

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Examining girlhoods in KwaZulu-Natal through “coming of age”
conventions in selected *Bildungsroman*.**

Key terms: South African literature, gender, girlhood studies, novels
of development.

Farzanah Adam

A dissertation submitted in English Studies at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

English Studies

In the Graduate School of Humanities

Supervisor:

Dr Thulani Mkhize

Month and Year of submission

November 2020

DECLARATION

The Registrar (Academic)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or to any other university. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged.

Farzanah Adam

30 November 2020

Student Number: 217080571

Signature



Supervisor: Dr Thulani Mkhize

Signature: ..



.....

iii

ABSTRACT

Presented chiefly as an endeavour within the field of post-colonial feminist scholarship in South Africa, this study navigates the emerging terrain of girlhood studies. It explores the changes and inclusions in the novel of development, particularly the narrative arc of girl protagonists in this genre. It examines continuities and discontinuities between girlhood and womanhood through selected texts within feminist studies. This study considers how different post-apartheid home environments shape the gendered experiences of girls in just one province of South Africa. *The Story of Maha* by Summaya Lee (2007) is set in an affluent Muslim suburb in central Durban where an orphaned, mixed-race girl is raised. ZP Dala's *What about Meera* (2015) visits the protagonist's traumatic childhood on a sugarcane farm on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, as the offspring of indentured labourers. *The Paper House* by Dalena Theron (2015), focuses on girlhood within an Afrikaner family: a protagonist living with her homosexual father and his partner in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The primary texts show how a girlchild's quest for identity and belonging is inextricably linked to issues arising from her home life. Drawing on the hermeneutical interpretations of the novels, the voices of South African girls are presented. Using a theoretical framework that intersects the aforementioned postcolonial literature with belonging and trauma, this study presents the complexities of belonging — exploring identity, trauma and the social concept of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) within South African girlhood studies. Key thinkers in the aforementioned theoretical concepts include Cathy Caruth (2016); Mary Celeste Kearney (2009); Claudia Mitchell (2016); and Christi van der Westhuizen (2018, 2019). Each of these concepts is explored independently: chapter one discusses the *Bildungsroman* genre and then expands on the extent family and culture play in shaping the girl child in *The Story of Maha*. Chapter two explains how trauma, including physical violence and internalised aggression shapes the protagonist from *What about Meera*. Chapter three discusses the effects of (breaking) generational prejudice and the trope of “good girlhood”, especially in the Afrikaans community under study in *The Paper House*. Key expansions explore how the postcolonial female *Bildungsroman* is an extension of the genre rather than an antithesis. The question of “good girlhood” (Van der Westhuizen 2018) and the “defamiliarisation” of trauma (de Finney et al. 2011) within the postcolonial female *Bildungsroman* genre contribute to scholarship on South African girlhoods within the *Bildungsroman* ‘novel-of-development’ genre.

Dedication

To the girls of Africa.

*You are not a country, Africa,
You are a concept,
Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
To hide our separate fears,
To dream our separate dreams.
Only those within you who know
Their circumscribed plot,
And till it well with steady plough
Can from that harvest then look up
To the vast blue inside
Of the enamelled bowl of sky
Which covers you and say
'This is my Africa' meaning
'I am content and happy.
I am fulfilled, within,
Without and roundabout
I have gained the little longings
Of my hands, my loins, my heart
And the soul that follows in my shadow.'
I know now that is what you are, Africa:
Happiness, contentment, and fulfilment,
And a small bird singing on a mango tree.*

From: *The Meaning of Africa* by Abioseh Nicol (Hughes 1967:158).

Acknowledgments

With thanks to my supervisor, Dr Thulani Mkhize, for her thought-provoking suggestions, timeous responses, kind attitude and patience. With thanks to my (Honours) supervisor, Dr Beverley Cornelius for her interest and instilling confidence in me. With thanks to Prof. Bernard De Meyer for his administrative facilitation. Special thanks to my number one fan — my son, Abdullah. And to my parents & Abdullah and Raeesah; Shabnam and Zainab: thank you for your support and being part of this journey with me.

Peace be with you.

Contents Page

Preliminary Pages

- i. Title page
- ii. Title page
- iii. Preface and Declaration
- iv. Abstract
- v. Dedication
- vi. Acknowledgment
- vii. Table of contents

Introduction	Page 9
Theoretical Framework	Page 10
Literature Review	Page 16
Research Aims and Objectives	Page 21
Research Methodology.....	Page 22

Chapter One: <i>The Story of Maha</i> (2009)	Page 23
--	---------

1.1 Introduction	Page 24
1.2 Novel analysis.....	Page 26
1.3 Girlhood and Post-feminism in the Bildungsroman genre.....	Page 31
1.4 Growing Down or Growing up.....	Page 37
1.5 Girlhood and faith.....	Page 40
1.6 Conclusion	Page 43

Chapter Two: <i>What About Meera</i> (2015)	Page 45
---	---------

2.1 Introduction.....	Page 46
2.2 Novel analysis	Page 47

2.3 Trauma and Postcolonial Girlhood studies.....	Page 57
2.4 Defamiliarisation through Susan: The White-saviour complex.....	Page 62
2.5 Changes to the traditional Bildungsroman.....	Page 64
2.6 Conclusion	Page 64
 Chapter Three: <i>The Paper House</i> (2015)	Page 66
 3.1 Introduction	Page 67
3.2 Novel analysis.....	Page 70
3.3 <i>Ordentlikheid</i> (respectability and decency)	Page 76
3.4 Girlhood suspended	Page 82
3.5 Conclusion	Page 86
 Dissertation Summary....	Page 89
References.....	Page 92

1.1 Introduction

In many respects, this research project follows from a previous Honours long essay which examined the concepts of home, belonging, liminality and polycentricity for an African woman who relocated to Scotland. The protagonist in this novel, *The Translator*, by Leila Aboulela (1999) experiences acute feelings of dislocation. Her ability to forge a new identity in a liminal space led to my interest in how concepts of adaptive belonging are applicable to children, and girlchildren in particular, who experience (un)belonging – not in foreign countries, but in their own country – as a result of familial and social injustice.

Since this research emanates from a university in KwaZulu-Natal, it felt important to shine a spotlight on the girlchild in KwaZulu-Natal and explore the strategies through which they negotiate (un)belonging and selfhood. Through close textual analysis of selected debut novels set in the province, namely: Summaya Lee's *The Story of Maha*, ZP Dala's *What about Meera*, and Dalena Theron's *The Paper House*, the study aims to examine how these protagonists navigate a girlhood shaped by family trauma and social injustice. Summayya Lee was born and raised in Durban, South Africa. *The Story of Maha* is her debut novel which was published by Kwela in 2007 and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book – Africa, and longlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Award. ZP Dala, the author of *What about Meera*, is a freelance writer and a psychologist at a school for autistic children in Durban. She was long-listed for the Orange Prize for short fiction. Dalena Theron, the author of *The Paper House* is an award-winning journalist from KwaZulu-Natal. In the novels under study, girls and young women primarily struggle to assert their autonomy in their home environments, and their experiences of belonging to and relating to others in key public spaces. A full examination of all girlhood *Bildungsromane* in KwaZulu-Natal would require the larger scope of a doctoral dissertation.

