written by brown; etc. - is an indication of the duality not only of Derk with his ‘white spirit’ within his brown skin but also of the entire ‘coloured’ population who, as expressed in the story, belong neither here nor there. Ilsa Touwa, the little white girl, desires with all her heart to have enough money to buy the copper urn for the old ‘coloured’ woman.
whom she calls Même Katryn. In her innocence, she too equates the old copper urn with a ‘coloured’.

The all too obvious symbolism of the copper urn is placed from time to time in juxtaposition to the symbolism of the alabaster vase which once formed part of the merchandise in the store and which had since been bought by a beautiful, well-dressed white woman. Like the copper urn, the copper skin is cursed and can only bring doom to those who possess it (cf. Ilsa's gift to Même Katryn when it was too late; tragedy strikes Derk's family at the time when the copper urn comes into his possession). The copper urn in the display window is ‘old and dented’ (p. 7), it is ‘battered and dirty’ (p. 9) and it is ‘crooked’ (pp. 8, 14, 55). Now that it has been used and abused, neglected by its different owners, nobody wants it. Even if it is polished to shining glory, it shall remain imperfect; even if the ‘coloured’ acquires all the cultivation and ‘polish’ of white civilisation, s/he shall remain non-white - that is the unmistakable message the author intends to bring across.

The opposition between the copper urn and the alabaster vase not only forms the theme of one of Derk's poems (God has willed both, i.e. the white race and the brown race), but also the imperfection of the one is continually placed in opposition to the perfection of the other. They can never be the same, neither in appearance nor in composition (perhaps one should also bear in mind that alabaster is chiefly European in origin while copper is essentially an African raw material). Obviously, the author did not have in mind the warm, friendly glow of copper in contrast to the cold, hard and impersonal qualities of alabaster.

The novel, briefly, is an attempt to embody the grim conditions which arise as a result of the apartheid legislation, in the experiences of the ‘coloured’ teacher and poet, Derk Booysen. The characters become simply mouthpieces for certain ideas and the novel itself becomes an undisguised plea for apartheid. The story mostly concerns Petro who is about to marry a white man who is completely unaware of her true background and who is fiercely opposed to ‘miscegenation’. Her impending marriage causes Derk much grief, not because he is opposed to her marrying a white man but because it would mean that he would no longer have access to her, that his pet daughter would be lost to him forever. Derk and his family are castigated and ostracised by the ‘coloured’ community because of his obvious preference for white company and his propagation of the apartheid ideology.

3.3.2.3 Language

The next bit of text after the title is the motto, an extract from a poem written by Derk Booysen and a sombre indication of what is to come:

'n Vader het twee seuns gehad,
'n witte en 'n bryne;
Sê die bryne: Gee datlik myne
en ek gaan saailint op my pad.
(A father had two sons,
a white one and a brown one;
Says the brown one: Give me mine immediately
and I'll go silently on my way.)

Obviously a parody on the parable of the Prodigal Son, this poem is presented in the so-called ‘skollie’ language (‘gamat-taal’, the author calls it - p. 76) of the ‘coloured’ people of the Western Cape, so called by white Afrikaners who view it as a gross violation of ‘their’ language. This motto together with the language in which it is written is intended as a further indication of the ‘uncultured’ nature of the ‘coloureds’, besides being a direct and explicit plea for the ‘coloured’ to accept his/her fate silently, passively and unprotestingly. One cannot ignore the implicit meaning of the motto: the prodigal son (‘brown one’) is decadent and degenerate and his only hope of salvation is by turning to the father (white man) for guidance, thus condemning himself to eternal servitude.

Admittedly, most of the characters use what the Afrikaners prefer to call ‘Algemeen-Beskaafde’ (‘generally civilised’) language; Derk writes most of his poetry in this ‘civilised’ language and only when he attempts writing protest poetry does he use the Western Cape dialect. Likewise, his son, Frankie, fiercely opposed to and outspoken about his opposition to apartheid, writes protest poetry in this dialect and uses it in his speech to taunt his father. The vegetable vendor, Jafta, and the few incidental ‘coloured’ extras who are intended to represent the larger ‘coloured’ community, are the only ones who consistently use this dialect, but then Mikro displays a phonetical and syntactical ignorance of their speech. Jafta's speech - and by implication that of the average ‘coloured’ - is limited and simplified and his range of intellecution and feeling is by implication correspondingly limited and simplified. Furthermore, this particularised rendering of speech may have been intended for a well-defined reason, i.e. to create a comic effect, thus reinforcing Gerwel's thesis of the 'Jollie Hotnot' stereotype. It conveys in addition a certain naïveté, even childishness, which reflects on the quality of mind of its speaker and the ‘coloured’ people in general.

The forms of address in this novel are of particular interest. Given Derk's status in the community, he is portrayed in his relationships and dealings with whites as the ‘idealized child’ (Gerwel). He consistently addresses Louis Beeg in the third person as ‘Professor’ and the very formal second person pronoun ‘u’ (‘Thou’), usually reserved for addressing one's parents or elders. In contrast, Beeg addresses him as ‘jy’, the more familiar second person form of address used for equals or...
those below the social status of the speaker. Even more striking is Derk's conversation with the publisher, Floors Roux, who, incidentally, is introduced to him by Louis Beeg as 'mnr. Roux'. Once again, Derk addresses him as ‘u’ or ‘meneer’ (Sir), while he addresses Derk as ‘Booysen’, without the customary courteous addition of ‘meneer’. Even the drunken, degenerate white man, Gys Touwa, addresses him as ‘Booysen’ or ‘jy’, while he addresses Touwa as ‘meneer’ (p. 140). While Louis Beeg addresses Derk as ‘jy’ or by his first name, he shows considerable more courtesy to Derk's white daughter by addressing her as ‘juffrou’ ('Miss’). In Derk's dealings with people from his own group, we observe the same phenomenon. He addresses members of his staff and the parents of pupils at his school by their surnames, e.g. John Orlep (staff-member) and Freek Voster (parent of one of his pupils) are addressed simply by their surnames: ‘Orlep’ and ‘Voster’. This is a highly unlikely form of address by a school principal, since it is part of the code of conduct in the teaching profession to address colleagues and parents alike courteously. Derk displays even less courtesy when dealing with the run-of-the-mill people among the 'coloured' population (cf. for example his manner of speaking to Jafta, the petrol attendant, Méme Katryn).

These forms of address have definite functions: firstly, they illustrate the vertical and horizontal divide and compartmentalisation which characterise South African society; secondly, they are intended to make the reader aware of the social stratification which exists among the oppressed people, i.e. those who are oppressed can only assert themselves as full human beings by in turn further oppressing the oppressed. They are intended to show that class consciousness, segregation and stratification are part and parcel of the human condition, and not only peculiar to white South Africans. Thirdly, asymmetry of address which usually marks disparity of status between interlocutors is by no means a phenomenon confined to Afrikaans, as J.M. Coetzee (1988:130) points out. But social disparity is more usually reflected in the opposition of familiar to formal second person: the opposition of second person to third person would appear to mark a social divide that is felt to be particularly wide or else - in an authoritarian, patriarchal culture - a disparity of status much like that between parent and child.

Significantly, when Derk Booysen attempts to articulate by means of poetry his opposition to the inequalities which came about as a result of apartheid, he uses the Western Cape dialect. But his white critic, Louis Beeg, his white publisher, Floors Roux, and his white daughter, Petro, object to his protest poetry on the grounds that these poems are ‘blemishes’ (p. 56) on an otherwise good anthology; they are representative of ‘ugly, horrible things’ (p. 136) within Derk and they illustrate an ‘impure sound’ (p. 131) in his verse. Frankie also articulates his resistance to apartheid in poetry and also uses the Cape dialect. It is left to Petro, instigated by Louis Beeg who arrogantly decides what is good and what is bad for the ‘coloured’, to destroy Derk's poems on apartheid, thereby aiding and abetting.
the process of emasculation of the black male which characterises Mikro's oeuvre. It is also Petro who tears up Frankie's resistance poetry. As in the case of Frankie who had to die because of his dissidence, so too the black man's protests must be stifled, silenced, destroyed. But that is not all: this destruction of Derk's and Frankie's verse also symbolises the attempted destruction of a culture which has developed independently of white South Africans, the destruction of a language which is accessible to all and which has become the language of the protesting masses.

3.3.2.4 Focalization

External focalization is a convenient strategy to portray the black character as perceived by a superior white narrator and focalizer whose ideology is dominant and therefore more readily acceptable to (white) readers and critics.

‘Narrative with external focalization’ (Genette 1980:189) is where the hero performs in front of us without our ever being allowed to know its thoughts or feelings. The events are seen from the outside by a character or narrator who is in fact not a participating witness of the events. Such a narrator also does not comment on the events. This, however, does not prevent the narrator from being subjective. Mieke Bal (1985:100) states that it is possible to try and give an ‘objective’ picture of the facts, but this would involve an attempt to present only what is seen or perceived in some other way. In that case, all comment is shunned and implicit interpretation is avoided. She points out that perception is a psychological process which is strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body. The degree to which one is familiar with what one sees also influences perception. (How familiar are white authors in South Africa with the conditions, cultures, traditions, etc. of black people?) Many factors influence perception, so that attempting to achieve objectivity is a futile exercise. Among those factors is the psychological (and I may add the ‘ideological’) position towards the focalized object, in this case the black woman character.

Genette (1980:191) points out that external focalization with respect to one character could sometimes just as well be defined as internal focalization through another. This ambivalence (or reversibility) is equally noticeable when the witness is not personified but remains an impersonal, floating observer. In recent years it has become more and more ‘fashionable’ in the Afrikaans literature to have an external focalizer as well as a character-bound focalizer, where the character is black, to give crede to the white, superior external focalizer's image of the black character. This is especially true of Petro's perception of the ‘coloureds’. She and the external focalizer/narrator articulate her feelings towards this group of whom she is irrevocably part: “I shall never, never be happy among the coloureds,” she says (p. 17) and the external focalizer endorses this: ‘She will never be able to
marry one of her own people’ (p. 68). She and the external focalizer stop short of
giving reasons for this abhorrence of the ‘coloured’ people but it is not difficult to
infer those reasons. Given the fact that most if not all people aspire towards upward
social mobility, one can conclude that she and the EF view the ‘coloureds’ as crude
and uncultured, that living among them or marrying one of them would involve a
lowering of social, economic and political status; in short, the ‘coloured’ is anathema
to her and by implication to the white, superior EF.

To repeat, it is generally believed that the EF is objective, non-partisan, but is that
really the case? Rimmon-Kenan (1983:82,83) points out that verbal indicators of
focalization may betray the attitude of the focalizer. She states: ‘The overall language
of a text is that of the narrator, but focalization can “colour” it in a way which makes
it appear as a transposition of the perceptions of a separate agent’. Naming and
addressing are such verbal indicators, as I have shown in the sub-section on language.
When the EF in Mikro's novels continually refers to the ‘spul’, ‘tros’ or ‘broedsel’
(‘caboodle’, ‘bunch’ or ‘brood’) children of ‘coloured’ women, one cannot but see
that as a value judgement, which may refer either to their promiscuity or their
stereotyped role of breeders or both.

An external focalizer may perceive an object either from without or from within. In
the first case, only the outward manifestations of an object are presented. As an
example take the earlier Afrikaans novels which have led to the entrenchment of
existing stereotypes about blacks by only observing the outward actions of a black
character and interpreting them according to a dominant value. In Die Koperkan
Derk - and by implication the narrator-focalizer - thinks of his fellow-‘coloureds’ in
this vein:

| Oh, many coloureds blame the whites for their backwardness, poverty and diseases. He knows better. What did Jafta do when he had a windfall? Immediately went and bought a radiogram instead of nutritious food and good clothes. What does the labourer do with his wages? Liquor for the weekend. Apparently they are quite happy to live like that (p. 78). |

Not only does Derk think of these people as the ‘other’ and thus distancing himself
from them, but he also reinforces age-old stereotypes applied by the colonials to the
indigenous people. In addition, he attempts to interpret their outward actions according
to his values (and those of the narrator-focalizer) without trying to find the underlying
causes of such actions. This is but one of the numerous examples illustrating the fact
that Derk is only the mouthpiece for the author's views, for if he had been a credible
character and an educated man, as we are told, then he would have been less harsh
in his criticism of the average ‘coloured’ and would have attempted to seek the
reasons for their actions in the sustained, relentless process of oppression, domination
and dehumanisation the ‘coloureds’

and other black groups have been subjected to ever since the white man set foot in South Africa.

When Rimmon-Kenan discusses the ideological facet of focalization (1983:81), it serves to endorse the above view even further. The ‘norms of the text’ are presented through a single, dominant perspective, that of the narrator-focalizer or external focalizer. She goes on to say that if additional ideologies emerge in such texts, they become subordinate to the dominant focalizer, thus transforming the other evaluating subjects into objects of evaluation. The ideology of the narrator-focalizer is usually taken as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this higher position. In Die Koperkan the external focalizer focalizes the ‘merits’ of apartheid and the idea that the ‘coloureds’ should refrain from trying to be incorporated into the white community. An opposing ideology is presented by Frankie, Sarah, and Orlep, all of whom have to ‘bite the dust’, so to speak: Frankie is killed by white thugs because of his rejection of apartheid; Sarah, still a minor and dependent on her parents, has to toe the line and conform to her father's obvious preference for apartheid; Orlep, a state employee, is threatened with dismissal if he continues his ‘subversive’ activities.

What are the other features of external focalization which white writers use to their advantage when portraying black people? Since the black character then becomes the object of focalization, the image we receive of it is determined by the focalizer. This focalized object need not be a character - it can be the living surroundings of the black character, an event, etc. We are then presented with an interpretation of the elements which is far from neutral. For example, Derk's physical environment is sharply contrasted to that of the rest of the ‘coloured’ people. We learn that Derk and his family live in an ‘opulent house’ (p. 13), while the physical surroundings of the ‘coloured’ group area are described as ‘the backstreets of Salt River... noise; shuffling of feet; the odour of garlic; swearing and jostling’ (p. 7); the houses are ‘smaller and dirtier, the pattern of the houses is exactly the same... untidy little gardens and filthy curtains’ (pp. 9, 10). The emotive value of the adjectives puts paid to any idea of neutrality.

As Bal points out, the object of focalization may be perceptible but in some cases it may be visible only inside the head of a character and only those who have access to it can perceive anything. The EF is in the best position to have access to these non-perceptible objects and to interpret them. The EF can therefore extensively describe the thoughts of the focalized, while other characters are unaware of them. It is therefore easy to use and manipulate the thoughts of the object by means of external focalization and to manipulate the reader in the process to choose sides.

There are cases where the EF seems to ‘yield’ focalization to a character-bound focalizer. What is really happening, is that ‘the vision of the character-bound
focalizer is being given within the all-encompassing vision of the external focalizer’ (Bal). In fact, the EF always keeps the focalization in which the focalization of a character-focalizer may be embedded as object. The EF can also watch along with a person, without leaving focalization entirely to a character-focalizer. This gives rise to double or ambiguous focalization, which makes it difficult to decide who actually focalizes: the EF on the first level or the character-focalizer on the second.

The EF has the added advantage of having a bird's-eye view of the presented events - it is situated at a point far above the object(s) of its focalization. It can yield a panoramic view or a ‘simultaneous’ focalization of things happening in different places. It has at its disposal all the temporal dimensions of the story as well (past, present and future). It has unrestricted knowledge, it knows everything about the represented world and always knows more than a character-focalizer. The EF also has the advantage of penetrating the consciousness of the focalized and consequently has the privilege of manipulating that consciousness to conform to its own ideology, as is amply illustrated in the case of Derk Booysen.

There are traces of variable internal focalization in the story, but it is so loose and sporadic that it becomes of little importance. When it does take place, it is only to show that the brown skin is a scourge and that apartheid is the only solution for the problems of the ‘coloureds’. Then, of course, there is the EF who makes no bones about its contention that white is beautiful and black ugly and who yields focalization to other characters in order to manipulate them to think likewise. Cf. for example:

Alet Booysen does not look like a coloured woman. The hair is long and wavy and rustbrown while the face is almost white but the eyes are black. At the age of fifty she is still beautiful. (pp. 12-13)

(Derk to Petro, his ‘white’ daughter): ‘Let me look at you. Do you know how terribly beautiful you are?’ (p. 17)

Frankie Booysen is eighteen, tall and dark-skinned with redbrown frizzy hair, slightly flat nose, high cheekbones and thick lips. He is the ugliest of Derk's and Alet's children. (p. 22) - emphases mine.

The focalized is largely Petro who, because of her white skin, is seen through the eyes of her father, her fiancé and other whites who are unaware of her true ‘identity’, as being chaste, cultured, intelligent, beautiful and sincere, someone with a ‘developed taste’ for the arts (p. 45), someone of ‘noble disposition’ (p. 46). But she is also the focalizer and the objects of her focalization are the ‘coloureds’ in comparison to the whites. The EF manipulates several ‘coloured’ characters to invoke the so-called Biblical message of separation between the races, among them Derk and the old woman, Même Katryn.
3.3.2.5 Race and ethnicity

In South Africa, as in other parts of the world where heterogenous populations are to be found, groups are distinguished by physical and cultural characteristics. Race and ethnicity is, for the underdogs at least, a liability. Situations of conflict, invidious discrimination, exploitation, oppression and deprivation are explained by those who dominate them as in some sense inevitable or natural. Whether the exploited and oppressed group is defined racially or ethnically, racism is present on the level of ideology.

Since the phenomenon of ‘passing for white’/‘try-for-white’ does exist and both the dominant and dominated are conscious of its existence, and since the transcendence of the racial barrier is not viewed very kindly by the white dominant class, it follows that an individual's physical features are constantly under heavy scrutiny when that individual shows the faintest trace of not entirely belonging to the white race. The main concern is that such a person would, in the process of procreation, pass on the ‘black’ genes to its offspring, thereby threatening the ‘purity’ of the white race which in any case is a fantasy and which science declares has no validity whatsoever, as pointed out by, among others, Phillip V. Tobias (1961: 32-35).

For his story, Mikro creates a ‘coloured’ family consisting of the parents, Derk and Alet Booysen, and their four children, Petro, Hayward, Frankie and Sarah. With a complete disregard for the laws of genetics, Mikro creates a father and mother who both have ‘white blood in their veins’, with the father ‘more brown than yellow’ and the mother who ‘does not look like a coloured woman’. (One wonders what a ‘coloured’ woman looks like!). But their children display a remarkable deviation from genetic theory: Petro is fair-haired and fair-skinned and her physical features do not show the slightest indication of her ‘coloured’ ancestry; Hayward resembles his father and has inherited his copper-brown skin; Frankie is dark-skinned with woolly hair and Sarah is ‘even darker than Frankie’ (p. 31) - one white-skinned and three dark-skinned offspring of an almost white mother and a brown-skinned father is truly a violation of genetic veracity. Significantly, the two members of the family who most resemble whites are also given typically Afrikaner names, Alet and Petro (Petronella), and, combined with their typically Afrikaner surname, their assimilation and acceptance into the white community, especially that of Petro, is facilitated. The deformation of the Afrikaner name, Dirk, to ‘Derk’ is a clear indication that he does not belong to either Petro's or his other children's category. Likewise, his other children have obviously non-Afrikaner names which, together with their obviously ‘coloured’ physical features, effectively exclude them from the privileged class, in addition to suggesting that they do not conform to the moral values Petro, and by implication the entire Afrikaner population, subscribe to.
Petro, the ‘coloured’ woman who can easily ‘pass for white’, is carefully scrutinised by the external narrator (EN) who, in addition to being a superior, white observer, is also a self-styled expert on race biology. Explicit information is given about Petro’s race and ethnicity, for example, the EN describes her as resembling ‘... a white person even more than Alet. She has fair hair, a fair skin and it’s only the high cheekbones which would betray her ancestry to an expert, that, and the slight bluish tint under the fingernails’ (p. 13). Later, by means of the stream of consciousness technique, Derk thinks of his daughter in the same vein: ‘Petro's facial features betray no sign of her ancestry. Perhaps only the faint bluishness under the fingernails’ (p. 35). One would think that ‘bluishness under the fingernails’ is a feature of a dark-skinned person!

In fact, every ‘coloured’ character in the novel is described in terms of race and ethnicity. Petro looks upon herself as a white person, for example: ‘... to herself she is white. And indeed she is ... Is she not white of skin and white in upbringing, speech, everything?’ (pp. 47, 48). And again: ‘I am white, I have had a white education and I carry the identity document of a white person’ (pp. 67, 68) and by her own admission, she ‘thinks like a white’ (p. 68). She and the EN observe a young woman working in the same building as her and reveal her repugnance of the ‘coloured’ race: ‘In her building works a girl who is as tall as she is but the skin is dark-blue and the hair that of a bastard. She shudders’ (p. 68 - my emphasis).

This repugnance of the ‘coloureds’ is further reinforced by different narratological strategies which dupe the reader into believing that the views expressed are those of the ‘coloureds’ and not necessarily those of the real author. For example:

‘Alet thinks: I shall make sacrifices. Petro will not be able to live among our people again. Grant her the opportunity’ (p. 16);

(Petro to her father): ‘‘I shall never, never be happy among the coloureds’’ (p. 17);

(Derk to Louis Beeg): ‘‘She will never marry a coloured ... rather remain unmarried’’ (p. 20);

(Petro to her fiancé): ‘‘I can only love someone with intellect’’ (meaning her white fiancé - p. 45);

EN: ‘She will never be able to marry one of her own people’ (p. 68).

One has to infer from the above excerpts that Petro (and the EN) view the ‘coloureds’ as some kind of sub-human species but paradoxically so strong that they might infect, pollute or flaw the white race. Brushing aside the fact that white people...
were responsible for creating a race of ‘coloureds’, Mikro continues in the true Sarah Gertrude Millin tradition - though not as overtly - of ascribing to this group of the people all that is demonic in life.
Why this over-emphasis on race? There are still some, like Mikro, who maintain that race determines all social and mental activities and therefore culture and civilisation generally. This view had its origin in the days of slavery, when slaveowners answered those who wished to abolish slavery by suggesting that slaves were ignorant and illiterate because of their race (and not because they were denied schooling facilities!). It is easy to deny a subservient people the benefits of civilisation and then to describe them as uncivilised. The resulting idea of racial superiority and inferiority has been carried to absurd extremes to the present day at the hands of racist anthropologists and politicians.

3.3.2.6 ‘Futility’ and ‘tragedy’ of trying for white

The unmistakable message of this novel, over and above the propagation of the apartheid idea, is a serious warning to ‘coloureds’ that trying for white is a futile exercise which could only end in tragedy. Even those who can easily pass, must realise that they carry the ‘blood flaw’ which surely will be passed on to their offspring should they consort with white partners. It is all right for this ‘blood flaw’ to be passed on from ‘coloured’ to ‘coloured’, but to infest the white race in this manner is a mortal sin and the most serious of crimes. Moreover, a life of suffering and subterfuge awaits those who have the audacity to cross the racial barrier, as Petro had to discover.

Despite Petro's Christian upbringing, she is forced into a life of lies by informing her fiancé that she has no living relatives and that she can never have children because of her ‘haemophilia’. The impression is given that her life is a complete vacuum: living among ‘coloureds’ is unthinkable; living among whites causes stress and fear of discovery of her true identity. The inner conflict that is consequently engendered causes not only unhappiness but confusion, deception and feelings of guilt as well. She wants to live as white, she is prepared to sever all relations with her family in order to pursue a life which would give her all the advantages of being white and which would enable her to marry the man of her choice. Yet, in a letter to her parents she states: ‘My mind and my conscience tell me that I may not marry a white man’ (p. 15). The question arises to what extent her mind and conscience had been manipulated by the EF, because in the end her ‘mind and conscience’ triumph over her selfish interests as her little adventure among the white community abruptly and in an unmotivated manner comes to an end.

At the heart of the matter is the suffering and tragedy of leading Petro's kind of life, which must serve as a deterrent for any ‘coloured’ having aspirations to pass for white. In the already mentioned letter to her parents all her confusion, fear and unhappiness filter through, so that her father prays: ‘Take Petro in Thy eternal arms and carry her with Thy love. What must she do, Lord? ... [T]here is
pain in my heart because of Petro's suffering, because of Petro's suffering...’ (p. 17).

Every meeting between Petro and Sas, her fiancé, is a demonstration of this suffering, of fear (p. 46), of loneliness because of her secret (p. 47) and the hopelessness of her situation. Her unhappiness results from her ‘outsider’ position in the white community in which she can never be completely integrated, not because the white community would not accept her as one of them, but because of her own guilt and the realisation that she would ‘sin’ against them and do them an injustice by marrying Sas. Happiness can only be attained by returning to her people where she belongs. The invocation of the Biblical message of separation between the races as interpreted by the Afrikaner, the ‘tear-jerking’ story, the advocation by none other than some of the ‘coloured’ characters of apartheid as the only solution for the ‘coloured problem’, all these and other strategies are used to convince the ‘white coloureds’ of the ‘futility’ and ‘tragedy’ of trying for white.

Appearing nearly twenty years after Mikro's novel, i.e. in 1976, Bartho Smit's drama, *Die Verminktes* (*The Maimed*) explores the same theme of ‘futility’ and ‘tragedy’ when the white woman, Elize, commits suicide after she had discovered that her lover, Frans, has ‘dark blood’ in his veins.

### 3.3.2.7 The women

#### 3.3.2.7.1 Peripheral status

What is said about the peripheral character in 3.2.2.6.1 also applies here. With regard to *Die Koperkan*, we notice that Mikro departs from this tradition by ‘promoting’ a woman who to all intents and purposes is white but remains ‘coloured’ because she carries the ‘blood flaw’ in her veins, to a position very near to the centre of the events. Although Petro is not the main character, she is nevertheless the axis around whom everything revolves. This appears to be anomalous with Mikro's oeuvre regarding ‘coloured’ people, especially ‘coloured’ women, but the reasons for this departure from tradition soon become apparent. The author's intention is to advocate an idea; in addition to the authoritative voice of the external narrator, mouthpieces must be found to promote that idea and who better than two representatives from the ‘coloured’ community who have attained the level of white ‘civilisation’ to fulfil that role, whose views must be considered as reliable affirmations of the idea?

#### 3.3.2.7.2 Petro

As stated before, Petro is placed in a different context and category than the rest of her family already by naming. The very traditional Afrikaner name of Petronella (together with an Afrikaner surname) distinguishes her from the other members of her family and facilitates her assimilation into Afrikaner society, bearing in
mind the Afrikaner's suspicion and distrust of aliens, albeit white. In her case, one can hardly speak of analogous naming as a means of characterisation as expounded by Hamon, for her name does not reveal a character-trait but rather serves to place her in a social and political milieu concomitant with the racial classification she has assumed.

A character's physical surroundings (room, home, street, town) as well as its human environment (family, social class) are often used as trait-connoting metonymies (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:66). The relation of contiguity is frequently supplemented by that of causality. Petro leaves her family home in Cape Town - a city with the reputation of being by far the most lax in implementing the apartheid legislation (cf. pp. 99-102) - and moves to Pretoria, administrative capital of the country and heimat of conservative Afrikaners. This is in agreement with what Graham Watson (1972:464/5) asserts: ‘To facilitate the process of passing (for white), Coloureds will ... often move from the town or province where they are known ... [T]hey must move in order to establish themselves as White’. The move to Pretoria is well thought out. This is only one of two cities in South Africa, the other being Bloemfontein, where the race laws have been stringently applied in addition to those, e.g. curfew for blacks, instituted by the city councils themselves. The move to Pretoria must surely rank as one of the severest tests for Petro to live and work among conservative Afrikaners such as her fiancé, Sas Stulle, and her white friends. One can assume that this is a conscious attempt by the author to reinforce her difference.

Petro's room in the private hotel is tastefully furnished, with an original Frans Oerder and a Van Gogh print. From her fiancé we learn that she has a ‘developed taste in music’ (p. 45), for she listens to the music of Schubert and Mussorgsky; we are told by the EN that she reads classic English novels. Her circle of friends comes from the Afrikaner elite, her fiancé is the architect son of a retired judge of the Supreme Court, ironically someone whose task it had been to enforce apartheid legislation.

The metonymic relation between external appearance and character-traits is a powerful resource in the hand of many writers, even today. One should distinguish in this connection between those external features which are grasped as beyond the character's control, such as height, colour of the eyes, etc. and those which at least partly depend on him/her, like hairstyle and dress. While the first group characterises through contiguity alone, the second has additional causal overtones. Mikro has already demonstrated his use of these resources in the creation of Toiings, and now he attempts to use it again in characterising Petro, this time to extol the character's virtue and to suggest her elevated social class. The external narrator-focalizer sees and describes her in the following manner:
Petro weighs 123 pounds, is 5 ft 7 inches tall and has the measurements which any fashion model would envy her, as well as her walk. Her legs are well-filled and the skirt she is wearing has a slit so that the pure white lace of her petticoat flashes with every step. (p. 39)

We are also told by the EN that she is beautiful, that men stop to stare at her (p. 39). Her father praises her beauty (p. 17), Sas considers himself a very lucky man to have such a beautiful yet chaste fiancée (p. 45) and even John Orlep, the anti-apartheid activist, acknowledges her beauty (p. 70). However, we are not told what exactly constitutes her beauty, except that she has a fair skin and fair hair and the body proportions of a model. One must therefore conclude that it is her whiteness that makes her beautiful, the author's strategy to legitimise the contention that white equals beauty and virtue.

Petro herself admits that she hardly knows her own family, except her father who she came to know mainly through his poetry and letters written to her. She therefore relates better to him, not least because he shows traces of ‘culture’ as interpreted by whites, and comes to the conclusion that he ‘should never have had a brown skin’ (p. 47). Ever since Petro had started her schooling, she had been separated from her family - weekends and school holidays were spent with her white friends and their families; should she run accidentally into one of her family members, she had to disown them. Her schooling and university education exposed her to white culture and values. One of the many anomalies of this novel is the implication that Petro's finesse is entirely due to her white education while we are told repeatedly about the refined lifestyle of Derk and his family, Derk's aspirations to live like white people and his white spirit within a brown skin. Given these circumstances, Petro would have acquired the same values in her parental home as those she acquired from her white education, but once more the reader must be led to believe that even the best of ‘coloured’ lifestyles are not on a par with those of whites. Moreover, in view of Petro's lack of knowledge about her own family and the ‘coloured’ population at large, one finds it difficult to comprehend her dislike of them, save to infer from it that a process of indoctrination had been/is set in motion to view the other as the beast and the white woman as the beauty.

3.3.2.7.3 Alet, Sarah and Même Katryn

Not much is told about the rest of the women characters in the novel. Very little narrating time is allocated to them and their degree of communicativeness is far less than that of Petro. They simply become incidental background figures who chiefly fill the space, i.e. the milieu of the ‘coloureds’, in which the main character, Derk Booysen, acts. Especially in the case of Alet and Sarah, their main function is only to summon contrasts to Petro, but no parallels.
In true Afrikaner tradition, Alet is portrayed as the dutiful wife of Derk Booysen, beautiful, an object to be displayed and admired. Intellectually she is not her husband's equal and this disparity is also manifest in their marriage. Derk isolates himself from the rest of his family, not only physically when he buries himself in his study, but also ideologically when he apparently is the only one who endorses the Afrikaner's views on apartheid. This inevitably leads to a degree of estrangement between husband and wife and it is not surprising that Alet sides with her children in their opposition to apartheid. The only time she stands up to him is when she confronts him with the inequalities brought about by apartheid but, like a dutiful wife, she is indoctrinated - in an unconvincing manner - to think as he does.

Even less is known about Sarah, except that she is the youngest child of the family, is a student at a teachers' training college (no university education for her!), has a good alto voice but more importantly, that she is the ‘darkest’ of the Booysen family. Like her brother Frankie, she is fiercely opposed to the policy of apartheid and since Derk suspects she has been influenced by her ‘communist’ friend, John Orlep, he forbids her to see him again. Every member of the family is unhappy and the cause of their unhappiness is linked directly or indirectly to Derk. Sarah is shunned by her erstwhile best friends because her father is selling out the ‘coloured’ people.

In a side-intrigue we meet the character Même Katryn, as she is called by the little white girl, Ilsa Touwa who finds comfort and love in her simple home. Katryn is ‘planted’ in the text with no other function but to promote the apartheid idea. Since she is old, a staunch Christian and respected by her community, she becomes the ideal mouthpiece for the author's ideas. Like Derk, she also invokes the Biblical message of separation between the races, for she tells Ilsa: “The Lord has made us white and brown. The brown ones must live with the brown and the white ones with the white” (p. 61). Katryn and her husband do not believe that their children should further their education, the reason being that ‘books make people evil - the Bible says so’ (p. 62). While Derk listens to this kind of logic, he silently wishes that all his people could be ‘as naive as Katryn’, for with this kind of person one could start building something, not with John Orlep and his ilk (p. 63). In his own naivety, Derk fails to acknowledge the true reasons for this lack of motivation on the part of Katryn and her husband. Once again, blame for the ‘coloured’ people's ‘backwardness’ must be apportioned to their own lack of ambition and not to their socio-political and economic position which effectively exclude them from a decent education.

3.3.2.7.4 Silences in the text with regard to ‘coloured’ women

What is most important in this entire diatribe about the novel, is what the text cannot and would not articulate, especially with regard to the ‘coloured’ women
characters. It is imperative to examine those ‘strategies of exclusion ... and litanies of evasion’ (J. Hillis Miller: Deconstruction and Criticism, p. 15), to speak about the literary work instead of just repeating what it says, to enable us to go beyond the work and explain it, to say what it does not and could not say. We are all aware that the speech of the book comes from a certain silence which makes explication and not merely interpretation of paramount importance.

Bearing in mind the popular view among some well-known Western feminists that the Western woman is as oppressed and marginalized as the black male (e.g. De Beauvoir), one has to conclude that the black woman is then by implication the lowest on the scale of the human species, not only concerning oppression and marginalization but also the views held about her. From the silences in Mikro's text, one can conclude that he subscribes to and reinforces the view of black women's position on the human scale. We have already established that Petro's white skin and white education place her in a category other than that of the black women in the story; also that scant information is supplied about the other women. From these facts alone one can already infer several dichotomies between white and black in the text.

The most apparent of these dichotomies is implied in the narrating time allocated to Petro in comparison to that allocated to the other women. This per se is not a pointer to her superior position, since centre or periphery is not necessarily an indication of superiority or inferiority. But Petro's prominent traits, her exceptional qualities, are defined by the external narrator, the most authoritative voice in the text; likewise, the mediocrity and even ‘backwardness’ of the other women are defined by the EN. The reader is thus implicitly called upon to accept those definitions.

When one takes into account the period in which this novel was published and the then relative absence of the black woman as a meaningful character, one has to examine the motives behind Mikro's choice of an ‘almost white’ woman as a near-central character when the theme of the novel is ostensibly the justification of the apartheid policy, as well as the ‘futility’ of trying for white. As far as this novel is concerned, a few conclusions can be drawn from this: (a) the whiter the skin, the nearer a character can move to the centre of events and the more ‘acceptable’ it becomes to the intended reader; (b) the choice of an ‘almost white’ woman is designed to show the vast differences on several levels between white and black women, which would subsequently reinforce the existing negative view of the latter; (c) the black woman is one of those ‘necessary evils’ of society, to be tolerated but not to be given a status equal to that of the white woman. By once again relegating the black woman to the utmost periphery, her status in society becomes apparent.
A second observation is the binary opposition of black and white and the concomitant attributes of darkness and light. Here we have a ‘white’ woman in opposition to ‘coloured’ women, which already says much in the South African context. Petro's near-perfection, her beauty, virtue, high moral values are time and again extolled, not only by the narrator but also by those who come into contact with her. If she is beautiful because she is white, then one is led to conclude that Sarah, her sister, who is described as the ‘darkest’ of the family, must be ugly, although it is not said. Everything Petro is, the ‘coloured’/black women are not. One further example will suffice: the narrator-focalizer observes the ‘pure white lace’ of Petro's petticoat (p. 39), from which we may infer her cleanliness of body and mind; when Derk pays a visit to one of the incidental ‘coloured’ women in the story, he immediately observes her dishevelled appearance of ‘tousled, unkempt hair and a dirty face’ while inside the house he is greeted by ‘stuffy fumes’ (p. 115). If Petro's external appearance reflects her ‘noble disposition’ (p. 46), then surely this ‘coloured’ woman's untidy appearance must reflect quite the opposite.

The cultured, civilised, refined and educated Petro could only attain this position because her white skin enabled her to break the restrictions placed upon black people. But that is not enough. Her aspirations are to make a complete break with the ‘coloured’ community and what they represent in her perception. She tells her father: “I dream far beyond my circle, very far” (p. 17). Obviously she has in mind the ‘perks’ that go with a white skin and are denied to black women: the best education the country can offer, self-determination and self-empowerment. Again the ‘silence’ of the text virtually shouts at the reader: black women have not attained her level of development and never shall. A telling example of this is when her mother, Alet, also white but not quite as white as her daughter, admits to her husband that she does neither understand his intellectual arguments about the ‘merits’ of apartheid (p. 51), nor is she as intelligent as he (p. 108). Petro is the only one of the women characters who fully grasps the ‘merits’ of apartheid - telepathically she communicates with her father: ‘You are the only one who always understands me. I also understand you, your ideals and ambitions ... Mamma never understood, or Sarah or Hayward or Frankie’ (p. 46); Derk in his failure to communicate with his wife, his other children and the rank and file of his community, intimates that they have neither the intellect nor the inclination to understand him and his ideas - the only one who does, is Petro (cf. p. 79), thus implying that she is the only one with intellect.

The strongly emotional question of religion, particularly Christianity, is also invoked to demonstrate the dichotomy of black and white, nature and culture, barbarism and civilisation. The age-old distinction between civilisation and barbarism rested solely upon the one group having adopted the Christian faith while the other has not. In the South African case this was and still is no less the basis of the distinction made between black and white and subsequently the purported
basis of the apartheid policy. On several occasions we are told by the EN, by other characters and by Petro herself of her ‘Christian upbringing’, her Christian conscience and her Christian virtues, of her ‘irreproachable character’ (p. 20), of her ambition to become a missionary (ostensibly to christianise the blacks!). Everything that is noble and admirable is concentrated in the Christian faith and consequently in Petro. Hatred is an alien emotion to her, she can only love her fellow human beings, as we are told by Derk:

God wants him (Derk) to love his fellow humans but also to have great need of love. Petro too. Petro has always loved her fellow humans. Of course she loves Sas Stulle very much. How can it be otherwise? Love and Petro are twins. (p. 64)

One gains the impression that Derk raised only one of his children, Petro, in the Christian faith, for his other children do not attend church (Hayward); Frankie refuses to become a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and says that after 2000 years of religion, the whites are still as resentful and intolerant as before (p. 51); they shall probably appropriate the very best, the ‘goulden haáp’ (golden harp), once they get to heaven; Sarah, as disillusioned as Frankie with the white man's religion, also believes they will take the best, the golden streets, and leave the copper ones to the ‘coloureds’. When her father admonishes her for ridiculing ‘his God’, she retaliates: “But we do not have one, Dad. It's the white people's God!” (p. 76). Furthermore, Petro sees Frankie's death as retribution for his ‘sin’ of hating white people, that ‘abominable, ugly hatred’ he harboured and which found expression in his protest poetry. In Petro's perception these poems express ‘nothing but unbridled hatred’ and she prays to God to forgive Frankie (p. 143). Like Derk, Petro misinterprets Frankie's attitude as hatred for whites instead of hatred for the system of apartheid because of the wide chasm that has developed between Derk and his brown children on the one hand, and Petro and her siblings on the other. Significantly, both Derk and Petro put the blame for Frankie's death on his ‘hatred’ for the whites. Derk tells Petro: “Hatred is a poisonous snake. Frankie hated the whites, and hatred generates hatred” (p. 129). The same must then hold true for both Alet and Sarah, for both silently admit that at times they hated Petro because of Derk's obvious favouritism, his love for Petro and his preoccupation with her and her suffering to the exclusion of his wife and other children. Petro's Christianity as interpreted by the Afrikaner, once again elevates her to a position far above that of the black woman. She considers it her selfimposed task, like the missionaries of old, to ‘uplift’ the ‘coloureds’, and in a very arrogant fashion which illustrates the polarisation between her and her family, she decides: 'The coloureds need me’ (p. 128).

The most important of these dichotomies is reflected by silences and strategies of exclusion rather than by explicit definition or even implicit information. This concerns the question of procreation and miscegenation. Miscegenation results in a race of ‘half-breeds' who, because of their half-white origin, may claim

assimilation into the white community and the rights they have appropriated for themselves. The ‘purity’ of the white race which they use as an argument to justify their superiority and hegemony, will be placed in jeopardy and the material benefits they reap will be diminished.

The motive behind Mikro's choice of an almost white woman as the main female character in his novel, now becomes even more apparent. She carries in her veins the ‘blood flaw’, but everything in the text points to her being poised for marriage to a white man and passing on the ‘blood flaw’ to their offspring. But then, her strong moral values prevail and she confesses in a letter to her fiancé her true origin which precludes marriage. Having made the conscious choice of terminating the relationship, she must have realised that she will be exposed to the white community for what she really is, talled and feathered and finally cast out of the staunchly conservative Afrikaner laager. So who to turn to? The decision is taken out of her hands, for the untimely, unmotivated and non-functional death of her brother is the deus ex machina which wrenches her from a predicament which could have had unpleasant results. She returns to Cape Town and her family of whom she still thinks in terms of ‘the coloureds’.

What does the text fail to articulate? Petro is being held up as an example to all other ‘coloured’ women who, like herself, can pass for white. Her ‘noble disposition’ restrains her from deceiving her fiancé into believing she is white, it prevents her from 'polluting' the white race with her dark genes, it enables her to make her contribution to maintaining their ‘purity’, all of which are highly commendable characteristics. But by Mikro's process of exclusion and evasion, the black woman becomes the target of severe condemnation for already having brought about a race of ‘half-breeds’ who are so degenerate that they can only be viewed with repulsion. The irony is that the black woman is held solely responsible for this state of affairs, that the white male is completely exonerated from blame for his part in creating this race of ‘half-breeds’, that she is either elevated to a plane far above that of the Virgin Mary in the number of immaculate conceptions she experiences or debased to the level of the amoeba who can procreate asexually. It then follows that her sexual mores also come under attack, for if she is prevented from legally marrying a white man, she can still illegally and immorally (cf. the Immorality Act) copulate with as many white men as she wishes.

To conclude, Mikro's so-called sensitive novel is as insensitive to the ‘coloureds’ in general and to the black woman in particular as are his earlier novels in which he attempts to portray this group of people. As stated before, the novel itself is narratologically a feeble attempt and not worth discussing but is included in this dissertation to demonstrate that it is works like these that contribute to the continued oppression and marginalization of women in general and black women in particular by the very images they project and which are used by legislators and others in positions of leadership to justify unjust practices.
3.4 Concluding remarks

In my discussion of the two novels representing the earlier period of apartheid rule, I may have seemed to digress from the topic I am dealing with, but I consider it necessary to establish the general mood and thinking of the Afrikaners during the period, to ascertain to what extent, if any, this mood and thinking have changed when dealing with the later periods.

As already stated, the black woman as a meaningful character in the earlier novels is non-existent. In both novels discussed above, the black woman is either the helper or opponent of the main character who in both cases is a black male. Therefore, not much can be said about the characterisation of the black woman in these novels, since not much characterisation takes place in the novels themselves, in keeping with the devalued status of the black woman in the South Africa of the 1950s and even the 1990s.

The assessment of novels such as the two discussed above as ‘half the solution’ to South Africa’s racial problems, seems to be exactly the opposite of that. In both these novels conscious attempts are made to portray blacks as sub-human and black women mostly as the eternal whore. If that is termed ‘half the solution’, the other half of the solution should then surely be the complete annihilation of the black population?

Eindnoten:

1. A critic in the English press described Mikor's novel as ‘half the solution’ to South Africa's racial problems, but does not mention what the other half of the solution is,
3. Cf. in this respect the policy statement made in 1954 by Hendrik Verwoerd as Minister of Native Affairs: ‘There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. His education should therefore not mislead him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze’ (cited by Bernstein 1985:77).
4. The brewing of traditional beer (called ‘kaflir beer’, ‘Bantu beer’ and ‘sorghum beer’ by the state and various other names by the people themselves) used to be and still is the exclusive domain of women as part of their domestic duties. It is the housewife's responsibility to have traditional beer available in the house at all times, as it is considered an act of hospitality to welcome a guest by offering him beer. This is done to make the guest feel welcome, to improve relations if the guest happens to be a stranger and for the purpose of socializing. In addition and more important, beer is brewed as a libation to the gods at the different thanksgiving and fertility ceremonies and is the only beverage served at wedding feasts, etc. Urban black society tried to carry on this tradition, more so because the different Liquor Acts and Liquor Amendment Acts (e.g. No. 172 of 1961) prohibited Africans anywhere in the country from purchasing liquor. Subsequently, various laws and by-laws were introduced, prohibiting home-brewing, except for particular celebrations for which prior permission had to be obtained from the authorities. The sale of home-brewed beer was strictly forbidden, according to the government, the effects of drinking the beer were often bloodshed, rioting and vandalism. In an effort to combat home-brewing, the government embarked on a plan to establish beerhalls in the townships, the profits of which (20%) would ostensibly used to improve amenities in the townships and the
rest going to state coffers, again ostensibly to be spent on improving conditions for Africans. The institution of beerhalls led to mass corruption and theft by the functionaries, in addition to causing the disruption of family and social life. It is no wonder that in 1976 the beerhalls became the first targets of the youth's wrath.
Chapter 4  
The sestiger period and Jan S. Rabie's 'brown Afrikaners'

No discussion of the black woman character in the Afrikaans novel can be complete without a discussion of the Sestigers, for it was the Sestigers who paved the way for incorporation of South African peoples other than white Afrikaners and black people other than ‘fillers’ into their narrative, albeit still stereotyped in many cases. The period itself was one of much turbulence on the South African political scene which is perhaps the direct cause of the emergence of a generation of writers who were no longer complacent about their privileged position but tried to use their literary products to conscientise legislators and the white population at large.