KwaZulu-Natal is ethnically home to the Zulu monarchy, and given that the majority population and language of the province is Zulu, it could be argued that it would have been more fitting to look at novelists who write on Zulu girlhood and un-belonging in the province. These include Mike Nkululeko Maphoto's *Diary of A Zulu Girl* (2015), Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2017) that won the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa and Angela Makholwa's *The Blessed Girl*

(2018). However, I assert that my analysis fills the gap of an unexamined body of work. The selected textual works are written by first-time woman authors. *The Story of Maha* is set in an affluent Muslim suburb in central Durban; ZP Dala's *What about Meera* goes back and forth to the protagonist's traumatic childhood and abusive marriage in Tongaat on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, and Dalena Theron's *The Paper House*, which looks at the girlhood of an Afrikaaner living with homosexual fathers is set in in northern KwaZulu-Natal, close to Ulundi. Africa.

In Chapter one, *The Story of Maha* will be analysed with the intention to firstly describe the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* genre and its involution, and secondly to highlight the extent to which family and social framework colour the girlhood experience for the young protagonist, Maha. Theoretical concepts include becoming and identity. The first chapter considers whether or not Maha manifests a 'growing down' to grow up like her Victorian counterparts, displays agency (active involvement in her development) and/or self-reflection (the ability to grow from her experiences), as well as if she is reintegrated into society by the end of the novel, as is characteristic of all *Bildungsromane*?

What about Meera will be analysed in chapter two to highlight the effects of trauma on the girlhood experience for the protagonist, Meera. Theoretical concepts explored in relation to the text include Postcolonialism and Trauma. Key questions ask how the internalisation of traumatic aggression during childhood factors in the victimisation of Meera, and why Meera's alter-ego, who forces her to murder Stuart, is white?

Chapter three discusses how the concept of "ordentlikheid" (respectability), is used to police the borders of girlhood (and by who) for Anna in the novel *The Paper House*, as well as the role it plays in her development and socialisation as an adult.

What is worth noting is that the girls in these novels are all heterosexual. A pressing issue in girlhood studies also has to do with the limited presence of, or rather absence of, trans and queer girls and the urgent need to denaturalise the very concept of girlhood both as a lived experience

and as a theoretical concept. At present, media¹ debates rage with regard to biological sex and gender identification, with gender critical feminists disagreeing with trans rights activists' view that gender identity is separate from one's biological sex, and that it should be given priority in terms of law-making and policy. They fear that sex is being argued into non-existence and that this will erode rights hard-won by women in the face of historical biological discrimination. Transgender 'coming-of-age' narratives within girlhood studies and the *Bildungsroman* genre is a mentionable genesis of the genre.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Given that the protagonists undergo traumatic experiences that shape their girlhood, my theoretical framework intersects postcolonial literature with trauma and belonging. Due to the recognition of girls as important social actors and the concept of "girlhood" as a critical category for gender analysis, rather than as merely a descriptive category of age, girlhood studies is linked to identity and feminist scholarship. Given the nature of each novel as a "coming-of-age" story, this study will also lay down a theoretical basis outlining the coming-of-age novel as a literary form that is related to, but in some respects different, from the classic *Bildungsroman*.

Girlhood Studies

Girlhood studies is a broad and developing multidisciplinary field of study that intersects with feminist studies, women's studies, and childhood and youth studies. Mary Celeste Kearney (2009) and Claudia Mitchell's (2016; 2017) scholarship is seen as significant for how they position themselves within Girlhood studies, both as an independent discipline and the acknowledgement of girls as legitimate and knowledgeable experts in their own right. Their scholarship reclaims girlhood from feminine studies entirely as a site for agency: social, cultural and political. According to Mitchell (2016), girlhood studies officially became a field in the 1990s, after the increase in conversation about getting more girls into science, math, and technology fields in the

¹ J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues. (10.06.2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/ya4lwp8s>

1980s. Kearney (2009) notes that prior to the early 1990s, most feminist research studies focused on understanding women, rather than girls. Similarly, within the field of youth studies, girls' experiences were often marginalised or subsumed under the general experiences of male youths or boys. The relationship between age and generation has served to marginalise the lived realities of girls' experiences in much the same way that the relationship between sex and gender has been used to marginalise women's experiences. The fact that girls have historically been excluded from most social analyses on account of their gender, and then further excluded generationally from feminist discourses on account of their age, has led to the genesis of girlhood studies.

Belonging

Belonging is a broad concept and can be taken to mean 'to belong' or to possess, and can also mean 'belongingness', denoting belonging to and being a member of a particular social group, solidarity, collectivity or organisation. Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), writing from the perspective of a political theorist, is one of the most influential scholars of belonging. She outlines an analytical framework for both the study and the politics of belonging. Her analytical framework is divided into three interconnected parts. The first part, which is applicable to this research, explores the notion of belonging and the levels at which it needs to be studied, including factors such as social locations, identifications and emotional attachments. The second, focuses on the politics of belonging and how it relates to citizenship and status. The third, shows ways in which political projects of belonging use pre-constructed levels of belonging to further their causes.

According to Yuval-Davis belonging involves an emotional or ontological attachment of feeling "at home" and in a "safe space" (2006:199), even when these feelings are not warm and positive. She proposes that social locations of belonging may include aspects such as age group, gender, race, class or nationality, but that not all social locations exercise equal influence or power. Rather, social locations tend to be positioned hierarchically on different power axes. This gives them greater or lesser status and power depending on the particular social context, social solidarity or historical moment in which the individual is situated.

I concur with Nira Yuval-Davis (2011:1) that "questions of belonging and the politics of belonging constitute some of the most difficult issues that are confronting all of us these days" as a new arena

of political and cultural contestation. For these reasons, “the processes, practices and theories of belonging have become a subject of interest and interrogation across multiple disciplines” (ibid) making this analysis of the bildungsroman genre and whether the protagonists are able to re-enter society – a characteristic of the genre – through *belonging* of interest. With regards the conceptual duality of belonging/unbelonging, Ann-Dorte Christensen (2009) argues that belonging/unbelonging are inextricably linked. She uses Judith Butler (1990) and Beverley Skeggs’ (1997) approach in concluding three fundamental elements in the notion of belonging: (1) the distinction between “belonging” and “politics of belonging”; (2) the perspective of intersecting social categories; and (3) the interplay between constructions of belonging/unbelonging.