In this chapter, I propose to concentrate on but one of the Sestigers, Jan Rabie, who not only is the forerunner of Sestig but became one of the founder members of the Skrywersgilde (Writers' Guild) and outspoken critic of apartheid. Likewise, I shall limit myself to only one of his novels, *Die groot anders-maak* (1964), the only one of the period in which a black woman is a functional character. The novel's message is one of transition/transformation, the novel itself is an example of transition from exclusively ‘white literature’ (Rabie 1985:32) to a literature which would encompass the entire rich variety of South Africa's population, as well as a product of a transitory phase in the Afrikaans literary history.

This chapter is also intended to illustrate male dominance on the South African literary scene, with these dominant male voices and values finding their way into the narrative of the Sestigers.

4.1 Literary trends

The years 1960-1975 saw more apartheid legislation being adopted and severe repression by the state by means of security laws. African and ‘coloured’ people were completely stripped of their last vestiges of representation in the central government when the white representatives of African voters were removed from
parliament in 1960 and those of ‘coloured’ voters in 1968, not to say that these representatives had any influence or really represented the interests of the oppressed. In 1961, after a fraudulent referendum among the white electorate, South Africa became a republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth. The Sabotage Act (1962), General Law Amendment Act (1963) and Terrorism Act are a few of the security laws which had as their aim the severe repression of the oppressed.

Once again, the voiceless people courageously made their opposition to these laws felt in the only way they could and were joined by the international community in their opposition. This resulted in the massacres at Sharpeville and Langa in March 1961, the banning of political organisations such as the ANC, PAC and numerous others, including teachers’ unions representing black interests. Sabotage trials became the rule rather than the exception; thousands of people, among them some of the best brains, clandestinely or openly left the country and with the state of emergency in force, South Africa became a country of exacerbated fear and distrust because of the countless spies and informers among black people in the regime's employ.

The 1960s saw many acts of sabotage, supported by strike action, culminating in the arrest in 1963 of Nelson Mandela and ten others at Rivonia. Eight of the eleven were sentenced to life imprisonment on 11 June 1964. Torture and death in detention became commonplace during the period under review. In 1973 the United Nations General Assembly formed the International Convention on Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

On the Afrikaans literary scene during this period, many novelists still continued in the literary tradition as shaped by their predecessors. The repressive legislation and horrific events in the country seemed to leave them cold. Instead, someone like F.A. Venter continued in his novels to glorify the Afrikaner past, to reinforce the idea that the Afrikaners tamed the land, that it is rightfully theirs, to entrench the stereotypes about black people as being barbaric, untrustworthy, lazy and deceitful. His saga on the Great Trek in a tetralogy is an excellent example of this: Geknelde Land (Strangled Land - 1960), Offerland (Land of Sacrifice - 1963), Gelofteland (Land of the Covenant - 1966) and Bedoelde Land (Destined Land - 1968), the title of the last novel in the series being an unambiguous reference to South Africa as the promised and destined land of the Afrikaners. The infuriating fact is that novels such as these were prescribed by the education authorities to black school children as a conscious strategy to brainwash and manipulate young minds. In Die Rentmeesters (The Stewards - 1969), Venter continues the theme of the inalienable family farm. Another novelist who continued in this tradition, is W.A. de Klerk who, in Die Laer (The Laager - 1964), another historical novel, portrays the Afrikaner's hardness, determination and perseverance during the ‘Dorslandtrek’ (Thirstland Trek). During the period under review, the emergence of Afrikaner female novelists is of cardinal importance (see Chapter 6).
The most significant ‘happening’ on the Afrikaans literary scene during this period was the emergence of the Sestigers, not a literary movement as such, since they were not united as to identity of aim, style, outlook or talent. The Sestiger literature was a literature in exile in its own country, especially in the context of the greater Afrikaans literature. On the one hand, it was in conflict with the ruling power as well as the ruling norms and traditions of Afrikanerdom; on the other hand it was a literature which had not yet come into its own.

The Sestigers were criticised for their failure to ‘develop a theoretical or critical basis by which to balance their work against the realities surrounding them. They launched no sustained analysis of the failure of their predecessors in order to clear the way for their own evolution. Their claim to be a renewal of Afrikaans writing fell short largely because of undeveloped thought. The failure or inability of the writers to think through the vital issues before them was covered over by an intense concentration on form and techniques, with the result that they fell easily into the trap of formalism and an escape into unreality from hard issues like politics, racism, etc. They were more interested in form and literary devices and themes derived from a different environment and applied from the outside. The dangerous presence of Africa was largely ignored in their writing while they concentrated on European themes’ (see Polley: 1973).

Be that as it may, the Sestigers with novelists like Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux, Dolf van Niekerk, André P. Brink and Chris Barnard forming its vanguard, brought a complete new dimension into the narrative of Afrikaans, albeit a narrative of non-commitment for the most part. This renewal was not limited to literature but its influence was felt in white Afrikaner society by the demolition of many taboos and prejudices of that society and the modification of the literary, moral, religious and political conventions of the Afrikaner. The Sestigers and their successors exercised this influence on society through their creative work but also through repeatedly expressing their views on art and their ideas on the relationship between literature and the authorities in argumentative writing. Though tentatively, some of them, especially Jan Rabie and André Brink, already explored the South African actuality.

True to South African patriarchal society and tradition, the Sestigers comprised mainly of male writers and critics, even though there was no lack of women writers among the Afrikaans literary corps of the time. There may be valid reasons for the exclusion, perhaps self-exclusion, of women writers from this ‘movement’. However, it will suffice to mention a very significant event in the Sestiger saga to illustrate how women writers were either excluded or were not involved: in February 1973 the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Cape Town hosted a symposium on the Sestigers. Significantly, over the five-day period of the symposium not a single woman presented a paper or participated in the panel discussion.1
4.2 Jan S. Rabie

A leading figure of the Sestigers was undoubtedly Jan Rabie who brought renewal to the Afrikaans prose with his expressionistic, surrealistic and poetic short ‘stories’ in the anthology Een-en-twintig (1956). The publication of this anthology was, as André Brink (1977:3) asserts, ‘the heralding of the entire so-called Movement of Sixty’ and ‘one of the most radical announcements of renewal in the entire framework of our literature’.

The novel, Ons, die afgod (We, the idol - 1958), already mentioned in the previous chapter, is the first novel of ‘commitment’ in the modern Afrikaans literature, generating sharp polemic in which literary and political values became hopelessly entangled. It is especially with these two works that Rabie influenced other writers and heralded a new era in the Afrikaans narrative.

4.2.1 Rabie's commitment to Africa

Over the years Rabie has made several statements and pronouncements in connection with his own writing, censorship, literature and society, the exclusivity of white Afrikaners, literature as a vehicle for political change, in addition to pleas for more of Africa in the literature of Afrikaans.

By his own admission, Rabie became progressively more engrossed in the everdominant colour problem. His erstwhile intention in the ‘apprentice school’ of Paris to write against l’injustice et le malheur had been his life-long aim, so much so that he could write more or less about nothing else than apartheid. The urgent socio-political crisis in his country forced him willy-nilly to write with less style and more message, almost always in the hope that white and brown Afrikaners can become one (Rabie 1987:241-245).

At the symposium on the Sestigers in 1973, Rabie sharply criticised the white establishment in his paper, from legislators to critics to writers and criticised the Sestigers for ‘glowing in stylistis copied from overseas’ and for focussing on racial situations in other countries rather than their own (Rabie 1973:162). For him, Afrikaans and Afrikaner are not synonymous with white and he concludes: ‘Afrikaner for me is much more than white man. I try to write that. In prose’ (Rabie 1973:164).

In an article written in 1975, ‘Is dit ons erns - in Afrika?’ (‘Is it our zeal - in Africa?’), he puts the following questions to Afrikaner authors: To what extent does their literary art reflect the (multicoloured) history of South Africa? Is it solely a white literature? To what extent are Afrikaner authors responsible for their insecurity, fears, indifference or guilt? To what extent do they honour the
earth from which they and their language have sprouted? Is that how serious they are in Africa, about Africa? (Rabie 1975:32). In the same article he makes a plea for ‘less of that which is labelled “Made in Europe”’ (Rabie 1975:36).

The same plea recurs in an article published in 1987, ‘Minder Europa, meer Afrika’ (‘Less Europe, more Africa’). Apparently, Rabie's ‘Africa’ is confined to the portrayal of the ‘coloureds’ with whom he feels a cultural, religious and language bond, and to the Khoikhoi who are part-ancestors of this group of South Africans. Significantly, the vast majority of South Africa's population, the Africans, do not feature in Rabie's works. He explains this omission as follows:

... the majority of people around me was brown, and not black as elsewhere in the country ... I have consistently restrained myself from speaking on behalf of the black man; my ignorance is too great. Perhaps it is also the result of a suspicious pessimism which has restricted me to people of my own language and background. The basic lack of understanding between Afrikaners and European-oriented liberalists (be they Roman or British) who could say: ‘Very well, I'll hand over my estate, on condition that you assume my image’. But from his experience in black Africa the Afrikaner suspects it is impossible. His world is too small and too delicate (Rabie 1987:240, 241).

4.2.2 The Bolandia series

One of Rabie's most important contributions to the Afrikaans narrative is his Bolandia tetralogy, works of prose which deal with, in Rabie's own words, ‘our early history in the Boland, the cradle where Dutch and other Europeans, indigenous Hottentots, imported black slaves and Orientals encountered and transformed each other into two new national groups in South Africa: whiter and browner Afrikaners - even though the word “Afrikaner” for more than a century indicated only bastard children with one Hottentot parent’ (Rabie in his preface to Bolandia). The writing of these novels would also bring him to a better understanding of how the chasms between the peoples of South Africa originated. Despite these claims, Kannemeyer (1983:342) asserts that this is Rabie's epic of Afrikaner nation-building with the accent on the origins of the Afrikaner of today and the elements which constitute him/her.

The four novels in the Bolandia series are briefly: Eiland voor Afrika (Island-gateway to Africa - 1964), situated in the years 1657 - 1658 and based on an event documented in Van Riebeeck's Dagregister (Diary). The events take place on Robben Island where five exiles from different parts of the world have been instructed to mind the V.O.C.'s sheep and to fire signals to oncoming ships. Together they illustrate the diverse variety from which Cape society originated, while at the same time their problems prophetically refer to those which would
later dominate the mainland. *Die groot anders-maak* (*The great transformation* - 1964), situated circa 1730, deals with the disintegration of the Khoi-Khoi with its proud traditions through the influence of the mightier white civilisation (see 4.4.3). *Waar jy sterwe* (1966) - translated in 1969 by the author himself as *A man apart* - takes place at the beginning of the 19th century when the destruction of the Khoi-Khoi was an accomplished fact and white nomad farmers accompanied by a few remaining Khoi and ‘bastards’, are threatened by the southward movement of black tribes. The emphasis is on the Khoi-bastard, Douw Prins who, in his fight against domination and enslavement, acquires his own independence and liberty but then finds himself an outcast who does not fit in with either society. With *Ark* (1977) Rabie turns to the problems of contemporary South Africa. The main character, a writer, must reorientate himself after a spell of amnesia in respect of South African racial tensions and history, a task which results in a search for his own origin and identity and ultimately a new vision of the past.

In his historical research in preparation for the writing of these novels, Rabie relied heavily on archival material found at the Cape. He acknowledges that a one-sided account of the indigenous peoples of the Cape emerges from these archival documents, and the question arises: What does he do about it?

### 4.2.3 Die groot anders-maak (1964)

#### 4.2.3.1 Introduction

As previously stated, this novel is the second in the *Bolandia* series and gives ‘an illustration of the disintegration of the Hottentot nation, circa 1730’ (Jan Rabie). On the dust cover of the first edition the following observation appears:

> When the first migrant farmers crossed the mountains between the Boland and the Karoo in search of new pastures for their steadily increasing flocks, the death-knell began sounding for the Khoi-Khoi, the proud race who for so long had been the rulers of the outstretched plains. With reference to the experiences of the Hottentot woman Keas, who had learnt and adopted the life-style of the whites but then tries to return to her people only to discover that they are already doomed to destruction, Jan Rabie illustrates the moral and physical decline of a proud race and a peculiar form of life which could not withstand the influences projected by the newcomers.

Rabie himself supplies an explanation for the title of his novel:

> In this novel, Dutch and Hottentot or rather Khoi-Khoi encounter each other, and both change into browner and whiter Afrikaners. Already it is about 1730, and the encounter of slave, burgher and indigine has progressed a long way.
towards a new synthesis. The title indicates that the Khoi-Khoin regularly danced by new moon to make themselves ‘different’ or to transform themselves, i.e. to renew like the moon; that the greatest renewal here in fact was the encounter and intermingling of races at the Cape from which browner and whiter Afrikaners were born (Rabie 1987:241).

In spite of this explanation, one has to examine the semantic quality of the second part of the title: ‘anders-maak’ (make different), which not only implies external influences in the process of ‘making different’ but also a forced or an imposed transformation. It does not necessarily imply a voluntary act on the part of the one undergoing the change. Of course, one can transform oneself but more often than not this happens as a result of external pressures brought to bear upon the transforming self. In Rabie’s explanation the impression is created that a fusion of cultures took place with influences going out from and received by all involved. What in reality the novel is saying, is that a one-directional influence goes out from the white people, the Khoi are the recipients of this influence but never the donors.

This imposed transformation occurs on different levels in the novel, the first level being the already-stated cultural practice of the Khoi to renew themselves like the moon through dancing when the new moon is sighted. This does not necessarily mean a transformation. The moon is ‘immortal in eternal rebirth like Heitsi Eibib, All-Father of the Khoi-Khoin’ (p. 47). Cf. for example the words of Sigeb, the witchdoctor, in his incantation to T’Kamkhab (the New Moon): “‘Be welcome, oh Lord of the Night Sky! Give us plenty of forage food and honey! Give us herds of horned wild animals! Give grass to our cattle so that we may have plenty of milk! Give, so that our children may honour you!’” (p. 53). The women's incantation echoes this: “‘Oh, Moon, in your previous lives you have been good to us... We hope you shall care better for us’” (p. 53). It becomes clear that this cultural practice does not imply ‘making different’ but rather renewal by way of an adequate supply of daily needs.

On the second and most important level, the title has a bearing upon Keas in different manifestations (see 4.2.3.3.3). But not only upon Keas. In fact, different members and implicitly all members of her race are ‘made different’, not least the proud Damoeb who has resisted the overtures of the interlopers until he meets Keas. Then, gradually, the entire kraal, with the exception of the proud old sage, Oasib, is lured by white technology and expertise to abandon their traditions and adopt a life-style, albeit the negative sides of it, which is in direct conflict with their own. The question now arises whether, as Rabie submits, the whites were also transformed through their contact with the indigenes. From textual indicators it does not appear to be so, for not only do the white migrant farmers openly express their disgust for the Khoi life-style and backwardness, not only do they regard it as inferior to their own and barbaric (p. 121) but they also insist that intermarriage
can never take place between Dutch and Khoi (p. 81). Therefore, Rabie's assertion that the intermingling and fusion of cultures at the Cape led to 'browner and whiter Afrikaners’ is completely refuted in the story, even though it did in fact happen. At best, the white migrant farmers rely heavily upon the Khoi for tracking down villains (in this case the San), for identifying waterholes and the best grazing, for information about climatic conditions and weather patterns in this harsh land and for gaining knowledge about edible plants, wild animal behaviour, etc., etc.

As in Rabie's earlier and later novels, e.g. *We, the idol* (1958) and *Johanna's story* (1981), racial and ethnic features are invoked several times, in this novel even to the extent that they become tautological, repetitive and non-functional. Time and again we are reminded of the Khoi's 'yellowness' and shades of yellowness (e.g. pp. 5, 6, 10, 11, 17, 90, 93, 101, 108, 109 × 3, 111, 125); their 'broad cheekbones' (e.g. pp. 5, 8, 80, 103); their 'triangular faces' and 'pointed chins' (e.g. pp. 5, 126); their ‘slit eyes’ and ‘flat noses’ (e.g. pp. 9, 63, 109); their ‘hair like peppercorns’ (e.g. pp. 10, 61) and their steatopygia (e.g. p. 20).

Together with the Khoi's and San's 'yellowness’ which is often associated with the landscape, thus invoking the ability of animals to camouflage themselves when danger lurks [cf. for example: Damoeb is described as ‘just as yellow-brown as the rocks behind him’ (p. 5); the San are described as ‘little people yellow-grey like the rocks around them’ (p. 108)], the Khoi and the San are bestialised several times, à la Hondius (see chapter 2.3.3). A few examples will suffice:

‘(Hakwa's) slit eyes fall shut while he lies down: a yellow dikdei’ lizard which lies uncaringly basking in the sun’ (p. 10)

‘The Sonkwas can't be far off, and these grey-brown snakes can lie unseen behind the smallest rock to unexpectedly spit their venom’ (p. 63)

‘The wild triangular face lifted up like a ringed cobra ready to strike’ (p. 109).

In one way or another, Rabie weaves into his story the age-old stereotypes applied to these original peoples of Southern Africa by European travellers and explorers of the 16th and 17th centuries and the generations following them. The difference now is that these stereotypes are applied to the Khoi by themselves, since they are now the focalizers who watch alongside the external narrator/focalizer. Admittedly, in some instances Rabie tries to give more balance to these one-sided reports by allowing the Khoi to articulate the reasons for their purported laziness. Cf. for example the words of the captain of the kraal, Oasib, in reply to the Dutch ensign's question as to why they are too lazy to till the soil:

Because we have no wish to become slaves of the soil by labouring and scratching in it all day. Because we have no wish to barricade ourselves in fear in stonehouses and to build barriers around our lands. Because we are satisfied with the
little we have, free people, who have always shared with others ... Is it not true that White man is so enslaved to White man's hunger for possessions that you have come from across the great waters to look here for even more possessions? Is it not so among you Christian people that the more you have the more you want? (pp. 103, 104).

Added to the stereotype of the Khoi's sloth (pp. 10, 20, 99, 101, 103, 116), are those of the filth and stench surrounding themselves and their living quarters (pp. 29, 30, 71, 73, 74, 89, 101, 102, 120); their dishonesty and backwardness (pp. 79, 85, 102, 103); their lack of pride and ambition (pp. 100-104); their inability to conceive of God and their love of liquor (pp. 102, 121, 128).

The Khoi is further identified as a race apart by several indications of the ‘peculiarity’ of their language, the ‘excited smack-smack of the tongue against the palate’ (p. 6), Ougaa speaks ‘so that his tongue cracks like interminable little whips’ (p. 60) and the whiteman views it as ‘this impossible click-clack language’ (p. 102).

While it can be conceded that Rabie tries to capture and (re)create the sphere of the Khoi by the numerous invocations of their racial and ethnic features, the ‘peculiarity’ of their language and the stereotypes attached to them, it is to be questioned whether, by doing so, he does anything to alleviate and minimise the deep racial divide existing in South Africa. Rather, this strategy can be interpreted as a further entrenchment of the stereotypes attached to a considerable portion of South Africa's population who are said to be direct descendants of the Khoi, in spite of Rabie's intentions as expressed by himself.

4.2.3.2 Khoi women

Although the Khoi women, with the exception of Keas, by no means play a significant role in the story, Rabie nevertheless paints a picture of Khoi society and tribal life in which gender roles are clearly defined, incorporating into this picture the age-old stereotypes attributed to the women of Africa in general and Khoi women in particular.

It is not clear whether Rabie found evidence in the archival material he used or whether he bases his assumptions on present-day South African society or whether it is his own patriarchal upbringing which leads him to conclude that the Khoi was a strong patriarchal society. Nevertheless, from evidence we have of the 18th century, not only pertaining to African peoples but also to peoples of different cultures world-wide, it is possible and even highly probable that a strong patriarchal system did in fact prevail among the Khoi. Several textual indicators point to that fact but not only that - Khoi women are portrayed as simply objects who do
not warrant any consideration from their male counterparts. The following are but a few of the statements made by Khoi male characters in respect of women:

““No, one does not think about a woman, one simply takes her”” (p. 13 - Hakwa is the speaker)

‘Many times already Damoeb had sat and peered southward like this, unaware that his resentful unease is also a kind of weakness, a captivation like that of a woman before a strong man’ (p. 49 - the EN)

““A Sonkwa can get at a woman easily from any side”” (p. 56 - Hakwa)

““A woman does what her husband does”” (p. 125 - Damoeb).

Khoi patriarchy, according to the story, also extended to the right of males to physically assault a woman when, in their perception, she has transgressed. Once again, it is not clear whether archival evidence exists that Khoi men actually employed physical violence against their women, or whether these are figments of an over-fertile imagination which in addition is fed by one-sided oral and written reporting by Afrikaner ancestors, or whether the author once again bases his assumptions on stereotypes applied to present-day South African blacks. Physical abuse of women is not a phenomenon peculiar to one particular race or society, but the impression is created in this novel that it was the ‘normal’ practice for Khoi women to be beaten by all and sundry if they happened to be male (see 4.2.3.3).

Khoi society revealed clearly defined gender roles which may or may not be confused with patriarchy and which in addition gave rise to several stereotypes about the Khoi and their descendants. Most prevalent of these is the sloth, laziness and idleness of Khoi men. It must be remembered that the latter, in a society where gender roles were so clearly demarcated, were solely responsible for the protection of the kraal and for providing venison when the need arose. Therefore, when there was no threat to the safety of the kraal or no need to hunt, they temporarily ceased being warriors and hunters. Khoi women, on the other hand, had the never-ending task of providing in the family's physical needs, i.e. gathering, preparing and serving food and beverages, bearing and rearing children and fulfilling men's sexual needs.

Lascivity is one of the main characteristics ascribed to Khoi women in the story, a characteristic commonly associated with black women, not least in literature. It is rather a contradiction in terms that women who are subjected to such a strict patriarchal structure nevertheless are allowed to dispense their favours freely and uninhibitedly. The external narrator/focalizer, focalizing through other characters, on several occasions describes their appearance which must serve as an external manifestation of their lustful disposition, e.g. ‘... Hottentot women with lustful, loose-lipped faces ... dancing about drunk and groaning ...’ (p. 75); ‘... women giggle lustfully and suggestively ...’ (p. 94); ‘On the dancefloor the
action becomes progressively wilder... Kaatjie and Sabina who have learnt their flirting from slave scum on Christian farms are the main ones to entice the men with sensuous giggling and shrieking...’ (p. 129). The captain of the tribe, Oasib, observes with sadness that the women of his tribe ‘unashamedly quarrel and sleep away from their kraal’ (p. 85) and that they have become ‘lascivious and brazen’ (p. 86).

Apparently it is this lascivious which is responsible for the Khoi women's great breeding capacity and for bringing about a race of bastards, information which is supplied explicitly and unequivocally in the text. We learn of Kiewiet's wife's ‘kasarm’ (ragtag and bobtail) of children (p. 117) and Khoi women's ‘trail of bawling children’ (p. 126). A recurring theme with Rabie is the one of ‘mixed blood’. Oasib observes among the migrant farmers ‘... black, brown, white and yellow from many nations, and several fatherless children of mixed blood’ (p. 11) and he tells Hakwa: ‘ “Our women want to carry little Afrikaners on their backs” ’ (p. 11). The EN informs us of ‘a bunch of children who bear witness of many kinds of fathers’ (p. 75). Cf. in this respect Johanna's story where Johanna's ('coloured') aunt is described: ‘... she has strange silent facial features ... as if she carries traces of all the many kinds of people who trekked through that region ...’ (p. 10).

Khoi women and men form diametric opposites with regard to work in the novel. While the women (and children) are portrayed as being industrious, always gathering food and firewood, building and cleaning huts, tending children, preparing food and beverages, the men sit or lie or doze in the sun all day (cf. pp. 10, 20, 99, 101, 103, 116), dreaming away the time or discussing ‘men's business’ (p. 118). One is left in no doubt about the source of Rabie's information.

4.2.3.3 Keas

The virtually non-speaking, non-focalizing character of Keas, the Khoi woman who returns to her people on the rebound after suffering the rejection and humiliation brought about by her race, can perhaps be described as having the dubious distinction in the Afrikaans literary corpus of being the first black woman character to occupy a position very near to the centre of events and who is not merely a filler character. André Brink has this to say about her: ‘... the sharply presented key-figure of the Hottentot woman Keas, caught between white and brown, already becomes a significant figure in our prose and a poignant commentary on present-day relationships’ (Brink 1973:4).

The choice of a black woman (in this case a Khoi - it could also have been one of the imported slave women) to occupy a position between black and white, is not coincidental, for Rabie perhaps ‘unconsciously’ (cf. Oasib's stream of consciousness on p. 100) wants to illustrate in his novel - as did several authors, historians
and politicians before him - that the black woman is solely responsible for bringing about a race of half-breeds and bastards (‘halfnaatjies’ and ‘basters’ they are called in the novel), thus creating and compounding South Africa's racial problems. The role of the male in bringing about this race of half-breeds, is simply shrugged off (significantly by women) as “a white man only plays with a servant, nothing more” (Tom's wife to Keas, p. 81) and “a white man does not marry a Hottentot ... children yes, but not marriage” (Tom's mother to Keas, p. 73).

4.2.3.3.1 Central character?

The question arises whether Keas can be termed a ‘central’ figure, whether she is a ‘helper’ or ‘opponent’, ‘subject’ or ‘object’, ‘power’ or ‘receiver’ according to Greimas' and Mieke Bal's models.

Through the title and the beginning of the fabula the impression is created that this is Keas' story, but it is soon subsumed by the story of the white migrant farmers' difficulties to survive in this harsh country and their struggle against the hostile inhabitants, the San. One also soon observes that this is rather the story of the influence projected by whites to transform the Khoi and the latter's easy submission to the foreign culture.

Nevertheless, Keas can be considered as a functional character to the extent that she has a functional part in the structures of the fabula since she undergoes or causes functional events. First of all, she is the subject who aspires to a certain aim/object, i.e. to transform herself in the hope of regaining the attention of the white farmer, Tom Muller. Very soon, however, we become aware that she alone cannot reach her object without the intervention of the power, thus becoming the receiver. The power in this case is seated in another functional actor, Tom Muller, as well as in an abstraction, i.e. white society that condemns Khoi culture and mores. But Keas also becomes the power when Damoeb, the subject who strives to adopt the lifestyle of whites, is supported by Keas in the realisation of his intentions. Likewise, she is the helper of the white migrant farmers whose object it is to ‘tame’ the land and making it more inhabitable (for themselves), because she warns them of imminent danger, and influences Damoeb and others to transform themselves to white values. She herself is the object of Damoeb's desire.

Keas, then, is both subject and object, power and receiver as well as helper. Does this make her a central character? Not necessarily, although much of the action revolves around and is inspired by her. In fact, in this novel it is difficult to identify a strong central character and one may conclude that Keas functions on the same level as Damoeb, Oasib and Tom Muller.
4.2.3.3.2 Keas' story

There are two parts to Keas' story: her life before she returns to Khoi society, and the part of her life after her return which forms the basis of the fabula. My concern here is Keas' story before her return to the tribe, for this part of her life is the key to her later actions and attitudes.

What emerges from the fabula and can be pieced together about Keas' life before we meet her in the story, is the following. She belonged to Gomarib's tribe. When the smallpox epidemic wreaked havoc among the Khoi, her mother fled with her to safer ground but they were stoned and driven off wherever they tried to find refuge. Then her mother also succumbed to the disease and Keas, as a small child, fled into the veld where she was taken into care by shepherds tending the flocks of white farmers. They took her with them to Roodezand, to Tom Muller's farm, Mooiplaas, where she was reared by whites and where she remained until the time we meet her in the story. It emerges that she soon forgot her Khoi upbringing and adopted the culture of the white people including their Christian faith and was given a ‘white’ name, Lea. Later, on becoming a young woman, Tom ‘came to tame the wild hunger in his body’ against hers (p. 73) and inevitably she found herself pregnant, later giving birth ‘in lonely fear’ (p. 73) to a daughter, Katryntjie.

For both Tom and Keas the outcome of their passion was disastrous: Tom was disinherited by his parents and sent off to the Cape to marry a white woman, after which he trekked into the interior. This forced separation spurred Keas to flee ‘like a mad thing to the mountain and (she) only knew that if her body could no longer receive him at night with pride, then she must be a Hottentot. A filthy, backward Hottentot woman who does not know she is filthy and unloved. That was all that remained for her’ (p. 73). It is at this point of her flight, on the way to the stone grave of Heitsi Eibib, the mythological Khoi ancestor who is reborn again and again, that she encounters Damaeb and the second part of her story begins, fuelled by her experiences during her childhood and young adulthood.

4.2.3.3.3 Keas' transformation

As already explained, the title of the novel, in addition to its other meanings, has a bearing upon Keas' transformation(s).

Her first transformation from Khoi child to one with white values has been explained above and can be regarded as a forced transformation due to the circumstances, viz. an orphan child delivered into the hands of white people and who is susceptible to influence and indoctrination, a child's natural inclination to imitate and someone completely dependent on her benefactors for her survival. Keas' second transformation, however, is voluntary; yet she is also forced by circumstances to subject herself to another ‘anders-maak’. On giving birth to
Tom's child and being rejected and humiliated by Tom's mother, she is forced to return to being a ‘Hottentot’, with low self-esteem and little self-respect. But once among the Khoi, she cannot simply relinquish the values she learnt from white people and aspires to be transformed once again to someone with white values.

She tells Oasib, headman of the tribe: “Keas feels like a broken thing ... Then Keas came back ... to be ... repaired again” (p. 15). For this reason the old man takes her back to his kraal, instructs the women of the tribe to prepare a hut for her, to make a proper Khoi out of her since she had forgotten all ‘the right things’ (p. 18). With the feast of the moon she would be properly ‘made different’ and initiated into tribal life. Everyone in the tribe must assist with the preparations for the transition, because in Khoi society every possession is shared among the rest (pp. 18-19).

The transformation occurs physically as well as spiritually - Keas must relinquish her Duusman (white people's) name Lea; her ‘white people's clothes’ are taken away from her on the express instruction of Oasib; she is dressed in typical Khoi fashion of pointed fur hat, loincloth and karos; she is provided with copper adornments for her ears, strings of beads for arms and ankles and bangles made of bone. After protesting violently, she is allowed to keep the silver chain she received from Tom. Sweet-smelling buchu powder is strewn over her, water fortified with urine is sprinkled over her to keep evil spirits away from the kraal, her face adorned with ajoos powder. She flatly refuses, however, to have the mixture made of animal fat, soot and red clay applied to her body and finds it difficult to hide her disgust at the stench and filth of the mixture.

The transformation also includes learning anew the duties of a Khoi woman: fetching firewood, learning how to identify forage food and how to dig it up with a stick. However, on the day of T'Kamkhab, the New Moon, when Keas' transformation should have been completed and she initiated into tribal life, Damoebo and Hakwa start a fight over Keas and immediately she is declared t'nau (taboo) by the witchdoctor, Sigebo. In essence this means that until the next fullmoon she must remain in her hut, may not communicate with anyone except the old woman Kunibes, and anything she touches will likewise become t'nau. In the strong patriarchal set-up of the Khoi as portrayed in the novel, only women who have strayed from the ancestral path have to undergo the ‘anders-maak’ and only women can be declared t'nau even if, like in Keas' case, she is not responsible for the reason.

Even with the best of intentions and sincerity of purpose to become a Khoi once again, the influence and pull of white culture is too strong and gradually Keas resumes her white people's name, dresses in white people's clothes (how did she get hold of them?) and influences Damoebo to adopt white values and appearance.
Keas' transformation, then, is a zig-zag process from Khoi to white to Khoi to white.

These different transformations are aided and abetted by several factors. Once Keas has tasted life among the white community, she cannot quite fully become a Khoi again and she remains in a state of flux, neither completely Khoi, nor completely white. She is rejected by both Khoi and white and, significantly, this rejection is more apparent on the part of the women: the white women (Tom's mother and his wife) consider her not good enough to come into their laager; the Khoi women view her as a stranger and very severely censure her ‘white people's’ appearance. Keas herself finds Khoi customs disgusting, even though they have welcomed her back into the fold when she felt rejected and abandoned by the very people she idolises.

4.2.3.3.4 Focalization

In respect of the focalized object, Keas, we have in this novel a curious mixture of focalization: an external narrator-focalizer (EF), character-bound focalizers (CFs) with ‘variable internal focalization’ in Genette's terms and interior monologue. The novel's focalization process is seated mainly in the male characters and the picture emerging of Keas is one seen through male eyes, especially those of Damoeb, Oasib and an EF who to all intents and purposes is male. We also have a situation where the EF is not only looking with the CFs but also interjecting and intercepting a CF's focalization time and again, with the result that we are not always sure who the focalizing subject is.

The EF, being a non-participating witness of the events, is expected to be nonpartisan and to shun comment on the events, but this does not prevent it from being subjective. As Mieke Bal (1985:100) points out, perception is a psychological process which is strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body, which makes it extremely difficult for the EF to remain objective. Added to this, is the focalizer's ideological position towards the focalized object, which can be extrapolated from verbal indicators and which may betray the focalizer's attitude. Rimmon-Kenan (1983:82,83) states: ‘The overall language of a text is that of the narrator, but focalization can “colour” it in a way which makes it appear as a transposition of the perceptions of a separate agent’. The bestialisation of Khoi women and their ‘breeding’ capacity are implied in verbal indicators such as the ‘cackling’ of the women ‘like a flock of sparrows which have become mad’ (p. 18) and reference to Khoi women's children as ‘kasarm’ (p. 117) and “n sleepe sel joelende kinders” (p. 126).

When the EF focalizes Keas, he seems to set her apart from the rank and file of Khoi women and reveals a certain compassion towards her and her acquiescence (pp. 17, 30), her passivity (pp. 30, 32) and her intermediate position. One is
reminded of the sympathetic treatment of the ‘almost white’ Petro by the EF in Mikro's *The Copper Urn* - is it possible that Keas too is treated differently because of her affinity to white culture?

The object of focalization may in some cases be visible only inside the head of a character and only those who have access to it can perceive anything. The EF is in the best position to have access to these non-perceptible objects and to interpret them. The EF can therefore describe extensively the thoughts of the focalized object, while other characters are unaware of them. It is therefore effective by means of an EF to manipulate the thoughts of the object and to manipulate the reader in taking a position for or against the focalized. The EF has the advantage of penetrating the consciousness of the focalized and consequently has the privilege of manipulating that consciousness to conform to its own ideology. Keas is a virtual non-speaking, non-focalizing character but her thoughts are extensively described by the EF under the guise of the stream of consciousness technique.

It is also true that the EF seems to ‘yield’ focalization to a CF in some cases. What is really happening is that the vision of the CF is being given within the all-encompassing vision of the EF, according to Mieke Bal. In fact, the EF always keeps the focalization in which the focalization of a CF may be embedded as object. The EF can also watch along with a person, without leaving focalization entirely to a CF. This gives rise to double or ambiguous focalization, which makes it difficult to determine who actually focalizes: the EF on the first level or the CF on the second level.

As far as character-bound focalization is concerned, we have here what Genette (1980:190) terms ‘variable internal focalization’ where varying ‘visions’ from varying characters are presented. This is especially true of Damoeb, the proud young Khoi, and the headman of the tribe, Oasib, who fights a losing battle until his death to maintain the traditions and culture of his people. Both, in addition to other minor male characters like Häkwa, focalize Keas and, as we shall see presently, this kind of focalization yields ‘subjective’ focalization with considerable bias and limitation. However, since the focalization varies and shifts from one character to another, this ‘subjectivity’ is somewhat tempered and a picture of neutrality may emerge. The CFs' images of Keas also say something about themselves. In the following paragraphs we shall consider the images emerging of Keas as determined by the different focalizers.

### 4.2.3.3.5 Images of Keas

*(a) Race and ethnicity*

When Damoeb sees a woman approaching (p. 5), it is quite natural for him to try and establish the stranger's identity. His first observation is that this woman is
‘odd’ (‘snaaks’), she walks in a curious manner and she looks strange in a spotted karos ‘like a guinea-fowl’ (p. 5). He also notices her ‘white people's clothes’, her bleeding feet and the fact that she is in a hurry although it appears as if she does not quite know where she is going. But when she turns her head in his direction, he immediately notices her ‘triangular face with the pointed chin and the broad cheekbones’ (p. 5) and owns her as Khoi, like himself.

Several times in the narrative Keas' ethnic features are invoked, especially her ‘broad cheekbones’ (e.g. pp. 5, 8, 80, 103) and her ‘yellowness’ (e.g. pp. 6, 7, 90, 101). She is the focalized object of especially the young Khoi male, Damoeb who, besides being proud about his Khoi heritage and initially fiercely tries to defend it against foreign influences and would therefore welcome Keas' return to her people, also has a vested interest in her as a woman. For this reason, Damoeb's perception of Keas may be biased. If he or any other Khoi figure focalizes Keas, it is highly unlikely that they would be struck by her ethnic features everytime they look at her. She is being portrayed as typically Khoi as far as physiognomy is concerned and for that reason we may safely assume that it is no different from that of the other members of Khoi society and therefore not worth mentioning as often as it is. The only conclusion one can draw from this repetitive invocation of ethnicity is that the EF focalizes with the CFs and is moreover identifiable as someone from a different race and culture.

Keas' external appearance, viz. unmistakable Khoi features but dressed in ‘white people's clothes’, as well as her ‘strange skin, as naked as raw meat and yellow-white like smoothly scrubbed mountain cypress wood with no fat and colouring or buchu powder on it’ (p. 6), intensified by her double names of Keas and Lea, immediately evokes a duality or ambivalence which foreshadows the conflict within her. In her case, the most common strategy of characterisation is employed: external appearance being an indication of a character-trait. Here, however, it is not so much a trait which is being illustrated by the description of her external appearance, but rather her intermediate and even outsider position which results in her inner conflict. In fact, Keas becomes the prototype of the ‘groot andersmaak’ (great transformation) of the Khoi-Khoin to a people who have ultimately adopted western culture but who are nevertheless not reckoned to western society.

(b) Patriarchy

‘Patriarchy’ can by no means be described as one of the ‘images’ of Keas but it is included here for the reason that a patriarchal set-up would also determine the images projected of women. We have already established that Khoi society is characterised by a strong patriarchal system, according to the narrative. Once Keas returns to her people, she is subjected to the same rules that govern Khoi society but especially women. Since she is the only Khoi woman in the novel who can be defined as a ‘functional character’, the manifestation of patriarchy is especially prevalent in her case.
In addition to what already has been said about patriarchy and women in section 4.2.3.2, an image of Keas as being the epitome of female subjugation is projected. She not only ‘obeys (Oasib and Damoeb) unprotestingly’ (p. 17), but she also with quiet acquiescence allows these two men to physically assault her. The old man, Oasib, does not understand her ‘quietness and obtuseness’ (p. 16) and misconstrues it as signs of disobedience. He then proceeds by beating her with his stick, scolding her for consorting with ‘Duusmanne’. All Oasib’s wrath and bitterness at the defection of his people to the ‘white side’ finds expression in this act, supplemented by his words to Keas:

Do you perhaps think Heitsi Eibib can help you? Heitsi Eibib no longer speaks in our trees, Heitsi Eibib wears white man's clothes these days, Heitsi Eibib speaks white man's language from white man's Great Book! (p. 16)

After becoming Damoeb's wife but still torn by doubt and indecision about her true identity, Keas becomes intoxicated with liquor and the music at a Khoi feast. Blindly she delivers herself to the rhythm of the dance and, apparently unconscious of the circumstances, allows Ougaa and Hakwa certain liberties. This infuriates her husband who vents his fury first on Hakwa and then on Keas:

Damoeb beats Keas until he has no more strength left in his arms. She does not resist, does not even utter a groan, again and again rolls back to his chastising hand (p. 132).

Not only women's traditional ‘acceptance’ of male authority is contained in the above extract, but also their purported ‘masochism’. Even after Damoeb has stopped his assault on her, Keas comes back for more.

The tragedy in real life for the South African black woman which is also reflected in this novel, is the double patriarchy to which she is subjected: that of her own society and that of the white man. Rosemary Ruether defines patriarchy as follows:

By patriarchy we mean not only the subordination of females to males but the whole structure of Father-ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, king over subjects, racial overlords over colonized people (Ruether 1983:61 - my emphasis).

Already Keas had been used by Tom Muller to ‘tame the wild hunger in his body’, already she had given birth to his child, already she had been rejected as a possible wife for him and has to abide by decisions made for her. Whenever she finds herself in Tom's presence, her attitude is one of humility, subordination and slavish admiration. Cf. for example the following:
When she saw the migrant farmer (Tom), she swung her body in such a way that the child was behind her, and fell to her knees. Her eyes were fixed on the floor ... The two men could notice how her face trembled (p. 120)

Damoeb again lifted his eyes, to Keas who assiduously kept her eyes fixed to the ground (in Tom's presence - p. 122)

(Again in Tom's presence): Damoeb looks up at Keas who kneels so close to him, her hands tightly clasped together on her lap, her head submissively bowed ... (p. 123)

Inadvertently Keas overhears a group of deserters under the leadership of fugitive slaves and mutineers, with Hakwa as the interpreter, plotting an attack on the migrant farmers. Her only fear is for Tom's safety and hurriedly she runs to warn him of the imminent danger, even at the risk of being declared t'nauf for a second time since she is now breaking her state of taboo:

... she tells (Tom) of the threatening danger as if it is a message of great joy. Only her lips move, her whole body is one surrender to the joy which beams from her face and eyes. She looks only at Tom Muller's face, she tells it to him only, she actually says only one word: You, you, you (p. 80)

After thanking her for warning them, he dismisses her unceremoniously with the words: "'Lea, thank you, but now you must go'" (p. 82) and when she hesitates, he even becomes angry and impatient. Even worse is the reaction of Tom's wife:

"'We are grateful that you have come to warn us, but now you must leave and never come again, do you hear! Take away your child of sin, do you hear! Why do you come here to humiliate my husband like this! Go! Why are you still waiting? Do you want me to summon my husband to drive you away? Do you think he wouldn't?'" (p. 81)

And dutifully Keas leaves when told by Tom to do so.

(c) Sex object

It is inevitable that Keas, both as a woman and as a black, would be portrayed as a sex object by a real author/narrator/focalizer who has been indoctrinated by persistent stereotypes about black women in addition to a very strong patriarchal background.

As stated in 4.2.3.2, women in Khoi society, according to the novel, are no more than objects to be used and abused at will by their male counterparts. Keas does not escape this fate, in fact, her fate is compounded by the fact that she is an ‘outsider’ and considered a harlot since she has consorted with a white man and to all intents and purposes acquired dubious morals among the white community.
We are also told that she is beautiful, especially as focalized by Damoeb, thus making her an object of desire. Her desirability is further enhanced by the fact that some members of her tribe, exclusively men, admire her adoption of white culture. Then, of course, the fact that she has brought into the world an ‘illegitimate’ child could be interpreted as an indication of lax morals.

Already having become the object of Tom's lust, Keas finds herself in the unenviable position - engendered by herself - of being in his and his wife's immediate proximity, making a meeting between them inevitable. On the two occasions when Keas appears in Tom's presence, he avoids her eyes (p. 123), gives no indication of knowing her, nor acknowledges the child he has sired. The only way out of this precarious position for Tom is to try and pass Keas off to someone of her own race. He therefore presents Damoeb with a horse, a rifle and ammunition with the words: ‘“I hear you now have Lea to care for ... A man must be able to defend his wife properly, is that not so?”’ (p. 123). Neither Keas nor Damoeb is fooled, for they both have the same thoughts: ‘Is the Whiteman so self-assured and unfeeling that he wants to redeem his debt with these gifts and at the same time bribe Damoeb to come and work for him?’ (p. 123). Nelly Furman (1985:61) states: ‘In a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange’. Indeed, then as now the Keases of this world become the ‘relational sign’ between men.

It is significant that Keas' interlude with Tom belongs to the past and does not form part of the fabula. The only information we have about it, is supplied through Keas' thoughts which the EN penetrates. To a certain extent, this very fact helps to mitigate Tom's behaviour, especially when his treatment of Keas is compared to that of Khoi males. In these thoughts described by the EN, the reader is manipulated into choosing sides. It would appear that, even though Tom used Keas' body to satisfy his sexual needs and even though there is no evidence to suggest that Keas enticed or solicited him - the gift of a silver chain implies that rather he was the initiator - Keas' situation is entirely due to her own doing. It is suggested that white men have the right to ‘play’ with a servant; in contrast and according to her Khoi background, Keas expected much more from the relationship, and when these expectations were not fulfilled, she became a ‘broken’ person. She compounds the problem for herself by going in search of Tom under the pretext of returning to her people, thus prolonging her agony and exacerbating her abandonment. Indeed, as Mbye B. Cham (1987) asserts: ‘abandonment ... is predominantly a female condition’.

The more immediate objectification of Keas comes in the persons of the Gonakwa, Hakwa, and the Sonkwa, Ougaa. Khoi society, according to the story, severely censures a relationship between a Khoi woman and a Sonkwa (San/‘Bushman’). This becomes clear when Oasib shouts at Keas:
Do you want to remain here so that wild animals devour you? Or so that a Sonkwa comes to take you as a wife? Do you want to bring this shame upon yourself? (p. 16)

At a feast where Keas' heartache and conflict drive her to drink too much, Oasib focalizes her and Ougaa's actions:

Keas dances with closed eyes and a gyrating body when she stumbles and falls. Ougaa so keenly helps her to get back on her feet that her dress tears. Keas laughs shrilly; shamelessly she humiliates herself with this Bushman by trampling on her self-respect as a married woman with stumbling feet. His lips thickly curled with anticipated pleasure, Ougaa begins to drag her away to the darkness (p. 130).

But it is especially for Hakwa that Keas is an object of desire. She dreads his 'lecherous, imperious eyes on her body' (p. 30). His marital status does not prevent him from making advances to her and openly expressing the wish to kwekwa (sleep) with her. He flirts with her and flatters her, calling her 'a two-legged heaven' (p. 129) and presenting her with a nerina with the words: ‘a nerina for a nerina’ (p. 56). When it appears that all his overtures come to nothing, he becomes sarcastic, insulting and threatening. She rejects his gift, ‘staring at the flower as if it is a snake’ and this infuriates him so much that he retorts: “If my beard is not red enough for you, then you'll have to take Ougaa. A Sonkwa can get at a woman simply from any side... Widow Keas, Hakwa says you must become his concubine” (p. 56). He obviously refers to Tom's red beard. Once again, Oasib is the focalizer.

Twice Hakwa's advances to Keas lead to a fight between him and Damoeb and twice Keas is victimised - first by being declared t'nau and thus isolated from society and then being beaten almost to death by Damoeb.

Not only the men view Keas as a sex object - she herself sees her only functions as being those of procreation and copulation, no doubt reinforced by the double patriarchy she is subjected to and by the way women generally are socialized in a patriarchal structure. Very early in the story, in her incantation to Heitsi Eibib, she prays to be made happy and whole again and to be given milk in her breasts (p. 14). Alone in her hut at Oasib's kraal, she lets the karos slip from her shoulders and breasts, ‘soft curves, so willing, so willing’ (p. 30). Here in this flea- and lice-infested hut (p. 71), she often escapes in her imagination to her little room on the farm Mooiplaas where she kept her bed clean and warm, ‘her bed in which she had learnt to groan like the springs of her bed, had learnt that the whole world could assume the divine form and weight of one man’ (p. 73). All this information is supplied by the external narrator/focalizer.
(d) Passive resignation

In addition to the fact that Keas is an almost non-speaking character, she is also described or focalized as ‘the quiet, yellow woman’ (p. 90) who seldom communicates with the other characters, even before her enforced isolation by being declared taboo.

Her ‘quietness’ is misconstrued by several characters, including Damoeb and Oasib, as haughtiness or obtuseness (cf. for example Kunibes’ complaint to Oasib that Keas ‘pulls up her haughty nose at everything’ - p. 56), even though Damoeb detects at their very first meeting a great sadness in her eyes and wonders: ‘What could be the cause of her great pain?’ and he also notices ‘a kind of terrified cunning coming over her face’ when he grabs hold of her arm (p. 6).

After suffering the pain of rejection, it appears as if Keas has lost the will to live, accepting the treatment meted out to her, however humiliating, without resistance. In reply to Damoeb’s enquiry about the purpose of her visit to the stone grave of Heitsi Eibib, she tells him: ‘I have to get medicine from our ancestor...’ and at the grave, in humble submission, she pleads for happiness, restoration and fertility. A further indication of her ‘brokenness’ is when she tells Oasib that she feels like a broken thing and has come back to be made whole again (p. 15).

Added to her great sadness is the subjection to patriarchy which together make her a robot-like thing and a martyr. For her, despite her obvious preference for white culture, sleeping with a man is tantamount to marriage in Khoi custom. It is therefore difficult for her to comprehend white attitude to such a serious matter. She insists that Tom is her husband (p. 31) and now that he has deserted her, she feels like and considers herself a kind of widow (cf. in this regard Hakwa addressing her as ‘widow Keas’ - p. 56) and is consequently prepared to undergo the physical suffering a Khoi widow has to submit to. The EN penetrates her thoughts on this issue and again her resignation is emphasised:

She is a kind of widow. Resignedly she thinks that if a Hottentot widow wants to take a man again, she has to give away all her possessions, have her little finger chopped off, have incisions made into her thighs until the blood flows and must allow the headman to urinate over her. Apparently it rinses away her past. She does not feel any disgust anymore, only a sad resignation (p. 72).

The gift of a tortoise from Damoeb to ease her enforced isolation, becomes an important symbol of her silence and resignation, but also of her indecision, lack of direction and ill-fortune which is the story of her life. Often she stares at the animal and equates its movements with her own: ‘For hours she can sit and watch how the animal struggles to get somewhere which is nowhere ... she feels she herself is such an old, old tortoise who can while away its days, or can crawl...’
forward without making any real progress, so stupid and stubborn, and oh, so slowly ... so slowly ...’ (p 32).

The thirteen shields which together form the tortoise's shell is an indication of ill-fatedness: ‘The Christians had taught her the number thirteen is a bad omen’ (p. 71) and, like the tortoise who pulls its head into its shell when it senses danger, she decides to also withdraw into her shell as a defence against humiliation and hurt (p. 74). Having neither the courage nor the inclination to do so, she transposes her own impulse to break loose on to the tortoise by setting it free.

(e) The stranger/outsider

One of the main causes of Keas' silence and resignation and closely linked to her conflict, is the fact that she is a stranger even among her own people and an outsider in both Khoi and white society. Rabie's theme of the outsider-figure, here in embryonic form, is later repeated and expanded in the third novel of the Bolandia series, A man apart, but then the central figure, Douw Prins, is the outsider because of his mixed race.

Keas is by no means a product of miscegenation - in fact, she is a full-blooded Khoi like the rest of her race - so what causes her ‘strangeness’ and outsider status? To what extent is she herself responsible for her situation and to what extent does she become the victim of circumstances?

Admittedly, Keas' ‘strange’ appearance and “otherness” (e.g. her skin without traditional Khoi make-up, her ‘white people's clothes’, the fact that she speaks ‘white people's language’, etc.) already set her apart from other Khoi women. For this reason she has to undergo the ceremony of ‘making different’ since she had forgotten ‘all the right things’. But it is not exactly these things that cause her outsider position. She has transgressed the most fundamental of Khoi laws by consorting with someone of another race and bringing a half-caste into the world. It is this child which causes her ostracism. Khamab wants to know from Oasib: ‘“If you call Hakwa a stranger, then what about Keas and her white-mouse child you yourself brought back to the kraal?”’ (p. 23 - my emphasis). Much later, when Damoeb informs Oasib that he wants to marry Keas, Eigaab, son and successor to Oasib, retorts: ‘“Must the bastard-child of a castaway wench be allowed to come into the captain's family?”’ (p. 94 - my emphasis).

This severe censure of Keas and her child by Khoi society becomes apparent on different occasions and from different characters. When Damoeb sees the child for the first time and notices her ‘hair which is more smooth than frizzy, and the little face which is almost as naked-meat white as that of the Smooth-haired ones’ (p. 7), he does not openly comment but his reaction by uttering the expletive ‘Igoge soreb!’ (literally ‘the sun dies!’) says much about his attitude to and
condemnation of miscegenation. Oasib is more explicit in his condemnation when he scolds and beats Keas for getting involved with white men (p. 16).

Both Damoeb and Oasib are the main focalizers of Keas and her plight, both are the severest censors of her cohabitation with a white man but strangely enough, both are the most compassionate, if not the only compassionate ones, towards her. It is through Damoeb's focalization that we learn about Keas' acute awareness of the kraal's women's disapproval of her child, so much so that she covers the child's long brown hair with a pointed cap and leaves her hut only to work, never to engage in conversation with them (p. 33). Despite Damoeb's compassion, he cannot prevent himself from brutally calling the child a ‘halfnaatjie’ (half-breed - p. 117).

Of the character-bound focalizers, it is especially Oasib who focalizes Keas and who is aware of her great sadness and outsider-position. As captain of the kraal he welcomes her back into the fold but it nevertheless takes a long time before he fully accepts her and her child as members of his tribe. Realising that he has come to the end of his life and would be succeeded by his son, Eigaab, and ultimately by his grandson, Damoeb, Oasib is fully aware of the tribe's rejection of Keas and her ‘white’ child and would therefore not sanction Damoeb's succession if he marries Keas (p. 56).

Oasib's deep compassion for Keas surfaces time and again in his thoughts which the EN penetrates. He thinks: ‘Poor Keas. Even if she can one day feel at home again among the Khoi-Khoin, what about her long-haired child? How many bastards have come into the country in his lifetime? How many different kinds of bastards?’ (p. 86) and with a sense of despondency he remembers that Keas' child is an Afrikaner too, one of the ‘backward, mangy-dirty caboodle of half-breeds ... neither fish nor flesh’ (p. 100). His condemnation of Keas and her child sprouts mainly from his concern about the direction his people is taking, including his beloved grandson, Damoeb, who is prepared to relinquish Khoi values and tradition in his pursuit of Keas and in exchange for white culture.

Yet it is Oasib who acknowledges that an inevitable mixture of blood has taken/is taking place and is the first to accept Keas' child as one of the new ‘race’ emerging at the Cape. He is also the first to suggest that the issue of their status has to be addressed. Khoi and white migrant farmers have been discussing various issues affecting both sectors without discussing the ‘status’ of the emergent Afrikaners. He articulates his thoughts, addressing the child: ‘“To think we have not said anything about you, eh, little Afrikaner? You who are neither Khoi, nor Honkhoikwa, and yet a little of both?”’ and then instructs Keas to leave the child in his hut (p. 125).

Much later, Oasib notices the child's marginalized position, how she is mocked and bullied by Khoi children in the same manner she is treated by white children.
He tries to alleviate her loneliness by telling her traditional Khoi folktales and it is during such a story-telling session that Oasib, fierce protector of Khoi custom and tradition, dies, signifying the all too obvious symbolic death of the Khoi-Khoin.

(f) Keas’ conflict

Conflict, be it an inner conflict or conflict between two individuals, an individual and society, an individual and forces beyond its control, etc., provides important indicators to certain characteristics or traits inherent in a character.

Keas’ external appearance which is time and again described or focalized, together with her double names of Keas and Lea, her bilingualism, etc., are only external manifestations of a duality or ambivalence within and imposed upon her by external factors. This duality/ambivalence finds expression in her conflict with Khoi and white society, resulting in her outsider position and ultimately her becoming the ‘quiet yellow woman’ who is in conflict with herself and whose only meaningful communication is with herself.

She has been brought up by white people and adopted white values in respect of dress, language, religion and culture. As an orphaned child she had no choice in the matter, while her benefactors took no cognisance of her Khoi background. Their only objective, it would appear, was to ‘civilise’ her. The irony of it all is that when she gives birth to a child fathered by a white man, this ‘civilising mission’ comes to an abrupt end when she is made aware of the fact that she is a ‘Hottentot’ who can never be assimilated into white society. In the final analysis, it is this rejection of her as a person but more especially as a mother who has to bring up her child in its ancestral culture that leads to her conflict which in essence is a conflict of identity.

Yet this conflict of identity comes about not only because of Keas’ ambivalence, but is rooted in the deep-seated, historical and ‘traditional’ dichotomy of centre and periphery which encompasses several other binary oppositions such as male and female, black and white, culture and nature, civilisation and barbarism, etc. Mineke Schipper (1989:12) points out that

> Western culture as a power centre appears to be even more unassailable, despite the forces which try to penetrate that centre from the periphery. He who controls information, also controls culture.

This centre-periphery dichotomy can be translated in a narrow sense to Keas’ situation and in a broader sense to the situation of women in general and the black woman in particular. While Keas is by no means a peripheral character in the novel, the fact remains that in both Khoi and white society she is pushed to the very periphery of human existence, although in varying degrees. She finds white
society an impenetrable fortress, in spite of the fact that she aspired in different forms to acquire white culture, even at the risk of being ostracised by her own community. For her, it is not a question of attaining parity with the white male - at best her quest is for acceptance into the white community, a quest which is confounded by statements forcibly made by several white characters, including Tom when he tells Oasib:

I regard captain Oasib as my friend ... But our experiences of the majority of Hottentots have led us to believe that they are not our equals in Christian virtue and probity, but ignorant children of nature. Only when they are in our service and under our discipline, can we try to civilise and christianise them ... (p. 121).

Kea's exclusion from and marginalization by white society illustrate in a microcosmic way women's situation in general, despite all the hard work they put into progressing to the centre.

Right at the beginning of the narrative, one is already bemused by Kea's reaction to her rejection: on the one hand she wishes to return to Heitsi Eibib and her people to 'be made whole again' (this is what she tells Oasib); on the other hand she flees to the mountains in pursuit of Tom after learning that he had trekked into the interior of the country (this emerges from her interior monologue as well as from words expressed by Tom's wife: “‘Why do you run after Tom into the wilderness? Do you think he'll look at a Hottentot wench again?’”). This behaviour is only the forerunner of a whole series of paradoxical, bordering on the schizophrenic, actions on the part of Kea. A few examples will suffice:

While she is being portrayed as one who displays 'quiet resignation' to her fate, she also becomes determined and defiant when the situation demands it; despite her continued humiliation and subjugation, she has a proud disposition; she is prepared to stand up to Tom's wife and even gets the better of her, yet she is reduced to a cringing, submissive creature when Tom scolds her; she vehemently refuses to have the mixture of sheepfat, soot and red clay applied to her body, yet she herself covers her face with the same mixture to convince Tom of her Khoi background; while she cannot hide her disgust for Khoi traditions and tries to maintain the values acquired from whites, she is nevertheless prepared to endure whatever is expected of her from Khoi society; her love for Tom excludes all other men from her life, yet she takes Damoeb as her husband; while she aspires to raise her child in white Christian culture, she leaves the child behind in Oasib's kraal so that her 'smooth-haired child can acquire her people's language and customs' (p. 137) as well; while she subjects herself completely to Khoi patriarchy, she defies Khoi laws when danger lurks for the white migrant farmers, etc.

These are undoubtedly the actions of a confused, erratic mind, brought about by the conflict within her. In an interior monologue Kea acknowledges the fact that
they (the Khoi) have received her with more cordial hospitality than a white person would ever receive a different kind of person’ (p. 30). Since she was not good enough for Tom, she returned to the filth and stench of Khoi living, but then her return is ‘provisional, uncertain and perhaps unimportant’ (p. 30). This perhaps is the key to Keas' final choice, which in any case is predictable from the very start.

Initially, and for a long time after returning to her people, Keas finds it almost impossible to adapt to Khoi lifestyle. Her plight is exacerbated by heartache, isolation, rejection, humiliation, fear and mockery, and it is no wonder that she assiduously clings to the culture she has adopted from whites and to memories of happier times at Mooiplaas. For instance, she insists on being called by her white people's name, Lea; twice she discards the traditional Khoi attire in favour of white people's clothes and she speaks to her child in white people's language. Likewise, her thoughts are often occupied by her past experiences which she invariably compares to her present situation.

Despite her ‘anders-maak’, Keas gradually but unmistakably moves in the direction of white culture once again. She tells Damoeb:

I have been made different according to the laws of the Khoi-Khoin, but I shall never be able to live like a true Khoi woman ... Once one has become accustomed to white people's habits ... then one can no longer tolerate dirty skin-clothes and sheepfat and soot on one's body ... I shall never be able to become a good Khoi woman again ... (p. 95).

In a stream of consciousness ‘she knows undeniably: a good Hottentot I can never become again; for too long I've been accustomed to better things, even though they were tin mugs and discarded bedclothes’ (p. 115). In her heart Keas has resolved her conflict, but how to resolve it in society remains the problem. It is in this respect that Damoeb becomes the helper in realising her objective.

Already deeply impressed by white culture and openly expressing his admiration for their expertise, as well as being deeply in love with Keas, Damoeb becomes an easy prey when Keas tries to convince him of the ‘superiority’ of white culture. Gradually and none too subtly she instructs him in the ways of white people, also intending to teach him how to till the soil and cultivate vegetables: ‘She must convince Damoeb that one can in an instant harvest more delicious food in a vegetable garden than by gathering forage food the whole day in the veld’ (p. 116).

Damoeb's decision to leave the kraal and become an indentured labourer in the employ of white migrant farmers has been initiated partly by Tom Muller but more importantly by Keas. He promises Keas: ‘“I shall wear white man's clothes if you become my wife. I shall easily learn white man's language because you speak it so
beautifully ... I shall do everything you require of me. I shall become like you if you become my wife ...” (p. 96).

Oasib is already aware of the fact that his energetic young grandson, previously full of pride and zest for life, is degenerating due to Keas' influence. When Damoeb informs him that he and Keas have already become husband and wife and adds: “‘We shall have a feast as soon as I return from commando ... Keas does not want a feast accompanied by all the old things... Later we shall marry like the whites. I want to become a Christian like Keas’” (p. 101), Oasib cannot hide his deep shock, resentment and disappointment (‘he looks as if his grandson had slapped him across the face’). He nevertheless recognises Damoeb's deep love for Keas and the fact that ‘Damoeb wants to become like a white man’ (p. 105), and therefore grudgingly gives his blessing to the young man's decisions, recognising that ‘... this is the great transformation in our nation's history’ (p. 124).

In this manner, Damoeb facilitates Keas' ultimate choice and when both of them leave the kraal to go to the white people, they look back to see Keas' hut in flames - once again a very obvious symbol of Keas' final choice but also of the destruction of the Khoi nation.

But this is not simply a matter of re-adopting white lifestyle and values in the case of Keas. Her return to Khoi society has left its mark upon her and in the end she does not reject Khoi culture out of hand. Marrying Damoeb, albeit on the rebound, already indicates her part-acceptance of Khoi culture. However, the most important indication of her recognition of her true background, culture and tradition, is when she returns her child, Katrynjtie, to Oasib's kraal to be initiated into the culture and language of her own people. In yet another obvious symbolic gesture, a further indication of this emerges: the silver chain necklace given to her by Tom and to which she clings with so much fervour that nobody could persuade her to take it off. When she takes it off and hangs it around Damoeb's neck with the words: ‘“You must always wear it”’ (p. 95), she symbolically unshackles herself, not only from her obsession with Tom, but also from the bonds imposed upon her by two widely divergent cultures and, in a sense, establishing her freedom both as a person and as a woman.

A salient feature which can be extracted from Keas' conflict, is her low self-esteem which, to a certain extent is as ambivalent as her actions. By means of interior monologue, verbal articulation and action she indicates that she is a ‘bad Hottentot’ (cf. Toiings in Mikro's novels), 'a dirty, backward Hottentot-woman who does not know she is dirty and unloved’ (p. 73). Ignorance, naïveté and the utter rejection of herself as a worthy human being are encapsulated in these thoughts. It appears that she has reached such a nadir in her existence that she no longer cares what happens to her or what treatment is meted out to her, as becomes
clear in the same interior monologue: she does not mind being t'nau or undergoing the bitter suffering in her attempt to adapt to Khoi lifestyle or being beaten by Damoeb.

Even after becoming Damoeb's wife she is still torn so much by conflict (NB: at this occasion she once again wears ‘white people's clothes’) that she becomes inebriated with ‘white man's liquor’ at a Khoi feast, ‘gulping down the entire bowl of wine with one convulsive swig’ (p. 128), with the result that she has to steady herself against the wagon and several of the men try to abuse her. The other women are shocked by her behaviour, she shouts at Hakwa: “Let go of me. This wench wants to dance!” and when another woman attempts to speak to her, she hits her with a tortoise-shell and with a voice trembling with grief, cries: “Leave me alone ... I am just dirt!” (p. 130). It is only after receiving a thorough beating from Damoeb that Kea calms down and fully accepts who and what she is, creating the impression that women, especially black women, need the chastising hand and even physical force of males to coerce them into submission.

Although the main cause of Keas' low self-esteem is the rejection and humiliation by the very people who raised her, other contributory factors can be identified. In fact, this rejection is simply the culmination of all the factors which socialized Keas (and women in general) into the belief that she is dirty, sinful and not worthy to be the equal of man. Perhaps Rabie subscribes to the Augustinian view that woman is prone to sin and disorder and particularly responsible for the sin and disorder which govern our planet (see Ruether 1983:chapter 4), which brings us to yet another of the several contradictions in the novel: the Khoi are portrayed as a people who cannot conceive of God, yet they, especially the women, are evaluated according to Christian values. Admittedly Kea has adopted the Christian faith and should therefore be aware of its laws and regulations, but in typically Afrikaner tradition the author goes about selectively in the application of those laws to blacks. Kea has been taught to ‘believe that the Lord loves all His creatures and that she must never doubt that love shall ultimately conquer all ... she must remain cheerful ...’ (p. 116) and that ‘lightning shall strike her down if she blasphemes the name of the Lord’ (p. 73). No matter how great her suffering, she must sit back passively and remain cheerful, for the Lord knows best - that is Christian the message to the suffering masses!

The Keas at the end of the fabula is still the ambivalent character we meet at its beginning, but now her conflict has been resolved, or so it appears. What is not articulated but what can undeniably be extracted from the text, is that the descendants of the Keases and Damoebs will remain in a vacuum somewhere between two worlds and can only gain some recognition by subjecting themselves to white supervision, discipline and hegemony, as is illustrated by the previously cited words of Tom Muller and by Kea's and Damoeb's choice at the end to indenture themselves to the white migrant farmers. Rabie's novel, then, is merely
a reinforcement of the purported
‘ek-het-maar-net-saam-met-die-baas-gekom’-syndrome (literally: ‘I have but only
accompanied my boss’, i.e. image of the ‘coloureds’ as eternal children), popular in
the Afrikaans narrative before 1948 and so forcibly challenged by Jakes Gerwel in
his study *Literatuur en Apartheid* (1988).

### 4.3 Concluding remarks

In the above chapter the main purpose was to examine the images of the black woman,
Keas, but also to illustrate that the images of black women projected by a progressive
author such as Jan Rabie do not differ markedly from those projected by his
predecessors, although one has to concede that the blatancy of the images now become
somewhat more subtle and a more balanced view is given by allowing the black
characters to be the focalizers. Yet this strategy once again becomes questionable,
since the views expressed (by blacks) reflect the very same stereotypes attached to
them by whites. The perceptions of the Keas of the 1730s and the perceptions of her
sisters near the end of the second millennium remain basically the same.

What particularly emerges from the novel is that women must carry the blame for
their situation. In particular, black women in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society
are solely responsible for their marginalization. In fact, they bear a double burden
of blame, being subjected to a double patriarchy, having the audacity to try and
penetrate the centre of a double society and aspiring to have double values. The
aspects of genuine love and desire, of sincerity of purpose, are not brought into play.
It would seem, as in Keas' case, that black women go about in a very irresponsible
manner in the creation of a race of ‘half-breeds’ and by so doing, subject their
descendants to an outsider status which causes a myriad of psychological and
emotional problems and which in turn make it impossible for them to assert
themselves as whole and worthy human beings.

I have also attempted to show that, despite Rabie's claim of the novel being an
illustration of the emergence of ‘browner and whiter Afrikaners’ and of influences
going out from both black and white, the novel actually is an illustration of what
Edward W. Said states:

> ... cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations
> on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for
> the benefit of the receiver, *they ought to be* (Said 1978:67 - my emphasis).

**Eindnoten:**
2. ‘Dikdei’: a yellow-brown, fat lizard of the genus *Mabuia*.
3. In view of oral evidence that African, especially Southern African societies were characterised by matrilineal and matrifocal systems before patriarchy asserted itself (not least through Western influence), it is quite possible that Khoi society was a matriarchal one. However, since the Khoi were practically wiped out by small-pox epidemics and wars of dispossession, not even oral evidence to this effect is available.
4. ‘Afrikaners’: originally people of mixed Khoi and white descent. The word has since undergone ‘ameliorative’ semantic change, referring today *only* to white people who speak Afrikaans.
5. ‘Karos’: cape made of skin.
6. ‘Ajoos’: powder made from *Phellorina delestrei*, a field fungus, and used as a brown powder and as snuff.
8. From documented reports by the first visitors to and the first settlers at the Cape, we learn that the ‘customary’ form of trade was by exchanging trinkets, tobacco and liquor for the indigenes' land, herds and flocks. This practice was extended to the indigenous young woman especially, as a strategy of dispossessing her of her virginity, of enslaving her and of subjugating her to a double patriarchy.
9. One of the several invocations in the novel of the persistent stereotype of the Khoi's love of and easy succumbing to ‘white man's liquor’.

Chapter 5
A man for all seasons: the ongoing voice of André P. Brink

It would appear inconsistent with the pattern followed in the previous two chapters to devote an entire chapter to the ‘phenomenon “André P. Brink”’ who, ‘next to Breyten Breytenbach is the single Afrikaans author who elicits the most a-rational (and irrational) response from the public and academics’ (Malan 1986:12). If Rabie can be regarded as the forerunner of the Movement of Sixty, Brink is undoubtedly its key-figure. His work spans more than three decades of literary production, includes a remarkable variety of literary genres and can be divided into three broad categories: creative work, literary criticism and literary theory. In addition to Brink's image of polemist, Charles Malan mentions his ‘conglomerate-image of writer/critic/academic/thinker/reformer/demonstrator’ (Malan 1986:12).

More consistently than any other Afrikaans author before or after him, Brink creates women characters - black and white - who demand to be analysed, despite the claim by several critics that his female characters are largely ‘stereotyped’ (e.g. Van Zyl 1988:30), undoubtedly referring to his white women characters only. His black female characters are rather peripheral to his stories and even when they occupy a position central to the events, they are seldom central characters and do not take precedence over the central male characters.

In the first part of this chapter, I am deviating somewhat from the pattern followed in the previous two chapters by isolating certain ‘trends’ which can be identified in Brink's work with particular reference to women, trends from which images of the black woman can be extracted from the perspective of a black South African woman.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to go into detail about the reception of Brink's novels by South African critics. It is sufficient to say that in many respects he is a controversial figure in literature, especially in his native country where he is the man many conservative Afrikaners love to hate; the man who put Afrikaans literature on the international literary map but who at the same time exposed
many of the injustices perpetrated by his own people against black South Africans; the man who popularised in his novels the struggles of the oppressed to liberate themselves but who simultaneously found himself caught in the crossfire between black and white extremists. D.J. Hugo sums up the general Afrikaner attitude to Brink:

It has already become accepted currency in Afrikaner circles to be suspicious of André Brink's literary-political motives or at least to doubt them. He would write politically committed novels solely for the purpose of capturing the attention of the outside world, and with that attention to make money and hopefully win the Nobel Prize. He would thus exploit his own propounded theory of the injustice of Apartheid for personal gain. And abroad - where he can depend on applause - he would make more radical statements than he would in South Africa where he cannot summon the courage to do so (Hugo 1984:34).

What is important, though, is that no matter how Brink as a writer is perceived, no matter how much some critics would like to dismiss his work as ‘a political little sauce over mediocre story-telling’², the fact remains that his contributions to literature cannot be ignored.

I shall refer in this chapter to three novels by the author, viz. Kennis van die aand (1973), Houd-den-Bek (1982) and Die muur van die pes (1984), with incidental references to some of his other works. These novels have been translated into English by the author himself as Looking on darkness, A chain of voices and The wall of the plague respectively. Of the three novels, I have selected one, A chain of voices, and in particular the figure of Ma-Rose as an example of Brink's portrayal of the black woman for reasons that will become clear in the course of the chapter.

5.1 Brink in the 1970s and 1980s

Brink's prolificacy as a creative artist is best illustrated by his literary products during the 1970s and early 1980s; but these products also illustrate the growth of the artist since his metaphorical ‘birth’ on a park-bench in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris in 1960 (Brink 1983). In addition to all his other work, Brink has written and published no less than six novels during the period 1973 - 1984: Looking on darkness (1973), An instant in the wind (1975), Rumours of rain (1978), A dry white season (1979), A chain of voices (1982) and The wall of the plague (1984), all of them romans engagés³ and four out of the six dealing with love across the colour-line, which can be regarded as the ultimate emotional and moral emancipation in a country where love between black and white has been forbidden by law.

All three novels selected for inclusion in this study, to a greater or lesser degree, deal with blacks, more precisely the ‘coloureds’ or their part-ancestors, the Khoikhoi; the black woman character in these novels develops towards a formidable presence in the unfolding events and progresses from an extremely peripheral character (*Looking on darkness*) to the near-centre (*A chain of voices*) to the centre (*The wall of the plague*). They are representative of Brink’s work in the 1970s and 1980s, especially representative of his commitment to Africa and his pronouncements on littérature engagée; in these novels he consolidates his worldview and pronouncements regarding racism and sexism as the ultimate forms of oppression. The novels also represent a past-present dichotomy and similarity - while one of them (*A chain of voices*) invokes the South African past, the other two deal with contemporary issues but the problems remain fundamentally the same; in all of them the past, present and future are integrated to show that the present is a legacy from the past and the future shall be the legacy of another past, that the contemporary South African situation can never be divorced from past tendencies. At the same time, this irrevocable past does not mean that change cannot and does not take place but that change can only realise itself within the individual. While it is true that these novels deal with sex across the colour-line - as has repeatedly been pointed out by several Afrikaner critics⁴ - this was not the main reason for their selection, although this aspect forms a relevant part of my study.

Admittedly, an analysis of *An instant in the wind* would have been a real challenge from a black female perspective but while this novel is another example of Brink's littérature engagée, it is excluded from this study for the reason that the female character is white. Likewise, the other two novels are excluded because the black woman does either not feature at all (*Rumours of rain*) or her role is so negligible that there is very little to say about her (*A dry white season*).

### 5.2 Brink on women and sex

Although Brink has since rejected his own ‘romantic chauvinism in respect of women’ as revealed in his article ‘Oor religie en seks’ (‘On religion and sex’ - 1964), it is nevertheless important to include here a brief account of his views as expounded in that article, mainly as an attempt to understand how he portrays women, especially in his earlier novels, to understand the erotic element in his work and also to show his development from ‘chauvinism’ to non-sexist narrative.

He acknowledges the central role of woman in creation myths. She is primordial being who gives birth to the human race but at the same time she brings misery to humankind by unleashing the destructive forces of creation. In most religions this
is the case, for example, in Christianity it is through woman that man comes to a fall but in the shape of the heaven-graced Mary it is again woman who creates the possibility of redemption. Creation, destruction and redemption through resurrection are the primary roles of woman, and in them Brink sees the coalescence of religion and sex.

According to Brink, the creative-destructive role of woman is specifically confirmed on the terrain of the sexual: the sex act implies compassion as well as violence; it is a moment of tenderness but also of fierce struggle. For man it is both conquest and defeat, because woman is his conquered possession but he becomes her victim as well. She is weaker than he and looks to him for protection but at the same time she is the all-mother from whom he is born. This diminishes her in his eyes but at the same time it elevates her: to him she is saint and whore - she has to be both for the sexual moment to be fully ecstatic.

For Brink, woman is a key-figure in both religion and sex, which he relates to one another. Man (read man and woman), entrapped in himself, has a constant need to reach out to something/Something or someone/Someone external to himself and, according to Brink, both religion and sex represent man's attempt to do so. Man has the need for identifying with another, especially in a hypercivilised society where the individual feels himself threatened by the nameless and amorphous masses. Through the sex act in which his entire personality is involved, he can repeal his temporality. Confession of sin and literal denudation are, according to Brink, the indispensable conditions for the religious and sexual experiences, for each in itself is an act of revealing oneself for and to the Other, an act of making oneself vulnerable in complete honesty. Both religion and sex are forms of communication and contact - one communicates and makes contact with God through prayer; likewise in sex one communicates and makes contact with another person.

5.3 ‘Tendencies’ in Brink's writing with regard to women

In view of the above pronouncements as well as in view of the already mentioned fact that Brink consistently creates female characters who demand analysis, attention should be given to some ‘tendencies’ in his writing with regard to women and, for the purpose of this study, with regard to black women. What follows here results from the premise that every reading is a gendered experience as well as a rewriting of the original text. Against this background, the following selection of identifiable tendencies pertaining to women in Brink's novels will now be examined.
5.3.1 The systematic ‘breast’ metaphor

When reading Brink's novels - also depending upon who the reader is - one is immediately struck by the numerous references to breasts. When a woman character appears on the scene or in the head of the narrator-focalizer, there is invariably at least one reference to her breasts. Brink seldom describes a woman's external appearance in detail, we seldom know what exactly she looks like but we are left in no doubt as to the size and shape of her breasts. However, the number of times these female protuberances is mentioned or described does not pose a problem for me and I am sure neither does it for other readers of Brink's novels, unless they happen to be members of the Kappiekommando. Since time immemorial the female anatomy - especially the breasts - has been the subject of artistic expression. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/87:190) points out that even in civilisations where sensuality is more subtle than in Western civilisation and ideas of form and harmony are entertained, the breasts remain favoured objects to arouse desire because of their gratuitous developing. Breasts are inextricably female. Are breasts then not organs and symbols of femininity, motherhood, female sensuality and eroticism? I reiterate: I have no problem with the number of explicit and implicit references to and descriptions of breasts in Brink's novels.

I do however have problems with the perception of breasts and the distinction made between white breasts and black breasts. The white heroines of Brink's novels who incidentally are seldom if ever Afrikaner women (his reverence for the Afrikaner ‘civil religion’?), invariably have small, firm breasts, an almost prepubescent flatness. A few examples will suffice: Jessica Thomson in *Looking on darkness* has the ‘small, definite, round breasts of a portrait from the innocent age preceding Raphael’ (p. 7) and Joseph remembers ‘the sunlight on her small white breasts’ (p. 22). Another of Joseph's white lovers, Janet, has ‘unusually small breasts with elongated brownish nipples’ (p. 153) and yet another, Beverley, has ‘small breasts with pale nipples’ (p. 163). For such an extremely talented and intelligent writer, Brink displays a remarkably limited vocabulary when describing this part of the female anatomy. In contrast to white women, Brink's black female characters have ‘full breasts’ (Ursula, pp. 125, 128, 129); Joseph's mother, Sophie, is a ‘full-breasted woman’ (p. 76) who ironically has her left breast amputated and subsequently dies of breast cancer; in *A chain of voices* Ma-Rose's breasts are equated to the udders of cows (see 2.2.3).

In addition to the difference in shape and size of white and black breasts, the very language used makes a further distinction. White women have breasts; black women have ‘pramme’ and young black girls have ‘prammetjies’. Several times Ma-Rose refers to her own breasts as ‘pramme’, ‘tette’ (teats) or even ‘uiers’ (udders). In the author's own English translation they are called ‘dugs’, ‘paps’ or ‘teats’, with definite bestial and contemptuous connotations (see *Oxford Dictionary*). We know today that the shape and size of a woman's breasts have

nothing to do with her sexuality. And Brink knows it, his characters know it. We have the classic example in *Looking on darkness*. Joseph as a young boy idolised the young white girl Hermien. She was the Virgin Mary, a goddess, the ultimate of his wildest dreams all rolled into one. Until he saw her in a near-naked state:

It struck me like a blow in the solar plexus: there was Hermien, and underneath that floral dress she was naked on the rock, and there - look - through the damp material clinging to her, her young nipples were darkly visible. The holy Hermien I used to worship was, suddenly, not different in any way from all the little brown girls whose tits and slits I'd fondled behind the muddy bank of the dam (p. 97).

So why this almost systematic distinction between white breasts and black breasts? Stereotypes about the black woman dating from the days of slavery and even prior to that are obviously difficult to dispel, because consciously or unconsciously they find expression in the works of even progressive authors such as Brink. The following meanings can be inferred from the particular way the black woman's breasts are depicted:

1. If the black woman's breasts are described as ‘large’, ‘full’, ‘heavy’, ‘long’, etc. and are called ‘pramme’, then that can only mean one thing: these are the breasts of a mother, more specifically a mother who has given birth to several children, the black woman as the consummate breeder. In spite of Brink's anti-racist vision, it would seem that he goes back to a tradition established centuries ago with regard to the black woman. For example, as early as 1447 the Italian, Antonio Malfante, wrote about the black women of Africa: ‘They breed greatly, for a woman bears up to five at a birth’ (cited by Davidson 1963:23). During the time of slavery, it was expected of the slave woman/girl to give birth as often as is biologically possible in order to increase the slave population without the slave-owner having to incur the cost of purchasing new slaves (cf. Davis 1981:8). Perceptions like Malfante's and coercive practices during slavery are responsible for the tenacious persistence of the stereotype of black women as breeders. It is no wonder that Afrikaans authors like Mikro, Rabie and Venter use collective nouns such as ‘spul’ (caboodle), ‘trop’ (herd or troop, as in ‘a troop of monkeys’), ‘tros’ (bunch), ‘kasarm’ (ragtag and bobtail) and ‘sleepsel’ (trail) when referring to a black woman's children.

2. If the impression is created that the black woman's only function upon earth is to breed, then it must follow that her only activity is to mate. She is explicitly portrayed as the copulating, fornicating, lascivious woman in Brink's novels. Joseph Malan remembers that his widowed mother had a different lover in her bed almost every night, ‘the whispering behind (her) floral folding-screen, and the creaking of the brass bed, and the muffled moaning of her joy’ (p. 30);
he recalls her explanation for her ‘open and frequent transgressions’ of the Commandments: “The Commandments only say thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, it says nothing about wanting a man” (p. 88). He also remembers the insatiable, nymphomanic lust of Ursula, who was ‘too demanding’, who wanted ‘to devour and possess’ him, whose ‘excessiveness (was) a form of hunger’ which he could not satisfy, for it was ‘too voracious, too blatant, too uncompromising’ (p. 123). Ma-Rose reminisces about her younger days when she could ‘milk’ any number of men at any given time, in fact, she admits to ‘having had all the men of these parts and from far away’ who came ‘to have their marrow drained’ (p. 27). Andrea in The wall of the plague has had several white lovers before she met Mandla, and so it goes on.

In the early 1970s, Brink published a play based on J.M. Synge's Playboy of the Western World under the title Bobaas van die Boendoe. The setting is a fishing village somewhere along the West Coast of the Cape Province and the characters are so-called coloureds. Already then Brink, employing one of the oldest techniques of characterisation, viz. analogous naming, named one of the female characters Séra Fyndraai. Another eloquent example from The wall of the plague: Andrea has an altercation with a dirty old clochard on the beach in France when she remembers one of her father's favourite invectives in which the black woman's only function (breeding) and her only activity (copulation) are combined: she shouts at him: “Jou ou droëdrol wat uit jou ma se poephol gebore is oor haardos te besig was” ("You old turd who have been born from your mother's arse because her cunt was too busy at the time") - p. 72, my translation).

In fairness to Brink one must concede that, in addition to popularising the black people's struggle to liberate themselves and exposing the injustices perpetrated by his own people in his work, he makes a serious indictment against society and the powers that force women into prostitution. Joseph's mother sells her only asset, her body, ‘her safeguard for the future, her key to the present’ (p. 110), so that he can have a proper education. But to suggest that the black woman has neither the mental faculties nor the physical skills (even without a formal education!) to earn a living other than being prone on her back with splayed legs, is grossly insulting to womanhood and to humankind alike. The black woman in South African literature cannot and does not even exercise ‘pussy power’ (Eldridge Cleaver, 1968), for the impression is created that she is merely the object to serve the needs of men, the infernal seductress - not in an ameliorative sense - but as a demonic force let loose to demolish Afrikaner values and white hegemony.

3 Jakes Gerwel points out in his study Literatuur en apartheid (1988) that the black man is symbolically castrated in the early Afrikaans novel. If the black male is thus emasculated, the black woman is degraded by the images projected
of her and by the contemptuous language used to describe her anatomy and her motherhood. Sherry B. Ortner (1974:87) cautions:

Efforts directed solely at changing the social institutions - through setting quotas on hiring, for example, or through passing equal-pay-for-equal-work laws - cannot have far-reaching effects if cultural language and imagery continue to purvey a relatively devalued view of women.

5.3.2 The theme of ‘freedom’

The theme of freedom, or rather the search for freedom, runs continuously through Brink's fictional work, novels and dramas alike, establishing itself anew in each and every subsequent work. Especially his novels deal with the same problem, viz. the struggle for freedom, justice and a ‘liberal humanism’. Given the numerous existing barriers in his native country, it is no wonder that the artist displays a kind of ‘magnificent obsession’ with freedom - chiefly the freedom of the individual which will remain an unattainable myth while artificial barriers remain or are maintained or are newly created. Brink himself points out in Mapmakers (1983) that the struggle for freedom has been an Afrikaner enterprise since the early days of South African history and cites among the examples the first stock farmers' rebellion against the stringent rules of the VOC, the Voortrekkers' search for freedom from oppressive British rule, individuals in that history who have sacrificed their lives in their search for freedom.

Among Brink's many statements is the contention that art can be used as a weapon against ‘verkramptheid’ (ultra-conservatism) as a means of leading the ‘volk’ to liberation. For the individual to attain personal freedom, s/he has to become first of all morally emancipated since it is one of the first signs of the liberation of the individual and which often coincides with his/her political emancipation. Thus, the depiction of the erotic in his literature becomes one of the primary means to emotional and ideological emancipation. It is therefore no coincidence that four out of his six novels of the 1970s and early 1980s deal with sex across the colour-line at a time when it was forbidden by law in South Africa.

However, the quest for freedom in Brink's novels remains a predominantly male aspiration and enterprise, which is not surprising as his main characters are almost invariably male. If the central character happens to be white, his search for freedom is essentially a search for personal freedom; if black, the character has to go through various stages and overcome various barriers before he can even attempt to go in search of personal freedom. Cf. in this regard Joseph Malan (Looking on Darkness), Adam Mantoor (An Instants in the Wind) and Galant (A Chain of Voices), all of whom must either find freedom from racial oppression and servitude, have to reach the top of Langston Hughes' 'racial mountain'
Hughes 1926/1976:309), or from slavery before they can aspire to freedom in other forms. Ultimately, in each case, white or black, it becomes a search for freedom within themselves. This quest for freedom is seldom if ever accomplished, since the human condition is of such a nature that various new barriers - in many instances created by the individual himself - present themselves time and again.

If the searching self happens to be female, she is more likely to be white, for example Jessica Thomson in Looking on darkness who, despite her upper middle-class upbringing in England, is held to ransom by a text found on one of those Victorian plates in her home, ‘Thou God seest me’, and which has ever since put a strain on her relationships with other people; Elisabeth Larsson in An instant in the wind whose search for freedom from the constraints of patriarchy and eighteenth-century Cape society and politics is to some extent realised in her unrestricted physical identification with the slave Adam Mantoor and her complete transformation through the sex act but who nevertheless returns from idyllic circumstances to the Cape and to a different kind of bondage. Hester van der Merwe in A chain of voices similarly finds her freedom of spirit severely curtailed by ‘the corruptions of both power and suffering’ (p. 505) but vows that nobody would ever possess her again (p. 103); she is acutely aware that ‘there are always new thresholds to cross’ (p. 253) in her search for freedom and recognises that ‘not past or future was freedom’ (p. 260). She sums up her concept of freedom: ‘one always thinks of freedom as of something “out there”, remote and separate, a territory to be reached ... But is there, ever, anything “out there”: freedom? truth? Can it ever be anywhere, or otherwise, than here, in here, inseparable from who you are, what you are, what you were, what you alone allow yourself to become?’ (pp. 260/1). It is only when she and Galant consummate their love and desire for one another that Hester finally, though only for a few fleeting moments, realises her quest for freedom, this very act ‘giving (her) being, a name, an inseparable existence, a loneliness, excruciating fulfilment ... setting (her) free forever’ (pp. 504/5).

However, the concern here is how Brink applies the concept of freedom to his black women characters in the three selected novels. In respect of the peripheral black women characters in Looking on darkness the points can be debated at length as to whether these women in their sexual freedom have indeed achieved emotional, ideological and political emancipation according to Brink's argument, or whether they are seen as simply promiscuous women whose only objective is to satisfy their seemingly insatiable sexual hunger, or whether the only freedom they dare possess in a constrictive apartheid society is the freedom of their bodies. Be that as it may, it is never articulated by any of them that they are in search of anything, let alone freedom. The closest any of them comes to articulating a dissatisfaction with her existence and therefore implying a ‘search’ for a better dispensation, is when Sophie tells her son: “Joseph, look, inne daytime I work my blerry arse off fo' the white people, but when it gets dark it's our turn. The Lawd
give us the night to have a bit of happiness, for the days are hell”’ (p. 88); so one must either accept that these women have already achieved emancipation or that freedom is a concept alien to them and that they therefore have nothing to pursue.

However, as evidence of Brink's own evolution, the characters of Ma-Rose in A chain of voices and Andrea Malgas in The wall of the plague - though different in almost all respects - have ‘evolved’ from the purely physical black women in Brink's earlier work to women possessing (nearly) all the properties of a full human being. Ma-Rose's forceful and explicit claim to being ‘the only free person on this farm’ (p. 84) encompasses many implicit manifestations of freedom. As was government policy of the early nineteenth century, the Khoikhoi were ‘free’ persons who could come and go as they pleased and could indenture themselves to white employers if they so wished. In this respect Ma-Rose as a Khoi woman is ‘free’ but not necessarily free from the rules and regulations governing slaves. With regard to other Khoi figures and also with regard to the white masters and mistresses whose freedom is a ‘right’, she cannot possibly be the only free person on the farm. Her statement therefore appears to be not only contradictory but also incorrect. So what exactly does she mean by this statement?