The Bildungsroman

The *Bildungsroman* can be broadly defined as a novel of education. However, despite this broad definition, the *Bildungsroman* is a complex genre with a rich and contested history which has to be expanded upon in order to develop a thorough reading of the selected texts. The word *Bildungsroman* is a combination of the German word *bildung*, meaning formation, and *roman*, meaning novel. The word *Bildungsroman* is typically capitalised because of its German origin, where nouns are capitalised. *Bildungsromane* (pl) originated in the early 19th century and recount literal or figurative voyages of discovery, the final destination of which is a sense of one’s unique purpose. Since this has been scantily explored from a postcolonial perspective, my analysis expands on an existing but underdeveloped genre, wherein feminist critics like Lazzaro-Weiss (1990), Felski (1989) and Maier (2006) analyse similarities and differences between girlhoods and boyhoods in Victorian novels and through traditional *Bildungsroman* narratives. These told male coming-of-age stories, with male mentors. The aim of this study is to explore if the postcolonial girlchildren in this study, Maha, Meera and Anna share universal traits with male coming-of-age stories, and if the female *Bildungsroman* is seen as an “extension” of the traditional coming-of-age genre rather than a separate genre entirely. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) refer to postcolonial as an engagement with, and contestation of, colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies, more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism.

Jessica Murray (2017) notes that feminine narratives of gender violence and shaming have a common thread of silencing going back to gendered power structures. Her study analyses *What About Meera* by Z. P. Dala among other novels. Her summation is that representations of silence, shame and gender violence have received scant attention from literary critics.

Trauma

Leading theorists on trauma within girlhood studies include the likes of Cathy Caruth (2016) and Dominick LaCapra (1998). Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. In this trauma model pioneered by Caruth (2016), trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. Trauma is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation. Configuring trauma into the postcolonial female *Bildungsroman* narratives adds further complexity to the processes of becoming that girls endure, as my selection of primary texts attests. Here, the journey to ‘mastery’ does not follow a linear path and is incessantly characterised by fragmentation, dysfunctionality, and the hold that past events exert on the present.

Aside from the obvious, LaCapra (1998) asks how experiences of trauma block understanding and disrupt memory; he also questions whether art itself has a special responsibility with respect to traumatic events that remain invested with value and emotion. Caruth (2016) offers insights into the relationship between mental suffering and cultural representation and into the inseparable connection between individual and collective trauma, as well as the essential place of literature in the theoretical articulation of the very concept of trauma. However, postcolonial critics like Roger Luckhurst (2008) have argued that trauma theory does not sufficiently fit cross-cultural engagement, and that Caruth’s trauma theory is too “Eurocentric”, “event-based”, “too-narrow a focus on Freudian psychoanalysis”, with too much “emphasis on melancholia and stasis” and thus “closes off other approaches to literary trauma” (Visser 2015:264). There is a vibrant trajectory of decolonising trauma theory for postcolonial studies, explaining re-routings of the original theory

and delineating the present state of the project (de Finney et al. 2011). These developments aid towards an expansion and inclusiveness of trauma theory.

Defamiliarisation is the technique of forcing the audience to see common things in an unfamiliar or strange way (literally "making it strange"), in order to enhance perception of the familiar. The term was first coined in 1917 by Victor Shklovsky, one of the leading figures of the movement in literary criticism known as Russian Formalism. Formalism focused on the artistic strategies of the author and made the literary text itself, and not the historical, social or political aspects of the work of art, the focus of its study. The result was an appreciation for the creative act itself. According to Victor Shklovsky (1925), the essential purpose of art is to overcome the deadening effects of habit by representing familiar things in unfamiliar ways. W.G Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) is one example of contemporary defamiliarisation of trauma. Sebald's character, Jacques Austerlitz, an architectural historian, is unaware of his lineage while being raised by adopted parents in Wales, after being sent on the Kindertransport to England from Czechoslovakia at a very early age. Through fragmented memories and socio-political forces which force him into a detached geographical, psychological, and familial life, the world that Austerlitz floats through becomes dizzying. Defamiliarisation emerges as a method of illustrating a seemingly incomprehensible trauma. Like the protagonist in *What About Meera*, Austerlitz acknowledges that the past can return through dreams, or at least subconscious manifestations that surface, most notably, during dreams. This dream is used to convey the trauma, which is simultaneously defamiliarised. The dead are alive to Austerlitz. This seemingly delusional perspective goes almost unnoticed at this point in the novel because Austerlitz's trauma has shaped his worldview: logic has been manipulated by the trauma he has endured. In *What About Meera* by Z. P. Dala, Susan and Berdie are a figment of Meera's imagination, characters she conjures up through her subconscious when she is feeling most vulnerable, lonely, resentful, enraged or rejected.

Literature review

Key elements that shape this section include girlhood studies and its links to identity. This is because all the novels are post-colonial coming-of-age stories about girlchildren negotiating their belonging. Due to the familial and social issues that colour the protagonists' upbringing, this study also intersects with postcolonial theories of trauma and belonging, including analysis from the likes of Cathy Caruth (2016) and LaCapra (1998). My literature review reflects these combined threads. To begin with, differences in patterns of gender development within the *Bildungsroman* genre will be examined, as well as the development arc of three girls in a postcolonial context to determine any departures from the traditional genre. Insofar as the *Bildungsroman* genre is concerned, Ferguson (1991) discusses gender differences with regard to the pattern for the male and female novels of development. Her observation is that towards the end of the novel of development, the male character usually achieves self-realisation through his linear "spiritual and psychological journey in the external world" (Brändström 2009:6). In contrast, the female protagonist's development is more circular as she does not have the same possibilities as her male counterpart to go out into the world to find herself. If there happens to be women in fiction who violate these norms in a female pattern of development novel, they are "perceived as rebels and end up unhappy or insane" (Brändström 2009: 6).

While scholarship on the female *Bildungsroman* is fairly established in literary studies, for example Abel et al. (1983) published a collection of essays on the female novel of development in reaction to the lack of female protagonists in the *Bildungsroman* genre. This work has not however prioritised the development arc of girls in postcolonial contexts. To date, all the novels under this study have not been critically examined. Women writers of the *Bildungsroman* genre tend to describe the female experience as dealing more with nostalgia, loss, home and community, and the generation gap between mothers and their daughters (Lazzaro-Weiss, 1990). Felski (Brändström, 2009) shows how the male hero is free to embark on his quest for self-discovery, whereas the female protagonist of the colonial era has to struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing herself from subordination within her marriage and dependence on her in-laws.