Ma-Rose herself supplies part of the answer when she tells Nicolaas: “My heart is my own”’ (p. 84). And indeed it is. As a labourer on Piet van der Merwe's farm it is required of her together with all the other labourers and slaves to attend house-prayers and to listen to the master reading from the Bible as part of the white people's 'civilising mission'. She is therefore able to claim: “I know that book (the Bible) backwards, Nicolaas. Every night of my life I got to listen to your father reading from it and praying”’ (p. 83). But in spite of this persistent indoctrination, she remains firmly rooted in her belief to Tsui-Goab and Heitsi-Eibib and even threats of the wrath of God coming down upon her unless she repents her ‘ungodly’ and ‘heathen’ ways, fail to impress her. In his futile attempts to convert her, Nicolaas threatens that God will send fire from heaven to destroy her, to which she defiantly retorts: “Let him send it then. Let him try”’ (p. 84). Ma-Rose's religion, as is indicated in her humble submission and incantation to Tsui-Goab (cf. pp. 175, 440), is one of reverence and sincerity in contrast to Piet's challenging and rebellious communication with God (cf. pp. 32/3, 497).

Her freedom is manifest in yet another way. When Galant is transferred to the farm Houd-den-Bek as part of Nicolaas's possessions, Ma-Rose follows him but insists on having her hut built at half an hour's distance from those of the other labourers where she wants to live alone. No amount of persuasion by Galant can make her change her mind, brushing aside his protests that it is too far away, too isolated and too exposed with the words; “I won't be tied to another man's yard, Galant ... I don't ask favours from any man. I'm free”’ (p. 129). By these very words and concomitant actions she confirms her independent nature and freedom from fear and coercion.
Ma-Rose's freedom also lies in her unrestrained love for people and a resultant compassion for everyone who happens to cross her path. She is never judgmental in her attitude, is fair in her assessment of the other characters, is the conciliatory medium between the two opposing forces and is prepared at all times to listen to the various points of view. Those making her the custodian of their confidences are assured in the knowledge that their secrets are safe. It is therefore not surprising that Ma-Rose, reflecting upon the trial at which Galant and the others would surely be sentenced to death, knows that there would be ‘one man's word against another's, master against slave ... Liars all’ for ‘only a free man can tell the truth’ (p. 23). This implies that only she, being the only free person on the farm, is able to give an unbiased account of the events leading up to and including the revolt and, when examining her monologues together with those of the other personages, there is nothing in them that would refute her claim.

The laws, rules and regulations brought into the country by the colonisers could never succeed in inhibiting or curtailing Ma-Rose's freedom of spirit: ‘... we, the KhoiKhoi, had been coming and going for innumerable winters and summers. We'd come and gone as free as the swallows that arrive in the first warmth and depart in the first frost - here one evening and gone the next morning, and who could stop them?’ (p. 25). While this freedom of the KhoiKhoi had been interpreted by the European settlers as 'work-shyness' or 'lack of stability' or 'inability to sustain any effort' (see Chapter 2.3.3), Ma-Rose gives the opposite view, from the perspective of one who knows. Unlike those of her race who easily succumbed to the new laws and rules and were soon indoctrinated with new ideas, Ma-Rose has singularly and unflinchingly retained that freedom of spirit which was an inherent part of her forebears and which became her legacy. It is for this reason that she represents her people's past, their culture and traditions which she passes on to Galant in the hope that he would pass it on to his descendants. Galant's search for freedom is perhaps influenced by her very insistence on her own personal freedom, so that one can say without fear of contradiction that Galant's quest, even though it results in failure, is a legacy from Ma-Rose which he in turn passes on to future generations.

With Andrea Malgas (The wall of the plague) the situation is vastly different. In search of freedom all her life - from a precarious working-class existence first in District Six and later in Bonteheuwel, from poverty and a comfortless environment - her efforts to accomplish it are misguided since it appears she was under the impression that freedom could come to her through her association with white men (cf. Galant's elation at the thought that a white woman might be the mother of his child and therefore it would be born free). Shulamith Firestone (1979:109) applies a political interpretation of the Electra Complex to the psychology of the black woman (she similarly applies a political interpretation of the Oedipus Complex to the black male). Irrespective of how controversial or even ludicrous Firestone's argument is, when applied to Andrea Malgas one can almost believe
in its validity, for how else is one to explain her ‘identification’ with one white man after another - all of them, with the exception of the expatriot South African Paul Joubert, significantly foreigners, emphasising Andrea's misconception that freedom is something ‘out there’ - in her search for freedom?

When Andrea is confronted with the inhuman effects of the Immorality Act, she flees with her lover Brian first to France where they journey through Provence and then to England, one of the many journeys she undertakes in her search for freedom. The journey motif in this novel is of utmost importance, for a physical journey implies enforced travel (as in Andrea's case), escape from someone or something, a political quest, an inner journey in the psyche of the travelling self, a quest for (self-)knowledge. In addition, it also implies a flight from stereotypes, from the confines of a racist, patriarchal society and ultimately from the bonds of being a woman. It is therefore no coincidence that her last name is ‘Malgas’ = the Cape gannet (cf. Andrea: ‘We Malgases are sea-birds’ - p. 21), a large white sea-bird with black-tipped wings, signifying not only flight/freedom but also ‘coloured’, a kind of marred ‘purity’/whiteness; that all her efforts to live with and like a white can never succeed because her final identification - which is inherent but which she failed to recognise - is with the black Africa she has always denied. Likewise, the map provided in the book to indicate the different French localities which appear in the text - although primarily meant as a guide to the reader - conjures up expectations of a journey or a journey motif which functions on different levels in the novel.

Already the title of the novel, in fact the title of any novel, is ‘the threshold to the narrative text’ (Brink 1987:124) and although it refers on the first level to a historically real wall that had been erected in the Middle Ages in an attempt to stave off the plague, it also suggests the different walls/barriers which especially Andrea has to scale or break down in order to achieve that freedom which she pursues but which persistently eludes her. The title refers not only to walls within South African society (although this is the main aspect) but also to other kinds of barriers and other kinds of plagues which continually threaten and haunt her. The title is very explicitly marked in the text: ‘Any wall which separates one person from another, is a Wall of the Plague. If you want to break it down, you have to start at the very beginning. At a man and a woman. A father and his son. A brother and his brother’. But it is ironically by implication also something that has to be erected against the oppressor: ‘There is only one possible barrier against the oppressor, and that is the staying-power of the oppressed’.

From the very first paragraph of the story text the journey motif and by implication the search for freedom establishes itself: ‘So many journeys are undertaken in one journey ... one never really arrives anywhere, nor does one ever become free. Journeying. In search. In flight?’ (p. 13). In one of the many shifts in narration and focalization Paul remembers Andrea telling him of her recurring dream that
she is flying: ‘Whole nights long she is flying, inaccessible to those who pursue or threaten her’. The freedom of this ephemeral yet unreal experience is reflected in her real yet equally ephemeral freedom while scuba-diving in the waters of the Cape, an ‘entrance into an entire world organised differently to your own ... the quiet ecstasy of a completely new kind of existence’ (p. 21).

The five-day journey Andrea undertakes to (a) find suitable locations for Paul's proposed film on the Black Death and (b) find clarity about her relationship with Paul and to decide whether she should marry him, is indicated in the text as ‘Day One’, ‘Day Two’, etc. Each of these days coincides with one or more flashbacks to a ‘journey’ in one sense or another and each of these ‘journeys’ was in essence a search. The flashbacks themselves are journeys back into time in an attempt to assess her past experiences in a clinically cool manner; in addition, they are recollections of physical journeys: her first journey through Provence with Paul; her last journey through South Africa with Brian; her very first journey through Provence with Brian; her journeys through parts of South Africa with her father; an increasing awareness of the terrible journeys Mandla had to undertake in his search for freedom, not for himself but for his country and his people; and finally her journey back to South Africa.

Unlike Ma-Rose who is free, Andrea is in constant search for freedom and only when, in those brief, ecstatic, excruciating moments, she makes love to Mandla, does she experience the freedom she so desperately sought, significantly initiated by a man. This new-found freedom also gives her the courage to return to her country, ‘to forfeit (her) aloofness, to relinquish (her) security, to turn (her) back on comfort, and to choose the hell because it is (hers)’.

5.3.3 A ‘feminist’ perspective

The women's movement which has put equality of the sexes firmly on the world agenda certainly has had a profound influence on Brink's writing and, when bearing in mind the strong patriarchal nature of both black and white/Afrikaner society, it is no mean achievement for a male author in the South African context to identify himself with women's equality. Referring to his article, ‘Oor religie en seks’ (1964), Brink states twenty years later that for a long time he no longer subscribed to ‘the romantic chauvinism with regard to women’ and that he would not write on this topic today without emphasising the identification of the two in mysticism (Brink 1985:12).

As far as Brink's female characters are concerned, the ‘feminist’ perspective is inextricably linked to the ‘freedom’ theme and much of what has already been said in 5.3.2 may be of relevance here. The rejection of the ‘traditional’ role and image of women, of their devalued status in society, of their ‘expected’ submission to the
will of the male, of the idea that women are merely nubile females, are fundamental to feminist thought, and the aspiration to the transcendent female is in essence a search for freedom.

It is perhaps necessary to explain what I understand ‘feminism’ to be. Neither the term ‘feminism’ nor the term ‘womanism’ is acceptable in its totality, for both have implicit in their meaning another kind of sexism. I do concede, however, that male chauvinism has been with us since time immemorial and that male sexism is largely responsible for the devalued status of women even in the most democratic societies. I prefer the term ‘humanism’, since all kinds of discrimination - sexual, racial, in the area of social class, elitism in human activities, etc. - are equally abhorrent. If ‘feminism’ is defined as ‘the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women ... Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement’ (Barbara Smith, quoted in Minh-ha 1989:86 - original emphasis), then I have to agree that the struggle for freedom is political, that freedom is the natural right of all women. But can women really be free when their brothers, fathers, husbands and sons are still in bondage through racist or other ideologies? If all forms of discrimination, except that against women, by some magic formula disappear overnight, then, of course, I shall subscribe to the view quoted above. In the meantime, the struggle to free women must be fought alongside the struggle to free all oppressed people, for only then, in my opinion, shall women and men recognise and accept equality of the sexes. And, even if that equality is achieved by some miracle, I do foresee a situation of the Orwellian philosophy of all people being equal but some being more equal than others, for our world has been defined in terms of hierarchy ever since we can remember. That, however, does not mean that we have to give up the fight for freedom which some appropriate for themselves. In short, I believe that every human being must have the opportunities in all spheres of life - health, living standards, education, etc. - for self-fulfillment, achievement and betterment. (See also 6.3.2.5 for black South African women's views on ‘feminism’.)

The first evidence of an unmistakable ‘feminist’ perspective in Brink's novels is provided in *An instant in the wind* (1975). One of the two main characters, Elisabeth Larsson, is described by Anita Lindenberg (1982:689) as ‘surely the strongest feminist figure in the Afrikaans prose’ and Laura Milton (1988:259) echoes this view when she writes that Elisabeth is ‘indeed a very strong feminist figure’. From the perspective of white, middle-class women such as Lindenberg and Milton, these views cannot be contradicted, but one wonders whether Elisabeth would have been such a ‘strong feminist figure’ and as assertive if the opposition between the two main characters had not been as great as it is. Let us not forget that Adam Mantoor is first of all a fugitive slave which already puts him in a vulnerable position and at a disadvantage, while Elisabeth is free, in all probability mistress of slaves before her ‘defection’; secondly, that Adam is black with surely all the dehumanising connotations of black attached to him in the
South African historical context, while Elisabeth is white with all the privileges of being white her ‘inalienable right’; thirdly, that Adam, already emasculated by Western influence, depends for his ultimate fate entirely upon Elisabeth's goodwill or otherwise. The subjunctive mood in which the story of Adam and Elisabeth is told inspires one to ask: What could have happened if the situation were reversed, if Elisabeth were black and Adam white? She the slave and he free? If both the main characters were white? Nevertheless, the fact remains that a male author, possibly with as strong a patriarchal background as most people in his native country, has created a strong feminist figure who reflects the implicit author's ideology.

Returning to the three selected novels and the ‘feminist’ perspective in respect of black women, *Looking on darkness* can immediately be excluded from this discussion for there are not even brief flickers of feminist rhetoric on the part of the black women figures, let alone a ‘feminist’ perspective. If ‘freedom’ is an alien concept to them, then surely the message which is being brought across is that ‘feminism’ has not yet arrived on the socio-political scene in District Six or on the Cape Flats. Once again it can be argued that these figures in their sexual liberation are either in no need of a Western-style bourgeois feminism or that the constraints of a sexist-racist-class-conscious society make it impossible for them to pursue personal freedom.

Though still seminal, explicit feminist thinking reveals itself in the figure of the white woman, Hester, in *A chain of voices* but in the case of the black woman, Ma-Rose, her feminism is implicit in everything she says or does. It would be an interesting exercise to compare these two women in detail: the one white, free, yet in bondage; the other black, in bondage to all intents and purposes, yet free. Hester's aversion to ‘stifling’, her resolve to ‘belong only to (herself), separate and intact’ and her quest to ‘confirm (her) own identity’ (p. 103) establish themselves in different ways, and are indications of unmistakable feminist thinking.

As already stated in 5.3.2, Ma-Rose reveals a singular freedom within herself despite the artificial constraints of the political system of the time. Her feminism does not reside in empty rhetoric - she acts it out in every deed. The only time she explicitly articulates her independence, one of the main tenets of feminism, is when she tells Galant that she would not be tied to any man's yard, that she does not ask favours from any man (p. 129), for in her wide experience and knowledge of men across the entire spectrum of the microcosmic Cold Bokkeveld society, she knows that receiving favours results in another kind of bondage, is another way of holding the receiver hostage. Ironically, she never waits to be asked for favours; she gives them freely and voluntarily in the only way she can and it is her freedom, her independence, that makes it possible for her not to expect reciprocation.
Several other characters bear testimony to Ma-Rose's strong personality and independent spirit, albeit sometimes in a negative sense. The white woman, Alida, for example, grudgingly acknowledges that Ma-Rose asserts a 'subversive hold' on Piet (p. 65), even though she exudes an air of 'humble dignity' (p. 67); Nicolaas soon discovers that 'invariably it was she (Ma-Rose) who got in the last word' (p. 84) in any argument and that even his book-bound knowledge cannot refute her arguments; like his mother, he too is conscious of 'the strong hold’ Ma-Rose has on people (p. 85).

What is of particular interest with regard to A chain of voices, is that no white South African critic thus far has acknowledged the embedded feminist perspective in respect of black women in this novel, while several agree about the feminist ‘code’ in An instant in the wind. Could it be that they too regard feminism as a white prerogative, as the exclusive domain of the white woman? Or could it be that the white, Western-style, middle-class feminism to which they subscribe trivializes ‘feminism’ as interpreted by black women?

Until now, there have been only scant references to The wall of the plague as a ‘feminist’ novel and to Andrea's ‘feminism’, for example by Heinrich Ohlhoff (1988:40). In a fairly recent interview, Brink has this to say about his novel: ‘I have written the book from the perspective of a coloured, Andrea, Paul's friend. I believe that a racist system is linked to male chauvinism. In South Africa there are two kinds of oppressed: blacks and women. I want to examine this double discrimination’ (Brink 1989:33). Although Brink significantly does not mention the third kind of oppression, i.e. class oppression which is responsible for the severest exploitation of especially women in the labour market, this statement is a far cry from the ‘old’ Brink of the 1960s and early 1970s whose black women figures constituted only the physical.

Andrea's feminism reacts to an inherent sexism in South African society. While her father is known for his libidinous exploits, also by his wife and children, he nevertheless expects Andrea to keep her body pure, warning her that he would be the first to know if her body had been violated for, according to him, a man can see from the way a young woman walks whether or not she had been devirginised. Another reality Andrea has to contend with is continual sexual harassment, not only in South Africa but also in Europe, and her absolute powerlessness to deal with it. A further reason for Andrea to establish her independence originates from the limited choices that characterised her life in South Africa. It therefore becomes imperative for her to have freedom of choice, especially concerning her relationship with Paul. She has no desire to return to the country of her birth, she never wanted to after her enforced departure, the circumstances of which were of such a nature that the country had become to her ‘the name of a bad conscience,'
a threat in (her) sleep’ (p. 20). When Paul asks her to marry him, she needs time to consider it. If she accepts, she knows that a choice in her future life would once again be excluded. While still unattached she has the choice to go back if she wants to but once married to Paul - he white, she black - they will not be allowed to return together, and that would finally destroy their relationship. She has to decide whether she has the courage to go through with it, to face that ‘slow erosion, the undermining of a relationship which is (her) most important defence against life, the nagging suspicion or reproach’. Her journey through the south of France, initially with no pre-planned destination or no fixed route, is therefore symbolic not only of the conflict within her, but also of her search for herself, for freedom and for truth.

When considering the above tendencies in Brink's novels, it is clear that a progression in his portrayal of black women is taking place, from the purely physical female to women with dreams, hopes, aspirations and emotions like every human being.

5.4 Houd-den-bek/A chain of voices (1982)

Some may argue that The wall of the plague would have been a more appropriate choice for inclusion in this particular study, especially because of its obviously feminist tone and content and the fact that for the first time in Brink's oeuvre we have a black woman as central character, as main focalizing subject but also as main focalized object of the fictitious writer Paul Joubert. Perhaps my own subjective non-identification with the main character has influenced my choice, for example her initial preference for white men, the denial of her roots and of the Africa within herself, her rejection of the people's struggles, etc. - although I concede that her ‘awakening’ becomes all the more significant and her change all the more radical because of her former prejudice and bias.

Instead, I have chosen A chain of voices, mainly because of its multiperspectivity which gives it a ring of ‘truth’, the strongly defined characters, the convincing historical situation and especially the fact that the discredited and almost erased history of one of Southern Africa's original peoples is given a new relevance and significance, the novel itself being a testimony that they had always been there. It is almost as if the author says on behalf on these ‘extinct’ people: ‘It's not that we haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds’ (Audre Lorde 1990:xi). Most of all, my choice of A chain of voices has been influenced by my fascination with the figure of Ma-Rose who, in my opinion, is the most memorable of all the female characters Brink has ever created, for
reasons that will become clear in the ensuing pages. I can endorse Steenberg's view of this novel: ‘Already on the level of mythical-religious material and its intertextual integration, A chain of voices reveals a particular richness. Add to that the greater nuance of personages and the use of narrators, and one comes to the conclusion that one is probably dealing with the best novel by Brink to date ...’ (Steenberg 1984:266).

5.4.1 Focalization and narration

The English title of this novel already suggests a narrative process whereby different voices articulate the events and where different focalizers are present. It is interesting to note that the Afrikaans title, which can be translated as ‘Shut-your-trap’, is the name of the farm, the spatial location where most of the events take place, but at the same time suggests a silence, a non-articulation of thoughts, feelings, experiences, questions, etc. as was expected of slaves. This becomes clear when Piet, one of the ‘voices’, reminisces about his ancestors, one of whom told a detachment of dragoons who came to arrest him: ‘In this place your word counts for nothing. No one but I have the right to speak here’ (p. 33). The author himself stated in an interview: ‘The relationship between people is based on the possibility of communication. If one can no longer communicate through language, if “shut-your-trap” is all that still can be said, then one form of articulation is still possible, and that is the language of violence which destroys on both sides’ (interview in Die Transvaler, 06.05.82). This succinctly sums up the story in this novel and the story in present-day South Africa. Through ‘all these voices in the great silence’ (p. 441) the author wants to establish conversation with the readers (white?) to help them understand, but not only that. The insights to which Ma-Rose comes after all the bitterness are essentially here: ‘Is it enough to understand unless you also try to change it?’ (p. 441).

In a narrative text where different narrators speak the implicit author is clearly identifiable as an active agent. Different focalizations and different narrating perspectives appear but no one other than the implicit author can make such a distinction possible, can organise it and can present it in such a manner that the readers ‘know’ how to read the text. In this novel the different voices do not speak consecutively in a haphazard manner but it is the implicit author who organises them as links in a chain, who manipulates the readers by making them listen to a chain of voices which he selects and causes to reverberate in a particular sequence.

This novel is an excellent example of what Genette terms ‘multiple internal focalization ... where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several ... characters’ (Genette 1980:189). There are some 30 ‘voices’ (characters) with 84 ‘speaking turns’ who, to a greater or lesser extent,
focalize the events leading up to the slave revolt in the Cold Bokkeveld of the Cape Colony in 1824/5, as well as the revolt itself. The main narrator/focalizer is Galant, the slave who initiated and led the revolt but he becomes the focalized object of almost all the other focalizers. My interest, however, is mainly the black female characters, Ma-Rose, Bet, Pamela and Lydia and, to a lesser degree, the white female characters, Alida, Cecilia and Hester. In a novel where there are two clearly opposing camps, where mutual prejudices are the great stumbling blocks on the road to harmonious race relations, it is Ma-Rose, the black woman, and Hester, the white woman, who act as important links between cultures or as conciliators between opponents.

Brink uses this multiperspective as a narrative technique to create a great dramatic multiplicity of voices for the sake of greater objectivity without the intervention of an external narrator. In this way he has indeed created a series of fictional situations with which he constructs a dialectic of ‘truths’: each necessarily subjective rendition of particular facts gives another vision of the events, so that a former or following character's vision is again relativised or put in a different light. The question with regard to truth can therefore never be answered because each speaker's perception of his/her fellow humans is naturally limited and limiting. The reader is therefore compelled to arrive at his/her own conclusions and ultimately to act as judge in this labyrinth of equivalent views.

The multiperspectivity - surely the most salient feature of this novel - must be linked to the polarisation of spaces. It has often enough been indicated that a clear link exists between space and perspective. Weisgerber (1972:161/2), for example, formulates it thus: ‘In essence the space of the novel is the complex relation between the places where the action takes place and the people who are involved in it, i.e. the individual who narrates and the people of whom s/he narrates’. Van Luxemburg (1985:188) endorses this view: ‘The image of the space presented to the reader, the places where the history is taking place, are equally determined by focalization’.

In a discussion of space in a text, a distinction is usually made between (narrated) story space, (narrative) story space and (discursive) narrator space. Narrated story space is the topographical details or place or topological position of the events. In *A chain of voices* this would be the Cold Bokkeveld, Cape Town, the different farms, Tulbagh, etc. It is therefore the elements which can largely be geographically determined and which form the ‘world’, including the socio-cultural and historically conditioned sphere, of the acting personages. Then there is the narrative story space, called ‘narrative space’ by Bal (1985:93) and which, according to her, is a place ‘seen in relation to its perception’ by story personages. The discursive narrator space refers to the agent from whose spatial consciousness it is perceived or focalized. In this approach, it does not concern only the literal or physical view from which the narrator looks at something or someone, but also...
the ideological perspective with which s/he looks and registers. This can be related to what Rimmon-Kenan (1983:81) terms the ‘ideological facet’ of focalization.

When we consider the narrated story space or topographical details, we ascertain that there are two places of action: the Bokkeveld and nineteenth-century Cape Town. These two places are in the eyes of the story characters geographically and spiritually irreconcilably far apart with nothing in common. Cape Town is mainly the city from where it is ‘ruled at a distance’ (p. 229) and where a totally different mentality exists from that in the interior of the country. Nicolaas sums it up from the white perspective:

What did they know about our lives out there beyond the mountains, a sprinkling of people devoted to taming a wild land so that others might live in safety? (p. 230).

But already in the first ‘speaking turn’ of the novel, that of Ma-Rose, this distance and irreconcilability are implicit:

If you go towards Tulbagh and climb the highest peak, you can see a long way in all directions. You can see fully seven days far, for that's how long it takes to Cape Town by wagon. You can see the Table Mountain of the Cape, even though it's so far you can't really be sure it's there, but it is; and you know that's where the Gentlemen live and where the ships come and go and where the cannon booms from the Lion's Rump ... (p. 23).

Nicolaas can be considered a typical representative of the white community of the Bokkeveld who, with the view quoted above, makes his people and his slaves in his own space special but which at the same time isolates them. As he situates himself and his relatives in the passage above in space and time and as he justifies his slave-ownership, we are not dealing exclusively with story space but also with narrator space: his view, representative of the view of his fellow-whites, of an isolated space where his interpretation of the Scriptures and faith is the only valid one, is being disclosed. Cape Town and surely England but even Waveren (pp. 229-231) are regarded as basically hostile places or as a kind of threat where ‘they’ live and do not think and live and believe like ‘us’. From the very outset, the world for him - one of the most important focalizing personages in the novel - consists of opposing spaces inhabited by people who have completely different mentalities. Nicolaas's ‘us’ obviously does not include the slave population on his farm.

Ma-Rose, the main internal focalizer among the black women (and perhaps even among all the women characters in this novel), is also the most important narrator/focalizer in respect of the differences between white and black mainly because of her intermediate position - in more ways than one. Since she is also the
focalized object of all the main characters, black and white, male and female, her status and role in the story demands attention (see 5.4.3 - 5.4.3.6).

Ma-Rose focalizes the space and the proud history of her people, the Khoikhoi, but at the same time she focalizes the contrast between her people and the ‘white people, the Honkhoikwa, the Smooth-haired ones’ who ‘are still strangers to these parts’ (p. 25). She observes:

They still bear in them the fear of their fathers who died on the plains or in the forbidding mountains. They do not understand yet. They have not yet become stone and rock embedded in the earth and born from it again and again like the Khoikhoin. One doesn't belong before one's body is shaped from the dust of one's ancestors (p. 25).

She not only focalizes the whites but also narrates how the whites perceive the Khoikhoin, thus a form of embedded focalization:

And here they found us, the White men did, when they came to tame the land as they called it, digging themselves in, and building their stone walls. But it's no use. They know nothing of these parts yet and already death has come in among their walls. We of the Khoin, we never thought of these mountains and plains, these long grasslands and marshes as a wild place to be tamed. It was the Whites who called it wild and saw it filled with wild animals and wild people. To us it has always been friendly and tame. It has given us food and drink and shelter, even in the worst of droughts. It was only when the Whites moved in and started digging and breaking and shooting, and driving off the animals, that it really became wild (p. 25).

Ma-Rose not only focalizes the space, the history of her people, the slaves, the white slave-owners, the differences between black and white, but she also focalizes herself, her role in the slave community, in the white community, her intermediate position. She is therefore the subject and object of her own focalization. Likewise, most of the other characters focalize Ma-Rose. It is interesting to observe the divergent perceptions the other characters have of Ma-Rose, depending upon who the focalizer is: black or white, female or male, free person or slave. This criss-cross focalization, on both the horizontal and vertical axes, requires further analysis for our understanding of how Ma-Rose and the other black female characters are portrayed, particularly with regard to entrenched stereotypes about black women (see 5.4.2 and 5.4.3).

Another aspect with regard to *A chain of voices* should be emphasised, which may influence the reader's perception of the events and characters. As previously stated, this novel has a historical framework - the slave revolt in the Cold Bokkeveld in 1824/5 - and the literary text itself has a concrete historical framework by beginning with an ‘Act of Accusation’ and ending with the ‘Verdict’,
two historical documents to be found in the Cape Deeds Office. Brink has of course ‘doctored’ these documents somewhat, as pointed out by Van Coller (1988:166-199) in order to ‘serve the fiction system’. The perceptions of ‘His Majesty's Fiscal’ in the ‘Act of Accusation’ and those of the ‘members of the court’ in the ‘Verdict’, are the perceptions of superior, authoritative ‘voices’, superior in the dichotomy of white and black but also superior in the dichotomy of a foreign colonial power and local colonists. It is therefore necessary for the other voices to articulate their perceptions to counteract the bias found in these two documents, and to refute or negate or confirm their contents.

5.4.2 Black women characters in the novel: an overview

The black women's ‘voices’ in the novel cannot be dismissed as inconsequential even though they are peripheral to the events. Their inclusion in the chain of voices functions as a means to give more objectivity to the complexity of views and counter-views, to give an indication of the socio-political milieu of the time and especially of Houd-den-Bek but more importantly, to reflect how they as women are perceived by the male characters and significantly by white women characters.

Although not one of the ‘voices’ in the novel, we are nevertheless informed entirely through Ma-Rose's narration and focalization of the helpless plight of the young slave girl, Lys, in the Houd-den-Bek situation. Lys was the mother of the main character Galant, and it is through Ma-Rose's narration that we are informed of the circumstances of Galant's birth and the circumstances which led to her becoming his foster-mother. Lys, ‘a mere child with apricot breasts’ (p. 27), apparently came from Batavia as a slave and soon became the object of several men's desires. To Ma-Rose it appeared that Lys had something about her which seemed to lure men: ‘That is how it was with Lys, Lys of the apricot tits; and all the men from far and wide came to pluck her’, one of whom was the master of the farm, Piet van der Merwe (p. 27). Yet, unlike Ma-Rose, Lys neither welcomed nor enjoyed these attentions and after the difficult birth of her child of an unknown father, she remained ill for a long time, ‘scared of getting well, scared the men would start again’ (p. 28). In this state she was sold by Piet to a passing farmer as she was no longer of any use to him, and because Lys herself showed no interest in the child, Ma-Rose who happened to be ‘in milk’ at the time, fed him and cared for him from the moment of his birth.

The mentally deranged Lydia's two speaking turns in the novel can hardly be considered elucidating with regard to events on Houd-den-Bek and we have to rely on the information supplied by other characters about this abused and brutalised woman. In her state she is the easy victim of men and also of the white woman, Cecilia. It is mainly through Galant's and Bet's narration and focalization that we learn anything about Lydia's situation. From Galant's perspective she is

a good woman, a generous body’ and she is ‘better than nothing’ when he and another slave, Ontong, take turns with her (p. 128). But it is also Galant who informs us that ‘she's not right in the head’ when he describes her strange behaviour.

However, it is not only the slaves who exploit this most vulnerable of the female figures. When Nicolaas, owner of Houd-den-Bek, comes to Ma-Rose for advice and help against his impotence when he is with his wife, she advises him to ‘soak (his) root in a black woman’ (p. 178) for it to grow and be given life. Being the boss, master and owner of slaves, his choice falls upon the defenceless Lydia, saying much about his own character. This is where Bet's narration and focalization become important, because together with Lydia she is employed by Nicolaas's wife, Cecilia, a big, strong woman who bases her entire philosophy of life on her interpretation of the Scriptures. Much more than her mother-in-law Alida, she could and would not tolerate her husband's adultery, with a black woman at that. Being altogether in no position to bring an end to Nicolaas's adventure, she can only vent her fury on Lydia.

From Bet's narration we learn that ‘the Nooi’ (Cecilia) could not control herself with Lydia, she simply could not stand her. Whenever Nicolaas had paid his nocturnal visit to Lydia's hut ‘there would be trouble the next day’ (p. 147) and male slaves would be called to tie up Lydia in the stable for a flogging by Cecilia herself, an uncontrolled, sadistic act which would only stop ‘after Lydia's screams had changed from the sound of a woman in labour to the whimpering of a dying puppy’ (p. 147). As if that was not enough, Lydia would be shoved out of the stable without ‘a stitch of clothing on her body’, her clothes either beaten to shreds or mostly torn from her body in rage. In this naked state Lydia would be forced to go to the veld to collect wood and dung-cakes, even in winter when the ground was covered with snow. Bet observes that, despite this literal and figurative divestment of human dignity, Lydia still manages to ‘hold herself straight, tall and gaunt as the aloes of Bruintjieshoogte’ (p. 148).

But it is especially Bet's observation of ‘the Nooi’ which is important. The first time she was witness to this flogging it made her feel sick - it was not just the beating; it was Cecilia's way of talking while she went on flogging the woman: ‘A strange moaning tone of voice, almost sobbing ... I couldn't make out anything she was saying, except that it sounded like the Bible’ (pp. 147/8). After venting her fury in this manner, Cecilia's face would be ‘flushed a deep red, her hair all dishevelled and damp with sweat, her cheeks streaked with tears; and she was panting. It might have been of tiredness, it was enough to wear anyone out, even a woman as strong as the Nooi. But it was something else that upset me ... my first thought when I saw her was that she looked like a woman who'd been with a man all night’ (p. 148).
While Cecilia's actions may perhaps be understood and justified, Nicolaas's are certainly incomprehensible. On one occasion when Lydia returned from the veld with her load of dung-cakes after such a flogging, stark-naked, her body ‘black-and-blue ... her face smeared with tears and snot ... covered in bruises, not only her back but everywhere, even her belly and her breasts’ (p. 148), Cecilia orders Nicolaas to ‘do something’ about Lydia's insolence, ‘shamelessness and cheekiness’. He orders Lydia to lie down and then flogs her with his sjambok, only to return to her hut that very night. Lydia is the victim of two sexually unfulfilled human beings: Nicolaas, impotent when with his wife because he was robbed by his own brother of the woman he loved; and Cecilia, insatiable, yet frustrated in the fulfilment of her sexual needs.

Interesting to note is Nicolaas's perception of Lydia. Torn by guilt and viewing his copulation with her as ‘the ultimate blasphemy’ against God or God's punishment of him residing ‘in the very beastliness of the act’ (p. 184), he nevertheless acknowledges her unprotesting submission to him as a ‘submission to the whims and idiosyncrasies of the master’ (p. 185). Yet he does not acknowledge that he is abusing not only a slave from whom it is expected to ‘unquestioningly submit’ to whatever he desired, but also a demented woman who does not understand what is happening to her. The only way he can think about her, is in derogatory terms, coupling with her being ‘laborious hours ... in the stench of her dark hut’ (p. 184), her body ‘sticky’ and all he feels for her after the act is ‘abhorrence’ and ‘disgust’ (p. 185).

Even in her deranged state Lydia, in a stream of consciousness, wishes to be free from everything that is happening to her. Her obsession with birds and feathers can only symbolise her desire to escape from her situation, to fly away like the birds: ‘I can fly. Look, I can fly. Why don't you believe me? No one will ever force me down again to ride me. No more beatings that cut me to bits’ (p. 377).

Bet, a Khoi woman and therefore a ‘free’ person, has three speaking turns, one each in Parts II, III and IV. Her narration brings the troubled history of the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony at that time in relation to the status of the Khoikhoi who were by no means slaves in the true sense of the word but who nevertheless were (‘unofficially’) subjected to the same treatment. It was the trouble on the Eastern frontier that forced the few remaining Khoi to trek back to the Cape. After much hardship, losing her baby in the process, she finally reached Houd-den-Bek where she was taken into employment as cook. It emerges from her narration that she is a lascivious woman, for she informs the reader in a stream of consciousness: ‘They [the slaves and labourers] were easy people to be with and I soon took a liking to Galant ... I'd been without a man for a long time then, not counting the few encounters on the farms where I'd been doing odd jobs on the way, and that makes one ruttish and moody. If the root isn't planted the furrow goes to waste.

So I was relieved when Galant took me... And I'll say this for him, that he was a rider second to none, of horses and women alike’ (pp. 146/7).

Already sickened by Cecilia's and especially Nicolaas's treatment of Lydia, Bet is further struck dumb when her and Galant's child is beaten and kicked by Nicolaas on two occasions, the child succumbing to his injuries the second time, and at a time when Galant is away from the farm. It transpires from both Nicolaas's and Cecilia's narration that the real cause of this act is envy: Nicolaas's envy that his great antagonist, Galant, could sire a son while he is unable to do so; Cecilia's envy that ‘even slaves have sons!’ (p. 186) while she has only daughters. For this reason she cannot tolerate the child's presence while Bet goes about her duties in the house, and continually nags Nicolaas to take action.

The child's death leaves Bet numb with shock and fear and the certain knowledge that Galant would never forgive her or take her back - the only way she could fill her empty body once again is to submit herself unconditionally to the ‘Baas’, to be like Lydia whom Nicolaas could order at any time to ‘lie down’. She follows him slavishly, begging him with her eyes and body to take her. Ironically, Nicolaas interprets Bet's actions as an attempt to take revenge; although he feels tempted ‘to make use’ of her (p. 185) and admits to ‘a peculiar fascination’ she had for him after the death of her child, he is restrained by fear: ‘... what would be easier than for her to get at me when in the spasms of lust I was most vulnerable?’ (p. 185).

Bet's main role, as can be extracted from her narration, is to illustrate how those slaves and labourers who were initially on the side of the white masters or completely neutral, eventually became so antagonised by the treatment meted out to them that they were forced into siding with the rebels. Rejected and despised by Galant and equally rejected and despised by Nicolaas to whom she offers her body unreservedly, Bet feels herself an outcast, ‘ridiculed and abused ... everybody's mongrel bitch’ (p. 462) when she tries to warn her master and mistress about the trouble brewing on the farm. In an interior monologue in which she articulates her bitterness and resentment, she addresses Nicolaas: ‘When I followed you begging you with my body to put out the fire you'd kindled with the killing of my child, you rejected me. But you don't mind taking her (Pamela), to plant your white children in her womb. Then, for all I care, you can die like the scavenging dog you are!’ (p. 463).

Bet is focalized by Galant too. When she arrives on the farm, he immediately takes a fancy to her, ‘the young woman from the distant Eastern Border who turns my limbs to water. An easy woman, Bet. Difficult when she's difficult, but easy with her body. Usually, when there's a new woman in the neighbourhood we all go to her like horses to a trough, for a woman's cunt is a precious thing in these parts and a man is in need of wetness’ (p. 129 - cf. how Galant's words almost verbatim

echo those of Ma-Rose on page 27 when she refers to the scarcity of women in the Cold Bokkeveld). The horse symbol, so important in the entire narrative, is often associated with copulation, e.g. Ma-Rose: ‘When the stallion approaches, quivering with stiffness, I open up’ (p. 27); Ma-Rose tells Nicolaas to ‘ride (his wife) like a man’ (p. 177); Bet admires Galant's skill of riding horses and women alike (p. 147); Galant informs us how he rides Bet ‘so she won't forget she's been ridden’ (p. 133) and a little later: ‘All I can do, that night, is to ride Bet bareback, to ride her hard. I ride her well, and now she is with child’ (p. 137). Amongst all its other meanings, the horse is in this novel a symbol of male virility, especially when applied to the black woman.

The other black woman character, with the exception of Ma-Rose, is Pamela, also with three speaking turns, one each in Parts II, III and IV. She too is a slave owned by Nicolaas after she and her mother had been sold separately on the slave-market at Worcester to pay for their previous master's debts. Her role in the novel is to illustrate the growing chasm between Galant and Nicolaas and the part she played in the slave revolt, leading to her becoming one of the accused in the subsequent trial. In the ‘Act of Accusation’ she is described as Galant's ‘concubine’, this document ironically not mentioning that she was Nicolaas's concubine as well.

What we learn from Pamela's own narration is that she had given herself willingly to only one man before, the slave Louis, but then he was sold, leaving her behind with a child who later died of an inflammation. She had made up her mind after pining so much for Louis ‘that no other man would claim me for himself again’ (p. 268) but when she meets Galant, she desires him yet she is scared, ‘knowing that if ever something were to happen between us it would be like a river coming down and taking us with it...’ (p. 268).

Whereas the relationship between Galant and Bet was wild and passionate, the blossoming relationship between Pamela and Galant is one of tenderness, caring and sincere affection/love, the physical side being secondary. She reveals this love which came to fruition the night after Galant had been flogged almost to death by Nicolaas:

... we were together to comfort one another with the warmth of our bodies which was all we had. In such a night one aches with the awareness of death ... and it brings suffering and soothing of suffering, and a tenderness, a willingness to share whatever is available of love and caring, to make the pain more bearable for one another, against the terrors of the coming day. So I opened myself to him, not just my body but myself, for him to flow into me and flood me and sweep me along with him like a tree uprooted by a swollen river, wherever he might wish to take me, beyond all darkness (p. 271).

It is at this point, when Pamela and Galant have discovered their love for one another, that Nicolaas finds out about it and, being the master and owner of slaves,
orders Pamela to henceforth sleep in his kitchen at night, with the filmsy excuse that she serves tea too late in the morning when she sleeps in her own hut. In the same manner he begrudged Galant his son he begrudges Galant Pamela and with little ceremony takes Pamela. Again it is she who focalizes Nicolaas's action:

That night, on the kitchen floor ... Nicolaas took me for the first time with the violence of someone who's scared of what he's doing, but who feels himself provoked and will not let anyone stop him, for the very reason that he knows it to be wrong (p. 278).

In this passage all the conflicting emotions Nicolaas experiences towards Galant are summarised while at the same time transferring his violence, fear, provocation and guilt to Pamela, for in his weakness to challenge Galant, all he can do is vent whatever he feels on someone who is even weaker and more vulnerable than he.

When Pamela falls pregnant, Galant is once again elated at the thought of having a child but whereas his elation in the child Bet gave birth to was at the thought of the child being born free and not in bondage like himself, in this case it is the genuine love he feels for Pamela and the knowledge that she will be the child's mother that brings him so much happiness:

Pamela: from her nothing can set me free, because of the child who will rise from her ... The woman, the child. The child ... I give myself up in order to return to the child ... I am back with the woman in whose belly life is blindly stirring, like a fish ... In the night the waters break. The child struggles to swim free. Pamela heaves and sobs and moans to rid herself of the terrible burden. At sunrise the child lies sleeping in her arm. A child with white hair and blue eyes (p. 328).

This, together with all the other factors not mentioned in the ‘Act of Accusation’, serves as a further exacerbating feature in Galant's growing resentment against his childhood friend, Nicolaas. It is not surprising that when the revolt finally breaks out, Galant bludgeons this blue-eyed child to death with the butt of his rifle.

Lys, Lydia, Bet, Pamela: all of them in one way or another act as a catalyst in the polarisation of master and slave as well as in the fermenting hatred which culminates in the murder of Nicolaas and the execution of Galant, in addition to and in spite of their role as mere sex objects.

5.4.3 Ma-Rose

My choice of Ma-Rose as an example of Brink's portrayal of black women rather than Andrea Malgas (The wall of the plague) who is much more of a central character, has been influenced by several factors. Ma-Rose is perhaps the
character black women can identify with more fully; she is the most remarkable female character Brink has ever created; she remains in the mind long after Andrea Malgas or Nicolette Alford or Jessica Thomson or Elisabeth Larsson have faded from memory. Her intercessionary role between black and white, women and men, past and present, freedom and bondage, makes her an unforgettable personage.

Ma-Rose's role is mythologised into that of all-mother, primordial mother-being who transcends the boundaries imposed on her by her race, gender and class. For the first time in an Afrikaans novel where black and white are juxtaposed, it is a black character, and a woman at that, who emerges as the strongest and most memorable. While Brink's heroes/main characters are invariably male, here he has created a woman character who makes these male characters fade into insignificance.

But Ma-Rose as a character is much more than all this: she is, in the final analysis, the product of a creative artist firmly implanted on the ‘other side’ of the racial divide but who himself transcends the boundaries imposed upon him by the tight little laager of Afrikaner exclusivity, to see the ‘other’ not merely as labour units or dehumanised creatures.

5.4.3.1 Naming

One of the commonest strategies, viz. analogous naming, is being employed to partly characterise Ma-Rose. Names can parallel character-traits in different ways, inter alia semantic connection or semantic parallelism between name and trait (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983:68). The name ‘Rose’ is by no means unusual but the hyphenated name is intriguing. Several factors indicate that this name says much more than it does on face-value. Despite Brink's contention that the proper name is ‘an empty sign’ (Brink 1987:71), a kind of semantic space or openness in the text, a signifier which has not yet found a signified, the name ‘Ma-Rose’ generates certain questions, expectations and more importantly, conjures up certain meanings.

The rose has often been associated with female sexuality. For Sigmund Freud, for example, all flowers and blossoms had the meaning of female sexual organs, but especially the vulva-shaped rose (see De Vries 1974:392). The rosary was an instrument of worship of the Rose, which ancient Rome knew as the Flower of Venus, and the badge of her sacred prostitutes. Things spoken ‘under the rose’ (sub rosa) were part of Venus's sexual mysteries, not to be revealed to the uninitiated. The red rose represented full-blown maternal sexuality (see Walker 1983:866-869). In an indirect manner its five petals became the corresponding symbol of motherhood, fruition, regeneration and eternal life. In India, the Great Mother, whose body was the temple, was first addressed as Holy Rose. Even in
Biblical terms, the Gospel of Luke is said to represent the Holy Rose as a sign of the vulva. The rose was obviously a sexual symbol of goddess-worship.

Among the many meanings attached to the rose, already the two described above are combined in the name of Ma-Rose: female sexuality and motherhood, two inseparable elements made even more inseparable by the use of the hyphen. In a contradictory fashion, the hyphen also separates (like a broken hymen or Ma-Rose's perennially distended body?) these two functions as Ma-Rose's sexuality does not necessarily lead to motherhood (see 5.5.3.3). Unlike in appellations such as ‘Mother Goose’, ‘Mother Hen’, etc., the name of Ma-Rose does not only signify a mother; by the use of the hyphen it may signify ‘the mother of the rose/vulva’, i.e. the supreme vulva. Also, unlike in ‘Mother Earth’ where the earth is equated with a providing, nurturing mother, the hyphen in Ma-Rose's name abolishes that function in favour of engendering the meaning of and cementing together two primordial functions of women: copulation and procreation.

Another facet of naming as a method of characterisation can be applied to Ma-Rose. Rimmon-Kenan (1983:82) points out that both the presence of a focalizer other than the narrator and the shift from one focalizer to another may be signalled by language, of which naming is an interesting example of such signalling. The use of various names for Ma-Rose betrays differences as well as changes in attitude towards her. All the black characters, with the exception of Ontong who is her contemporary, call her ‘Ma-Rose’; the younger white characters, with the exception of Cecilia who is perhaps the prototype of white/Afrikaner women, call her ‘Ma-Rose’; Piet calls her ‘Rose’ or ‘old Rose’; Alida calls her ‘old wench Rose’ (in the Afrikaans version); Nicolaas who of the young white people was closest to her, later relinquishes the ‘Ma’ and calls her simply ‘Rose’, as does his cantankerous wife, Cecilia. In the following pages the reasons for these various names will be made clear.