Susan Fraiman (1993), provides a critique of static views of the formation and the construction of subjectivity, reading the novel of female development against the linear orderliness of the male *Bildungsroman*. In her view, identity for women is provisional, conflicted and contingent. Instead of asking how the heroine of her novels come of age, Fraiman (1993) asks about the divergent developmental narratives at work, and what they tell us about competing ideologies concerning the feminine condition. In *Unbecoming Women* (1993), Fraiman's careful readings of major novels by Frances Burney, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot, she iterates that "growing up female" produces "a deformation, a gothic disorientation, a loss of authority, an abandonment of goals" (p. xi), in short, the "unbecoming" of her tide. This definition supports my examination of the 'un-becoming' of the girlchild particularly.

The *Bildungsroman* under examination fits under the lens of girlhood studies, a broad and developing multidisciplinary field of study that intersects with feminist studies, women's studies, and childhood and youth studies. Kearney (2009) notes that prior to the early 1990s, most feminist research studies focused on understanding women, rather than girls. Similarly, within the field of youth studies, girls' experiences were often marginalised or subsumed under the general experiences of male youths or boys. The relationship between age and generation has served to marginalise the lived realities of girls' experiences in much the same way that the relationship between sex and gender has been used to marginalise women's experiences. The fact that girls have historically been excluded from most social analyses on account of their gender, and then further excluded generationally from fresh feminist discourses on account of their age, has led to the genesis of girlhood studies. Mitchell (2016) concurs that one of the key advances made in feminist scholarship since the 1990's has been the recognition of girls as important social actors and the concept of "girlhood" as a critical category for gender analysis, rather than as merely a descriptive category of age.

There are, however, tensions within this field. Girlhood studies has yet to have its inclusive genesis of postcolonial feminist critics. The reason for this, as E. Wendy Saul and Barbara White (1986) maintain, is that the novel of adolescence focuses more on the girl protagonist's conflict with society than her successful personal development. Kearney (2009) maintains that non-white and

non-Western girls are vastly understudied. The reason for this is that most girlhood studies research is conducted primarily in Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Northern Europe and the United States.

Considering that the term girl could hold discriminatory and deprecating connotations when used in certain contexts, Nafisa Patel (2013) uses the South African example. She mentions how the term ‘girl’ in South Africa evokes a denigrating and painful reminder for many black females who were commonly referred to using this label during the apartheid era, regardless of their age. She notes that the term provided one of the many ways of entrenching deep psychological wounds by creating “a stigmatising perception of inferiority based on gender, class, and racial differences.” (Patel 2013:62). She infers that any reference to females as ‘girls’ can be perceived as provocative and may be considered offensive to some. The term ‘girl’ rather than ‘female’ or ‘young female’ thus provides an important vocalised means of making the necessary age-based divisions and distinctions between women and girls. Patel notes that this differentiation recognises young females as the knowing and active agents they are, and not as incomplete or “not yet” versions of what they might become or grow up to be (2013:63). She surmises that unlike the term ‘young woman’, the term ‘girl’ is not future orientated and does not neglect the present realities of female experience.

Is there currently a category for postcolonial or African children within the *Bildungsroman* genre? Richard Arthur Austen (2015) believes in the universality of the *Bildungsroman* genre. He argues that the African *Bildungsroman* is not, any more than its European predecessors, an ideological instrument either for or against a specific form of modernity, but rather a reflection on the possibilities of self-formation within a specific set of historical contexts, whether through inherited culture, formal education or more autonomous *Bildung*. That said however, few scholars have written on southern African girlhoods. Hajer Elareem (2015) suggests one reason for this is that the child in African literature is always intrinsically enmeshed in a cultural and social community, and thus must somehow negotiate ethnic identity or social status in the course of the narrative, leaving little space to negotiate the lenses of girlhood.

According to Elareem (2015), because girlchildren are members of a world of which they are intrinsic parts, they are not viewed as separate entities located in space. Given that African

literature focuses on issues such as colonial Africa, the British Empire, group politics, race, the colour bar, feminism and the connection between them, they often overlook the centrality of the quest for selfhood. Elarem, who analyses the works of southern African Nobel Prize-winning author Doris Lessing, concludes the necessity for all genders to transcend the limitations of an exclusively individualistic world and acquire a collective consciousness. Concurrently, she acknowledges that fictional female characters develop a sense of identity through opposition. And the consequence of this is that they constantly express insuperable differences between themselves and the other characters (male or female) they consider as obstacles in their quest for personal identity.

Mitchell (2016) acknowledges the presence of girlhood studies in Africa, referencing a South African video project called *Vikela Abantwana* (Protect The Children: A Story about Incest). Mitchell mentions this film project to highlight the necessity of girlhood studies. The girl under study mentions her assault to several adult women and is ignored. If there are few scholars writing on southern African girlhoods, even fewer focus on methodologies for researching girlhood. Moletsane, Mitchell, Smith and Chisholm (2008) investigated a range of participatory methodological and theoretical approaches that can be adapted to study girls and girlhood in Southern Africa. These methodologies look at research with girls, about girls and for girls. They include policy research, writing, fictional practice and visual arts-based methods, and can be used as analytical tools to examine the lives of girls. In this study of girlhood, the literary analysis falls within the framework provided by the theories of becoming, identity and trauma studies.

Looking to the future, the emerging field of girlhood studies is gaining traction as more scholars attempt to contribute to this field. Insofar as scholarship that South Africans have offered and delivered in this field, there is Rozena Maart, currently living in Durban, who has a body of work that examines relationships between and among political philosophy, feminist theory, and critical theories of race and racism. In *Girlhood Studies* (2018) she is cited asking why girlhood studies, like its predecessors, women's studies and gender studies, overlooks the role of coloniality and empire building in its development and scholarship. Maart raises the claim that freedom is something that never comes to girls raised in the context of colonial enslavement.

This researcher will initially draw on resources which examine belonging, identity, trauma and postcolonial identity from the likes of Susan Fraiman, Cathy Caruth and Domenic LaCapra. However, considering the limitations of this body of scholarship with regards post-colonial Girlhood Studies in South Africa this researcher will examine more current bodies of work — those of Mary Anne Ferguson and Claudia Mitchell, as well as very recent publications by Christi van der Westhuizen and Soňa Šnircová, and Stephanie Marie Stella. Included is Stef Craps (2013) research on issues of memory and trauma as mediated through culture which helps to better frame a decolonised trauma theory. A decolonised trauma theory is one that redresses the marginalisation of non-Western and minority traumas and challenges the universal validity of Western definitions of trauma. Thus, the angle of “defamiliarisation” of trauma within the *Bildungsromane* genre will be explored, wherein rhetorical gaps in trauma narratives interrupt and challenge the cultural systems in which girls and girlhood are understood. By exploring this gap, this study does not overlook the role of coloniality in girlhood studies and its scholarship.