5.4.3.2 Function in the novel

The four parts of the main text have as continuous motifs the life elements earth, water, wind and fire, in that order. The traditional hierarchical order of the elements is wind, fire, water and earth - in other words, deriving from the igniferous or aerial state comes the liquid and finally the solid (see Cirlot 1962:91). Brink has turned this order upside-down by starting with the solid, followed by the liquid, the aerial and finally the igniferous, and for good reason, as becomes clear when analysing the novel.

Jung stresses the active nature of the first two (air and fire) and the passive nature of the last two (water and earth). Hence, according to Jung, the masculine, creative
character of the first two and the feminine, receptive and submissive nature of the second pair. (N.B.: This philosophy is refuted in the novel by the slave, Klaas, whose male ego and chauvinism were severely dented when a woman, Hester, interfered to stop the flogging: ‘Man is stone [read earth]: you can see him clearly, you can walk round him and touch him, he's right there. But woman is water, you cannot stop it. That was what I couldn't bear’ - p. 309).

In Brink's novel the solidness of the earth, of a by-gone existence, of values in the lives of both the white and black personages is destroyed by all-engulfing flames, but with a clear message: while destructive, fire is a symbol of purgation, transformation and regeneration, as so succinctly depicted by the recurring image of the Lightning Bird. Between these two are the elements of water and wind/air. The projection of the mother-imago into the waters endows them with various numinous properties characteristic of a mother. Water, like earth, is a female principle and symbolises fertility. Of all the elements, water is the most clearly transitional between fire and air (the ethereal elements) and earth (the solid element). By analogy, water stands as a mediator between life and death, with a two-way positive and negative flow of creation and destruction. Wind/air is an aerial, ethereal element which is both destructive and life-giving but at the same time cleansing and separating - also in a symbolic sense - the chaff from the grain (cf. Ma-Rose: ‘Tsui-Goab will send his wind to sort the grain from the chaff’ - p. 359).

Ma-Rose fulfils an extremely important function in this discourse. In each of her four ‘speaking turns’, one in each part of the novel, she time and again situates the narrative space in the sign of a different prominent spatial element. All these elements acquire a literal and figurative interpretation in her narration, which also reappear in the narrations of the other characters.

In Part I she is the first ‘speaker’, almost like an omniscient, all-wise narrator who, with the power of her word, as it were, creates from earth, and especially stone, the space of the following events, a space which she mythologically models from her perspective: ‘And from the stones the great god Tsui-Goab made us, the people...’ (p. 23). As in any creation myth, spatial elements naturally play a major role. Significant in Ma-Rose's narration is the contrast between her own group, the Khoikhoi, and the whites who ‘have not yet become stone and rock embedded in the earth and born from it again and again like the Khoikhoi’ (p. 25). Stone and earth obviously have symbolic value and refer to that which is solid, established and constant; it can also be seen in relation to the settlement of black and white communities, the attachment to the soil, earthiness and a conservative or fossilised mentality, as pointed out by Jonckheere (1988:85).

Ma-Rose is ‘rooted in rock’ (p. 30) and her people have been ‘as numerous as the stones of the mountains’ (p. 25) before smallpox wiped them out. It is no
wonder that she reveals in her narration a deep reverence for the ‘pure solid stone’ which ‘grows old just like a tree’ (p. 24) and the rocky mountains which ‘shelter (them) from the sun and ward off the wind from the narrow valleys’ (p. 24) in contrast to the whites who ‘build their stone walls’ but which nevertheless cannot protect them from peril, for ‘already death has come in among their walls’ (p. 25).

In direct opposition to Ma-Rose, Alida, Piet's wife, could never reconcile herself to living in the Cold Bokkeveld, still having ‘the sea in her blood’ (p. 37), with memories of and longings to her younger days in Cape Town, with feelings of ‘being abandoned in this hostile land’ (p. 64). It is only with the death of her son Nicolaas that she feels she ‘had acquired a responsibility towards this place’, that her ‘extranee has been strangely and solemnly resolved’, for in Nicolaas her ‘flesh lies interred in this earth, and (she is) growing towards it’ (p. 66). With these words she ironically and unwittingly substantiates the words of her great adversary, Ma-Rose, who alleges that white people will become established only when they ‘become stone and rock embedded in the earth’ (p. 25). It is also Alida who focalizes the slaves and associates them with stone, ‘dull placid faces hewn from dark stone’ (p. 66), but the solid and constant qualities of stone are not applicable to them, rather its unfeeling, dead nature, contrary to Ma-Rose’s assertion that stone is alive.

It is especially in the main character, the slave Galant, that the connotations of stone are epitomised, mainly in the image of a man’s footprint stamped in solid rock which he discovered high up in the mountains. Again it is Ma-Rose who provides an explanation for this phenomenon: ‘The mark of Bushman or Khoikhoi ..., imprinted in the sunrise of the world when stone was soft; perhaps the mark of Heitsi-Eibib himself, the Great Hunter ... or Tsui-Goab’s, when he came down to shape man from stones’ (p. 40). Galant dreams about that footprint, about leaving his mark in stone forever. His dream is realised, but not in the manner he visualised. Having initiated the slave revolt in the Bokkeveld, his name shall remain in the annals of white and black South African history, in ‘the mountains ... where my footprint remains forever proudly trodden in the stone’ (p. 509).

Part II stands in the sign of water which now becomes the central concept in Ma-Rose’s narration. With that she does not only mean the water of fertility, the rain which Tsui-Goab gives, but also ‘the water she [a woman] has inside her’, so necessary for a man's root (p. 178) and, on a more symbolic level, ‘the flood I felt swelling below the surface of our farms long before the storm broke out’ (p. 179) - thus water of life and of death and destruction. Water in Ma-Rose’s narration also signifies the body fluids: amniotic fluid (‘the inside of a woman is water; her children swim from her into the world’ - p. 175; ‘men don't know patience; they don't know what it means to wait for the breaking of the water’ - p. 176);
semen (she advises the impotent Nicolaas how to make his root ‘spurt’ - p. 178); vaginal fluid (a man's moodiness can ‘be treated with the wetness of women’ - p. 179); breast milk (she reminisces how she suckled Galant - p. 180 and how he and Nicolaas ‘both tugged at my teats’ - p. 182); sweat (Galant, in his frustration, throwing stones until the sweat dripped from his face - p. 179); tears (Ma-Rose could hear in the dark that Galant was crying in his frustration - p. 180); blood (she allowed Galant to get the anger ‘out of his blood’ X 2 - p. 179) and sputum (Galant spits at the mention of Nicolaas' gift to him after the latter had kicked his child to death - p. 180), and all of them once again linked to life and death.

In Part III Ma-Rose's words, like those of a prophetess, establish relationships between the real spatial elements and the spiritual sphere of the novel. She speaks about ‘a dry year and windy’ and of ‘a real threshing wind’ (p. 351). Shortly afterwards about ‘another wind (that) was rising’, which she relates to the fermenting revolt by the slaves, after rumours of their emancipation turned out to be ‘just wind’ (p. 272 - Afrikaans version). For that reason the ‘dust-devil far away in the wagon-road’ (p. 356) is being interpreted by her as an awesome omen which brings death to the farm. Significantly, soon after driving the whirlwind (‘dust-devil’) away with water, she experiences ‘a whirlwind of anger’ sweeping up inside of her after being rebuffed by Nicolaas (p. 358), and warns him that his roof will not keep out the wind: “‘When the storm comes up it'll blow all of this right away’” (p. 359). She knows Tsui-Goab will not allow his people to be humiliated and will therefore ‘send his great wind’ to cleanse the earth (of slaveowners?).

She introduces the images of threshing and the threshing-floor which, in combination with the wind, are very important symbols of revolt in Part III: ‘They turning this land into a threshing-floor where they themselves are to be threshed’ (p. 359). Her words reverberate in those of Galant: “‘What's begun on this floor today will go on till the whole land has been threshed and winnowed’” (p. 387) and a little further he attaches the revolt motif to the blowing wind and also to the horse motif: “‘... we'll gallop through the land like the wind itself’” (p. 387).

Finally, there is the imagery of fire used by Ma-Rose when she introduces Part IV and talks about her people's fires dying, her heart growing cold inside her, ‘another kind of lightning, invisible, and inside you, leaving its mark on your heart’ (p. 439) and ‘the fire that broke out ... that night’ (p. 440). As in the other three parts of the novel the imagery is echoed in Galant's words, to suggest the particular bond between him and Ma-Rose. This becomes especially apparent from his reference to the Lightning Bird whose eggs are hatched from time to time to cleanse everything. Despite the destructive fire of hatred, there is also the fire of (illicit) love between Galant and Hester which at last comes to fruition in the chaos of the abortive revolt and which may signal Galant's perpetuation after his death.
Ma-Rose, then, has the function of explaining the action, expressing sympathy with characters and drawing morals, almost like the chorus in an Attic tragedy or like a personage in a Shakespearean drama who speaks the prologue and explains or comments on events, in addition to her predictions of imminent disaster. The fact that her four “speaking turns” coincide with the four life elements, progressing from creation (stone) to life (water) to foreboding (wind) to destruction but also regeneration (fire), is not accidental, for she is primordial being, ‘nobody's mother’ (p. 83) and yet ‘the mother of all’ (p. 441), all-wise and omniscient.

5.4.3.3 Mother Supreme

When attempting to define Ma-Rose as natural, biological mother, the words of one of Gayl Jones' characters, Great Gram in the novel Corregidora (1975), immediately come to mind: “And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them”. 9

From Ma-Rose's own narration we learn that she had been ‘in milk’ (p. 28) at least twice, i.e. had given birth to at least two children, one of whom died at birth (p. 28). Of the first (?) child we know nothing, save that Ma-Rose was also ‘in milk’ when Barend was born and therefore able to nurse him. If one can surmise that the first child died as well, one sombre datum emerges: Brink's black women characters, despite their stereotyped considerable procreative powers, cannot perpetuate themselves or bring continuity to their existence through their offspring.

In Looking on darkness, Sophie's ancestral history is wiped out because she is a foundling with no knowledge of her ancestry; neither does she have descendants as her only child who himself has no offspring in spite of his libertine adroitness and numerous ejaculations, is to be executed. In his death-cell, Joseph carefully documents his history and that of his paternal forebears as related to him by his mother but he symbolically destroys that history by flushing his written testament down the toilet.

In A chain of voices the outlook is even bleaker: Bet, the Khoi woman, loses her first child while trekking to the Cape and her second child is kicked to death by Nicolaas; the slave woman, Pamela, loses her first child through an inflammation while her second, with ‘white hair and blue eyes’ (p. 328), is bludgeoned to death by Galant; the young slave girl Lys is dead and her only child who has no descendants either, is to be executed; the slave woman Lydia, we are told, has children, but in her demented state she cannot possibly create the circumstances

for their future development; Ma-Rose's children are either dead or nothing is said about them, while she herself is past child-bearing age.

It would appear that this annihilation of the black woman is also the abject denial of her history, the rejection of her ability to ‘bear witness’ or to ‘leave evidence’ of her past and her existence, the abrogation of her ability to make generations. She is being made symbolically barren, her links with the past eradicated and her links with the future broken and ultimately obliterated. The black woman/mother as repository of culture and tradition in the absence of a written history is, in the final analysis, denied an existence, or so it would appear.

In respect of motherhood and by way of comparison, the consummation of the love between Hester and Galant needs to be mentioned. As stated above, Galant leaves no descendants, or does he? By Hester's own admission, ‘it was the time of the month when desire sears (her) womb like a flame’ (p. 453) when this consummation takes place, and her conceiving Galant's child a real possibility and the ultimate irony. What this implies, among other things, is that while the black woman is viewed as an unfit mother (cf. for example Galant's rejection of Bet after their child had been murdered by Nicolaas), the white woman Hester is an ideal person to bear and rear Galant's child. Not only shall this child be free because of its mother's race (Galant, p. 509-N.B. Bet was also a “free” woman but nevertheless black), but the mere fact that in the end Hester would/could/should perpetuate Galant's line and neither Bet nor Pamela, suggests that Hester will be more suitable to ensure Galant's posterity than any of the black women, his ‘footprint stamped in solid rock’ (p. 40).

It is in the sense of the black woman's inability to ‘bear witness’ that Brink fulfils an important function: the disparaged and erased history of the black woman (and man), so often a salient feature of societies where colonizer and colonized encountered each other, is reconstructed, albeit fictionalised, to re-establish the fact that s/he had always been ‘there’, despite claims often made by colonizers of finding uninhabited lands. As Ma Rose puts it:

There is nothing more I can do about it. I cannot change the world. When the fire broke out here that night, blown up high by Galant and the others, I could neither stop them nor encourage them. I couldn't join in with them; but I couldn't stay out of it either. All that was left for me to do was to be there: to see what was happening; to look with my old eyes and listen with my old ears - so that it wouldn't just pass like a summer storm on the horizon of which you remember nothing when you wake up in the morning. I did not sleep. I was there. I was among them. I was too old to do anything, but one thing I could do and that I did: to be there ... And all I can say about what has happened is that I was there ... To be there: that is what's important... I was there (pp. 440/1 - my emphasis).
For the black woman, as for the rest of the world's population, there had always been a ‘there’ and a ‘then’; there had always been an ancestral history and there shall always be descendants to ‘go on talking and talking, an endless chain of voices, all together yet all apart, all different yet all the same; and the separate links might lie but the chain is the truth’ (Ma-Rose, p. 441). The black women's history in Brink's stories has been erased. Yet, in a contradictory manner, the ‘death’ of these characters and the symbolic ‘burning of the papers’ have been repealed ironically by a descendant of colonizers who restructures that which had been denied.

The only way for Ma-Rose to experience motherhood is to be a surrogate mother on different levels. First of all, she is wet-nurse for other people's children. Several characters bear testimony to the fact that her breasts and milk were always available when needed. She in fact is the first narrator to point this out: ‘At first I lived on Lagenvlei, seeing Piet's sons grow up in front of me, Barend and Nicolaas both; and suckling them when they were small’ (p. 26). Alida, Piet's wife, throws more light on the circumstances which necessitated her first-born Barend to be nursed by Ma-Rose: ‘There were the children, of course; the only future I dared presume. The first was Barend, a large, strong baby torn from me and leaving me helpless; if Rose hadn't intervened he may not have survived. I could never reconcile myself with the thought that she'd suckled him, precisely because it had saved his life’ (p. 71). Grudgingly she admits: ‘All these years she (Ma-Rose) had been in the background, suckling our children...’ (p. 67). Even the envious and abrasive Barend, in voicing his resentment to the friendship between his brother Nicolaas and the slave Galant, remembers how Ma-Rose suckled the two boys: ‘For most of the day he (Nicolaas) and Galant would lie side by side on a kaross beside the house, and often I saw Ma-Rose suckling them, one to each breast’ (p. 107).

Ma-Rose performs a second mothering function. Her ex-master and ‘lover’, Piet van der Merwe, is struck down by a massive stroke, leaving him as helpless as a baby. It is she who focalizes Piet in his present state but also compares it with his former virility while she reveals her mothering role. Leaving her hut at Houd-den-Bek, she returned to Lagenvlei to ‘nurse him, to feed him and to turn him over and wash him’ (p. 26). She had known him since he was a young man and she knew his needs and likes. Piet corroborates this when, in a stream of consciousness he curses his family for looking at him as if he were senile and dumb in his stricken condition: ‘In the beginning I cursed them as I lay here. Shouting in silence, in fumes of sulphur. They didn't even know. Old Rose, maybe. She'd always had a way of looking at me and understanding’ (p. 31).

Alida, too, confirms Ma-Rose's mothering role in respect of Piet: ‘... in stark uncool shade Piet lay breathing and staring, tended I presume by Rose who was
taking the chance in my absence to reassert her old subversive hold on him’ (p. 65).
After the funeral of Nicolaas and the others, Alida reminisces, she and Ma-Rose

together washed Piet, changed his sheets and made him as comfortable as they could,
‘lavishing on him the care of our common motherhood’ (p. 68). This was the last
time Ma-Rose saw Piet and she reinforces but also refutes Alida's account of their
‘common motherhood’: ‘Now he was finished, wasted away. For the last time I
washed him too; and to my surprise Nooi Alida did nothing to prevent me. He was
still alive, but I washed him the way one washes a body for burial; the way a mother
washes her child’ (p. 440).

Whenever there was illness, a difficult birth, death, a body broken by flogging or
whatever trauma, Ma-Rose would be there, not only to bring comfort with her
reassuring presence but also to minister to and nurse the sick and wounded. She
helped with the birth of Alida's three children and nursed her throughout the second
pregnancy when she was 'constantly ill'; in fact, Alida admits that ‘without the
ministration of herbs and horrible concoctions devised by Rose’ she might have died
(p. 71); she was midwife to Lys, Bet and Pamela; she nursed Galant's wounds after
he was flogged almost to death by Nicolaas; in short, Ma-Rose truly fulfilled the role
of a mother in many lives, especially those of the slaves who were either torn away
from their own mothers by the practice of selling slave-mother and slave-child
separately or saw their mothers dying horrendous deaths.

On a third level, Ma-Rose is much more than just someone who cares for the physical
needs of others. She effectively sums up her position on the farm when she states:
‘We're all of us human, and I pity us all, for I'm the mother of all’ (p. 441 - my
emphasis). Her compassion, wisdom and discretion attracts all and sundry to her hut:
‘...I might be living apart from the rest, but all the world came past my hut, and there
was nothing I didn't know... Each with his own story to tell: and I listened to them
all, for I was old and what they wouldn't dare tell anybody else they confided to me,
and why shouldn't they? I was mother of them all’ (pp. 351/2 - my emphasis). Bet
confirms Ma-Rose's assertions when, torn by inner conflict when the revolt broke
out, she needs someone to confide in: ‘I set out on the footpath to Ma-Rose's hut.
Through the years we'd all trodden that path to ask her help when everything else
had failed’ (p. 463 - N.B.: In the Afrikaans version Bet says: ‘Through the years we'd
all trodden that footpath to Ma-Rose's hut; she was mother of all’ - p. 363 - my
emphasis).

It is especially Ma-Rose's compassion for both Nicolaas and Galant that confirms
her ‘mother of all’ status if one bears in mind the wide divergence in their situation.
These two characters leave us in no doubt about the crucial role she plays in their
lives. In the case of Nicolaas it would appear incongruous that a white child of that
period would develop such an affinity for a black woman, even to the extent of calling
her ‘Ma-Rose’, but when assessing the circumstances of Nicolaas's birth and life, it
becomes quite logical: when he was born, his mother

‘hated him for forcing (her) first-born Barend finally beyond (her) reach’ (p. 71) and to his father he was ‘an embarrassment’ (p. 73) because of his interest in books rather than in farming. Sensing this rejection, Nicolaas would spend more and more time with Ma-Rose and Galant and succinctly sums up her role in his life: ‘Once upon a time there was a woman who was nobody's mother but whom we all called Ma, Ma-Rose, who dried our tears and laughed with us, and who used to tell stories better than anyone else in the world’ (p. 83); he calls her ‘something as large and safe as a mountain’ (p. 84). And yet it is his own mother - who had reason enough to dislike Ma-Rose - who initiates the growing chasm between Nicolaas and Ma-Rose. Nicolaas remembers: ‘They (his parents) never approved of Ma-Rose. Pa didn't mind much, but Ma was suspicious and annoyed. “For Heaven's sake stop calling her “Ma-Rose”. She isn't your mother. She's a Hottentot woman. And all this visiting with her must stop too. I won't have my children growing up in huts like slaves”’ (p. 83).

But the main focalizer of Ma-Rose is Galant, the child that became hers from the moment of his birth and who she ‘spoiled ... from the first’ (p. 28). The close bond between the two is time and again revealed, not only by themselves but also by other characters. It is therefore no wonder that it is especially Galant who confirms Ma-Rose's all-mother status. His tracks ‘cover the length and breadth of the Bokkeveld’ (p. 40),

always coming back to Ma-Rose. Ma-Rose ... warm as a kaross protecting you against the world, surrounding you like an attic filled with smells. Ma-Rose with her cure for every ill ... And stories for all occasions ... And whenever I cannot sleep she holds me close to her, uttering the sounds of a mother-hen as she caresses me, taking my small member in her hand and rubbing it, ever so gently, until my feet leave the ground and I begin to drift away like a cloud over the mountains ... Always Ma-Rose ... she is always there to return to (pp. 41/2).

Even aspects of the Houd-den-Bek space remind him of Ma-Rose: ‘The dam has its own way of soothing grief; it is as motherly as Ma-Rose’ (p. 49). Catastrophe and grief which dominate his life from beginning to end, continually drive him back to the warm, reassuring presence of Ma-Rose. In his childish innocence and naiveté he cannot understand why white children wear shoes while he has to go barefoot among the rocks and thorns, why they live in a house while he has to live in a hut, why they would not teach him to read and write, why he cannot swim with them when the white girl Hester is present, etc. In his adult life, the questions become even more urgent and serious: why his only child is kicked to death by Nicolaas, why Nicolaas takes Pamela away from him, why he is a slave, why rumours of the slaves' emancipation are not revealed to the slaves by the slave-owners, etc. To these questions Ma-Rose can only reply: ‘“That's how it is”’ (p. 40) or ‘“It's not for you to ask”’ (pp. 54, 61) or ‘“Galant, you got to get this into your head. No matter what he (Nicolaas) does, he got the right to do it because

he's baas. Stop asking questions or you'll land in big trouble. Nicolaas is baas on Houd-den-Bek”’ (p. 181). Galant interprets Ma-Rose's evasive answers as her having no answers either or that ‘she has no remedy for this ache’ (p. 62).

Ma-Rose's answers seem to reflect the quiet acquiescence of the fate of slaves, but her actions prove differently. Knowing Galant better than he knows himself (‘he's always had a streak of the devil in him’ - p. 27), her answers are her way of protecting him from the consequences of too rash actions. As a slave he has to remain ‘unquestioning’ but she, as ‘the only free person on this farm’ (p. 84), often on Galant's behalf sets out to find answers to his questions, for example her efforts to find confirmation of the rumours about the slaves’ emancipation.

5.4.3.4 ‘Vulva’ Supreme

When considering the implications of the second part of Ma-Rose's name, i.e. rose = vulva, one's first impulse is to characterise her as ambivalent in her attitude to men and sex. Being ‘the only free person on this farm’ but given the circumstances of her existence, she displays a remarkable independence and freedom within herself and could be - if such a description can be applied to a black woman, not much more than a slave, of the early nineteenth century - termed a ‘feminist’ in the contemporary sense of the word.

Yet, despite Ma-Rose's assertions of her freedom as well as her actions to corroborate her statements, it would appear that she sees herself as a someone who is destined to serve the needs of men, in fact, whose main function is to serve those needs. On several occasions she reiterates this position, especially when referring to her copulation with Piet, whose ‘poor little limp thing...stood up like the pole of a stallion’ in his youth (p. 26) and: ‘... whenever he got into me, neighing like a wild horse, I could feel the spasm coming right from the bottom of my spine all the way to my throat, and my eyes would turn up. He could pump away, all right’ (p. 26). She further claims to have had ‘all the men of these parts and from far away; for when I was young they all heard about me and came to have their marrow drained’ (p. 27). Whether she finds her sexual activities enjoyable is never expressed. What we have here, is obviously a male perspective which manipulates Ma-Rose into looking at herself mainly in relation to the needs of men.

From her statements one can infer that she sees herself in the service of humankind, also as far as sex is concerned, for example when she focalizes the space in which the events take place, she adds: ‘This is a hard land and women are scarce, and the men are lustful. And who am I to turn away from life? When the stallion approaches, quivering with stiffness, I open up’ (p. 27). Her sexual activities, it would seem, are of a philanthropic, humanitarian nature, as is so clearly
illustrated by her protection of the young slave girl Lys. In order to keep Piet and other men away from Lys' body, she would seduce them - 'I have a way of holding a man' (p. 28) - for her body is 'deep and I am marsh enough for herds to wallow in' (p. 29). Already analogising lecherous men with stallions and herds confirms the idea that sex for her is mere mating, a necessary activity of life with no question of deeper feelings.

Ma-Rose also has definite opinions about black and white women's sexuality and ability to satisfy men, which is perhaps the reflection of another of the entrenched stereotypes about black and white women, and reinforced in this novel. She advises the impotent Nicolaas to 'soak (his) root in a black woman. That'll let it grow and give it life' (p. 178) because, according to her, some white men suffer from 'a sort of blight’ since their women ‘aren't deep enough. A man's root needs the water she has inside her; and some white women don't seem to have it’ (p. 178). She shocks Nicolaas with her revelation that she had made his father the man he is, since he had ‘soaked his root’ in her.

It is not only Ma-Rose who describes her own sexual experiences. From Piet's narration we learn that he had known her since she was a young girl; in fact, she was called 'to dance her wild reels' at his wedding feast which lasted a full week. Piet describes what transpired:

> What a body she had in those days. Strange race, the Hottentots: smooth and beautiful until they're twenty or thirty; then they grow old overnight. Less than ten years later Rose was an old hag. But at the time of the wedding she was still shining with smoothness, a half-wild female creature wearing only the briefest of karosses around her parts. And even that was soon shed as she danced naked among the men, breasts bouncing. Trembling with every move. The brandy was flowing in torrents, and the men taking turns with Rose, some of them on all fours (p. 36).

Ironically, nowhere in Piet's two 'speaking turns' does he make mention of his nocturnal visits to Ma-Rose's hut, except to say that he had never committed adultery after taking his wife Alida: 'Adultery? Ever since I took Alida I've never been with another woman. At least not a white one and God said nothing about others. They were made to give us a bit of sport in a hard land, otherwise it would all be labour and sorrow’ (p. 33).

It is left to Alida and Galant to confirm Ma-Rose's allegations that Piet had known her body. All these years her adversary (Ma-Rose: ‘Alida ... had always been jealous of me, and with reason. She knew only too well that I'd known his body even before she had’ - p. 26), Alida admits that Ma-Rose had taken 'to her deep body my husband and others, abundant and accessible as any cow, fertile as earth, threatening my small decent authority with her voluptuous presence’ (p. 67).
In Galant's narration about his childhood, he remembers how he dragged his tired, aching body at the end of the working day back to Ma-Rose's hut, how all he wanted to do was to lie down and sleep but how he found ‘more often than not there's no room for me because a man has taken my place on the mattress beside her... Some nights it's the Oubaas (Piet) who's visiting her...’ (pp. 42/3).

The above evidence seems sufficient to conclude that Ma-Rose is portrayed as a sex object but also as a magnanimous all-mother. Abdul R. JanMohamed (1985:91) states with reference to *A Chain of Voices*:

> [T]he novel remains rooted in racial stereotypes/archetypes...the only distinction between the two racial groups, other than the obvious one between masters and slaves, is that the whites experience severe sexual repression, while the nonwhites are obsessed with sex; indeed, some of the nonwhites can perceive themselves only in terms of sexual pleasure and fecundity. The undiscriminating sexuality of Ma-Rose, the slave earth mother, is endowed with an ill-defined liberatory quality.

But is Ma-Rose a mere sex object? When assessing her from a perspective opposite to that of the masculine point of view, it emerges that her ‘freedom’ has nothing whatsoever to do with the dichotomy master/slave, man/woman or black/white. Her freedom is within herself; in a remarkable way she succeeds in divesting herself of the limitations brought to bear upon the colonized by the colonizer; she succeeds in keeping her gregarious spirit free from prejudice, racial or otherwise, and she succeeds in transcending the impositions of race, gender and class. She surrenders herself with complete abandon to whatever venture, whether it be nursing the sick and disabled, story-telling in her inimitable style or sex. If men have the notion of ‘using’ her body, it would not matter to Ma-Rose because in her generous love for people she is not only humanitarian who, in her particular way, sees her main task as caring for those who need care, but who is also prepared to sacrifice her body in the interest of others (for example, the way she sacrificed her body to keep men away from the defenceless Lys).

In characterising Ma-Rose as ‘supreme vulva’ and the other black women characters as ‘lesser vulvas’, cognisance has to be taken of Brink's pronouncements regarding women and sex. In equating the experiences of religion and sex with one another, he stresses the importance of *serious* experiences, and not the casual association with these two components of human life. In order to experience them both in a meaningful way, a three-fold process has to execute itself: (i) self-exploration, self-discovery and denudation which leads to (ii) a kind of ‘sacrificial’ deed or denouncement of ‘the old self’ which finally leads to (iii) a form of rebirth and surrender to faith. In sex this means first establishing who you are and, when knowing who you are, shedding your clothes in order to perform the sacrificial deed of giving yourself unreservedly to your partner so that you can finally become a new person through the very act.
The question is: does this ‘religious’ experience of sex apply to black women too in Brink's novels? The significant fact is that this process executes itself time and again where the female character is white and the male black or white (cf. for example Nicolette Alford and Paul van Heerden in *The Ambassador*, Jessica Thomson and Joseph Malan in *Looking on darkness*; Elisabeth Larsson and Adam Mantoor in *An instant in the wind*; Beatrice Fiorini and Martin Mynhardt in *Rumours of rain*; Melanie Bruwer and Ben du Toit in *A dry white season* and Hester van der Merwe and Galant in *A chain of voices*). It would appear that in the implied author's perception black women have not yet reached the stage in human evolution where sex can be experienced as elevated and spiritual; that love or what passes for love is confined to a purely physical nature; that they lag behind their white sisters to the extent that sex is a mere instinctive and impulsive copulation with no question of ‘self-exploration’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘denouncement of the old self’ and ‘rebirth’ (again the example of the lovemaking of Hester and Galant in contrast to Ma-Rose's purely physical experiences can be cited).

5.4.3.5 ‘Milk’

The two images of Ma-Rose described above, i.e. Mother Supreme and Vulva Supreme, are closely linked to the concept of milk in the novel. Milk denotes nutrition, nurturing, nursing, nourishment; it is motherhood and a female principle since it is a body fluid associated with the element of water. In the most common sense, milk is what is derived from mammals for consumption by humans and other animals. It is no wonder that Alida thinks of Ma-Rose's body as ‘abundant and accessible as any cow’ (p. 67), imagery which finds close association with Ma-Rose's own description of her body as being ‘deep and marsh enough for herds to wallow in’. Ma-Rose refers to her own breasts as ‘dugs’, ‘paps’ or ‘teats’ (N.B.: in the Afrikaans version she refers to her breasts as ‘uiers’ = udders - p. 18).

In Ma-Rose's case one can truly speak of hers as ‘the milk of human kindness’, for not only is she ‘mother of all’ but her humane nature places her in a position far above the rest. As wet-nurse she is milked, significantly by male babies: Barend, Nicolaas and Galant. It is not simply a case of her suckling them in the literal sense - she is milked in other respects as well, becoming the giver of kindness but seldom the receiver. But, like an ‘abundant (milk) cow’ (Alida about Ma-Rose, p. 67), she never dries up and gives of her unlimited resources whenever called upon to do so.

More importantly, Ma-Rose is the one who ‘milks’ men. Ad de Vries (1974:321) points out that milk is not only a symbol of regeneration, abundance and fertility but also of semen. Ma-Rose says of herself: ‘...I've had all the men of these parts and from far away; for when I was young they all heard about me and came to have
their marrow drained. Now I'm old and they think I'm useless, but I swear I can still 
milk the lot of them’ (p. 27 - my emphasis) and a little later she tells us how she 
‘milked’ Piet twice in one night to make sure he would not bother Lys.

The question arises whether, if milk = semen, Ma-Rose is regenerated and fertilised 
by the semen of the many men she has had. To what extent is she nurtured by the 
semen of all those men? Does she, like a baby fed on mother's milk, flourish and 
bloom? These questions cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. She is childless 
- deep down she must have felt the emptiness of losing her babies; her fertility and 
the fertilizing function of semen are thus nullified. In a certain kind of naïveté she 
believes she has ‘milked’ men and ‘drained their marrow’ which would have 
regenerated her but the opposite is true, since she contends that a man's root needs 
the wetness of women for it to grow and flourish. Although she is by no means a 
slave but a ‘free’ Khoi woman in the employ of white masters, she is nevertheless 
subjected to most of the rules and regulations applicable to slaves, not least 
voicelessness and submission to the will of the overlords. She admits to the submission 
of slaves and particularly slave-women for she asserts that it was Piet's ‘good right 
of course’ (p. 28) to copulate with his slave-women. She has had men from all sectors 
of the community but when seen in relation to the dichotomies of freedom and 
bondage, white and black, she is simply the exploited labour-unit and sex object in 
more than one sense. ‘Milk’ and ‘milking’, then, signifying regeneration, abundance 
and fertility are used here in an ironic sense when applied to Ma-Rose, for black 
women ‘were made to give us [white men] a bit of sport in this hard land’ (Piet, p. 
33).

5.4.3.6 The ancestral presence

Whether by accident or design, Brink has created in *A chain of voices* an ancestral 
presence which has become a salient feature of Afro-American and African women's 
writing during the last few decades. 12 I find it important to include into this study a 
discussion of this ‘ancestral presence’ in the figure of Ma-Rose for the following 
reasons: (i) Trends in black women's writing have filtered through to Brink, which 
is another indication of his preparedness to acknowledge and accept the literary 
merits of groups other than his own. It is especially noteworthy that it is the black 
women's literary products which Brink acknowledges and emulates, given the fact 
that both ‘black’ and ‘woman’ have been absent entities in the literature of Afrikaans. 
(ii) An anomalous situation arises from the creation of a black ancestral presence: 
the black woman's and the white man's ancestry which to all intents and purposes 
are in direct conflict with one another, but which some time in the South African 
past - as indeed in the novel itself - became intertwined. How does Brink blend the 
two and how does he associate the ancestors, black and white, with the characters?
Joanne M. Braxton (1990:300) describes the ancestral presence in Afro-American women's writing as follows:

The ancestral figure most common in the work of contemporary Black women writers is an outraged mother. She speaks in and through the narrator of the text to ‘bear witness’ and to break down artificial barriers between the artist and the audience. Not only does this ancestral figure lend a ‘benevolent, instructive, and protective’ presence to the text, she also lends her benign influence to the very act of creation, for the Black woman artist works in the presence of this female ancestor, who passes on her feminine wisdom for the good of the ‘tribe’ and the survival of Black people...

Ma-Rose is by no means the female ancestor of the artist in this case; neither does she speak ‘in and through the narrator’ since she herself is narrator even though her narration/monologues are ascribed to her from outside the story (Brink 1987:136). Brink himself states: ‘Sometimes it is necessary for the reader to make a clear distinction between the actual monologue of a character and an ‘interpretation’ by a commentator (narrator). I have often been surprised that the different ‘statements’ by characters in A Chain of Voices are so readily read as monologues while numerous narrative signs are planted in the text to indicate that these parts are ‘ascribed’ to the characters from outside the story - Brink's emphasis, my translation). But what is of cardinal importance here is the fact that the underexposed and even erased history, traditions and culture of a people who 'had once roamed free’ (p. 183), who for many centuries ruled over the vast plains and valleys of South Africa are (re)created through the ancestral figure of Ma-Rose and by an (implicit) author who feels himself bound to that history, tradition and culture by his very South Africanness and ancestry.

As already stated, the figure of Ma-Rose is a binding factor in the novel and in the entire saga of the events leading up to and including the slave revolt. With her ‘old eyes and old ears’ she sees and listens to everything and everybody and, in her feminine wisdom, sees and hears beyond what she sees and hears, for she interprets, concludes and extracts meanings to which the other characters are oblivious.

The novel attempts to blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world - in the same way Brink ‘doctors’ historical documents to blend truth and fiction - with neither taking precedence over the other. To blend superstition and magic - which is another way of knowing things - with the real world at the same time, cannot be assessed as limiting; on the contrary, it is an enhancing feature of the novel. It is important to note how different characters respond to Ma-Rose's acceptance of the supernatural and her superstition, her peculiar knowledge of things: for Alida, Cecilia and eventually Nicolaas her
knowledge is discredited knowledge. When Alida forbids Nicolaas to visit Ma-Rose's hut as often as he does, he pleads with her, saying Ma-Rose tells them stories, to which Alida retorts: “Heathen nonsense. She'll land you all in hell” (p. 83). Cecilia, prototype of the white (Afrikaner) woman, almost exactly echoes her mother-in-law's words when Ma-Rose drives Gaunab, the Dark One, away with water: “What ungodly stories are you telling again?... How often have I told you to stop scaring the children with all this heathen nonsense? I won't have it, do you hear me? God will punish you for your evil ways, Rose” (pp. 356/7). Ma-Rose's stories 'both scared and angered' Nicolaas (p. 84) who tried his best to 'convert' her. When he fails to blend Ma-Rose's belief in the supernatural with his book-bound knowledge, he mistakenly thinks that she is 'receding' from his life.

Ma-Rose keeps her history and that of her people alive in oral literature. Among several functions of opening formulae for oral literature, Mineke Schipper (1990:22) mentions one in which fixed passages or formulae remain recognisable even in different variants. She states: ‘Sometimes it happens that totally different stories are combined in a new story at a later stage. This regularly happens when the narrator, in beginning his narration, refers to his “sources”, for example, “My father told me and his father told him ...”’ (my translation). Cf. for example the invocation of Ma-Rose's female ancestors when she starts relating a particular part of her history: ‘The world is very old hereabouts. It was like this in my mother's time, and in her mother's, and I suppose in her mother's too ...’ (p. 23); ‘My mother used to tell me how our people had been as numerous as the stones of the mountains ... but then, she said, there came a disease among us, in the time of my mother's mother's mother ...’ (p. 26); ‘my mother had told me long ago ...’ (p. 356); ‘I was told by my mother, and she by hers, and she I should think by hers again ...’ (p. 439). Ma-Rose's job is to ‘make generations’ and ‘to bear witness’ to the rights and wrongs of the past, as well as to her culture and traditions. By incorporating her narratives into the text (N.B. the whole novel is an adventure in orality, from the title onwards), Brink achieves ‘orality’, the sense that the narrative is as much told as written. However, as stated before, the loss of her own children as well as the loss of Galant who would most definitely have passed down to his children what had been told to him by Ma-Rose, is also the loss of future ability to make generations. Thus, where in some sense Ma-Rose and the other black women characters have no beginning and no end and are what might be called ‘the woman suspended’, she is in another very real sense a woman rooted in culture and history. She is being portrayed as someone who in her belief is firmly anchored to the Khoi creator and raingod, Tsui-Goab, and to the ancestral spirit, Heitsi-Eibib.

The inclusion of an ancestral presence in the person of Ma-Rose could be interpreted as ‘a deliberate effort on the part of the artist to get a visceral, emotional response as well as an intellectual response as s/he communicates with
the audience’ (Morrison 1983:341). The mother/ancestral figure of Ma-Rose embodies the values of sacrifice, nurturance and personal courage - values necessary to an endangered group - while at the same time employing reserves of spiritual strength derived from her rootedness in Tsui-Goab and Heitsi-Eibib.

In addition to that, Brink also succeeds in creating a historically authentic image by using the ‘voice’ of Ma-Rose to establish the historical setting of the early 1800s when the Khoikhoi's group and family relations were already disintegrating and by referring to the smallpox epidemics which practically wiped out this indigenous group of people. With the portrayal of the Khoi personages as survivors in whom the myths as handed-down treasure have been preserved, he uses Ma-Rose's stories to form an integrated chain of motifs with which the reader is led to new insights. While the mythical data give the characters a grip on their reality (especially Ma-Rose and Galant), they also contribute to give the world of the novel an illusion of reality to the reader (cf. Steenberg 1984:260).

Galant reflects upon the stories Ma-Rose told him, stories into which she incorporates the origins of certain beliefs of her people but which at the same time inculcate reverence for the forces of nature and for life and death; in short, she had ‘stories for all occasions’ (p. 41). The catastrophic events on Houd-den-Bek and the tragedy which permeates the life of almost every character are closely related to the ominous signs and figures of evil from Ma-Rose's stories, for each of which she also has an exorcising ritual. The most important of these signs, with their uncanny relationship to the four life elements but then more ominous and threatening, are:

1. The thas-jackal which ‘no one has ever seen... but it's out there; and it wanders about when somebody has trodden on a fresh grave. It's the spirit of the dead that turns into a jackal to haunt the living’ (p. 182). Very significantly, the thas-jackal is heard deep in the night by both Ma-Rose and Galant shortly after Galant's child had been murdered by Nicolaas and he comes to Ma-Rose in his grief and bitterness to find out the truth. She cannot (or would not?) supply answers to his questions, save to say: “Stop asking questions or you'll land in big trouble. Nicolaas is baas on Houd-den-Bek” (p. 181). Houd-den-Bek, then, is not only the name of the farm but a very clear injunction from master to slave not to question, not to retaliate; in fact, it encompasses the entire attitude of the period and thereafter. In Parts III and IV Ma-Rose invokes the image of the thas-jackal once more when she focalizes Galant: ‘Without looking at me, his eyes still far away in that distance where the thas-jackal roams ...’ (p. 352). In her last monologue she states: ‘There is another kind of death, a deeper one, the death of the heart ... only the wail of the jackal is heard...’ (p. 439). To comfort Galant, she offers to perform a typical Khoi exorcising ritual by strewing buchu leaves on Dawidjie's grave to ‘set him to rest’ (p. 182), but for the ‘death of the heart’ even Ma-Rose has no remedy or exorcising ritual.
2. *The hammerhead bird* is similarly an omen of death and again it is especially Galant, with ‘Ma-Rose's hold on him’ (Nicolaas, p. 85), who firmly believes in its ominous presence. When the planning of the revolt is in its final stages, Galant and the other workers go to the vlei to wash themselves before returning home after a long day's threshing. There they encounter a couple of hammerhead birds standing unmoving in the muddy water, ‘like weird-shaped brown stones, staring at the fish. In silence we hold back, paralysed, too numb to interfere. For we know it's not fish they see in the dark water, but the face of a man marked for death’ (p. 387). Ma-Rose's thoughts on death and the Khoi explanation of ‘how death came into the world’ include the hammerhead bird as death symbol, ‘... the cry of the hammerhead bird treading the waters of death’ (p. 439).

3. *Gaunab*, the diametrical opposite of Tsui-Goab, can be equated to the Christian concept of Satan and Hell. Already at the beginning of the main text his presence gives an indication of the tragedy and ill-fortune which would execute themselves on Houd-den-Bek. In true oral tradition Ma-Rose relates the creation myth of the Khoikhoi: ‘And from the stones the great god Tsui-Goab made us, the people, the Khoikhoi, the People-of-people. And here in the Bokkeveld you can see it very clearly, for we live surrounded by stone’ (p. 23). It is once again not Ma-Rose but Galant who explicitly invokes the presence of Gaunab for the first time in the text: ‘There's Tsui-Goab who made the world and all the people, the rain and sun and wind and fire; and Gaunab who lives in the night and rules over all that happens in the dark’ (p. 41). In contrast to Tsui-Goab who lives in a beautiful heaven, Gaunab lives in a dark, black heaven. For this reason Ma-Rose's first observation and ‘prophecy’ implying the presence of a force of darkness is described as follows: ‘Now I suppose it's easy to say I've seen it coming a long way, as one sees the clouds coming from far off... growing darker as they come closer, darker and darker all the way, until they break out in a storm that beats you down and strips you to the bone’ (p. 23).

For the Khoikhoi, Gaunab the evil destructor, is also linked to evil spirits and death and is one and the same force as the whirlwind or ‘dust-devil’ or sâres, as Ma-Rose explains a whirlwind: ‘... I couldn't help shivering. I knew it was Gaunab, the Dark One, taking on the shape of a whirlwind. In that form his name was sâres, my mother had told me a long time ago; and it was a bad omen. I could see it coming towards us... and I was frightened, for I saw it heading straight for the house’ (p. 356). For that reason she does the only thing a Khoi can do to prevent the evil a whirlwind brings, using one of her exorcising rituals: she throws water right in the way of sâres, which made it change course and die down. When Cecilias scolds her for her ‘ungodly’ ways, she replies: ‘“The dust-devil means danger, Nooi. If I hadn't stopped him in time there would have been death on this farm’ (p. 356).
4. The Lightning Bird is undoubtedly the most significant and most recurring of the omens of death and destruction. Ill-fortune is linked to the personification of the forces of nature in the Lightning Bird which, according to Schapera (1930:194), is seen by the Northwestern San as the child of Khaunawho in turn is the origin of ill-fortune.

Galant reports fairly comprehensively his knowledge of the Lightning Bird from the stories of Ma-Rose, the Lightning Bird ‘that scorches the grass where it settles to lay its egg which burrows into the earth in search of moisture. There it lies abiding its time, swelling and growing, until the clouds start thundering overhead again; then a new Lightning Bird is hatched. The lightning is its spittle, and the clouds its dark wings spread out over the world’ (p. 41). Ma-Rose herself transposes the bad connotations of the Lightning Bird onto the liberation struggle which appears like a fire: ‘There is a kind of lightning that one sees with one's eyes, the lightning that announces the storm which lays waste the wheat but which also brings new life to the earth for next year's harvest. But there is another kind of lightning, invisible, and inside you, leaving its mark on your heart; it lies there waiting for years, curled up, as patient as the egg of the Lightning Bird in the darkness of the earth, and suddenly one day it breaks out to burn and scorch you inside... (pp. 439/40). In this way, she recognises the fire that broke out that night, ‘blown up high by Galant and the others’ (p. 440).