Research aims and objectives

Drawing from post-colonial feminist scholarship in South Africa, I propose to navigate the emerging field of girlhood studies and specifically -:

- Explore changes and inclusions in these specific novels of development, particularly the arc of girls within this genre,
- In as much as a study like this allows, examine continuities and discontinuities between girlhood and womanhood in feminist studies,
- Contribute to the scholarship on South African girlhoods within the *Bildungsroman* 'novel-of-development' genre by highlighting limitations of current trauma studies with regards post-colonial girlhood Studies in South Africa, for example the defamiliarisation of trauma within the *Bildungsromane* genre.

Key Questions:

Given that each chapter discusses a different novel, my question in each section is different and specific to that novel. This allows me to display more than one perspective on girlhood in KwaZulu-Natal. From *The Story of Maha*, could it be concluded that the postcolonial female *Bildungsroman* is an extension of the genre rather than an antithesis? As an extension of this question: Is 'growing down' to grow up true for the postcolonial protagonist in *The Story of Maha*? Viz. instead of coming of age on their own terms, are female (child) protagonists still forced to undergo their transformation within the male world? Does religion have the potential to be turned into a positive force where girlhood is concerned? This is framed as a question in chapter one in investigating variations in Maha's *Bildung* and quest. How does the internalisation of violence factor into the victimisation of Meera in *What about Meera*? Why is Meera's alter-ego, the one who *forces* her to murder Stuart, *white*? Under the trope of "good girlhood", especially in the Afrikaans community under study in *The Paper House*, mothers and women in the community are evaluated on how accomplished girls are at household chores and whether they behave respectably outside the home. (Van der Westhuizen 2018). How is this *ordentlikheid* (respectability) used to police the borders of girlhood for Anna in *The Paper House*?

Research Methodology

This is a hermeneutical study of Lee's *The Story of Maha* (2007), Dala's *What about Meera* (2015) and Theron's *The Paper House* (2015). Since this is a literary study, my research methods involve close textual analysis of these novels, as well as reading secondary (theoretical) material in terms of the considerations outlined above. The latter readings will be sourced from archived online journals, books, relevant literary blogs and newspaper articles.

In substantiating my close readings and subsequent interpretive tools, I will explore relevant theoretical material and scholarship on girlhood studies with its links to identity politics and feminist scholarship; theories on becoming and their complication of the literary form of the *Bildungsroman*, specifically the 'becoming' of the girl-child; and the concepts of home and belonging in postcolonial/post-apartheid fiction. Through close readings, I will deepen my understanding of these theoretical concepts and illustrate their intersectionality in this project on girlhoods in KwaZulu-Natal.

Each analysis chapter will begin with an overview and examination of each novel. Turning to my thematic analysis of primary texts: chapter one will discuss the *Bildungsroman* genre and then expand on the extent family and culture play in shaping the girl child in *The Story of Maha*. Chapter two will explain how trauma, including physical violence and internalised aggression shapes the protagonist from *What about Meera*. Chapter three will discuss the effects of (breaking) generational prejudice and the trope of "good girlhood", especially in the Afrikaans community under study in *The Paper House*. Exploring these influences will offer unprecedented perspective on the positioning of girlhoods in KwaZulu-Natal against the backdrop of South Africa's emergent democracy.

The interpretive paradigm thus used in my research involves a constant process of reading (primary, secondary and/or theoretical materials) and simultaneous reflection on the research considerations listed above.

Chapter 1

***The Story of Maha* by Summaya Lee (2007).**

1.1 Introduction

The Story of Maha by Sumayya Lee, described as “A spunky tale of Romance, Rotis and Unsuitable Boys” (Lee 2007, introduction)² explores the boundaries of Muslim life in a claustrophobic suburb of Durban in South Africa. This novel follows a strong-willed Maha, a half-coloured and half-Indian (or ‘half-Bruinou’, ‘half-Chaarou’, in the slang of the novel) girl born in 1972, through her transformation from lonely child, to rebellious teenager, to tentatively happy twenty-year-old married to Sameer Patel in 1992. The young woman matures under the watchful eyes of her loving but staid, insular, Indian, Muslim grandparents. Through her we are introduced to her friends, and her extended family (Zeenat, Auntie Farida, Uncle Imraan, Gorinani etc.), her domestic helper, Sarafina, and her physical and emotional maturation.

Due to a politically charged tragedy in Cape Town, she loses both her parents. Her mother, Maryam Maal, of South African Indian heritage, (also an only child), eloped to be with her father, Achmat Jacobs. Achmat, a ‘Cape-coloured’, was deemed an unsuitable partner by her parents. As a consequence of their tragic death, Maha (aged eight) finds herself living in Durban “Slumburbia”, (from ‘Slumou’ which is Durban slang for a Muslim and ‘suburbia’) with the Indian, Muslim grandparents, (Nana and Nani Maal), leaving her Ouma Galiema behind in Cape Town. The novel is written very informally in a first-person narrative. Maha colourfully tells of the wonders and difficulties of the Islamic faith; male-female relations; the fascination with her ‘coloured’ hair; child-on-child molestation; caste culture; segregation and apartheid; first love; beliefs about tertiary education, and family expectations in particular.

While many South African novels, for example the works of Nadine Gordimer, Zakes Mda and JM Coetzee, explore the consequences of “love across the colour line”, there are relatively few accounts of the other kinds of “mixed marriages” that South Africa's tortuous racial and cultural codes proscribe. Fewer still are the narratives that confront inter-Muslim tensions, such as those that can surface between Cape Town's dominant Islamic community, the “Cape Malays”, and the later established community of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent. The contradictions between

² Introductory page of novel. No page number provided.

a faith that accepts all who belong to it, and the biases erected by culture, and how it is perpetuated within a family environment are at the root of this novel.

The author, Sumayya Lee was born and raised in Durban, South Africa. She has worked as an Islamic Studies teacher, Montessori Directress and Teacher of English as a Foreign Language. This is her debut novel which was published by Kwela in 2007 and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book – Africa, and Longlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Award. She describes her motivation for writing the novel as follows:

After growing up feeding on a literary diet set predominantly in Europe or the Americas, in stories where other faiths or non-faiths coloured the thoughts, words, and deeds of most protagonists, it seems imperative that one should be able to find literature, (light, serious and otherwise) with protagonists for whom being Muslim is an essence to her existence, about how this does not mean that she is an enemy of all things western, modern or twenty-first century (Lee 2005:3).

She continues describing the inspiration for her protagonist:

While all teenagers have their angst, Muslims growing up in an unjust country within a society hell-bent on its public image, the angst is of African proportion. At this point I was grim with adolescent determination that I would create the voice of an Indo-African Muslim Female. I wanted Muslims and everyone else to be able to read of imperfect, thus realistic protagonists facing up to similar twenty-first century issues, albeit coloured by their faith. (Lee 2005:5).

From this broad introduction to the novel and via the intentions of the author, one is hopeful that *The Story of Maha* promises insight into a post-colonial *bildungsroman* narrative, or at the very least draws parallels between her story and the archetypal tropes of coming-of-age narratives.

1.2 Novel analysis

This section highlights how family and close social frameworks colour the girlhood experience for the young Maha. Theoretical concepts explored include Becoming and Identity. Maha's girlhood and socialisation is entangled in a *mélange* of faith, ancestry and a unique, apartheid model of South African culture. As stated earlier, the contradictions between a faith (Islam) that accepts all who belong to it and the biases erected by culture within a family environment, are at the root of this novel.

This section will begin by exploring the concept of identity, since Maha is initially confronted with *what or who* she is. According to Rogers and Meltzoff (2016), middle childhood (7–12 years old) is an important time to explore the emergence of social identity because children's cognitive advancements and social pressures invite new ways of thinking about their self–other relations. Children use social concepts such as race and gender to discover their own identity. Maha starts with a reflection on the colour of her skin in comparison to other girls: “It’s serious, silly...’cos you look like a Witou,” she jabbed Farah’s plump cheek, “I look like a Pekkieu and Maha looks like a Bruinou!” (Lee 2007:34). Rogers and Meltzoff (2016:2) reference Erikson who referred to middle childhood as the stage of “industry versus inferiority” in which a child discovers and refines self-confidence and competence, whether they are industrious or inferior, through introspection. According to their research, social categories such as race and gender influence how children navigate this question. Moreover, the sense of self a child forms in this middle childhood stage lays a critical foundation for identity development across their lifespan.

Their data (2016:9) suggests “gendered” nuances in the identities of boys and girls. For example, girls were more likely to use physical appearance to define the meaning of gender than boys. On the identity ranking task, girls ranked family higher in their identity hierarchy than boys.

If a child discovers and refines self-confidence and competence, whether they are industrious or inferior, through introspection, then Maha's *becoming* and identity is measured against the scale of inferiority. She is constantly taunted for being a half-breed. She stands up for herself, responding to common taunts not fully understanding what they mean. Taunts like “You so stupid Maha. You

don't even know Gujarati...your *jaath* is half...your breed, man" (Lee 2007:42) by saying "My mother was a Durban Chaarou and don't call me half-breed," (Lee 2007:69). As she gets older, she is repeatedly traumatised for her mixed-race identity by her belligerent *Gorinani* who makes constant racial slurs. In light of her noticing boys and making colourful clothing choices, *Gorinani* calls her a 'luchee' (promiscuous woman), 'gaandi' (mad), a "Saali kutri Adhman" (stupid, filthy, mixed-race dog) who dresses "Gora-style" (like a white person) and wears a scarf like a "Kaaryan" (black woman) (Lee 2007:82-83). Her (un)welcome and outcast status within her family and extended family and society is only exacerbated as she grows older.

Maha is informed about the class/culture apartheid among the various Indian sub-cultures in Durban by her cousin Zeenat who tells her: "Memon morphs into Memrah, to note derision... and anyone who speaks Urdu is Hedroo, whether from the state of Hyderabad or not" (2007:104). She continues to internalise the slurs, censure and rebuke. However, when as a teenager she discovers how her cousin Zeenat fell pregnant with a married man then lost her baby, "the shrouds of perfection that cloaked Slumburbia fell away and she rages against all the people of the world." (107).

Later her biological identity as in her father's actual surname is replaced from her passport, from Maha *Jacobs* to Maha *Maal* (2007:117) by her grandfather on her first trip overseas. Then aged sixteen, vulnerable and having a low sense of self-worth, she is seduced by a married Saudi prince who she believes she is in love with. Her grandparents do not realise she carries on a telephonic affair with him long after her return to South Africa.

Insofar as self-determination, her post-matric life is determined for her by her grandparents. Her grandfather and grandmother respectively remind her that "[her] first priority is to complete [her] Islamic Studies", "and it is also a big responsibility to make sure [she] know[s] how to cook and sew" (2007:140). She goes to a religious centre and learns to cook, until she allows herself to be seduced by her madrassa teacher's brother, Ameen (2007:186).

It is only at this point, viz. seduction by a significantly older boyfriend that she begins to question why she puts herself in compromising positions: "There must be something wrong with me," I

hollered. ‘Why do I get sucked into it all so easily?’ (2007:200). At this point she begins bargaining with God, as if this is the only interaction wherein she can assert control. She clearly states: “My abstinence was my trump card and I bandied it about desperately during prayer: Look! I’m being good. I’m finding it hard, but I’m doing it...so please? And I’m sorry” (2007:213).

Her audition to marry soon after she leaves school becomes an escape for her, but not a definitive turning point that is characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* genre. It is the knowledge that her father cheated on her mother (2007:144) that essentially makes her realise that nobody is perfect. Perhaps at this point it is apt to introduce how Maha essentially starts to display a ‘growing down’ to ‘grow up’ tendency, a hallmark of religious environments and upbringing, which will be discussed further.

According to Pratt in Lazzaro-Weiss (1990:17), the female *Bildungsroman* demonstrates how society provides women with models of “growing down” instead of “growing up”. This is not the case with the male model. Pratt expresses this sentiment through her 1982 study where she analyses three hundred and twenty-eight novels by women, and concludes that women's fiction between 1688-1975 reflects feminine archetypes that are signals of a repressed tradition, creating the impossibility of a true Victorian female *Bildungsroman*. Subsequently, she argues that a novel of female development is in itself a contradiction. According to her, “many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's novels that dealt with feminine conduct became a highly popular way of inculcating the norms of womanhood into young readers” (Pratt 1982:13), prescribing submission to suffering and sadism as an appropriate way to prepare for adulthood. For girls there was a “novel of choice between auxiliary or secondary personhood, sacrificial victimization, madness and death” (Pratt 1982:36). This image of the innocent childlike woman exerted a powerful hold over the Victorian imagination, and this commanding stereotype of femininity left no way for the girlchild to meaningfully achieve full personhood and self-fulfilment.

Evidently social constraints seem to work differently for Maha compared to the men around her and she begins to accept this. Much like her Victorian counterparts who accepted sexist practices like the withholding of female suffrage, and laws preventing married women from owning property, Maha’s passion for education and independence is tempered by reaching a marriageable

age. The following description is of Maha's interaction with her future husband and reveals her acceptance of societal expectations of her not working, or earning an independent income, let alone studying, when she meets her future husband for the first time:

'We girls don't have much choice, you know? We just have to go with the flow and hope it all turns out okay.'... "So . . . where do you stand on women studying and working, married or not?" I asked, forcing the swing faster. He shrugged, "I've got no problems with educated, working women, if that's what they want to do." I burst out laughing, I simply couldn't help it, this was overwhelmingly too good to be true. He gazed at me with bewilderment. "What? What's so funny?" "Nothing," I beamed happily. "So, you'd have no problems if *your* wife wanted to study?" He shook his head. "Study, work, stay at home, she should do what makes her happy . . ." I grinned delightedly. He was a rare breed. (2007:225)

Ellis (1999:16) seems to reflect the validity of the "growing down" claim, stating that the protagonists like Maha, start off as "self-assured young women who question their subordinate place in society, but the endings find them less active, less assertive, and reintegrated into society" via marriage.