Ma-Rose has a ritual too for exorcising the destructive power of the Lightning Bird. When Nicolaas married, his wedding ‘gift’ from his father was inter alia the slave Galant, which meant that he had to move to Houd-den-Bek with Nicolaas, leaving Ma-Rose behind at Lagenvlei. But being a ‘free’ woman, she soon decides to follow Galant. In exasperation Galant tries to scare her by saying lightning will strike her down, her hut is too exposed on the hill, but she is not scared of lightning, and Galant knows why: ‘I've seen her in storms before: if the lightning grows too wild or comes too close to her liking she goes out in the rain and bends over with her backside to the storm, and raises the back flap of her kaross. Nothing scares off the Lightning Bird so effectively as the sight of Ma-Rose's bare behind’ (p. 129). On another occasion when Galant again comes to Ma-Rose in a state of deep depression, he begs her to tell him a story: ‘“Tell me about the Great Hunter Heitsi-Eibib. Tell me about the Water Woman. Tell me about the Lightning Bird that lays its egg in the ground”’ (p. 134). Indeed, the ancestral presence in this novel is a comforting and consoling one, especially for Galant.

However, the Lightning Bird is not only a symbol of destruction - it is also a symbol of new life and hope, the age-old Khoi version of the Phoenix, especially in Galant's case. He analogises the seed he may have planted in Hester with the egg of the Lightning Bird and with the purifying properties of fire: ‘In its own way the lightning is as everlasting as the mountains. Deep in
the earth the Lightning Bird lays its egg; and when its time comes it hatches in the dark and fire returns to the world: a fire that burns and scorches and strips away all that is superfluous, so that life can sprout anew in red-grass and shrub, in small yellow flowers, in everything that grows. Like life in the womb of a woman the egg of the Lightning Bird lies waiting in the darkness to be born’ (p. 499). At the end of his last monologue which is also the end of the main text, he again invokes the image of the Lightning Bird but now it is no longer a single egg but eggs, suggesting the different forms of potential destruction and of potential hope/new life for his country and his people: ‘The eggs of the Lightning Bird remain in the earth for a long, long time: but one day they'll hatch and bring the fire back...’ (p. 509).

Finally, the ancestral presence in this novel in the figure of Ma-Rose must also be seen in relation to her function as prophetess/seer. In the very first paragraph of her first monologue, i.e. the first paragraph of the main text, this function is foreshadowed when she says: ‘Now I suppose it's easy to say I've seen it coming a long way’ (p.23). Referring to the slave revolt, she equates it with a brewing storm which ‘beats you down and strips you to the bone’. In her last monologue she reiterates what she said in the first but then she is more definite: ‘I can say that I'd seen it coming from far off, through years and seasons of sun and snow and wind. Indeed, I saw it all’ (p. 441 - my emphasis).

These are not the empty boastings of an old woman. Her increasing unease about Galant's justified troubled state of mind, her observation of the wrongs perpetrated by both masters and slaves, the growing antagonism between the two men ‘who were suckled on (her) paps’ (p. 439), Nicolaas's change of attitude towards her, all these factors and more enable her to know that the storm has to break out in one way or another. Added to this, is her prophecy to Nicolaas that ‘when the storm comes up it'll blow all of this (his possessions) right away’ (p. 359).

As the ancestral presence, it is also her function to share her wisdom and insights with her descendants, to act as seer/prophetess in order to guide them on their future paths. Indeed, the figure of Ma-Rose succeeds in breaking down ‘artificial barriers between the artist and the audience’ (Braxton 1990:300), for this novel not only communicates in a meaningful way to contemporary South African society but it also establishes the fact, albeit in a fictionalised account, that Ma-Rose and her ancestors ‘had always been there’.

5.5 Concluding remarks

The above chapter only skims the surface of Andrè P. Brink's narrative art and the last word on his portrayal of black women has yet to be said. The depth which
characterises his novels cannot possibly be explored in a mere chapter, nor can the
various contradictions in his work be fully exposed in so short a space.

Brink’s one-dimensional figures of black women in *Looking on darkness* have as
their one and only dimension the sexual aspect of womanhood. Admittedly, Joseph’s
mother, Sophie, shows seminal traces of being an ‘ancestral presence’ in the text but
even Joseph doubts the veracity of her stories about his ancestors. Is it perhaps another
attempt to discredit or erase black people’s history? Alternatively, what does it say
about Joseph?

Ma-Rose together with Lys, Lydia, Bet and Pamela, are first and foremost portrayed
as sex objects with very little else to justify their human existence. The mere fact
that parts of their anatomy and their sexual activities are often bestialised by
themselves makes one wonder whether this is a further attempt to entrench the images
of them the early explorers of and settlers at the Cape formed and perpetuated. In
the case of Andrea too, her main role in the scheme of things, despite her
Western-style ‘feminism’, appears to be that of sex-object. On the surface it would
seem that she had forgotten and forsaken Africa but deep-down her identification
with the continent remains manifest. Apparently the purpose is to show that, although
she had been taken out of District Six and Bonteheuwel, District Six and Bonteheuwel
- or rather the implicit author’s perception of these ‘coloured’ townships - had not
been taken out of her, as is so clearly illustrated in the previously mentioned episode
with the clochard. In the final analysis, it would appear that Andrea's long sojourn
in ‘civilised’ Europe, her association with white men, a materially comfortable life
with Paul Joubert have had no effect on her life, have not succeeded in mobilising
her upward. Or does it show that she is finally true to her roots? Does the implicit
author want to show that no amount of ‘civilising’ influences can overcome the
‘inherent’ crudeness of primitive people or their descendants?

Somehow, Brink redeems himself somewhat in respect of his black female characters
in *A chain of voices*, especially with regard to Ma-Rose. While she is portrayed as
the quintessential sex object in her own narration, by other characters and by the
implicit author who is in the final analysis the most important ‘voice’ in the chain
of voices, she also supplies the missing link in the chain of black people's being. Her
anomalous situation is no doubt brought about by the fact that the author finds it
difficult to divorce himself from his own ancestry as far as perception of the black
woman is concerned. Whatever laudable qualities she may have are often obfuscated
by her sexual excesses.

Nevertheless, I have attempted, from the perspective of a black South African woman,
to assess Brink’s perception of the black woman. What has emerged, is that his
perception is not that of a static, fossilised mentality but of someone who squarely
faces the challenge of change. It is true that the white writer cannot be
blamed for his whiteness, nor can he deny it, as Brink (1973:9) himself asserts; it is true that artificial barriers have made it virtually impossible for black and white to really know each other; it is especially true that black men and white women or white men and black women, in their lack of knowledge about each other, often have misconceptions about the other; it is also true that stereotypes attached to a particular group are hard to dispel. But if an artist accepts these ‘truths’ unquestioningly, there is simply no hope of conciliation, even if s/he tries to understand. To conclude, one can use one of Brink's own ‘truths’ to illustrate how difficult it is for black and white but especially for white authors to give a fair assessment of the oppressed's psyche: ‘What is important is not just to understand with mind, but to live through it all’ (Ma-Rose, p. 441).

Eindnoten:

1. The most comprehensive work to date on André P. Brink is the anthology compiled by Jan Senekal (ed.) 1988.
2. This was said to me in 1989 in Amsterdam by an Afrikaner academic and critic, Helize van Vuuren.
3. Brink’s novel States of Emergency (1988) is left out of contention for the simple reason that it is not written or even translated into Afrikaans, whereas my primary concern is the Afrikaans novel.
4. See for example the essays on Brink’s work in Donker Weerlig.
5. See Chapter 2.1.2
6. ‘Pramme’, according to the Afrikaans Verklarende Woordeboek and the Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (HAT), is the ‘vulgar’ term for breasts; according to Van Dale's Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal, a ‘pram’ is defined as ‘elk der borsten van een zogende vrouw’.
7. ‘Fyndraai’ is an Afrikaans colloquial word for ‘orgasm’.
8. According to Firestone, if the black man is the Son to the Family of Man (white man and white woman being the Parents), then the black woman is Daughter. The black woman's initial sympathy with the white woman (mother), her bond of oppression with her against the white male (father) is complicated by her later relationship with the white male (father). When she discovers that the white male owns ‘that world of travel and adventure’, she, in the subservient position of child, identifies with him, to reject the female within herself. In the effort to reject the womanly (powerless) element in herself, she develops contempt for the Mother (white woman). Like the young girl, she may react to her powerlessness in one of two ways: she may attempt to gain power directly by imitating white men (the black female achiever), thus becoming a woman of strong character, or she may attempt to gain power indirectly by seducing the Father (the black sex-pot), thus putting herself in sexual competition with the white woman for the Father's favour - causing her to hate and be jealous of the white woman, whom she now must attempt to imitate.
9. The ‘burning of the papers’ to which Great Gram refers, was the practice by slave-owners to destroy by burning all records pertaining to punishment (including rape of slave-women) meted out to slaves.
10. This process executes itself to a certain extent in Andrea's and Mandla's lovemaking (The Wall of the Plague) and, interesting enough, they are both black.
11. The Khoi woman's ‘voluptuousness’, i.e. her buttocks and genitalia, was commonly associated with lasciviousness by nineteenth-century European scientists [see for example Sander L. Gilman.
1986:223-261. Is it coincidence that the white woman Alida describes Ma-Rose's body as 'voluptuous' when referring to her sexuality (p. 67)?

12. Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison are examples of Afro-American women writers who incorporate this ancestral presence in their novels.

Chapter 6
Women's voices since 1976 and Poppie Nongena's dubbed voice

So far, the Afrikaner male perspective of the black woman has been examined. This chapter attempts to look at how women are portrayed by women, more specifically how Afrikaner women portray black women with the emphasis on Elsa Joubert's novel Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena. It would seem strange that women's voices in the Afrikaans literary canon should be left for last but the truth of the matter is that, while Afrikaner women writers have been no strangers to the Afrikaans literary scene, their work reveals an absence of black women characters of significance until 1978.

This chapter will attempt to illustrate the vast differences between Afrikaner male and female authors in their portrayal of the black woman. These differences are not only attributable to the distinctive style, themes, language, etc. which ostensibly characterise women's writing but also to the particular situation which characterise women's lives in South Africa: the 'maids and madams' situation; the powerlessness of the white woman in the face of white male domination for which she can find only some compensation by exercising power over her black employee; the advantage the white woman has over the black woman, not only in the sense of the employer-employee situation but the advantages legislation has given her but denied her black counterpart. In all societies women from all sectors experience a commonality which goes beyond the distinctions of class and race - they are mothers or potential mothers and as such discriminated against because of this gratuitous function which effectively excludes them, at least for a while, from full participation in human endeavour.

In this chapter, I shall give an overview of how some Afrikaner women portray black women and thereafter examine Elsa Joubert's portrayal of an African woman. This is perhaps the most important factor of Afrikaner writing after 1976: whereas prior to that date the black characters in the Afrikaans novel had been mainly 'coloured', the African as a meaningful character emerges only after 1976, the obvious reason being the shock and bewilderment brought to the white establishment by the youth revolt.
A considerable portion of this chapter shall be devoted to an examination of the reception of Joubert's novel by white critics and how my views correspond to or differ from theirs. Such a discussion shall have the purpose too of illustrating the 'validity' of white critics' views and the discounting of those of blacks when a novel written about blacks is reviewed. For a long time the only 'acceptable' currency in respect of literary criticism has been that of whites: they wrote about, thought, spoke and criticised on behalf of blacks. This is especially noticeable in the case of white and black women, since the latter have been discriminated against so severely that their development, education, participation in life as a whole have been seriously curtailed by the powers that be. White women have consequently taken it upon themselves to speak and think on behalf of their black counterparts. How successful or otherwise they have been in their attempts may emerge from the following pages.

In the examination of novels in the previous chapters the emphasis was on how black women characters are portrayed. The major difference in this chapter is how a black woman perceives herself. Again, one has to be careful of taking everything Poppie says about herself on face-value - the situation is far from that simple.

6.1 Women's voices in the Afrikaans literary corpus

Since the recognition of Afrikaans as a fully-fledged language and its introduction as one of the only two 'official' languages of South Africa, the literature of Afrikaans was largely a male literature. For a very long time the only women who gained recognition as poets were Elisabeth Eybers, Olga Kirsch and Ina Rousseau, the former two having left the country to pursue their literary careers elsewhere. As for prose and drama there was a dearth of women practitioners on the Afrikaans literary scene. Admittedly, a few women ventured into the area of prose in the 1940s, the most well-known being M.E.R. (pseudonym of M.E. Rothman), Audrey Blignault, Elise Muller and Alba Bouwer. Their sketches and stories are characterised by small realisms concerning the household, domestic work and children. This is not surprising since it reflects the norms of Afrikaner society in the first half of the twentieth century. In her prose, Minnie Postma focuses especially on the tales of the Basotho involving cannibals, monsters, animals, princes and princesses with love, revenge and death as motives. Indeed, the sound of women's voices was a rare phenomenon and when it did appear sporadically, it was overshadowed by male writing of the same period.

Elise Muller is best known for her novels Die vrou op die skuit, Die wilde loot and Van eensame mense in which she continues the realistic-psychological direction started in her novels of the 1940s. Significant in her stories is the severe censure
to which Afrikaner women who have transgressed the norms of their society are subjected (*Die wilde loot*).

However, it was not until the 1960s that a great surge of women's narrative entered and made an impact upon Afrikaner writing. The emergence of Afrikaner female novelists during this period is of cardinal importance, since the impression is often created that the Sestigers comprised of male authors only. Most of these women already wrote short stories and sketches in the 1950s. Anna M. Louw, novelist, dramatist, writer of short stories and travelogues, published her novel, *Die onverdeelde uur* with its strong patriarchal overtones in 1956. This was followed in 1963 by a novelette in English, *Twenty days that autumn*, which deals with the unrest in the black townships of Cape Town after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and which portrays white people's reactions to the crisis. But, like some of her male contemporaries, she concentrates on the heroic history of the Afrikaner in the novels *Die banneling: die lyfwag* (1964) and *Die groot gryse* (1968), both dealing with the life of Paul Kruger. She is perhaps best known for her family saga, *Kroniek van Perdepoort* (1975) which traces the fortunes and misfortunes of the Afrikaner Lotriet family over several decades. This ‘plaasroman’ (farm novel) - a prominent feature of Afrikaner writing in the 1920s and 1930s - is thematically and structurally a renewing intervention on the genre; the conflict with concrete forces is extended to a conflict with forces in the psyche, while the noble love relationship of the old farm novel is perverted.

*Kroniek van Perdepoort* is a parody on patriarchy and Afrikaner values and in which the inevitable downfall of a family through the influence of evil forces, the seven deadly sins, is depicted. The archetypal Afrikaner patriarch, Koos Lotriet (Koos Nek, because of his haughtiness), already dead for fifteen years, continues to exercise a strong influence on his family, especially his four sons. It is mainly in the portrayal of the wives of these four sons that the author parodies the males. For example, the eldest son, Jan Pampoen, is a weakling, a failure in life and would rather escape from reality with its tough demands than to face up to it. He blames his situation on his wife Letta, someone beneath his station and who embodies his entire hell. She is ‘Evil personified’ (p. 107); later when she laughs at his threats to commit suicide, he says to her: ‘All the devils in hell laugh like that’ (p. 217). Kobus, another son, comments that he and his brothers are married to ‘noughts’, simply because they have married women beneath their status. The irony of Kobus' statement is that in their relationships with their marriage partners, each of these women accentuate the sins of their husbands and illustrate how deviance not only destroys the self but also those who live in close proximity to the deviant person. Needless to say, not one of these marriages is happy.

After publishing a whole series of travelogues and short stories, Elsa Joubert ventured into the world of the novel in the 1960s (see 6.3.1). Like her predecessors, Henriette Grové continues in the tradition of the Afrikaner family saga, although
she is better known for her radio plays. Under the pseudonym of Linda Joubert she published the epistolatory novel *Meulenhof se mense* in 1961, with sinister old-world characters living under a cloak of secrecy and in an oppressive atmosphere, a tradition she continues in *Die laaste lente* (1962). Berta Smit uses Sestiger elements like the interweaving of story levels and anti-chronological sequences to illustrate the Christian's struggle in the world in the novels *Die vrou en die bees* (1964), *Een plus een* (1967) and *Die man met die kitaar* (1971).

After having made her debut as a poet of considerable standing in the Afrikaans literature [e.g. the anthologies *Vir die bysiende leser* (1970), *Spieël van water* (1973) and *Van vergetelheid en glans* (1977)], Wilma Stockenström turned to narrative art after 1976. With her novel *Uitdraai* (1976) she makes a challenging debut as writer of prose precisely because of the renewal it brings to the genre of the farm novel and because it debunks the concept of the mythical ‘purity’ of the Afrikaner woman. On the farm Uitdraai, lives the intelligent, educated and attractive owner Flip, the product of a forbidden relationship between an Afrikaner woman and a ‘coloured’ labourer on the farm. Flip's mother, vilified and castigated by the Afrikaner neighbours, was driven to suicide and Flip reared with loving care and protection by his maternal grandparents who also left their viable farm to him. In his humane efforts to care for his domestic servant and her sick child, the neighbours once again speculate that he co-habits with a ‘coloured’ woman, for is it not ‘in his blood’? The irony is that the daughter of his staunch Afrikaner neighbours, Cornélie, falls madly in love with him, actually seduces him when he is most vulnerable and finds herself pregnant. Rather than give birth to another ‘bastard’, the Afrikaner seamstress of the town with full co-operation of Cornélie's mother, performs an abortion to preserve Cornélie's purity. In pristine white she later marries another farmer and the purity of the next generation is guaranteed.

This novel is followed by *Eers Linkie dan Johanna* (1979). The simple yet complex figure of Linkie dominates the first half of the book: Linkie the singer who performs in nightclubs and dance-halls, the bulimic eater, the man who always grimaces - the deeply tragic person whose world, however small, gains a much wider meaning within the framework of the book. Then there is Johanna, who functions both as a commentary on and an explanation of Linkie. 1981 saw the publication of another Stockenström novel, *Die kremetartekspedisie* (see 6.2), followed in 1987 by *Kaapse rekvisiete* set in the world of theatre and with a definite feminist content.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s women's writing in Afrikaans continued to increase in boldness, often rejecting the traditional norms and values imposed on Afrikaner women. What clearly emerges from their work is how they differ from their male counterparts in their portrayal of female characters. Examples are Jeanne Goosen in *Om 'n mens na te boots* (1975) and *Louoond* (1987);
Eleanor Baker in *Wêreld sonder einde* (1972), *Splinterspel* (1973), *Monica* (1978) and *'n Geslote boek* (1981); Lettie Viljoen in *Klaaglied vir Koos* (1984) and Marie Heese in *Die uurwerk kantel* (1976). Stories are often told from a woman's perspective, the main character is often an emancipated Afrikaner woman and there are even suggestions of lesbian relationships in some of these novels.

Dalene Matthee's 'bush' trilogy, viz. *Kringle in die bos* (1984), *Fiela se kind* (1985) and *Moerbeibos* (1987) have a historical framework and, although they deal with the lives of people in the Knysna forest in the nineteenth century, British colonial rule at the Cape and all its ramifications permeate the novels and the lives of the characters, as well as making an indictment against the colonial power for raping the land by destroying the indigenous forest and making almost extinct the Knysna elephants for their tusks.

The above is merely a selection of writing by Afrikaner women. The main purpose was to illustrate the progress - quantitatively as well as qualitatively - that has been made in this area of Afrikaner writing. However, in their new-found emancipation these women writers often demonstrate a kind of introspection and preoccupation with their own ‘freedom’, once again forming a tight little laager within the laager of Afrikaner exclusivity, while turning a blind eye to the greater South African reality, thus confirming the general mechanism of public vs private and male vs female.

### 6.2 Overview of white women depicting black women

Throughout almost the entire period of apartheid rule the black woman as a character in the novels by Afrikaner women remains a strikingly absent unit, something which appears to be inconsistent with the ‘reality’ in which many black and white women find themselves, i.e. working in close proximity to each other, sharing domestic work, together raising the white woman's children, sharing the same physical surroundings for most of the working day and both being victims of patriarchy. Of course, the black woman appears occasionally in stories as a one-dimensional figure lurking in the background but seldom as a character who changes or causes to change the course of events or who herself undergoes change. For most of the time she is the non-speaking, non-focalizing figure who speaks only when spoken to and whose interior life remains a closed book to the reader. The very fact that black and white women have so much in common and therefore ought to be able to forge close bonds, makes the absence of black women in Afrikaner women's writing all the more bemusing for the outside observer and all the more a confirmation of how effectively Afrikaner ideology has permeated their artistic products.
While Afrikaner male authors have attempted during the first thirty years of apartheid rule to portray black women, albeit often in peripheral and stereotyped roles, Afrikaner women have displayed a singular reluctance to do so, even though the factors described above place them in a better position to give a more balanced view of black women (cf. for example Nadine Gordimer's assertion). One is inclined to attribute this neglect to craven indifference on the part of Afrikaner female authors but one has to go back into time to find the reasons for this deliberate exclusion of blacks from their writing. Afrikaner ideology and images of Afrikaner women by Afrikaner men have already been dealt with extensively in Chapter 2, and all that remains to be said here is that the ingrained attitude towards blacks originated in the European dictum that placing ‘civilised’ and ‘savages’ on equal footing would be ‘contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and colour’. It was especially the task of the Afrikaner woman to keep her race pure and any contact with black men and women would constitute a threat to that purity. It would seem that this ideology spilled over into the artistic products of the Afrikaner woman as well.

A forerunner of white women writers depicting black women is undoubtedly Alba Bouwer in her *Stories van Rivierplaas* (1957). Recalling memories from her childhood, the adult narrator devotes a large portion of her narration to the old Basotho woman who was employed as domestic servant on their farm but who fulfilled so many roles in the narrator's life: nanny, story-teller, disciplinarian, surrogate mother and teacher, in short, she was ‘mammy’ or ‘Aunt Jemima’ of *Gone with the Wind* fame. Nevertheless, Ou-Melitie - as she was called by white children and adults alike - despite her nurturing role in the lives of the white children, had absolutely no power or authority over them. The reader as well as Ou-Melitie are never allowed to forget or ignore the authoritative voice of the ‘madam’.

The Afrikaans literary world had to wait more than twenty years after Alba Bouwer's contribution for another black woman to make it into the annals of Afrikaner literary history. With the novel *Poppie Nongena* (1978) Elsa Joubert made a quantum leap into the world of international narrative art and with this single work she exonerates Afrikaner women from blame for excluding black women from their work (see 6.3).

Joubert's novel is followed by Wilma Stockenström's *Die kremetartekspedisie* (1981), translated into English as *The expedition to the baobab tree*. Vastly different from Joubert's novel in almost all aspects (style, language, genre, structure, narration and focalization, for example), they have one feature in common: both novels have as their protagonist a black woman. Stockenström's novel tells the story of an anonymous slave woman who, after undertaking a doomed expedition with her penultimate owner to the ‘city of rose-quartz’, finds herself left to her own devices after the other members of the expedition party either desert or
abscond or die. After much hardship she finds shelter in a hollow baobab tree where she spends the rest of her days and manages to survive with the help of the 'little people' (possibly the Khoisan). It is from this tree that she herself undertakes various inner expeditions, consisting of her experiences as a slave and her journeys of reminiscence. These 'journeys' at the same time encompass all the other expeditions undertaken in the story and in the text.

In the novel we have an example of retrospective first-person narrative, with the slave woman both narrator and focalizer; she is in fact the only focalizer, without the intervention of a narrating instance outside the represented events, without a shift in focalization - in fact, this narrative is an example of what Genette terms 'fixed internal focalization'. Of course, signs of the ever-present implicit author can be detected, especially in the language used by the slave woman. Afrikaner critics find it incongruous that a slave woman can use such poetic language that is ascribed to her, but once again the implicit author intervenes, to demonstrate that elaborate, sophisticated thoughts are not bound to a specific culture, race or language. This is especially true for this narrative which takes on the form of an interior monologue from beginning to end.

Since this is a retrospective narrative, the slave woman's experiences are articulated in an anti-chronological sequence, switching from present to past to present frequently. The reader has to deconstruct the text in order to reconstruct the slave woman's life from her childhood to her imminent death. As an old woman, her thoughts sometimes wander, concretised by the order and frequency of the narrated experiences in the text.

Although this novel does not deal specifically with contemporary South African conditions, a straight line can nevertheless be drawn between the experiences and situation of the slave woman (e.g. her status as a mere 'labour unit', the exploitation of her body by her different owners) and the situation of the black woman in present-day South Africa.

Another novel with a black woman as a functional character and which had a considerable impact on Afrikaner literature, is Dalene Matthee's *Fiela se kind* (1985), translated into English as *Fiela's child*. This is the story of Benjamin Komoeti/Lucas van Rooyen. A three-year old white child, Lucas van Rooyen, disappears in the dense Knysna forest and is never found. Very late one night a three-year old white child is found crying outside Fiela Komoeti's house. She takes him in, rears him and cares for him as if he were her own. Could this child be Lucas? But the distance between the Knysna forest and the Langekloof where Fiela lives with her family is great, apart from the dangerous mountains which have to be crossed before getting there. Is it possible for a three-year old child to cover that distance, to find his way out of the forest and to cross such treacherous mountains all on his own? Nevertheless, two white census inspectors discover this
white child living among ‘coloureds’ and immediately set in motion a process to
reclaim this child and restore him to his ‘rightful’ parents. The relentless machinery
of the law even resorts to fabricated evidence to get this child away from the
‘coloureds’, even though no natural mother could have cared better for Benjamin
than Fiela did. She puts up a tremendous fight, courageous, strong and determined,
but as a member of the colonised and a ‘coloured’ she is powerless against the mighty
law. Benjamin/Lucas is ‘given’ by court order to the lazy, struggling, slovenly Van
Rooyens but he retains the dignity, conscientiousness, honesty, neatness and thrift
Fiela has inculcated. Meanwhile, Fiela makes several journeys on foot across the
forbidding mountains to Knysna in a bid to get Benjamin back but is threatened with
arrest if she tries to intervene in the processes of the law. She never gives up hope
that one day Benjamin will return to her, which he does.

The story is told by a narrating instance and the focalization is almost exclusively
external. Fiela is perceived by the EN in a very favourable light, someone with
immense strength of character who has faced the disappointments and sorrows of
her life with dignity and the conviction that she has nothing to be ashamed of. When
she fights to retain Benjamin, the true strength of her character is revealed, in her
words, actions and thoughts which the EF penetrates time and again. This is indeed
a reversal of the traditional manner in which the black woman character is perceived.

However, while it is true that a few novels confront the South African actuality with
regard to the black woman [e.g. Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena, Die muur van
die pes (Brink) and to a lesser extent Louoond (Jeanne Goosen)], novels by Afrikaner
male as well as female authors in which a black woman character features
prominently, generally have their setting in the remote past of African/South African
history, for example, Keas in Die groot anders-maak (Rabie, circa 1730), Ma-Rose
in Houd-den-Bek (Brink, 1824/5), the slave woman in Die kremetartekspedisie
(Stockenström, circa 1400-1834) and Fiela in Fiela se kind (Matthee, circa 1870).
Do these authors consciously circumvent the reality of the present South African
situation by presenting a world which no longer exists? By so doing, are they trying
to prove that the invidious situation of the black woman in present-day South Africa
is a legacy from the colonial past and that blame should rather be apportioned to the
colonisers and not to apartheid rule?

6.3 Elsa Joubert

From those women writers who have depicted a black woman character I have chosen
Elsa Joubert, especially for her novel* Poppie Nongena. Just two years after the youth
revolt - with its profound effect on the mothers of the nation - shook
South Africa and the world at large, this novel made its appearance, tracing the trials and tribulations of a black woman from her birth up to and including the youth revolt of 1976. The publication of the novel, while memories of 1976 were still fresh in the minds of all concerned and while political upheavel in South Africa had reached a scale never before experienced, was well-timed, for its impact upon the literary world at the time was far greater than it would be today. The fact that Joubert and other Afrikaner women authors have apparently been oblivious of the plight of black women until 1976 has simply been ignored in the accolades the novel received.

6.3.1 Joubert's oeuvre regarding blacks and ‘preparation’ for the novel

Elsa Joubert made her debut as a writer mainly in the travelogue, especially reporting on her travels through Europe, East and North Africa. The first in which she depicts the life-style of blacks are the travelogues Suid van die wind (1962) in which she recounts her visits to Mauritius, Réunion and Madagascar; Die staf van Monomotapa (1964) which is a report on her visit to Mozambique and Die nuwe Afrikaan (1974) dealing with her visit to Angola. Kannemeyer (1982:316) points out that time and again there is ‘a socio-political approach and motive behind her travels through the African countries, because she especially wants to establish how the different countries deal with the problem of race relations and the conflict between different cultures’. He goes on to say that her travelogues reveal a particular sensitivity to atmosphere, especially the ‘fermenting, oppressive sphere of Africa’. A close connection can be seen between the portrayal of Africa, the relationships between people and the conflict between cultures in her travelogues and three novels with which Joubert makes her contribution to the so-called ‘literature of commitment’.

The first of these novels is Ons wag op die kaptein (1963), translated as To die at sunset (1982) with its setting in Angola, spanning only one day in which a group of whites is held hostage by a band of black guerillas in Northern Angola. The novel is described as one in which ‘white and black, friend and foe, in a kind of realisation of shared guilt and alliance are driven towards each other’ (Grové 19:210). The oppressive tropical atmosphere of Africa is again invoked in the novel Bonga (1971). The novel basically deals with the coming together of two people, Bonga and Inacia Maria from the world of ‘partly primitive half-castes’ (‘halfbloede’ they are called by Kannemeyer 1982:318) at Massangano and the relatively civilised white community at Tete respectively. Bonga has the overwhelming desire to free himself from his (dark) background and to rise to the light which he finds in his obsessive interest in the church and the white woman, while it is precisely the sensual, primitive and bestial in Bonga which attracts Inacia Maria to him. Kannemeyer (1982:319) assesses this novel as giving a ‘satisfactory account of the development of a primitive person and his growth to the light of
civilisation, while the whole presents a compelling Africa variation on the centuries-old theme of the conflict between two cultures, lifestyles and families’. The third of these ‘committed’ novels is *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978).

In an article entitled ‘Die ontstaan van *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*’ (1987:253-256), Joubert herself provides an explanation of how this novel originated and how she made preparations for it. She admits that the ‘immediate cause’ was the 1976 revolt but adds that the origin of the book, however, goes back much further. Her travels through African countries, bringing about an increase in her love for and interest in the greater Africa, are part of that preparation. She observed the patterns of co-existence between black and white in the countries she visited and how colonialism was doomed. While travelling through Africa and reporting as a journalist and novelist, she ‘unconsciously’ made her preparations for the novel *Poppie Nongena*. She states:

I have in different ways tried to learn about the life of black people around us, in the cities and in the rural areas. I visited Transkei, Venda, Ciskei and had interviews with teachers, business people, professors at the Universities of Umtata and Turfloop, and students. I visited schools, clinics and the courts. I had conversations with traditional leaders and ordinary people firmly rooted in their traditions, I visited witchdoctors and attended meetings of old men. In Soweto, in Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu the same... Witchdoctors in Nyanga and Soweto even more powerful than those in the rural areas. I have had discussions with young people and writers, have read their work, also the work of writers who have fled the country or whose work was banned (Joubert 1987:254 - my translation).

Very commendable, one would say, especially for one who had been ‘blind and deaf in (her) own country’ (Joubert 1987:254) but significantly Joubert does not mention whether or not she has had the opportunity or made conscious attempts to meet with the real leaders of the people and not only the government puppets in the bantustans; also significant is the emphasis on her visits to witchdoctors. Obviously Joubert's statement reveals naïveté and the assumption that after her visits she had ‘inside knowledge’ of the lives of blacks (cf. for example her statement: ‘Almost every scene Poppie mentioned, I knew myself’, p. 255).

### 6.3.2 Poppie Nongena (1978)

The novel has been widely acclaimed both in South Africa and abroad, mainly for the reason that it is ‘breaking the silence’ (Lenta 1984:147-157) which for so long characterised the lives of black women. Here the life of one black woman with the fictitious name of Poppie Nongena is revealed to the South African population at large but especially to the white reading public who until then had been oblivious of the black woman's travails or who wilfully shut their eyes and ears to the pictures and cries coming from that direction. Indeed, Elsa Joubert has to be commended...
for her courageous attempt to expose the plight of Poppie which purportedly assumes universal dimensions.

However, the tragic fact remains that the majority of African women in South Africa is severely disadvantaged in almost all spheres of human life: uneducated or with very little education, unskilled or semi-skilled through no fault of their own. These women, as indeed all black people in South Africa, were socialized by the colonisers into believing that white is best and beautiful, with the result that white models in lifestyle, beliefs, language, culture, etc. became the goals to be aspired to. In the process, a systematic and not always too subtle indoctrination of the black woman, more than the black man, executed itself, especially since the black woman as domestic worker is in closer contact with and more exposed to white values than her male counterpart. As mother, she inevitably will socialize her children in the same manner, thereby causing a vicious circle of indoctrination.

The questions inevitably generated in the mind of a fellow black South African woman with regard to Poppie are: What kind of black woman is presented to the reading public? To what extent has she been influenced or even indoctrinated by her various white ‘madams’? What kind of questions was asked of Poppie by the interviewer, bearing in mind Joubert's admission that the information extracted from Poppie came in the form of ‘question-and-answer sessions’ (Joubert 1987:255) and bearing in mind Joubert's journalistic background which does not preclude the asking of ‘leading’ questions, a certain amount of bias and the use of manipulative techniques? Also bearing in mind the vast cleavages between the interviewer (Joubert) and interviewee (the black woman who was to become Poppie) - one in a position of power and dominance, the other powerless and oppressed; the one privileged, middle-class and white, the other disadvantaged, proletarian and black; the one safely cocooned and emotionally strong by her very whiteness and privilege, the other broken, demoralised and helpless - the question also arises whether the information extracted is a true reflection of what Poppie really felt and suffered. Let us not forget that power relations in South Africa have often been responsible for the dominated group, in order not to antagonise the group that assumes hierarchy over them, telling the dominant exactly what the latter wants to hear and believe. Finally, bearing in mind that Joubert by her own admission has done ‘extensive research’ into the lives of black South Africans, one is inspired to ask with Dabi Nkululeko:

Can an oppressed nation or segments of it, engaged in a struggle for liberation from its oppressors, rely on knowledge produced, researched and theorized by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressor nation? (Nkululeko 1987:89).

The above questions are mainly generated by the fact that the story is presented as ‘true’. In the ‘Vooraf’ of the Afrikaans version the author states:
This story is based on the facts which I have gathered concerning the life of Poppie Rachel Nongena nee Matati. It is a true story, but for obvious reasons the names of the people have been changed. The book does not attempt to give a total image of the political and social events of the past forty years concerning the rural, urban and resettled black people. It only attempts to describe one family's experiences during that period as reliably as possible. Nothing is therefore added which has not been experienced by Poppie and her family members themselves (my translation).

The ‘To the reader’ in the English translation reads somewhat differently. There the author states:

This novel is based on the actual life story of a black woman living in South Africa today. Only her name, Poppie Rachel Nongena, born Matati, is invented. The facts were related to me not only by Poppie herself, but by members of her immediate family and her extended family or clan, and they cover one family's experience over the past forty years.

In one of her many interviews Joubert stated later that from the mass of information she had to make a selection. While it may be true that ‘nothing is added’, the question remains: How much is omitted?

In the ensuing pages an attempt shall be made to construct a picture of the protagonist as presented in the text and to reconstruct that portrait according to the perceptions and ideology of another black woman, myself. Let it also be said that my argument is neither with the merits or demerits of the novel according to Western literary theory (by which criteria it has been evaluated by white critics), nor is it my purpose to demean the value of the book in a volatile South Africa. My only aim is to look at Poppie, who has been looked at mainly through white male and female as well as black male eyes, from another perspective. In my discussion and assessment of Poppie I shall of necessity reveal a certain ambivalence. While her story is a deeply moving one and while as a fellow black woman - though not oppressed and marginalised to the same extent as Poppie - I can fully empathise with her, I nevertheless find Poppie, the way she portrays herself and the way she is being portrayed ambivalent to say the least, as shall be made clear in the course of the chapter.

6.3.2.1 Title of the novel and naming

The title of the original Afrikaans version of the novel is Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena and of the subsequent English translation by the author herself The long journey of Poppie Nongena. Already in these two titles a fundamental semantic difference can be observed: ‘swerfjare’ (literally ‘roving/roaming/wandering years’) becomes ‘long journey’, thus obfuscating the roving nature and
focusing on the length (plus-minus 40 years) of Poppie's journey. In any case, in both instances the emphasis is on Poppie's journey(s).

In the English paperback edition the title is drastically shortened to simply *Poppie*, thereby taking the focus away from the journey motif and pinpointing on the protagonist herself. The omission of Poppie's last name from this title puts her in absolute focus to the exclusion of everything else; it also signifies the rejection of a patriarchal system whereby a married woman takes on the name of her husband (the extra-textual information supplied in both the Afrikaans and English versions is that her maiden name is Matati; the titles name her as Poppie Nongena). This shortened title may also be an indication of the ‘maids and madams’ situation in the novel whereby maids are known only by their first name or some substitute which is easier on the tongue. Bearing in mind that Poppie's given name is Ntombizodumo (= young girl from a generation of great women) this conclusion does not seem to be too far-fetched. In connection with the naming of maids by their madams, Jacklyn Cock (1980/1989:117) posits that it is another ‘technique of depersonalisation’. In her research about the maids and madams situation she found that

The extent of this depersonalisation is illustrated by the fact that only 10 per cent of the employer sample knew their servants' full Xhosa names. Several habitually called their servants by standardised names, such as ‘Cookie’ or ‘Sissie’.

In connection with Miriam Tlali's novel *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975), Margaret Lenta (1989:241) observes that ‘the difference in status between black and white women... is marked by the way in which they are addressed, the whites being Mrs Stein, Mrs Kuhn, Mrs Green, while Muriel is always called, as are domestic servants, by her first name’. The same holds true for Poppie and her different employers and the various white officials she has to contend with. The name ‘Poppie’ (little doll), even extended to a form with the double diminutive ‘Poppietjie’, was given to her by her grandmother as an expression of love and caring. Ironically this very name assumes dire properties and signifies much of her situation as Poppie's story unfolds. Henriette Roos (1983:145) points out that Poppie is a doll, a plaything in the hands of bureaucratic powers, her powerlessness against legal and social systems and Margaret Lenta (1984:150) considers the name Poppie as ‘sadly prophetic of her helplessness against those who will control her adult life’.

The name Poppie, in addition to signifying her ‘powerlessness’ and ‘helplessness’, assumes even more sombre connotations when considering how Poppie perceives herself and how she is portrayed by the unidentified narrator: an inflatable little doll who collapses with every pin-prick, only to be patched up, reinflated, pricked and then collapses again (see 6.4.2.10). The name ‘Poppie’ can
be considered as prospective of her role as reproducer of producers in a society where
the zero value of the African woman is somehow conveniently abolished when it is
expected of her to provide producers of cheap labour in her children. Bearing in mind
that a doll is a copy, a false reproduction of a woman, an object to be possessed, then
Poppie's situation becomes reflected in her name: lifeless, unfeeling, dispensable, a
commodity which can be discarded at will.

The title(s) of the novel and the naming of the main character also suggest the
ambivalence which characterises Poppie's existence and her self-perception. She was
given two English names as baptismal names, Rachel Regina (Rachel = ewelamb;
Regina = queen); her Xhosa name is Ntombizodumo and when she married Stone
Nongena her in-laws named her Nonkosinathi (= the Lord is with us). She is called
by her English name ‘Rachel’ by her different employers and only her close relatives
call her by the name ‘Poppie’, thus a private and intimate code. It becomes clear why
this private name is used in the title instead of Poppie's more public name ‘Rachel’.
This reportage is a penetration into the most private and intimate aspects of the main
character's life; the title highlights her helplessness and zero value.

The title(s) have implications for the narrating process as well. Expectations aroused
by a narrating procédé of a first-person narrative are soon quashed when considering
these titles - they imply that a narrator/EN is about to tell Poppie's story, for if Poppie
narrates her own story then surely the title will not refer to her in the third person.
The narrating process is of crucial importance in this novel and will be examined in
6.4.2.3.

6.3.2.2 Reception of the novel

The novel, described by Henriette Roos (1987:3) as a ‘success story’ which indeed
it is, was reviewed by the foremost literary critics in South Africa's major and lesser
newspapers, women's magazines, political, literary and sociological journals and
generated literary discussions by academics at mainly white universities, while the
general public reaction to it was on a scale rarely matched only perhaps by that to
André P. Brink's novel Kennis van die aand. The wide publicity surrounding the
book was mainly in the form of accolades and to try and give a comprehensive
account of its reception is almost impossible and definitely not the main purpose of
this chapter. The book has been translated into the major European, including Eastern
European languages, it was scripted for the stage and published as a drama in 1984.
In 1982 it was performed as a highly successful musical in New York. During 1979
alone the book was awarded the Louis Luyt, C.N.A. and W.A. Hofmeyr prizes and
in Britain it was awarded with the Royal Society of Literature Prize.
The following views are those of white women and black and white men; significantly, I could not find a single review by a black woman. For Elize Botha (1980:428-431) the most successful aspect of the novel is the portrayal of the main character Poppie and for André P. Brink (1980:141-143) the remarkability of the novel lies in its ‘stylistic presentation...its amazing understatement... and a vision of human bondage’ which is perhaps the ‘ultimate sense of this poignant book’. Jakes Gerwel (Oggendblad, 28.02.79) isolates the technical experimentation and historical basis of the novel in his assessment but does not view it as an unqualified success, since he disputes the presentation of events in the final section of the novel (‘The Revolt of the Children’). Gerrit Olivier (1979:12-22) has many problems with the novel, especially regretting the ‘lack of order’ which leads to a ‘disorderly and fragmented’ work and views the ‘confused and confusing narrative perspective’ as unnecessary and slovenly. He nevertheless sees Poppie the character as a ‘township Mutter Courage’. In Richard Rive's reply (1980:57-60) to Olivier's review, he emphasises the ‘universal’ aspect of the novel and praises Joubert for successfully ‘cutting away the floss and penetrating to the very core of the situation of the ordinary Black in South Africa’.

The views quoted above are all from academics. However, literary critics in the press tend to go overboard in their reviews. For example, in some circles the novel is seen to be an indictment against Afrikanerdom and an account of the demise of the Afrikaner. Professor Viljoen, interviewed by Die Volksblad, 11.04.79, objected to the picture of the Afrikaner in the novel. He states: ‘Most Afrikaners experience it as an indictment, whereas Poppie has never had any cause to feel aggrieved. If the Afrikaner had not done so much for her she would never have developed a longing for civilisation. She would never have enjoyed this in her original primitive condition’.

One particular facet of the reception of the novel by white critics is their ‘urgent and systematic attempts to depoliticise the work’, for example: ‘The book is furthermore no political accusation. It is also not a sociological report. It is a work of literature in which lived perception and experience are given a convincing, artistic and lasting form’ (Audrey Blignault in Beeld, 20.11.78). Colin Melville in The Star (01.10.80) claims that politics do not enter the entire discourse and the literary critic of The Argus, O.D. Wollheim stated on 14.03.79 that the sensation which the book has caused could not be attributed to its political implications, but to its deeper, literary quality. Lynne Burger in the Eastern Province Herald of 17.04.79 emphasises that the novel's honesty is apolitical, while Maureen Pithey in The Cape Times (07.08.80) claims that the book is never political. Even André P. Brink suggests that the greatness of the work lies in the achievement of not lowering the literary to the level of South African politics, but rather by purifying and refining the socio-political, the author transforms it into literature proper (Rapport, 03.12.78 and 1980:143). Jan Rabie praises the book for the way in which it reveals the ‘authentic voice of black working people’ and reveals that

this ‘authenticity’ stems from its lack of political character: ‘In this book black Afrikaners speak with their own authentic voices, poor working-class people with no political motives, no racial hatred, only intent on obtaining a pass, keeping the family together somehow, keeping alive somehow’ (The Cape Times, 06.12.78).

Even more surprising are the author's views in this regard. Repeatedly in several interviews and reports she regrets the fact that some people have read the work as a political text. In an interview with Pat Schwartz of the Rand Daily Mail (04.01.79) the author states: ‘The point is, it is not a political book. I wrote it because the theme was one that interested me. I wanted to bring across the person as a human being, and that is as far as my interest goes’. Die Oosterlig (09.03.79) reported that ‘politics is not her (Joubert's) motive’ and Dene Smuts in Fair Lady (11.04.79) claims that ‘the book is working the way it should - on the human level ... the political debate does not concern her (Joubert)’. Joubert was determined to keep a careful watch over the reproduction of her text into other forms in order to control its political thrust. Of offers to film the work in 1981 she said: ‘I want to keep a close watch on the production because it is not my intention to make a political statement’ (The Star, 18.06.81). Any political motivation, she claims, would have turned it into a mere ‘pamphlet’: ‘Poppie is a human novel that goes beyond the boundaries of politics’ (The Sowetan, 18.07.81). She wants it to be judged as a literary work, not a political one (The Natal Mercury, 06.05.80) and, all in all, she would prefer the book to be left to ‘speak for itself’ (Rand Daily Mail, 04.01.79). White critics have depoliticised the novel to such an extent that Beeld (22.03.79) claims most readers read it as a religious novel while the work is also praised for its ‘universality’.

In contrast to these attempts by white critics to universalise Poppie's story the few blacks who wrote reviews insist on its particular, local and political character. A reviewer in the black newspaper Post (04.03.78) states: ‘This book is political. It cannot be anything else’. Aggrey Klaaste of The Sowetan (20.07.81) writes: ‘We don't have to be told the story of Poppie Nongena. We live it’ and a reviewer in the Evening Post (09.02.79) expresses amazement at claims that the work has ‘opened the eyes of whites’. S/he writes: ‘Poppie is in 1000 musty Black Sash files. She is part of the experience of all white South Africans. She washed their dishes and clothes, served them at table, swept their floors, looked after their children’. One of the few newspaper reviews already referred to and which addressed the novel in political and social terms is the one by Jakes Gerwel in Oggendblad of 28.02.79.