Maha settles on Sameer's decision to marry her based on a single meeting.

He seemed sensible and sincere, two great plusses, and, for the first time ever, my heart literally soared with hope as we sipped our tea. And yes, as we waved them all goodbye, I smiled and thought: I can see myself married to him. I really could! Nothing felt the same after that night. It was as though my life had taken on the air of a production – but first I would have to wait and see if I'd passed the audition. (Lee 2007:227).

However, she expresses resignation (266) when she discovers that this same man, her fiancée, is cheating on her. Yet she continues to believe that marriage will erase former errors. Her rationale is that she also emotionally cheated for the longest time with Walid, who up to a week earlier had sent her a diamond necklace. By this stage she finds comfort and guidance in her personal

interaction with God, she states: “I’d taken precautions and sought guidance” (276), “I lifted my hands and bonded with my Creator for a long time, until I was satisfied that I had asked for everything I thought I needed” (279) which seems important, as throughout her childhood and teenage years she merely saw religion as a set of rules meted out by undesirable adults. There is an attitude shift in Maha that happens through her interaction with her faith. Initially, she describes her religious teacher as one who “called the class to attention and proceeded with the serious task of teaching us the faith *as we ought to know* it” (161). She mocks her teachers and pictures their fantasies: “I bet she wanks every night”, and tries to “block out the image of her spread-eagled on a floral bedcover” (162). However, by the end of her religious studies she is saying things like: “but there was a different sense of satisfaction to be found in studying” (164). She says: “Apa Abeda manages to inspire within us a sense of responsibility to know and actively seek” and “I lapped up the knowledge on offer” and believed that this experience of kindling a relationship with God was “unlike the madrassah’s of my childhood, which had been for the most part tedious and boring (164). Maha initiates the process of allotting facilities to pray daily and ends up being called “Miss Goody Two-shoes” and “Little Miss Holy Superior” by her classmates who “sniffed at anything religious with the disdain of nouveau intellectuals and wannabe Marxists” (80).

Maha overcomes being groomed by Walid, who for all intents, molested her (133). Although Maha describes the experience and attention as pleasurable, this experience only exacerbates how vulnerable she is throughout her girlhood experience. As soon as he has stopped touching her in his hotel room she feels violated: “Was I expected to do something to him, I wondered? Give him a blow job? *Could* I do that? ... but now the Pepsi tasted vile and I suddenly *felt* vile as the reality of what had just transpired dawned on me. Just as suddenly as it had all started, the full force of what had happened hit me, and I stood up mumbling about having to go.” (133).

Since the early 1990s, gender research has intersected with Girlhood studies, resulting in a literature seeking to understand the gendered specificities of female girlhood and becoming against the backdrop of generational shifts, as well as economic changes. The focus on femininity as a trope creates a danger of speaking for all girls and writing a uniform script within Girlhood studies. This novel overview is intended to show a postcolonial narrative of becoming within South Africa.

1.3 Girlhood and Post-feminism in the *Bildungsroman* Genre

The following section will explore the postcolonial coming-of-age story and its similarities and differences with its predecessors: the Victorian novels and the traditional *Bildungsroman* which only told the story of male coming-of-age, with male mentors. The aim is to explore if the postcolonial girlchild, Maha, shares universal traits with the aforementioned.

Lee (2005) mentions that she sees *The Story of Maha* as a coming-of-age story:

The Story of Maha is simply any odd person's story of growing up in any part of Slumurban South Africa. I knew that the story would start at her birth and end (for now anyway) at her wedding. It is an Indo-African tale after all; making getting married the natural conclusion. Technically speaking the genre would be classified as a *Bildungsroman*, a coming of age tale —though whether Maha really comes of age— I am not altogether certain. She certainly grows, and in her own mind, seems to accept her circumstances and simply move on. (Lee 2005:3).

The word *Bildungsroman* is a combination of the German word *bildung*, meaning formation, and *roman*, meaning novel. The word *Bildungsroman* is typically capitalised because of its German origin, where nouns are capitalised. *Bildungsromane* (pl) originated in the early 19th century and recount literal or figurative voyages of discovery, the final destination of which is a sense of one's unique purpose; "The term *coming-of-age novel* is sometimes used interchangeably with *Bildungsroman*, but its use is usually wider and less technical." (Thamarana 2015:2). There are movement variations in *Bildungsroman* such as "*Entwicklungroman* (novel of development), *Erziehungsroman* (novel of Education), *Künstlerroman* (novel of artistic development), and *Zeitroman* (development of era along with personal development)" (Thamarana 2015:2).

Most youth novels have certain basic elements, such as: plot, character, point of view, setting, tone, and style. In many kinds of literary works, any one of these elements can be emphasised over the others. In the case of the *Bildungsroman*, character is primarily emphasised more than any other element. "The structure of the story tends to follow the standard pattern: introduction, rising

action, climax, falling action, and denouement” (Brändström 2009:6). Common supporting characters in the *Bildungsroman* include “the wicked authority figure, the enchanting same-sex friend, the unrequited love or the kindly mentor.” (Thamarana 2015:2). Common themes in *Bildungsromane* include “God, class struggle, sexual frustration or the supernatural” (Svensson 2009:3). In *The Story of Maha*, the wicked authority figure is present in the form of Gorinani who she calls the Cow (Lee 2007:81) and is always belittling her: “I stood there traumatised by her bellowing” (83). The same-sex friend manifests in her cousin, Zeenat, whom she loves and respects, as she states: “She hugged me fiercely and I hugged her back, allowing myself to break into sobs” (94) and from whom separation is daunting: “I felt a lump in my throat” (282). The unrequited love appears in the form of Walid who she stops calling “Just like That. I didn’t think it was right to pray for Mr Right and then flirt with Mr Wrong” (213). The kindly mentor manifests in the form of her Faith, where she seems to feel safest: “I lifted my hands and bonded with my Creator for a long time, until I was satisfied that I had asked for everything I thought I needed” (279). I make the latter observation based on the unkindness and grooming young Maha is constantly exposed to as a girlchild. She is never intentionally nourished and mentored by anyone not even the well-meaning Zeenat, who herself is dealing with the aftermath of a scandalous love-affair. Zeenat tries to redeem her esteem by teaching Maha to survive in the “Maal Post-Matric Female Education Policy (148).