David Schalkwyk's well-argued essay in which he insists that the novel be read as a political statement - even though I fully agree - and his numerous examples of how the novel has been depoliticised by white critics bring me to an important anomaly, even ambivalence. Yes, Joubert and the white critics are quite correct in stating that this is not a political novel. Joubert has gone to great lengths to make
it clear that she had no political motives when writing the book, and this is clearly illustrated when reading the novel. Poppie, her relatives and the unidentified narrator stand particularly aloof from the reality of South African legislation which, in the final analysis, is solely responsible for Poppie's situation. All of them, with the exception of Jakkie, display a singular naïveté and Joubert's contention that she ‘wanted to bring across the person (Poppie) as a human being’ (how else does a novelist bring across his/her human characters?) smacks not only of paternalism but is also an admission that the black women has never been seen as ‘a human being’ but merely as a labour unit. By this very admission Joubert denies that this ‘human being’ is bruised and battered by political forces and would rather create the impression that her situation is brought about by other forces beyond her control. The nearest she gets to blaming political forces for Poppie's situation, is in the implied condemnation of the children's revolt.

One wonders whether the novel would have been as well received if the protagonist were a political activist who experienced the same traumas as Poppie, and not the apolitical, long-suffering woman Poppie is made out to be, if she were more outspoken in her criticism of the forces responsible for her fate. One wonders whether the story would have been told at all - a black political activist would certainly not have sought a white Afrikaner to whom to tell her story. Would Joubert have dared to tell the story of such a woman?

The only conclusion I can come to from the author's statements regarding the non-political content of her book added to which is the very explicit statement in the ‘Vooraf’ of her novel that ‘nothing has been added which had not been experienced by Poppie and her family members themselves’ is that Joubert reveals a double agenda. On the one hand she makes sure that she does not antagonise the white establishment - who are the implied readers of this novel - by treading on ‘safe’ terrain, i.e. by choosing and portraying a main character who is as politically naive as the author herself; on the other hand this novel would reveal her ‘compassion’ and ‘understanding’ of the plight of black people - especially at a time when it was ‘safer’ for whites to gain the trust of black people - thus giving her some credibility among black readers and internationally. Bearing in mind that every reading is a rewriting of the text and also bearing in mind the author's injunction that the book ‘must be allowed to speak for itself’, my intention is precisely that, i.e. to allow the book to speak for itself to a black woman who would interpret it from her perspective and experiences in apartheid South Africa.

6.3.2.3 Narration and focalization

Before considering these very important aspects of Poppie Nongena, it is necessary to first establish whether it is fact, fiction or faction and secondly to briefly explain
the structure of the novel, for both these aspects have a crucial bearing on the narrating process and focalization in the novel. All these aspects are so closely linked to one another that it is difficult to separate them, with the result that the following paragraphs may show a certain amount of overlapping.

The work has been described by different critics as a ‘reportage’, ‘documentary fiction’ or simply ‘documentary’ and as ‘faction’. It may also be classified as an example of ‘New Journalism’ which refers to a series of works appearing after 1965 and in which journalistic facts, scenes and situations are presented in a literary form and as coherent whole. Truman Capote coined the term ‘non-fiction novel’ when he referred to his work *In cold blood* (1965). When considering the information provided in the ‘Vooraf’/‘To the reader’ of Joubert's work - i.e. ‘facts I have gathered’, ‘a true story’, ‘actual life story’ - then it can be all these things, but when the author herself calls her work a ‘novel’ (English paperback edition) and a ‘story’, then descriptions like ‘reportage’ and ‘documentary’ can immediately be excluded from the discussion for a fictional element is then brought into play. The term ‘faction’ would then seem to be the most appropriate description of the work.

If we assume that this is a true-life story told as a novel, i.e. ‘faction’, then we have to take into account the criteria for such a novel. David Lodge (1980:27-28) formulates these criteria as follows:

>This means more than selecting and ordering the narration of events with an eye to effects of suspense and ironic juxtaposition; and it means more than evoking atmosphere, setting and character by an artful selection of synecdochic details; it means above all presenting events as they were perceived and reflected upon by the people involved, rather than from the detached perspective of a historian.

It would seem that Joubert's novel fulfils these criteria, but then Lodge also prefers an absence of the author's personality from the text and stylistic self-effacement. Once again, it can be said that Joubert's novel fulfils this criterion for she tells her story very largely within the constraints of the linguistic registers of the people involved. Where Joubert's novel differs from Lodge's criteria, is when she overtly signals her presence in the text by using declarative tags such as ‘Poppie tells’, ‘says Poppie’, etc., i.e. signalling the presence of an external narrator, and when this EN uses the very linguistic registers of the characters in narrating parts of Poppie's story. We acknowledge that absolute truth is never attainable in human affairs; but the basic contract the non-fiction novelist makes with his/her readers, the guarantee that his/her story is based entirely on verifiable sources, does enable him/her to exert over them the spell of the classic realistic novel. In Joubert's case she has undoubtedly succeeded in exerting this spell over her white readers.
The external and internal structure of the novel are inextricably linked to the narrating process. Since several critics have dealt at length with the structuring of the novel, I shall confine myself to only the main aspects of its structure.

Externally the novel is clearly divided into seven parts with 83 sub-sections: Part I ‘Upington’ (10); Part II ‘Lamberts Bay’ (11); Part III ‘Cape Town’ (10); Part IV ‘Poppie's Pass’ (15); Part V ‘The Ciskei’ (14); Part VI ‘The People of the Land’ (9) and Part VII ‘The Revolt of the Children’ (14). The expectations raised about a journey and its roving nature in the title are confirmed by these headings in the author's text, in addition to indicating a strict chronological order in the narrated events (N.B. In the Afrikaans version the chronology is even more explicitly indicated in the headings, e.g. Part I ‘Poppie's Childhood in Upington’; Part II ‘Poppie's Teenage Years and Marriage at Lamberts Bay’, etc.). Externally then the novel therefore reveals a clear relationship to the internal structure. Although Poppie's story unfolds chronologically, Marisa Mouton (1984:14-20) identifies a definite two-fold structure. According to her, in Parts I-IV which she calls Period A, one perspective, that of Poppie, dominates. This period ends with a crisis in Poppie's personal life as is indicated by her words: ‘What can you do, if you can't go one way any more, then you take a road the other way’ (p. 192). The start of Period B (Part V-VII) is indicated by the words: ‘the old life fell away from her’ (p. 195), intensified by the symbolism of the train: ‘the coaches on half the train were hooked off and pushed back and shunted on to a new line, when the train whistled in a new way and jerked the newly-hitched wagons to life behind him’ (p. 195). During this period Poppie's life and that of her family members is characterised by uncertainty about the future. Towards the end of this period Poppie finds herself in a greater crisis than at the end of the previous period. While mainly her personal life was put into focus during Period A, the entire community of which she is part is in turmoil in Period B.

When reading the first sentence of the text, ‘We are Xhosa people from Gordonia, says Poppie’ (p. 11) and the subsequent two pages of narrative, the impression is created that we are reading the story of Poppie's life as told by Poppie herself to an anonymous listener. Very soon, however, a third-person varied with first-person narrative clearly emerges. We can therefore conclude that there are in fact two texts combined into one text: a Poppie text told in the first person by an acting personage and an anonymous text told in the third person by a non-acting, non-participating anonymous narrator. The narration continually switches from first person to third person, often in the same narrated event, for example:

For Poppie there was no more schooling because she had to look after mama's new baby who had been born while they were away. Mama went to work in the factory and brought the child to Poppie ... From her ninth year Poppie took care of the children mama had by buti Mbatane ... I looked after mama's children until I was thirteen, because at thirteen the factory took children to work as cleaners (pp. 47/8).
Janssens, Lijphart and Van Ijzeren (1981: 57-66) have carefully analysed this narrating process and have come to the conclusion that plus-minus 68,5% of the story is told by this unidentified narrator, while Poppie's contribution is a mere 29,5% and that of the other members of her family about 2%. Joubert herself explains the reason for the anonymous narrator appropriating more than two-thirds of the narration as follows:

At first I thought of using the transcripts from the (audio)tapes unaltered but after trying that I realised it would not work. It was boring and there was no link between or development in events. The book was to be more than a factual account. After that, I had the story told by an omniscient third-person narrator but that, too, did not work. It was once again a white person telling the story from the outside. It did not convince as authentic. I tried to let first Poppie narrate and then me but our narrating styles were too different. Ultimately I succeeded in telling the story in her narrating style, her ‘key’. In the book the perspective shifts from Poppie to a (external) narrator to dramatisation of events in order to combat monotony and uniformity (Joubert in an interview with Die Volksblad, 11.04.79 - my translation).

Joubert states further: ‘After many trials I decided on an alternation of first-person and third-person narration. The former to emphasise the authenticity, the latter to speed up the narrating time and to give perspective’ (Joubert 1987: 255). Janssens et a. (1981: 62) comments on this strategy in Part I of the novel as follows: ‘The reader, namely the white reader, must be captivated by the book so that he would not immediately dismiss it as monotonous and difficult to identify with’. They also justify the third-person narration in Part III (the 1960 unrest) thus: ‘If this part were narrated mainly by Poppie, then the chances are great that the white reader would dismiss her account of the events as too subjectively high-lighted from a black perspective’ (my emphasis). From the comments by both Joubert and Janssens et a. one is left in no doubt that the book was written for a white audience, but the most telling instruction one can draw from these comments is that white readers should not be put off, bored or antagonised by Poppie's ‘subjective’ experiences.

Of significance too are the parts narrated by the unidentified narrator but still focalized by either Poppie or members of her family. This narrating instance introduces the reader to the customs and traditions of the Xhosa (once again implying that the reader is a non-Xhosa). When Poppie is forced to make her home in Cape Town and confronted for the first time with pass problems, ‘sleep-in’ employment, the increasing turmoil in the townships, the death of Mr Mfukeng, it is again the anonymous narrator who takes over. Poppie's most traumatic and intense emotional experiences are not narrated in the first person but by the uninvolved third-person narrator, for example the strikes following the Sharpeville massacre, Poppie's submission to the forces of the law, her lonely life after having been forcibly removed from Cape Town and resettled in Mdantsane,
the funeral of her husband and the death of her grandchild. Clearly, Poppie's emotionalism and subjectivity - accusations often levelled at black women as if they were two of the seven deadly sins - must be contained and the only way it can be done, is for this uninvolved anonymous narrator to take over the narration.

What we have here, is a quite unusual and intricate form of focalization. Poppie, as the experiencing self, focalizes the events which so dramatically affect her life; in this sense she is an internal focalizer or focalizing subject. But she is also focalized by members of her family (and to a lesser extent by some of the white officials she encounters), thus becoming the focalized object. Poppie narrates her experiences and her vision of those experiences to an anonymous listener; she is therefore both narrator and focalizer. She narrates her experiences and her vision of those experiences to members of her family as well, who in turn focalize Poppie's focalization of those experiences and who then narrate Poppie's experiences, her focalization, their focalization of Poppie's focalization to the unidentified listener who narrates all that in the book. This can be termed multiple or variable internal focalization but I wish to term it layered internal focalization, where a layer has to be peeled away each time to get to the essence of Poppie's life and experiences. With the removal of each layer, another facet of Poppie's life is revealed. It is especially Poppie's mother (mama), her brother Mosie and his wife Rhoda who narrate Poppie's experiences and their focalization of those experiences to the unidentified listener. For example, when Poppie learns that her son Bonsile and one of her daughters had been detained by the police, her collapse is focalized and narrated to the listener by Rhoda:

Rhoda poured some medicine into a glass and gave it to Poppie. She had never seen her sister-in-law like this. It was as if her face had melted, as if the cheeks and the corners of her mouth could not stop trembling and would lose their form. But there are not tears. A little spittle runs from the corner of her mouth (p. 353).

However, the opposite happens more often. Poppie's relatives relate their experiences and their focalization of events to Poppie who in turn focalizes their reactions and then relates everything to the listener. Sometimes this focalizing process becomes difficult to decipher, especially establishing who tells what to whom and whose vision is given, for example:

Baby was the first to meet up with it [the children's revolt]. She went to the post office in Nyanga with Katie's child on her back. I went to phone, she told mama later, I was waiting at the telephone booth when the school children came along, pushing and shoving me aside. I heard them phoning from the telephone booth: We want to talk to the School Board, they said. They must have got through because I heard the money clinking and one was more eager to grab the mouthpiece than the other, I heard them say: We don't want to learn Afrikaans no more, we don't want Bantu education no more. Everyone grabbing the phone said the same thing till the time was up
Auk, what is this thing you are doing? I asked one of the children I knew, but he cheeked me: Shut up, sisi, you'll get hurt.

The same night they burned down the Nyanga post office. She saw the smoke rising from the school as well. She hid in the house, keeping the children with her, for she remembered the warning: You'll get hurt, sisi. But the next day she went back to see what had happened. The post office windows were smashed and the roof and woodwork burnt out, inside it was still smouldering, it stank of burnt rubber and paint, torn-up papers lay in heaps in the gutters and the road. The telephone had been pulled from the wall of the burnt-out booth. She picked it up from the gutter by its cord, it swung from her finger till she threw it from her. And the nylons drove up and down the streets, slowly (pp. 306/7).

In the above extract Baby experiences and focalizes the start of the revolt in Nyanga. She relates everything to her mother (mama), who in turn relates it to Poppie who relates it to the unidentified listener who narrates it to the reader. Apart from the distortions which usually occur when a story is related by one person to another to another, as is the case in the above extract, one also has to take cognisance of the bias and limitations resulting from the author's use of the device of focalization.

Returning to the bit of author's text before the main text in which she states that ‘nothing is therefore added which Poppie and her relatives have not experienced themselves’, one is puzzled by the anonymous narrator's penetration of the thoughts of mainly white people whom Poppie encounters. Surely Poppie could not have known what they thought and therefore could not have related these thoughts to the unidentified listener. For example, Mrs Retief the social worker comes to see Poppie after the birth of her second-last child and observes Poppie's appearance: ‘She looked at Poppie once again: Poppie's face had grown darker, the hollows of her eyes were nearly pitch-black, she looked neglected, the house was dirty ... Mrs Retief didn't believe Poppie could be like this ... Poppie seemed dazed and uncomprehending, afraid to leave the safety of the pondokkie, the four walls that enclosed her like the shell of a snail’ (p. 160); when Poppie nearly collapses in the street, a passing white woman ‘would have liked to help, but was unsure whether the black woman was drunk or not’ (p. 184); the white man at the pass office ‘sees her eyes on his face, expressionless. Her mouth does not move to talk. He sees the heavy body’ (p. 156); Mr Stevens at the pass office ‘looked down at her body, at the uncomfortable arms, the swollen face’ (p. 182); the white conductor on the train ‘knew their (displaced people's) type. It was not the first time he had to put people from the Cape off at Arnoldon, people who had no idea where they were going. They were like a stone you picked up in one place and put down in another. His face showed nothing of his feelings, but he seemed to pity them’ (pp. 196/7). This manipulative strategy is used with the clear intention of informing the (white) reader that white functionaries and people show compassion for Poppie's situation.

6.3.2.4 Journey motif

Journeying to and fro is an important element of Poppie's existence and gives clear indications of the ways Poppie perceives herself, how she is perceived by others but most importantly, how she is forced to perceive herself by the anonymous embedding narrator.

Henriette Roos (1983:141-144) recognises in *Poppie Nongena* the traditional epic convention, which can be traced back to the classic epic with its strict structural and thematic pattern, and motivates her assertion by mentioning the title of the novel, the family-tree scheme provided, the entire first chapter and the beginning of chapter 2. The indication of Poppie's place in the genealogical chain clearly shows a relationship between her roving years and those of heroic figures since Odysseus, according to Roos. The emphasis on the narrating act, the oral transmission from generation to generation of their journeying on far-flung roads until the end approaches is, according to Roos, present from the first sentence of the novel to the last. The sustained chronological, strict lineal narration unfolds according to personal as well as general human life-stages: birth, youth, marriage, motherhood, growing old, death.

Roos continues by stating that, since his/her birthplace has been left behind because of subjugation to powers of fate, the epic hero's journey is a search for a destination which could be a new fatherland, a regaining of the old home, an alternative to an era left behind. She even goes as far as viewing the roving Aeneas with his child holding his hand and Odysseus who towards the end of his journey allows his son Telemachus to take over, both as ‘predecessors’ of Poppie, wanderers who after many journeys attain knowledge and learn that their initial hopes were untenable. The desired destination is not reached nor is happiness achieved but an acceptance is finally accomplished.

I have quoted Roos extensively in the above two paragraphs, for she either wilfully ignores or misses the point of Poppie's enforced journeys, in addition to applying a Western European narrative tradition which effectively ‘confiscates’ Poppie's story. True enough, epic heroes more often than not are forced on their peregrinations because their circumstances have become so unbearable that remaining would mean deprivation and ultimately certain death. But they are nevertheless left the choice of either staying or leaving. Something Roos also seems to lose from sight is that Poppie can in no way be equated with epic heroes like Aeneas or Odysseus who are either rulers or of divine descent and who are forced to wander through ideological differences between them and their adversaries. Poppie is but one of millions who are equally forced into exile in their own country and without the option to stay. However bad her circumstances are, she is not offered any choice in the matter and forced to even worse conditions.
When we look again at the implications of a physical journey, especially from a (black) woman's point of view - i.e. enforced travel, escape from someone or something, a political quest, a journey in the psyche of the travelling self, a quest for (self-)knowledge, a flight from stereotypes, from the confines of a racist, patriarchal society and not least from the bonds of being a woman - then it would seem that none of them applies to Poppie. On the contrary, some of them are precisely the causes of Poppie's condition of being knocked about like a lifeless doll.

From her earliest childhood, tied to ouma Hannie's back, Poppie's life has been characterised by numerous smaller wanderings in which her grandmother, brothers and she were scrimping and scrouring for some kind of livelihood, journeying to collect food, firewood, dung and bones to sell to the Jew. Her schooldays were likewise a to and fro: Upington, Putsonderwater, back to Upington, Doringbaai, Lamberts Bay, all these journeys necessitated in the cause of survival. After her marriage to Stone Nongena, it is patriarchy that forces her to go to ‘Kaffirland’ - a journey 'from Lamberts Bay by bus to Graafwater, by train to Cape Town. They stayed over the day in Cape Town and caught the evening train. The next night at one o'clock they changed trains at Stormberg, for Burgersdorp, and at Burgersdorp they walked over the high bridge to catch the train to Aliwal North and at Aliwal North they changed trains for Lady Grey ... At sunset of the fourth day, they arrived at Sterkspruit and took the bus to Herschel’ (p. 77) - to meet her in-laws but more importantly to be initiated into the customs and traditions of the Xhosa. Then back to Lamberts Bay, only to be confronted with the full impact of South African politics. One should take note of the remarkable fractured sequences of Poppie's physical journeys (by bus, train and on foot, changing modes of transport frequently) to understand how fractured and fragile her existence is.

Forced out of Lamberts Bay by the Group Areas Act, Poppie and her family find themselves in the comfortless surroundings of the black townships and squatter camps of Cape Town. In addition to trekking from one shack to another, they drift from one job to another, often having to catch two buses and a train to get to their place of employment in the white areas. In order to hold down a job, get somewhere to live or enrol their children at a school, they had to be in possession of a pass, but a catch twenty-two situation arises: without a job, no pass; without a pass, no job. It is in her attempts to procure a pass that Poppie has to undertake numerous journeys, often lasting for most of the day, to the pass offices which ironically are situated in the white areas.

Poppie's forced removal from Cape Town to Mdantsane in the Ciskei also means the breaking up of her family once again, the increasing insecurity of her children, Poppie's concern for their future and for her husband left behind in Cape Town, an increasing deprivation and a deterioration in her health.
6.3.2.5 A ‘feminist’ novel?

It has been suggested that *Poppie Nongena* is a ‘feminist’ novel which attempts to
demonstrate the black woman's oppression and her fight against that oppression, for
example David Schalkwyk (1989:259) points out that the first two sections of the
novel indicate ‘the patriarchal system which operates in the lives of black women
within their own families and received cultural traditions’ and goes on to say that ‘a
systematic subordination of women is immediately evident’. Margaret Lenta
(1984:149) posits that the novel demonstrates another fact, ‘widely recognised yet
seldom reflected on in South Africa: it is that the society in which urban blacks live
is woman-centred’. It is not the aim of this section to invalidate such claims but rather
to take account of at least two factors before coming to any conclusion about the
purported feminist content of the novel.

The first factor that has to be examined within the framework of feminism and how
it applies to Poppie's situation is how this movement/philosophy is interpreted by
black women and where they put the emphasis. Perhaps it is rather unnecessary to
include here an exposé of black women's views on feminism, almost like Poppie
who time and again has to explain African customs and traditions to the implied
white readers. However, it is incumbent upon me to cite black women extensively
in order to gain clarity about the difference in the interpretation of this
movement/philosophy by black and white women in the South African context.

I wish to begin by citing the understated view of a black male in respect of the
relationship between black and white women: ‘It is the undeniable truth that all is
not well between black and white in South Africa as a whole, but it is worse between
black and white South African women’ (Mutloatse 1981:4).

Miriam Tlali prefers Alice Walker's term ‘womanist’ to the widely-accepted term
‘feminist’, the term ‘womanist’ having been coined to describe the particular character
of the black woman's struggle against gender oppression. Tlali reiterates her
commitment to racial issues: ‘The real problem is not so much a question of sexism
as it is a question of power ... (women's) liberation is bound absolutely with the
liberation of the whole nation’ (Tlali 1989). On Tlali's comments, Cecily Lockett
(1989:284) states: ‘In Tlali's life, as in the lives of all black women in South Africa,
race is the overwhelming issue ... for such women racism and sexism are perceived
as linked issues and their form of feminism arises from their acceptance of their roles
as wives and mothers and supporters of their men in a political context. They wish
for greater recognition and greater opportunities but do not wish to alienate their men
in what is perceived as a common struggle against racial oppression’. Lockett's choice
of phrase already puts paid to any idea of a common sisterhood between black and
white women.
Not a creative writer but a political activist and stalwart of the women's movement, Frene Ginwala states: ‘In South Africa, the prime issue is apartheid and national liberation. So to argue that African women should concentrate on and form an isolated feminist movement, focusing on issues of women in their narrowest sense, implies African women must fight so that they can be equally oppressed with African men ... Women's liberation in South Africa cannot be achieved outside of the context of the liberation struggle. And the question of women's liberation will only be taken up to the extent that women are involved in national liberation’ (Ginwala 1986).

Deeply conscious of their oppression and marginalisation, several younger black women, mostly academics, have formulated their concept of feminism. Sibongile D. Nene states in an unpublished paper:

(The black woman's) knowledge world encompasses elements that are in perpetual conflict with one another: a western middle-class male-oriented knowledge world with its so-called objective validation mechanisms and methodologies that often obfuscate and distort her existential life experience; her difficulty in discovering and holding onto a universal sisterhood with her white counterparts on the one hand and her raised consciousness about the overarching problem of racism which she shares with her black brothers whilst simultaneously being unable to overlook the male chauvinism which males, regardless of race, stand accused of by both history and human sense (Nene 1991).

In another unpublished paper, Kedibone Letlaka-Rennert states:

In South African literary circles, gender subordination is focussed on and targeted as a joint form of oppression that both Black and White women can fight against. Such a focus however ignores the existence of yet another form of oppression within the female gender, that of racial subordination (Letlaka-Rennert 1991).

Similarly and yet on a different level, Sisi Maqagi challenges Cecily Lockett's statement ‘We (white women) will have to develop a more sympathetic womanist discourse for considering the work of black women’:

Her prescriptive suggestion ... will be as effective in silencing the works of black women as are ‘current feminist paradigms’. the very fact that the discourse will be a ‘sympathetic’ one indicates that it will not have arisen from within. The word ‘sympathetic’ seems to suggest some kind of tolerance for something that is not quite up to the mark. The impulse to assume initiative becomes apparent again when she definitively asserts that ‘it is our (white women's) place as educationally and institutionally privileged critics to listen to their (black women's) voices as we formulate approaches to their work’. This assertion puts white women in the patriarchal position of ‘self’ and black women in the powerless position of the ‘other’, where the ‘self’ is the rational power that systematises and
arranges into a coherent whole the chaos of the ‘other's’ unschooled views of art (Maqagi 1990:23).
On the other hand, Zoë Wicomb challenges the now defunct notion that national liberation should come before women's emancipation. The fight against apartheid is not only a fight for racial equality but implicit in racial equality is liberation from the double patriarchy black women are subjected to. Wicomb states:

In South Africa the orthodox position whilst celebrating the political activism of women, is that the gender issue ought to be subsumed by the national liberation struggle ... I can think of no reason why black patriarchy should not be challenged alongside the fight against Apartheid (Wicomb 1990:37).

The second factor which has to be considered, more on the level of the South African context but unmistakably symptomatic of South African society and all its ramifications, including literature, is the ‘dialogue’ at present taking place between black and white women. A case in point is the historic conference entitled ‘Women and Gender in South Africa’ held in Durban in January/February 1991. The aim of the conference was to take a closer look at especially black women's position and their liberation. The facts are: (i) Of the over 300 women and men who participated, 30 women were black; (ii) Of the sixty-three papers read in eleven sessions, only three were read by black women. The contribution of Gcina Mhlope, a talented black story-teller, poet and playwright was billed on the programme as ‘entertainment’ instead of giving her recognition for her literary contributions. The input of a fourth black scholar was added as the conference proceeded; (iii) While the focus of most of the discussions was black women, it seems anomalous that so few black women were invited to participate. Some explanation was proffered for this discrepancy, viz. invitations had been sent through university departments and other institutions of learning because the organisers were planning a highly academic conference. All this demonstrates a lack of feminist consciousness about economic and social inequality in the South African context.

With regard to this conference, Nontobeko Mofokeng who attended the conference observes:

The existing academic/activist dichotomy needs redressing. We cannot afford to encourage a gap between the theory of women's oppression and practical efforts to correct it. Theory cannot be formulated in abstract but has to be located within the experiences of women.

Another observer at the conference was a Dutch academic attached to the University of Utrecht, Renée Römkens:

When I entered the conference room on the first day I was very much surprised by the domination of white South African academic women. 90% of the attendants of the conference were white. A substantial part of the Black women who were there, were coming from other Southern African countries in the region ...
Still I feel the issue is not only a matter of being a minority in a quantitative sense. It also reflected a deeply rooted dominance of white academic, cultural and political traditions that define what kind of knowledge is considered valid enough to be included in academic debates like these.

The two black academics who presented papers both criticised in their papers the claim of a ‘common sisterhood’ among black and white women in South Africa, asserting that

As much as Black feminism allows for the debate on the ‘women's question’ it cannot be lured into the dangers of another imperialism - that of Western feminism - at the expense of all that African culture and society can offer as part of Africa's pride among the family of nations (Nene 1991).

and Letlaka-Rennert posits

Whilst the historical value of White women's documentation of Black women's struggles must be acknowledged as an essential and brave initial step, it is time for a shift to occur. For this to happen both Black and White women have to effect movement (1991).

In an article widely criticised by white women academics, Dabi Nkululeko (1987:89) accuses white progressive researchers of continuing ‘to show reluctance to abdicate their self-assigned leadership role ... and often fail to recognise the potential inherent in oppressed and exploited peoples to liberate themselves and to write their own history’.

Returning to the claim that Poppie Nongena is a ‘feminist’ novel, it will be extremely ridiculous to completely refute that claim because in the first place it is a novel written by a woman about a woman and would inevitably have some feminist overtones. Secondly, since both author and main character are victims of strong patriarchal structures it is to be expected that a measure of criticism of those structures will surface from time to time.

My first concern with an unreserved proclamation of the novel as being ‘feminist’, is in the area of gender studies and relations. Several Afro-American as well as European feminist critics emphasise that the gender code ‘structures the differences according to the division between men and women on which the thematic network (is) based. The distinction between men and women is thus declared significant; this is the very foundation of the code... The gender code is not a priori polemic or dualistic. To keep in mind one sexual group is not to oppose another; it is to see the differences that separate them. To a certain extent, the presupposition of polemic is itself rooted in a sexist ideology, for it proclaims the significance of each sex for the other to be permanent and total’ (Bal 1985:111 - my emphasis).
Yet Poppie displays a consistent sexist attitude in her appraisal of the men in her family, including her husband. In Chapter 3 I have already mentioned that emasculation of the black male is endemic of white South African writing. In this novel the black male is similarly systematically declared impotent, an endangered species who cannot live up to the rigours of modern urban life and who is declared inadequate as a parent and who fails in his attempts to support wife and children.

The first indication of the ‘annihilation’ of the black male is Poppie's narration about her male ancestors: her great-uncle Jantjie died in the Boer War, significantly helping the Boers in their attempts to defeat the British; her grandfather George Williams died in the Big 'Flu of 1918, ‘the plague that the Lord sent us’ (p. 11), leaving ouma Hannie to rear eight children single-handedly; oompie Domani died in the First World War, again assisting imperialist powers to continue their programme of oppression; her own father Machine Matati is representative of the ostensibly irresponsible nature of black men, for he ‘didn't look after us well. He left on a Saturday morning and went to the office in Upington and joined up for the war, the war of 1939. He was sent away as a lorry-driver to Egiputa in the north and never came back to us at all’ (p. 13). Poppie's mother told her grandmother that ‘the father of her children was no more. He had died in the war. Other people in the location said: But the war is long since past, and Machine Matati is pushing a new bicycle down the street of Mafeking ... He never looked after my children like a father should ... I have no tears to weep for Machine Matati’ (p. 33). Even the younger males of Poppie's family are portrayed as up to no good, for example her two half-brothers, Pieta (killed by gangs because of his own involvement in gang activities) and Jakkie who had to flee the country because of his involvement in the children's revolt.

Poppie's lineage is traced almost entirely through the female line and stories of her ancestry are delivered to her by her mother, grandmother and aunts, often referring to her great-grandmother grootouma Kappie. Here, too, the female ancestral presence forms an essential part of the family's continued existence. However, the male line is almost completely ignored and the only information we have are scant references to Poppie's father and his clan-name.

Although Poppie's uncles help in bringing up Poppie and her brothers in the absence of their father, they are likewise emasculated, even to the extent of being portrayed as caricatures, especially oompie Pengi. If, as Jakes Gerwel submits, the ‘coloured’ male is portrayed in the early Afrikaans narrative as the ‘jollie hotnot’, then oompie Pengi is most certainly portrayed as the ‘jolly Kaffir’, a cretinous figure whose entire life apparently consists of drinking, swearing, tap-dancing, singing and playing his guitar. The most vivid recollections Poppie has of him are his drunkenness, stealing his mother's possessions to buy liquor, robbing her of the rent money he collected from the tenants and setting his mother's house on fire. The result of all this is that he lands in jail after his own mother laid charges of arson against him and when he reappears in Poppie's life, he is a sick,
prematurely old and broken man in hospital, a ‘tiny, wrinkled little man in the big
bed under the grey blanket’ (p. 150), who has wasted his life, whose only child had
been taken away from him because his wife could no longer tolerate his kind of life.

With regard to oompi Pengi and his mother's actions, Margaret Lenta has this to
say: ‘When Hannie expels her favourite son Pengi ... from the family because he
burnt down the house when he was drunk, we realise that she combines a sense of
responsibility to the family as a whole with a perceptive love for each individual’
(Lenta 1984:150). She says this in defence of her statement that family life in the
townships is woman-centred but she obviously fails to see how Pengi and the other
men in Poppie's life are systematically made impotent, how the silence about their
situation is maintained in the novel.

Poppie's brothers, too, with the exception of buti Mosie, soon fall prey to liquor and
its devastating effects on the poor. They lose their families in the process, are involved
in drunken brawls and often emerge seriously injured, lose their self respect and
generally their value as human beings (cf. for example pp. 56-59 and 61-62 for
Poppie's narration about Plank and pp. 114-117 about Hoedjie). The only positive
aspect of their drinking, according to Poppie, is that ‘they were full of fun when they
were drunk. Tata-ka-Bonsile liked their joking. He was a quiet man, but he was fond
of his brothers-in-law and their light-hearted, fooling, joking ways’ (p. 117). Again
the happy-go-lucky black man without a care in the world.

With reference to patriarchy, Poppie displays a particularly ambivalent attitude: on
the one hand she rebels against the system which further oppresses her; on the other
hand she allows herself to be subjugated and is intent upon conducting herself
according to the impositions of patriarchy.

Against the background of patriarchy described in 2.2.1, Poppie's situation in a
patriarchal society must be seen, especially with reference to her marriage to Stone
who represents traditional society and Poppie who represents urban black society
and the conflict which it generates. First of all, Poppie's problems in procuring a pass
are ascribed to the fact that she married Stone who came from Herschel in the Ciskei
and therefore officially not a ‘citizen’ of South Africa. Even before the pass problems,
Poppie's family were not too keen on her marrying Stone: ‘At first we were dissatisfied
that our little sister should marry a man from Kaffirland’ (Mosie, p. 69); ‘I told you
you would have trouble when you married a man from the raw country’ (Poppie's
step-father, p. 140); ‘You would go and marry a raw Kaffir’ (Poppie's mother, p.
156); ‘It's the fucking people of the land ... they must leave go of you’ (Poppie's
brother Plank, p. 261).

The only time Poppie reveals some ‘feminist’ tendencies is when she shows a measure
of resistance to patriarchy. Her loyalty towards and caring of Stone who
she sees as ‘a nervous man ... nervous about his job and about me and the children, and about himself’ [p. 117, N.B. In the Afrikaans version he is consistently referred to by Poppie as a ‘mannetjie’ (little man) which could be an expression of love but also of his diminished status in her eyes] places a heavy burden on her. Gradually she becomes the sole breadwinner and decision-maker in her family because of Stone's illness. The conflicts between her and her in-laws and ‘the people of the land’ increase.

During Poppie's first visit to her in-laws, she experiences the strangeness of traditional Xhosa customs which turns into derision and even contempt for them. Poppie narrates and focalizes this first visit:

They (her in-laws) asked me how it went with my parents. I kept quiet, my husband spoke to his people. He sat on a chair, because he's a man. He didn't sit on the side of the hut where I was sitting, he sat with the men. Where I was sitting was the side of the women. My father-in-law's sisters and sister-in-law and wife who had been taken up into the family's beliefs could sit with the men. But newly-married women aren't allowed there and they may not greet the father-in-law by hand ... I was scared of the strange people and didn't look around too much, for the hut looked so dark and frightening, lit only by a tin lamp standing near the dishes. It was a horrible place, I'm not used to such houses. But I kept quiet because my ma had taught me how to behave myself with my in-laws (p. 78).

Throughout her marriage, the raising of her children until she reaches the end of the road, there are constant conflicts with her husband's family who want to appropriate her children to help them on the land; the conflict about her husband wanting to take their son Bonsile out of school temporarily to assist him and his family to ‘fetch back his brothers who have passed by’ (= the death rites, p. 216); the conflict about where Stone should be buried, about Bonsile's initiation and about Thandi who apparently has the gift to thwasa (= talking to the ancestors). Save for Bonsile's initiation, Poppie refused to allow her in-laws to dictate to her. Yet, when she is haunted by bad dreams, the only explanation she can find for them is that her opposition to her in-laws' wishes should be amended. This she does by sending Bonsile to be initiated ‘in the land’ and by allowing her daughters to go and assist her ailing mother-in-law. Very gradually Poppie's fight against patriarchy turns into unwilling and eventually into voluntary participation in the traditions and customs of her husband's family.

Although Poppie's love and concern for her husband are never in doubt, and although she grudgingly acknowledges his status as head of the family, he nevertheless diminishes in her estimation as a provider, brought about by his illness. She becomes increasingly incensed by his jealousy, his insistence on consulting witchdoctors, his reluctance to completely adhere to Western religion and his partiality for his own family and their customs. However, she seldom voices her

feelings about these aspects to him and would rather discuss them with her relatives and relate them to the unidentified listener.

What is of particular interest is Poppie's unreserved acceptance of the patriarchy of the white male. It would seem that she is unaware of the double patriarchy to which she is subjected. Although she has little contact with white men save those officials at the pass offices, the reader is nevertheless given some indication of her attitude especially to Mr Steyn. She has great admiration for this Mr Steyn who is ‘a believer, religious man, a man of much faith ... a man to talk courage into you’ (p. 169), the one whose duty it was to inform Poppie that she had to leave Cape Town and go to the Ciskei. Her admiration for him stems from the fact that he told her: ‘If it is the Lord's will that you stay, then you will stay, and if it is the Lord's will that you go, then you will go’ (p. 169), so much so, that she even equates Mr Steyn with God's saving grace: ‘When the devil is on your tracks, then the hand of the Lord comes to you and takes your hand. As Mr Steyn took her hand’ (p. 170). In contrast to Poppie's low esteem for the men in her family, Mr Steyn assumes God-like proportions in her perception.

Another factor which causes one to doubt the ‘feminist’ content of the novel, is Poppie's intolerance and lack of understanding of other black women who are as oppressed and as marginalised as herself. When people are equally oppressed - even though they may have their personal differences - they tend to show solidarity with one another, more especially when dealing with a member of the oppressor class. In the case of women, their common suffering draws them closer together and, in Angela Davis' (1990:12) words, ‘we must always attempt to lift as we climb’. Poppie's only identification with other black women is restricted to members of her immediate family and perhaps one close friend, Mamdungwana. Her sisters-in-law are interlopers and immoral, the wives of her uncles are generally bad women who are not worthy of their husbands, even though Poppie herself acknowledges the deviance characterising the lives of the male members of her family. Even worse is her condemnation of women if they happen to be ‘coloured’ or half-Xhosa, half-coloured and her several references to the ethnic features of ‘coloureds’. Yet it is Muis, ‘half-coloured, half-Xhosa ... that thin girl with the legs like sticks, I can't stand her’ (p. 138) and married to Poppie's brother Hoedjie, who comes to her rescue when she is on the verge of a breakdown. Similarly, Poppie dislikes Rhoda, wife of her brother Mosie. She ‘couldn't take it that Rhoda wore long trousers the first time that buti Mosie brought her home’ (p. 175), that she sits on the sofa reading a book while Poppie had to do the cooking, that ‘she thinks she's better than us’ (p. 175). It is also Rhoda who comes to Poppie's assistance when she collapses after hearing that her children had been detained.

Not unexpectedly though it still leaves a black reader bemused, is the high regard Poppie has for two white women, the young unnamed missionary and Mrs Retief,
the social worker [a third white woman ought to be included, namely the author, to who a black woman ‘who would become Poppie Nongena ... bruised and battered after her experiences of the unrest in Nyanga East’ (Joubert 1987:254) poured out her story]. When considering Poppie's racial prejudice, sexism, intolerance of other black women and elevation of whites, especially when juxtaposed with the views expressed by black women as cited at the beginning of this section, one is left in no doubt as to the extent of her indoctrination at the hands of the very people who oppress her. Add to that the fact that her only real fight is against patriarchy, then one is convinced of how complete her indoctrination has been. A ‘feminist’ novel?

6.3.2.6 ‘Maids and Madams’

It has often enough been asserted by white middle-class women that one of the areas in which blacks and whites can have real knowledge of each other is the work situation. This view is challenged by Margaret Lenta with regard to white women employers and black women employees when she posits:

Yet the mutual ‘knowing’ which occurs between employer and servant is of a particular kind which involves as much - perhaps more - wilful ignorance as knowledge. The intimate knowledge which the employee has of the employer's private life is something which she is required to conceal, while the employer, though she admits her employee into her home, must deny her the status of a family-member and usually refuses or neglects to find out about her life and obligations elsewhere (Lenta 1989:238).

Lenta continues by saying that the legal and social divisions between black and white in South Africa reinforce the power of the employer and weaken the position of the employee, who must frequently suffer injustice and exploitation at the hands of her madam. Already in 1980 Jacklyn Cock came to the same conclusion:

The situation of black and white women in South Africa presents a challenge to any oversimplified feminist notion of ‘sisterhood’. That challenge is sharpest in the institution of domestic service where the wages paid and the hours of work exacted by white ‘madams’ from their black ‘maids’ suggest a measure of oppression of women by women (Cock 1980/1989:1).

‘Real knowledge’, ‘wilful ignorance’ and ‘a measure of oppression’ are but part of the story of the situation of domestic workers. It is significant how - even with the best of intentions - these white women who can only base their conclusions on observations and a questionable type of interview, underplay the situation between black and white women in their relationship of employee and employer.
a social worker in close contact with domestic workers, has this to say about their situation:

    Indeed, some of the leading white men and women in this country (South Africa) are the products of the ingenious hands and minds of the black ‘nurse’, ‘nanny’ or ‘mother’ who has been, and still is, underpaid for one of the outstanding responsible human services: that is, bringing up children. This is a task she has undertaken with pride, responsibility, love, loyalty and respect for both the child and the parents. Yet how has she been rewarded? (Kuzwayo 1985:23/4).

The ‘maids and madams’ situation is depicted in a few works of South African fiction, mainly by white, English, female novelists. Two examples from a black woman's perspective are the novels *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975) by Miriam Tlali and *Another year in Africa* (1980) by Rose Zwi. As far as Afrikaans fiction is concerned, even less appears in which the ‘maids and madams’ situation is highlighted. Of course, even in the earliest Afrikaans novels the black servant is part of the milieu, a mere caricature and always seen from a white perspective. In recent Afrikaans narrative we have an example in *Louoond* (literal translation ‘Luke-warm oven’) by Jeanne Goosen in which the domestic worker Anna acquires some bargaining power when she becomes politicised, but in the main the story deals with the hang-ups of the white central figure.

In *Poppie Nongena* the ‘maids and madams’ situation is inextricably linked to the labyrinth of bureaucracy which characterises the lives of black people and closely intertwined with the entire story of Poppie's life and travails. It is almost as if this facet of her life is a side-issue, played down considerably in the narrative. Yet Poppie's different employers and different experiences under them cannot be seen in isolation from her general situation. The author's advice that ‘the book must be allowed to speak for itself’ apparently does not take into account Poppie's feelings - the impression is created by Poppie herself and the anonymous narrator that Poppie accepts her treatment at the hands of her white ‘madams’ passively and unfeelingly. Her stoic silence and phlegmatic attitude towards her suffering virtually shout at the reader.

The journey motif which is dominant in the narrative, also applies to Poppie's working life: journeying from one place of employment to another, charring (i.e. working for different ‘madams’ on different days of the week), the different modes of transport used to get to her place of employment, the long, laborious journeys from the squatter camp to the elite white suburbs. In another sense, the journey motif is manifest in her thoughts going forth and back to her family whose welfare depends on her being employed.

Leaving aside Poppie's employment as a child-labourer - iniquitous and exploitative as it is - in a fish-processing factory at Lamberts Bay, Poppie has had several
employers during her stay in Cape Town, not including those for whom she charred
or who are not mentioned by name. Her first domestic job was at a plant-growing
nursery with an unnamed madam as a ‘sleep-in’ in Constantia, ‘first by bus and then
by train and then by bus’ (p. 98). On her one afternoon off per week, the journey
from and back to her place of employment would take almost the entire afternoon,
leaving her with only half an hour to spend with her family. The never-ending
drudgery of housework; the low wages (six pounds per month); her being the only
sleep-in woman employee in a compound for several male employees, thus making
her vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation; one hour's rest in the afternoon;
huge bundles of washing done by hand in a stone-tub outside and a ‘madam’ who
stands behind her like a slave-driver, all these and more resulted in Poppie becoming
ill. The white woman's comment is: ‘You can't be sick here, you must go to Nyanga,
I'm too busy to look after a sick person...work has never made anybody sick’ (p.
100). One of the few times Poppie expresses her feelings with regard to her
employment is when she says: ‘It hurt me very much when she said that...’ (p. 100).
If, as has been asserted, the novel is a demonstration of ‘understatement’, then surely
Poppie's understatement of her feelings (to a white person) reveals the extent of her
oppression.

A succession of employers follows, inter alia Mr Pullen with his invalid wife in
Bellville, Mrs Graham in Bishopscourt, Mrs Stevens, Mrs Scobie, Mrs Robson and
Mrs Swanepoel. Of some Poppie gives more information than of others but in each
case exploitation and insensitivity to her situation are dominant features of their
treatment of her. For example, when her husband is hospitalised for tuberculosis,
she can only visit him on her Sunday afternoon off while working for Mrs Scobie-
since the family usually had a protracted Sunday lunch and Poppie's work in the
kitchen would not end before three o'clock, it meant that her visits to tata-ka-Bonsile
(= father of Bonsile) would be cut to a few minutes to enable her to return to her
sleep-in job in time. This resulted in her husband becoming suspicious and even
accusing her of seeing another man. When she had to apply for another extension to
her pass, it meant more trips from one pass office to the next, necessitating her absence
from work and for which she is severely scolded by her employer. When her grandson
Vusile dies, Poppie is two days late for work and Mrs Swanepoel's only reaction to
her explanation is: ‘I am sorry, Rachel ... I brought back a lot of washing from the
seaside house. But don't try to do everything at once’ (p. 338).

All these and many more form part of Poppie's daily existence but several factors of
which the ‘madams’ are ignorant or ‘wilfully ignorant’ until articulated by Poppie,
emerge from the narrative and exacerbate her - and by implication that of her family
members - suffering. Most important is that a vicious circle of disadvantage executes
itself in the lives of black domestic workers. As a child, Poppie had to be taken out
of school to mind her step-brothers and -sisters; as a mother who has to work to keep
her children from starving, she herself takes
her own children and her step-sister out of school to mind her younger children. At one stage these young children had to stay at home all by themselves, locked into the shack which is home to Poppie and her family. The physical danger the children are exposed to as well as the temptation to roam the streets and making themselves vulnerable to all kinds of social evils are of no concern to the employers, as long as their children are cared for by the maid.

Something which is never articulated in the novel is the lack of protection or security for domestic workers: no maternity leave, unemployment fund, sick fund, pension fund, in short, an absolute denial of the domestic worker as a vital part of the labour force and therefore of the economy of the country. The fact that these women facilitate their employers’ entry into the labour market or set them free to pursue other activities, does not seem to be a factor worth considering. Yet, ironically, they are regarded as wage-earners and therefore subject to the rules and regulations governing all workers. A case in point is when Poppie's husband is declared unfit for work with Poppie nearing the end of her pregnancy and a meagre disability grant given to the family. But as soon as Poppie was able to go back to work, this grant is stopped.

Poppie's employment - as is the employment of all Africans in the urban areas - is entirely dependent upon her ability to obtain a pass. This involves numerous trips to and long waiting hours at the pass offices which are situated in white areas. The possibility of being fired from her job for trying to get a pass precisely to hold down her job is a very real one. Each time Poppie's pass would be extended for a week, a month, three months and once for six months and each time she had to make the same journey several times, had to stand in long queues all day for several days at a time in order to retain her job, only to be accused of irresponsibility and even laziness by her employers. Just two weeks before the birth of her fourth child, Poppie again had to apply for extension, and again had to make the trip to Standard House by bus and train:

Because of the rain, there were no long queues of people waiting outside in the street. All had pressed inside the building to get out of the wet, and were crowding the passages. She pushed in through the door and was shown where to join the end of the queue. The people moved forward inch by inch, for long stretches of time the queue did not move at all. Poppie tried to wipe the wetness from the shoulders and sleeves of her coat. The coat was mohair, bought second-hand from Mrs Scobie. It was too small for her and pulled over the shoulders ... The rain had soaked through the coat and down her back ...(p. 154/5).

6.3.2.7 Poppie's religion

One of Poppie's most lasting memories of her upbringing by ouma Hannie which undoubtedly had a profound effect on her, is her grandmother's deeply religious
life. Ouma Hannie was a ‘God-fearing woman’ (p. 16) who ‘never went to bed without saying her prayers’ (p. 17) and who woke up at five o'clock in the morning to pray, waking the members of her household to pray with her. She owned a Bible although she could not read but she loved to sing hymns. Her house was a ‘Christian house ... God's house’ (p. 33) which she would not allow to become defiled by Pengi's drinking or swearing or the isangoma's (female witchdoctor) influence brought into the house by Pengi. Anything which differed from her Christian values is ascribed to the devil, for example she blames Pengi's drinking on ‘the devil eating his heart’ (p. 45) and the fact that he ‘cast away his church’ (p. 46); ‘the swear words, the unholy thoughts’ came from Pengi's stomach and not his heart. From a very early age ouma Hannie took Poppie and her brothers to church with her and enrolled them in the Sunday School. Indeed, ouma Hannie's upbringing of her children and grandchildren set them on a firm path. Another feature of ouma Hannie's religion, is how she effectively combined Xhosa tradition with Christianity, for instance insisting that her daughters be married in the Xhosa tradition (the payment of lobola by the bridegroom, the arranging of the marriage by the families of the prospective bride and bridegroom) which Poppie describes as ‘marriage by force’ (p. 12): ouma Hannie ‘wasn't at rest till they were married with lobola money, as well as in church’ (p. 13). Poppie insists that although they were church-goers, ‘the Xhosa people kept strictly to their own traditional Xhosa beliefs as well’ (p. 41).

In contrast to ouma Hannie's stability, also in her church-life -she remained with the Methodist Church until her death - her children and grandchildren drift from one denomination to another, Methodist, Ethiopian, Anglican, Catholic, Dutch Reformed Mission and Zionist, which is not only symptomatic of the superstructure which governs their entire existence but is also another manifestation of the journey motif which operates on different levels in the text and in Poppie's life. The different mission schools which Poppie and her brothers attended also reflect the drifting nature of their lives. Partiality to a religious denomination is reflected by subtleties such as Mosie's assertion that he 'wasted (his) time at the Catholic school ... (he) couldn't get ahead, it was just play school. Then ouma sent (them) to the Dutch Reformed Mission school ... (he) carried on till (he) reached standard five ...’ (p. 48).

Poppie's forced removal from Lamberts Bay also necessitates a forced move from her church. Soon after arriving in Cape Town and after moving house several times, Poppie joins the Nyanga Holy Cross Church of the Anglicans, already having moved to the Anglican Church in Lamberts Bay when her husband decided to become Anglican rather than Methodist: ‘Tata-ka-Bonsile made me leave the Methodists, she often complained ... and now I go on my own to the Holy Cross, because he has no more spirit left for his church’ (p. 109). Indeed, the church becomes Poppie's anchor in the uncertain township life as well as in the instability brought about by the myriad of laws affecting her life. In deep crises,
her only comfort is in the church, and this is reiterated by Poppie time and again: ‘The church is my mainstay, Poppie thought. As long as I remain true to the church, the Lord will be with me’ (p. 172). Separated once more from her kinsfolk after her eviction from Cape Town, ‘the church was her comfort’ (p. 221) and ‘only in the church did she find comfort’ (p. 223).

The anaesthetizing effects of her religion are best illustrated by two phases or incidents in Poppie's life. When her pass can no longer be extended and her forced removal from Cape Town is imminent, Poppie finds much comfort in the words of the white official at the pass office, Mr Steyn. With this sword hanging over her, Poppie finds much comfort in his words but also in the church, even to the extent of equating Mr Steyn with the Lord. That Sunday in church, the preacher's words had such an effect on Poppie that she felt her soul was thirsting for the words she was hearing. Her soul drank in the words, she could scarcely remember them separately, they had sunk deep down into her soul. Only now she understood fully. She felt her heart grow big and strong. She wanted to tell of this blessing, it swelled up in her bosom, she wanted to sing it out to the congregation. When the singing started and her voice rose with the rest, it was as if she was being released from everything pent up within her breast, as if she had found peace in this release. Her body started swaying slowly from side to side, her eyes closed, her voice climbed above the rest (p. 170/1).

Significantly, the hymn the congregation is singing at the time is ‘Jerusalem, my happy home’ and Poppie ‘was standing before the throne of the Lord, singing these words that He might hear her ... she felt her head wet with sweat, as if a fever had been broken ...’ (p. 171).

The second example is when Poppie is already in Mdantsane in the Ciskei and her fears, grief, loneliness and pain can only be relieved through her religion which acts like a powerful drug on her agitated state:

Christmas and New Year passed, having no meaning for her. Only in the church did she find comfort. She spent nights singing, she would come home from church in the early morning, with hoarse voice and inflamed eyes, to throw herself on the bed and sleep, leaving the cooking and housework to the girls (p. 223).

Poppie's main concern for her children is that they should have a good education at all costs and be brought up in church. Like ouma Hannie did with her, she takes her children with her to church, inculcates admirable moral values but very often she becomes rather obsessive and coercive in keeping them on the straight and narrow. It is especially with her two teenage children, Bonsile and Thandi, that she uses coercion to get them to go to church when she finds out that their values differ from hers. ‘She could force (Bonsile) to come to church with her’ (p. 223)
because she had to pay a big amount in ‘damage money’ (= money paid by the parents of a young man to the parents of a young girl when the former fathered a child). Poppie had to beat Thandi to get her to church, in addition to threatening and warning her about the influence of the amafufunyana spirits, i.e. hysterical spirits:

They entered your body and dwelt in your belly. At parties they took hold of you, especially if you were a young married woman or young girl, and made you leave your body so that they could speak from your belly. It was an evil thing if it took hold of your child, it forced her to leave school, and put an end to her learning ... It is the spirit of the devil that goes into the people, the seven demons the Bible tells us about (p. 222).

Once again, Poppie displays an ambivalence in her character. On the one hand she is a committed Christian; on the other she firmly believes in other supernatural powers which her very Christian faith rejects. She believes in the power of the amafufunyana spirits; she believes as firmly in the Bible which warns about the ‘seven demons’ of which the amafufunyana spirits are one.

A telling feature of Poppie's religion is that she often seeks the causes of the abominations dominating her life in herself, in her ‘sinfulness’ and own human failings. Whenever she experiences a crisis in her life, she ascribes it to past sins she had committed. The most clear example of this is when she learns that her children had been detained by the security police and she cries out: ‘What have I done wrong, where have I sinned?’ (p. 353) and again: ‘Lord, Lord, where, at what place, did I turn from your path?’ (p. 355).

Although it is implied that Poppie belongs to a women's group of her church (e.g. the women wearing purple blouses, p. 172), no mention is made either by Poppie or the EN of the activities of such a group. It is a fact that religion, particularly Christianity, is an important factor in bringing women together. Fatima Meer (1987:22) points out that the church ‘cradled the most prolific African women's organisation, the Manyano’ and goes on to say that

The Manyano bonds African women in the urban areas drawn from a diversity of tribes giving them an identity manifested in distinctive uniforms, selfconfidence and security. In the depressed townships where men as the main bread-winners often have neither the means nor the will to respond to women's needs, and the State turns its back on them, the Manyano serves as a welfare pool. It organises stokvels or saving clubs, rotating among members the benefit of the capital accumulated each month to help with such emergencies as school and university fees, down payments and demands from creditors... It funnels grievances which though unintellectualised are expressed ‘intuitively’ as rooted in racism. ‘White people do these things to blacks’; ‘They happen because whites make them happen’.

Yet, if Poppie indeed belongs to such a group, its influence is either completely lost on her and therefore not worth relating to the unidentified listener, or in the selection of material for the novel the author did not deem it necessary to include the vital mobilising effects of such an organisation on black women.

Karl Marx\(^{27}\) states:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

Jeffrey Marishane\(^{28}\) states that the historical materialist approach should be adopted in order to understand the role of religion dialectically both as a form of apology and sanction for the status quo and the powers that be on the one hand, and as an inadequate response by some people drawn from the ranks of the popular masses to the unbearable situation of oppression, exploitation, poverty and disease in the face of seemingly invincible forces on the other.

Marx's assertion has a ring of validity to it when considering Poppie's situation. Her religion has the effect of desensitising her to her own plight and the mass of South Africans; in fact, her unquestioning adherence to her Christian faith is precisely the aim missionaries and capitalist powers had in mind when they set out on their ‘civilising missions’ to bring the ‘light’ of Christianity to the ‘darkness’ of the African heathens. The oppressed must bear their suffering with cheerfulness for the Lord knows best; suffering in this life is the precondition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven; oppression and its related suffering is the will of the Lord who loves all His creatures. The oppressed are taught to sit back with folded arms, impassively awaiting liberation from their suffering which would come from the Lord Himself. Although most black people can see through and reject this kind of indoctrination, this is the message in *Die koperkan*, *Swart Pelgrim*, *Die groot anders-maak* and now in *Poppie Nongena* but this time the protagonist herself propounds those views, showing how successful and complete her indoctrination had been.

### 6.3.2.8 ‘Mutter Courage’

Although this novel has at various times and by various critics been described as a perfect example of ‘understatement’ (e.g. Jakes Gerwel, André P. Brink, Henriette Roos), certain aspects of Poppie's life are given so much emphasis - for example Poppie's religious life so that some critics even describe the novel as a ‘religious novel’; the isolation of only two elements of the children's revolt, viz. their loss of respect for their elders and the myth of the so-called black on black
violence - that in my opinion there is no question of ‘understatement’, rather of over-emphasis to illustrate that Poppie, as a true Christian, loves her enemies and to discredit the positive aspects of the children's revolt which was but one remarkable event in the long history of the people's resistance.

Gerrit Olivier (1979:12) describes Poppie as a ‘township Mutter Courage’ (my emphasis), thereby displaying an overt paternalism. It cannot be denied that Poppie, as indeed all mothers when they have to protect their children, shows great courage in the face of all the invincible forces mobilised against her and the millions of black people generally. But she also displays an alien (for black mothers) form of partiality for her own children, even going as far as to wish that Jakkie would be arrested so that her children could be left in peace, being grateful that her children are not in Cape Town when the revolt spreads to that city, hoping that the unruly children would be severely taken to task by the security forces.

Despite Olivier's claim and despite Poppie's courage, she is nevertheless portrayed as someone who succumbs to pressure time and again. If all the black women had to collapse as often as Poppie does, then an even sadder picture of black society would emerge. A few examples will suffice.

The extra-textual information supplied by the author that the black woman who was to become Poppie Nongena arrived at her doorstep in a state of collapse after her experiences of the children's revolt in Nyanga East, already says much about the character Poppie. How many mothers' children were not detained? Even worse, how many mothers saw their children shot dead or tortured by the police and how many mothers until now are uncertain whether their children are alive after having had to flee the country? If all of these mothers had gone to white women to pour out their stories, I am afraid that there would not have been enough white women to listen.

In the story, the first example of Poppie's several breakdowns is provided after her forced removal from Cape Town, her family and her husband, becomes an accomplished fact, added to which is the fact that she had just given birth to her last child: ‘But Poppie did not have joy in the child ... She lay on her bed with a bitter feeling in her heart against her husband who had brought this thing upon her with his illness...’ (p. 158). Mrs Retief observes her depression and total devastation, and so does the much-maligned Muis: ‘She looked around her. Poppie's house had a different feel, nothing was clean and bright the way it was the first time she came there, the bed hadn't been made, the blankets on which the children slept just kicked to one side ... the smell of birth was still in the bedroom’ (p. 161).

Again in connection with her pass, Poppie breaks down a second time, this time in a queue at the Native Affairs offices in Observatory: ‘A nausea rose in her, she had difficulty in lifting her feet ... Poppie held on to a lamp post with both hands,
spasms passed through her body, tearing at her, her legs were shaking, the spasms rose, pushed up from her belly, her mouth opened, colourless slaver dribbling out of the corners, then her gullet jerked uncontrollably, and she doubled up retching. Not much came out, mostly bile’ (p. 184). A white woman offers to help, although she is unsure whether Poppie is drunk or not.

Loneliness, fear and a sense of futility take hold of Poppie the first night she and her children spend in Mdantsane and brings her to near-collapse: ‘She heard someone groaning ... But before fear took hold of her, she realised that it was she herself who was groaning. It was her own body giving voice to her pain. She tried to still the sounds, but her body started shaking, like someone with fever’ (p. 203).

Poppie collapses completely when she is informed that her children had been detained. Her sister-in-law Rhoda notices how her face ‘has melted’, the trembling of her face, spittle running from the corners of her mouth (p. 353).

With these examples I am not trying to prove that Poppie is not a Mutter Courage; on the contrary, all the forces of evil against her must inevitably culminate in one form of breakdown or another. However, the purported ‘understatement’ of the novel becomes an overstatement of Poppie's several collapses, in order to suggest that Poppie and the likes of her are not equal to the rigours of urban life; that she and the likes of her should have remained in the reserves where they are accustomed to a ‘simple’ life (cf. in this respect Swart Pelgrim where the message is clearly that the ‘white man's cities’ are not meant for black men and women alike, that they become degenerate; only, in Poppie's case, she is not portrayed as a shebeen queen or prostitute).

6.3.2.9 Poppie's politics

Two important events in the long history of resistance to apartheid legislation are included in Poppie's story: the 1960 mass demonstrations against the Pass Laws which resulted in the massacres at Sharpeville and Langa, and the youth revolt of 1976. These events mark important stages in Poppie's life and have a profound effect on her - the 1960 event marking her ‘introduction’ into township life; the 1976 event catalysing her into taking Ciskei papers and therefore completely succumbing to the pressures of the apartheid regime. In a certain sense, these two events are crucial in illustrating her non-political, a-political or even depoliticised stance which generated the white critical applause for the novel.

The Sharpeville massacre marked the end of an era of non-violent protests in South Africa, and the violence which accompanies the upheaval in the black townships of Cape Town is mainly focalised by Poppie and some of her family members. A significant feature of their narration is their unwillingness to become
involved in the people's struggle. For Poppie, the ‘trouble (was about) the passes and
the permits when we visit Langa. And for a pound a day wages’ (p. 120) and when
she is informed about a meeting where township residents are to discuss their
grievances, her reaction is: ‘Well, forget about this meeting, my buti’, for ‘she's not
complaining. She has a pass and her ma has one, and each of her brothers’ (p. 120).
Similarly, Major's advice to Mosie when they are inadvertently caught up in the
unrest, is also very significant: ‘We must get away from here, buti. We're not of the
Cape people, let's keep ourselves outside of their trouble’ (p. 122 - my emphasis).
This statement is indicative not only of the attitude of Poppie and her family members
to the aspirations of the struggling masses, but also of the entire attitude of the book.
Moreover, Poppie and her family seem to be satisfied with their situation but an
especially sombre aspect of their attitude is the fact that they appear to be oblivious
of the fact that they are being oppressed.

In addition, Poppie's choice of phrase (and that of the EN) when describing the events
in the black townships already clearly implies her attitude. For example, she describes
one of the leaders of the revolt who was not afraid to express his views in public, a
university student by the name of Kgosana, as: ‘he had a reputation for saying terrible
things at the meetings’ (p. 130); the EN informs the reader that ‘The second week
of the strike the hate and death came to Poppie's street’ (p. 126).

Any situation of unrest or war goes hand in hand with the most brutal atrocities on
both sides of the opposing camps but these are usually abrogated to a certain degree
when considering the cause in which they are perpetrated, as has been so clearly
illustrated time and again in world history. Therefore, for Poppie and her relatives
to condemn the violence out of hand and not to see or refuse to see in what or whose
cause it is perpetrated, is particularly tragic, especially when no such condemnation
of the violence perpetrated and instigated by the police is forthcoming. A case in
point is the killing of a white journalist as related to Poppie by Mosie and the narration
about Mr Mfukeng's death. Once again, the emphasis is on the ‘savagery’ of these
incidents, once again there can be no question of ‘understatement’ for both are
described in detail with scant references to police brutality. For example, in Mosie's
relation of the killing of the white journalist (p. 123), 33 lines are devoted to the
description of what transpired and only five to police action, and then only to describe
how they came to the journalist's assistance. Nearly four pages (pp. 126-129) of
narration are devoted to a description of Mr Mfukeng's death and only three lines to
the role of the police who once again are portrayed as humane. The glaring absence
of the police when the so-called black-on-black violence takes place is similarly not
condemned by any of the actors.

This systematic discrediting and denigration of the people's struggle continues
throughout the narrative and is another reflection of how it is discredited in real
life by those whose interests are in serious jeopardy. It is once again Poppie who

gives voice to ideas and observations which are rife in the white community: ‘The

feeling against the black police was fierce. From that year, 1960, people started

murdering the police, because they were reckless. If they saw a black policeman

walking alone, they killed him’ (p. 129); ‘I have seen a lot of ugly things but this

was the first time that I had seen people kill somebody with their bare hands ... It

was the worst thing I have seen, when they killed Mr Mfukeng...’ (p. 130). She

condemns the children's loss of respect for their elders which, for her, is another

negative outcome of the ‘strike’ (p. 132), as well as the strikers' rejection of God and

the destruction of church buildings. It is left to her brother Plank to articulate

somewhat simplistically black people's resistance to the church during this time:

‘God, sisi, what'll I be doing in a church? They take you like a chicken and pluck all

the feathers round your arse hole. And I am not for this bare-arse business’ (p. 125).

Very significant of all this is the highlighting of the negative aspects of the 1960

revolt with almost no mention of the role of the forces responsible for the situation.

The impression is being created that black people's struggles are barbaric affairs,

with the law of the jungle the only one known to them. Not once in this part of the

narrative is the cold-blooded murder of black people by the police mentioned, not

by Poppie, not by her relatives, not by the EN. The South African as well as the

non-South African reader who has no knowledge of the events of 1960, will read

this narrative as another indisputable proof of black people's barbarism. Is it

coincidence that these parts are narrated mainly in the third person, by an EN who

to all intents and purposes is ‘blind and deaf’ to the South African situation?

After 1960, black women's involvement and participation in the struggle for liberation

increased dramatically despite the repressive measures taken by the state to silence


women has moved in a continuous stream throughout the century’. When one reads

the accounts of African women's struggles, their heroism and courage in fighting

those laws which placed such a burden upon themselves and their children [cf. for

example Fatima Meer (1987) and Hilda Bernstein (1985)], when one looks at the list

of black women detained, tortured, restricted, murdered in detention and banned

during those turbulent years, then one has to come to the conclusion that this

‘militancy’ and fierce struggle were either completely lost on Poppie or that the EN

and by implication Joubert have not deemed it necessary to include it as part of

Poppie's story.

The sixteen years between 1960 and 1976 left Poppie completely unaffected or failed

to contribute to her politicisation; if anything, she has retrogressed so much that even

those brief flickers of political awareness she displayed during the 1960 upheaval

have disappeared altogether, despite all her humiliating experiences in
connection with her pass, despite her forced removal to an area which had never been her home. Her narration of the events of 1976 is similarly a focus on the negative aspects thereof, once again two aspects being highlighted: the children's loss of respect for their elders and the so-called black-on-black violence. It was especially the mothers of black children who suffered because of events in South Africa - they saw their children abused, tortured, detained, shot to death; they lost their children when many fled to safety; it was their children's suffering that catapulted them into more militancy, as explained by one of those who had to seek refuge elsewhere:

Even initially, during the peaceful demonstrations, parents supported the pupils. But what really thrust the parents into action was the brutal police killings ... Nobody expected the cold-blooded murder of young children. So besides their solidarity with young people they were angered - and their hatred and rejection of the whole system came to the surface. They were completely with the students in their militancy.29

This view is corroborated by none other than Poppie's brother Mosie when he relates to her how parents supported their children during the meeting called to inform parents about their grievances and to assess their stand on the situation. The parents agreed to march with their children to the police station to demand back those who had been arrested, and Mosie tells Poppie:

The children were now satisfied. They said: Mothers and fathers, you can go home now. This meeting was due to us not knowing where you stood. Now we know you are standing with us (p. 321).

Yet Poppie remains strangely aloof from everything, even to the extent of accusing some of her family members of siding with the children. She asks Mosie whether he is on the side of the children, to which he replies: 'I'm not on the side of the police' (p. 313). It grieves her that those close to her could get involved in 'the trouble' for she 'had no heart for what was happening in the location. It seemed to her that Mosie and Johnnie and Jackkie and everybody else was stirring up a trouble that would get too big for them to control' (p. 313). She sees Jackkie's involvement in the revolt as 'wasting his life' (p. 325), even hoping that he would be arrested: 'Let it be that he has been arrested, that this matter can come to an end, she now prayed. So that we can have some peace, so that my children need not be brought into all this' (p. 352). For Poppie the revolt was something 'out there' fought by 'them'. At the height of the revolt her grandson Vukile is killed by a stone thrown by one of the ‘Witdoeke’ (= white headcloths, referring to the migrant workers in the hostels aided and abetted by the police to fuel violence in the townships), and Poppie's reaction in addition to her stoic acceptance is: 'For what, I thought, all this for what?' When she collapses at the end after hearing that her children had also been detained, she remembers how she

thought about the revolt: ‘let the other mamas' children collect the troubles, let them burn the houses here in the city and throw stones and let them be shot and beaten up’ (p. 353).

With regard to Poppie's politics, in fact to her world-view on several issues, one should perhaps refer to the remarkable similarity between Joubert's novel and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Angela Davis writes about the latter novel which also enjoyed a very favourable reception and rallied a vast number of people to the abolitionist cause:

Yet the enormous influence her book enjoyed cannot compensate for its utter distortion of slave life. The central female figure is a travesty of the Black woman, a naïve transposition of the mother-figure, praised by the cultural propaganda of the period, from white society to the slave community. Eliza is white motherhood incarnate, but in blackface - or rather, because she is a ‘quadroon’, in just-a-little-less-than-white-face (Davis 1982:27).

Although Poppie is not a ‘quadroon’ in the true sense of the word, she is nevertheless so much indoctrinated with white ideas on a variety of issues (e.g. her politics, religion, ‘feminism’) that one can describe her as a mirror-image or projection of the implicit as well as real author but in blackface. In the same way Eliza is oblivious to the general injustices of slavery, so Poppie is oblivious to the injustices of another kind of slavery brought about by apartheid. In the same way Stowe ‘miserably fails to capture the reality and the truth of Black women's resistance to slavery’ (Davis 1982:29), so Joubert miserably fails to articulate the countless acts of heroism carried out by black South African women and their fierce resistance to apartheid. Once more, with Angela Davis' permission, I shall quote her in a somewhat adapted form to tie the situation of female slaves to the position of contemporary black South African women:

The Poppies, if indeed they exist, are certainly oddities among the great majority of black women. They do not, in any event, represent the accumulated experiences of all those women who are abused and exploited, work for and protect their families, fight against apartheid, and who are tortured and restricted, but never subdued. It is these women who pass on to their female descendants a legacy of hard work, perseverance and self-reliance, a legacy of tenacity, resistance and insistence on sexual equality - in short, a legacy spelling out standards for a new womanhood (adapted from Davis 1982:29).

6.4 Concluding remarks
An entire dissertation needs to be devoted to *Poppie Nongena* by a black South African woman, and not just a mere chapter. In the above, I could of necessity select only a few aspects which are problematic to me and which obfuscate even
further the painful reality of the black woman's situation in apartheid South Africa.

While Lenta and Schalkwyk claim that the novel is a ‘break in the silence’ about black women's lives, it is for me a further silencing of the full extent of the black woman's oppression but not only that - Poppie, the author, the EN, the entire book impose a silence on the manner in which, with the limited resources at their disposal, black women have heroically resisted apartheid and all its demonic ramifications to the extent that they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of their descendants.

Of course, Poppie is a tragic figure who demands the sympathy of all (not only white) readers. Her experiences, her suffering and her absolute powerlessness in the face of the law may move one to tears. But my sympathy for Poppie is generated not only by her situation but more importantly by the fact that she is a poor, naïve, misguided figure who is completely indoctrinated by the very system that oppresses and silences her on three levels but also on a fourth level: the novel itself. My problem is especially with the manner in which Poppie is portrayed by methods of selection, exclusion and manipulation. Especially the manipulation of characters and readers by means of focalization poses a problem. The novel is an attempt to portray the black woman as a 'poppie', a mindless doll, a resigned, unprotesting and fatalistic figure who gives up the fight for survival without resistance. Poppie's relatively easy submission to the authorities is a complete abrogation of the bitter struggle black South African women are engaged in.

For me, Poppie does not portray herself - she is being portrayed by a subjective anonymous narrator who goes to great lengths to focus on the negative aspects of black lives brought upon them, it would appear in the novel, by themselves and not those brought upon them by government policies. Only those aspects of Poppie's life which make her an innocuous figure in the eyes of whites are highlighted.

The only conclusion I can come to with regard to Poppie, is that her voice is dubbed in the text. What she relates to the unidentified listener and what is then narrated in the book seems to me to be two different stories, mainly through the external narrator's appropriation of so much of the narration and its focalization on what is related. One wonders whether the real person who became Poppie in the novel has had a chance to read the book and assess how she is portrayed.

My advice to Joubert and all those white reviewers who have proclaimed the book such an unqualified success would be that they take another peep through the murky windows of their history to find the true causes of the black woman's unenviable situation and then to change their perspective from essentially white to essentially colourless in a country doomed to extinction by the very policies so clearly propounded in the book.

Eindnoten:

1. The novel will henceforth be referred to as Poppie Nongena to include both the Afrikaans and English versions.
2. I am using the term ‘women writers’ despite the outcry against this categorization. Antjie Krog (1989:41), for example, posits that it is ‘mean-spirited and naïve’ to speak of ‘women writers’. Similarly, Sankie Nkondo protests against the term in her paper ‘Women writers: a separate entity’ presented at the Victoria Falls Conference in 1989.
3. Venter's novel Swart Pelgrim was among the first Afrikaans novels to have an African as central character but then a male.
4. A case in point is the conference on women and gender held in Durban in January/February 1991.
5. Anna Steenkamp, Piet Retief's niece, formulating the reasons for the Voortrekkers' decision to trek.
6. The author herself refers to this work as a ‘novel’, thus implying a fictional element, despite her own claim that it is ‘true’.
7. David Schalkwyk (1986:186). Most of the examples I have cited are taken from his article, since it was difficult for me in the Netherlands to have access to press reviews on South African literature.
8. Critics who have dealt extensively with the structuring of the novel are for example Marisa Mouton, Henriette Roos, Gerrit Olivier, C.N. van der Merwe, Lijphart e.a.
10. Most apartheid legislation has since been removed from the statute books.
12. It is significant how few papers by black women in South Africa are published, either because they do not have access to publishers or because of a lack of funds or because their work is not considered ‘up to standard by the mainstream publishing houses.
13. Kedibone Letlaka-Rennert 1991: ‘Women's Oppression and Power Relations in the Act of Writing’. She is attached to the Health Psychology Unit of the University of South Africa.
14. Sisi Maqagteaches in the English Department of Vista University on the Zwieb campus.
15. Zoë Wicomb teaches in the English Department of the University of Western Cape and is the author of You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town.
16. The conference was held in January/February 1991 with its main aim to discuss black women's oppression.
17. Gcina Mhlophe has to date written ‘Sometimes When it Rains’ (1988); Where is Sandile (1985), a play based on her life; a novel The Queen of the Tortoises (1990), in addition to being a talented performer and artist.
18. Paper read at a seminar on feminism, 13 April 1991, organised by the South African Cultural Community in Amsterdam. Nontobeko Mofokeng is a community worker for the South African Council of Churches and is at present doing research at the University of Bradford.
20. For example, Cecily Lockett (1990:14/15).
21. At the end of the Second World War, those black men who fought ‘for king and country’ were compensated for their trouble with a new bicycle and a greatcoat to be worn in the searing heat of a South African summer.
22. This heading is taken from the title of Jacklyn Cock's study on the situation of domestic workers and their white employers.
23. For example Nadine Gordimer, in a TV interview; cited by Lenta.
24. See for example Bernstein, Barrett e.a.
25. For example Sheila Roberts and Nadine Gordimer.
26. In Muriel at Metropolitan Muriel is not a domestic worker but employed as saleslady-secretary-bookkeeper-tealady-cleaner etc. in a furniture store with mainly black clientele. She becomes the butt of two white women employees' (Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Stein) wrath, ridicule and bullying, even though she is as good, if not better, at her work than they. The domestic worker Dora in Another year in Africa must carry the blame for everything that goes amiss in the Jewish household where she is employed. Gittle, the Jewish grandmother who has to keep an eagle eye on her, apparently subscribes to the often-quoted notion South African white

‘madams’ have of their black ‘maids’ in the household: ‘Nothing is kaffir-proof’ when referring to breakages in the home wrongly or rightly attributed to the clumsiness of the maid.


Chapter 7
Conclusion

This study does not pretend to be the last word on the subject of the portrayal of the black woman in the Afrikaans novel or South African literature generally during the first forty years of apartheid rule. Much remains to be looked into. It has, thus, been selectively representative rather than exhaustive. There are still many other avenues through which the subject can be explored, for example how the black woman is perceived by white writers in English, by black male authors and especially by black female writers.

In a society where black women are oppressed on three levels, it is to be expected that these oppressions would be continued and reinforced by other covert means, a ‘hidden’ form of oppression but nevertheless real and effective. It has often been asserted by Afrikaans novelists themselves that they write for a white audience. For example, André P. Brink stated in an interview: ‘When I write I have in mind the Afrikaner ... who is secluded from reality’ (SAPEM, March 1989). While it may be argued that their intention is to make Afrikaners aware of what is happening in the country, having wilfully shut their eyes and ears to that reality, it may also be argued that this literature is read by predominantly Afrikaners and therefore a powerful tool of indoctrination and propagation of the ideas of the dominant class.

During the time of slavery it was not uncommon practice for a female slave to be stripped of her clothing, tied hand and foot to incapacitate her, to prevent her from retaliating or defending herself, and beaten all over the body but especially across the breasts for the most trivial offence. In one of the most popular slave narratives of the period, Moses Grandy related the miserable predicament of slave mothers:

On the estate I am speaking of, those women who had sucking children suffered much from their breasts becoming full of milk, the infants being left at home. They therefore could not keep up with the other hands: I have seen the overseer beat them with raw hide, so that the blood and milk flew mingled from their breasts (quoted in Davis 1982:9).
The punishment for slaves in South Africa was no less brutal when one takes into account the findings of different researchers, for example, Frederickson (1981:92) concludes:

The laws of Holland [in the eighteenth century] ... still permitted torture and medieval methods of execution, making it possible to turn public punishment of slaves into sadistic spectacles designed to strike terror into the heart of the slave population in general.

A fictionalised account of the punishment meted out to slave women is provided by none other than André P. Brink in his novel *A Chain of Voices*, as we have seen in Chapter 5. Today, centuries later, the black woman seems to be as incapacitated and punished. Education for blacks has never been a priority of the South African government and education for the black woman even less of a priority, aided and abetted by a strong patriarchal structure. Her hands are therefore tied, she is attacked in a language which in most cases is not her own; she cannot retaliate by articulating - by means of the written word - her displeasure at the way she is being portrayed or by painting her own portrait in literature. Like the abused slave woman Lydia whose clothes are torn from her body, the black woman is stripped of her dignity and humanity in literature.

When considering the Afrikaans novel during the period under review, it emerges that the portrayal of the black woman has not remained static. From an extremely peripheral role, from a one-dimensional figure, she has developed towards a central figure during the last ten years of the period under review. From manipulating her presence in the Afrikaans novel to propagate certain ideas (Venter and Mikro), from trying to show that her outsider position - especially that of the ‘coloured’ - has been brought about by her own doing through miscegenation (Rabie, Mikro), the Afrikaans novel has progressed to the stage where the black woman's invidious position in an apartheid society is clearly illuminated (Joubert and Brink). However, I have shown that unconsciously, like a mental heritage, the ingrained attitudes of whites about black women somehow filter through in spite of this sympathetic approach to her.

All those early stereotypes and myths about the black woman's ‘excessive’ sexuality are further exacerbated by a number of other images. It is implied and sometimes explicitly expressed that the rural black woman is a more ideal icon of womanhood than her urban counterpart, that staying in the reserves - a word implying a safe haven like for example ‘wild-life reserve’ - is ultimately more preferable for the black woman from an Afrikaner perspective. Furthermore, it is suggested that the quiet, unprotesting black woman is a more ideal partner for the black male.
In four out of the five novels I have discussed, the Christian faith is invoked to subjugate the black woman. It is suggested that she must accept her fate unprotestingly, for her position in society is the will of God. While it is widely accepted among Christians that this same God provides humans with the intellect and skills to determine their own destiny, somehow this very reasoning has not been applied to the black woman in the Afrikaans novel. While it is argued that the ‘black savages’ cannot conceive of God, they are nevertheless evaluated according to Christian values, or rather, the way these values are interpreted by white Afrikaners.

As evidence and reflection of the black woman's devalued status in South African society, but also as evidence of the power of the oppressed's resistance to apartheid, one can mention the few novels in which the black woman features as a meaningful character: the five novels discussed in the foregoing chapters plus those by Wilma Stockenström and Dalene Matthee, as well as Brink's *The Wall of the Plague*. Significantly, five out the eight appeared only after 1976 - the black woman in all of them being the central or near-central character - proving that Afrikaner authors have largely been oblivious to the situation of black women before the children's revolt of 1976 shocked them out of their complacency.

It cannot be disputed that an extremely grim picture of the black woman is painted in the Afrikaans novel. While these pictures persist or are continued to be painted, one's first impulse is to conclude that liberation for the black woman shall remain an unattainable myth. Yet, throughout their long and bitter struggles against oppression in all its revolting forms, black women in South Africa have displayed and still display singular strengths and fortitude which their white sisters should try to emulate. With Langston Hughes (1926/1976:309) and without fear of contradiction, black women can truly say today

> We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.
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Samenvatting

Het doel van deze studie is hoofdzakelijk om aan te tonen dat met betrekking tot de zwarte Zuidafrikaanse vrouw er een dialectische relatie tussen literatuur en maatschappij bestaat. Literatuur bestaat nooit op zichzelf, maar komt tot stand in de context van een samenleving. Dit geldt zeker ook voor de positie van de zwarte Zuidafrikaanse vrouw zoals zij beschreven wordt vanuit het perspectief van Afrikaner auteurs: deze studie laat de dialectische relatie zien van ontwikkelingen in Afrikaner teksten en hun contexten in de apartheidssamenleving in de periode 1948-1988.

Het lag voor de hand om het jaar 1948 als vertrekpunt te kiezen aangezien de Nationale Partij in 1948 aan het bewind kwam en wetten invoerde om met vaste hand de apartheid te institutionaliseren. Hoewel deze wetten alle zwarten getroffen hebben, waren de gevolgen voor zwarte vrouwen aanzienlijk ernstiger door de specifieke situatie waarin zij gedwongen waren te leven. In Hoofdstuk 2 wordt de positie van zwarte vrouwen beschreven en vergeleken met die van Afrikaner vrouwen in de Zuidafrikaanse maatschappij in de betreffende periode.

Bij het bestuderen van de literaire teksten is in het bijzonder aandacht besteed aan de vertelprocedés vertellen, focalisatie en karakterisering, dat wil zeggen antwoorden zoeken op de vragen ‘wie spreekt, wie ziet, wie handelt?’ ten einde vast te stellen wat voor soort beelden van de zwarte vrouw in de gekozen romans naar voren komen. Aangezien de zwarte vrouw als personage of afwezig is of zo'n onbeduidende rol speelt in sommige van deze romans, was het ook belangrijk om vast te stellen wie niet spreekt, - ziet en - handelt, om de ideologische vooronderstellingen van de tekst te bepalen.

De zwarte vrouw als personage van betekenis is grotendeels afwezig in de romans uit de eerste periode van het apartheidsbewind (1948-1959). Maar juist deze strategie van uitsluiting is veelzeggend over haar situatie in de samenleving. Daar waar zij wel voorkomt als een onbeduidende figurant, wordt zij - niet geheel onverwachts - afgeschilderd als de hoer of als ‘voortplantingsmachine’. De zwarte vrouw wordt verantwoordelijk gesteld voor de totstandkoming van een ‘ras van halfbloeden’. Dit ‘ras’ schept een probleem voor de idealen van het gezag om een ‘wit Zuid-Afrika’ af te bakenen met een paar ‘bantustans’ aan haar grenzen. De auteurs Venter en Mikro houden beiden in hun romans een onverbloemd pleidooi voor apartheid en beroepen zich zelfs op de bijbelse boodschap van

de rassenscheiding. Bovendien worden de stedelijke zwarte vrouw en de zwarte plattelandsvrouw tegenover elkaar gesteld in een poging om aan te tonen dat de zwarte plattelandsvrouw een oneindig hogere moraal heeft dan haar stadszuster (Hoofdstuk 3).

Met de komst van de ‘Sestigers’ komt de zwarte vrouw als personage niet alleen nader tot de kern van de gebeurtenissen, maar ook worden stereotypen, waarmee zij wordt afgebeeld, subtiler in hun uiting. Toch verschillen deze beelden van de zwarte vrouw, zoals die door een progressieve auteur zoals Jan Rabie (Hoofdstuk 4) worden afgebeeld niet opvallend van die van zijn voorgangers. Een evenwichtiger beeld wordt gegeven door de zwarte personages toe te laten als focalisator in de tekst. Deze strategie werkt bedenklijk ten gunste van de status quo, aangezien deze zwarte personages over zichzelf hetzelfde stereotypen denken presenteren als de witte. Wat als gevolg daarvan vooral naar voren komt in Rabies roman is dat vrouwen zelf de schuld dragen van hun situatie en eigenlijk uitsluitend zelf verantwoordelijk zijn voor hun marginaal positie in een multiculturele samenleving. In feite dragen zij een dubbele schuld, omdat zij onderworpen zijn aan een dubbel patriarchaat.


In Hoofdstuk 6 wordt een overzicht gegeven van de bijdrage van Afrikaner schrijfsters aan de literatuur, gevolgd door een overzicht van Afrikaner vrouwelijke auteurs die zwarte vrouwen in hun romans geportretteerd hebben. De nadruk in dit hoofdstuk ligt op Elsa Jouberts roman Poppie Nongena (1978) waarin de benarde situatie van een zwarte vrouw voor het eerst onthuld wordt aan het witte lezerspubliek. Haar machteloosheid en hulpeloosheid tegenover de wet worden duidelijk geïllustreerd. Hoewel verschillende Afrikaner critici de roman toegejuigd hebben omdat deze de stilte rondom het leven van de zwarte vrouw doorbreekt, blijkt bij zorgvuldig bestudering van de vertelprocéédés dat hier
opnieuw in feite geen recht geschiede aan de eigen stem van de zwarte vrouw als personage en hoezeer ook hier nog altijd afbreuk gedaan wordt aan de weergave van haar onderdrukking.

Als we de Afrikaner roman bekijken in de onderhavige periode, blijkt dat de uitbeelding van de zwarte vrouw niet statisch is gebleven. Van een uiterst onbeduidende en één-dimensionale rol ontwikkelt zij zich tot een meer centraal personage gedurende de laatste tien jaar van de onderzochte periode. Vanaf het manipuleren van haar aanwezigheid in de Afrikaanse roman om bepaalde ideeën te propageren (Venter en Mikro) en een poging om te laten zien dat haar positie als buitenstaander - vooral die van ‘kleurling’ - door haar eigen toedoen als gevolg van rassenvermenging (Rabie en Mikro) is ontstaan, heeft de Afrikaner roman zich ontwikkeld naar een stadium waarin de netelige positie van de zwarte vrouw in een apartheidssamenleving helderder belicht wordt (Joubert en Brink).

Al deze oude stereotypen en mythen rondom de sexualiteit van de zwarte vrouw worden verder aangescherpt met een aantal andere beelden. Implicit wordt aangenomen en soms expliciet verwoord dat de zwarte plattelandsvrouw een idealer ikoon van vrouw-zijn is dan haar stedelijke tegenhanger en dat het wonen in de reservaten te verkiezen is boven het stedelijke bestaan. Verder wordt er gesuggereerd dat de stille, niet-protesterende zwarte vrouw een idealer partner is voor de zwarte man.

In vier van de vijf hier bestudeerde romans, beroepen men zich op het christelijke geloof om de zwarte vrouw te onderwerpen. Er wordt gesuggereerd, dat zij haar lot zonder protest moet aanvaarden, want haar positie in de samenleving is de wil van God. Van de romans waarin de zwarte vrouw een prominente rol speelt, is het tekenend dat vijf van de acht na 1976 geschreven zijn. Het bewijst dat Afrikaner schrijvers nauwelijks oog hadden voor de situatie van zwarte vrouwen voordat de jeugdopstand van 1976 hen uit hun zelfvoldaanheid opschrikte.
Stellingen

1. Zwarte Zuidafrikanen hebben een hoge prijs moeten betalen voor elke verbetering van hun situatie die in het land tot stand werd gebracht, ook op het gebied van de letterkunde.

2. De algehele bevrijding van Zuid-Afrika kan niet worden bereikt, zolang lezers en het bredere publiek voortdurend worden geconfronteerd met onderdrukkende beelden van zwarte vrouwen.

3. Larry Pokpas's bewering dat de Afrikaner in zijn geschiedenis het Afrikaans om ideologische redenen heeft gemanipuleerd en dit nog steeds doet is juist, wanneer men in aanmerking neemt dat deze taal door de onderdrukten wordt verworpen.


4. Dat zoveel sociologische studies over ‘kleurlingen’ door witte Afrikaners zijn geschreven, zou een indicatie kunnen zijn voor hun obsessie met de ‘zuiverheid’ van hun ras.

5. Als de Zuidafrikaanse schrijfster en Nobelprijs-winnares voor letterkunde in 1991, Nadine Gordimer, in een televisie interview stelt dat een van de plaatsen waarin zwarten en witten elkaar werkelijk kunnen leren kennen de werksituatie is, dan vraagt men zich af waarom zo weinig witte schrijfsters over zwarte vrouwen hebben geschreven en waarom zij zo weinig onthullen over het leven van zwarte vrouwen.

6. Uit de tragische lijdensgeschiedenis van zoveel Afrikaner voormoeders in de vorige eeuw hebben hun dochters en kleindochters in deze eeuw kennelijk geweigerd te leren solidaire te zijn met hun zwarte zusters.

[Vergelijk Anna Steenkamps *Gedenkschrift* (1843) voor haar ‘familie, kinderen en kindskinderen, opdat zij mogen weten waarom hunne ouders en grootouders hun moederland hebben verlaten en welke angst en benauwdheid, pijn en smart, honger en kommer, zowel van vijanden als van vuur ons getroffen hebben, en oorzaak waren van veel droevig zuchten en bittere tranen’. Geciteerd door Van Jaarsveld, F.A. 1959: *Die Afrikaner en sy geskiedenis*, p. 70, Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., Kaapstad.]

7. Ten onrechte beweert de Afrikaner academicus en criticus Ampie Coetzee in een interview in *NRC Handelsblad* (juli 1991) dat de Afrikaner geen roman kan schrijven zonder Europese achtergrond, omdat de roman in Europa is ontstaan.

8. Audre Lorde’s bewering dat ‘nothing we [black women] have to say is worth anything simply because we are saying it’ krijgt geldigheid als men in aanmerking neemt hoe het literaire werk van zwarte Zuid-Afrikaanse vrouwen als onbeduidend is afgedaan.


9. Het feit dat een groeiend aantal Nederlandse studenten onderzoek doet op het gebied van de orale en geschreven literatuur van Afrika, maakt het des te betrekkelijk minder dat aan geen enkele Nederlandse universiteit een vakgroep Afrikaanse literatuur bestaat.