Typically, a *Bildungsroman* will involve a trial, a life-altering question, and sometimes a resolution. This is displayed in *The Story of Maha* when she is challenged with the imperfection of her father, whom she idolised. Her mother’s family is portrayed as demonic and after she discovers that her father cheated on her mother, she realises that no one person is perfect -- and as a consequence reconciles herself to her family rules. Maha’s disappointment is noted in her words as “[she] felt like all the deflated balloons at the end of the party” (155) and “[she] felt like a stagnant blob” and her vulnerability and appreciation towards her grandparent’s is palpable: “on the outside I was fully fledged – tall and all grown up – but inside I still felt like a little girl with tangled hair, unable to live without her Nana and Nani” (156).

Themes within the *Bildungsroman* change with shifting social mores, but they all include at least a few of the following:

a David-and-Goliath situation in which a child faces a monumental challenge, often without adult aid; a stepchild, orphan, or outcast; the sense that domestic or parental affection is not enough; the discovery that life is not easy or clear; doubt about one's purpose or beliefs; and a quest for freedom, self-expression, and horizon-expanding love. (Carlson, 2013).

Maha's childhood experiences of identity, belonging/unbelonging, purpose, acceptance and integration are challenging. She experiences this in the constant reaction to the colour of her skin, the texture of her hair, the removal of her non-Arabic sounding surname, her outspokenness, and her desire for a career.

The existence of the female *Bildungsroman* genre — sometimes called the *frauenroman* — has been debated amongst scholars and feminists alike with a blurred resolution: “Does the genre stray from the patterns of the male *Bildungsroman*? What are its definitive characteristics? Are there enough works written about women, by women, to create a sub-category in the *Bildungsroman* genre?” These are all questions that arise because results are limited when investigating the “female bildungsroman” (Carlson 2013).

Many investigations into the female *Bildungsroman* take on a feminist critique. In the 1970's, feminist critics used the term “female *Bildungsroman*” to describe coming-of-age stories featuring female protagonists. These feminist critics analysed nineteenth and early twentieth-century women novelists' portrayal of young women as they matured. The female *Bildungsromane* of these times depicted the “suppression and defeat of female autonomy, creativity, and maturity by patriarchal gender norms” (Lazzaro-Weiss 1990:17). This portrayal fitted Victorian women, “who struggled with the expectation of social accomplishments and wifedom defining her entire being.” (ibid) Female development was a topic in literature that proved especially difficult to describe because of the social constrictions of the time. Writing the development of a female protagonist as parallel to a male lead character during this time period “would have meant describing a girl undergoing personal development through education, growth, and citizenry” (Maier 2007:318).

Women writers of the *Bildungsroman* genre tend to describe the female experience as dealing more with nostalgia, loss, home and community, and the generation gap between mothers and their daughters (Lazzaro-Weiss 1990:21). Feminist critic Felski notes (Brändström 2009:7) that an important difference between the feminist *Bildungsroman* and its masculine counterpart is the contrast between how the male hero is free to embark on his quest for self-discovery, whereas the female protagonist has to struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing herself from marital subordination and dependence. Another gender difference is that while the male *Bildungsroman* mainly covers the protagonist's childhood and adolescence, the female variant has a wider time span. Thus, whereas the hero's quest ends in early manhood, the heroine's journey continues well into middle age. These observations are all true for Maha, who only just begins the journey to independence at marriage and this is at the end of the novel. She asks herself: "How long would it take before I'd be comfortable with the script for Maha the Married? Well, I had no choice but to shut such thoughts off and follow the Rituals of The Reception. As for the future – I sighed – I would take it one tiny, designer-heeled step at a time." (Lee 2007:281).

Despite stark differences in the development of men and women however, the two genders of the *Bildungsroman* also have some clear similarities. These include "the protagonist's involvement in his or her own development, self-reflection and introspection, and reintegration into society" (Maier 2007:318-319). Whether this is applicable to *Maha* is one of the key reflections in this chapter. Ellis (1999) emphasises that rather than being the opposite of *Bildungsromane* novels with male protagonists, the female *Bildungsroman* is seen as an "extension" of the traditional coming-of-age genre (Maier 2007:320). This is my observation while studying this novel.

At this point I would like to highlight the work of Boes (2006) who observes how the novel of development has mainly been regarded as a phenomenon of the 19th century. Boes notes that the rise of feminist, post-colonial and minority studies during the 1980s and 90s led to an expansion of the traditional *Bildungsroman* definition. According to him, far from traditional definitions which focused exclusively on the development of the male hero, the *Bildungsroman* genre has expanded to include the development of the white female protagonist at first, and then also the non-white female protagonists.

Boes observes that in the 21st century, the focus of studies in the 20th century novel of development has been on minority and post-colonial literature. Given that the *Bildungsroman* continues to flourish in minority and post-colonial writing on a global scale, “... critics have begun to reconceptualize the modernist era as a period of transition from metropolitan, nationalist discourses to post-colonial and post-imperial ones” (Boes 2006: 240). Previously perceived as a period of nationalist writing, the modernist period has come to be viewed as an era of re-orientation toward post-colonial writing. In summary, the *Bildungsroman* genre has become more inclusive and thus changed its character. From having focused solely on the 19th century white male hero, it has expanded to include not only the development of the white female protagonist, but also the post-colonial protagonist, both male as and female.

Then, while the change in gender of the protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* does alter the norm of the genre, the shift of norms in society is what essentially altered the topics covered by female writers. Female *Bildungsromane* in contemporary literature and film are able to explore issues that those of the past were unable to mention. Sexuality, higher education, and other aspects of society that were once off-limits to female writers (particularly when writing about women) are now described and explored extensively because of the shift in cultural norms. For example, in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*³ (Blume 1970), her most scandalous line is: ““I must—I must—I must increase my bust.”” (49). The openness and crudeness with which Maha talks about periods, breasts, sexual discovery, sexual attraction and gender interaction is markedly different from her predecessors, she states: “Your Creator is not shy to talk about such matters, so why should you be?” (Lee 2007:112) and voices her teenage fantasies as she “imagined his voice and the caressing effect it seemed to have over [her] body – and suddenly took a deep breath” (213). She also confesses: “desire coursed through me and I carried on kissing him, incapable of peeling myself away” (132). These signify a shift from Victorian sensibilities and even from first-generational feminist sensibilities. This is evident in how Maha does not rebel against marriage, but rather seems to relish the prospect: “I shivered with excitement”, “I was getting fit to fuck”, “I had

³ Blume, Judy (1970). *Are you there God, It's me Margaret?* Bradbury Press. This is a young adult novel, about a sixth-grade girl who has grown up without a religious affiliation, due to her parents' interfaith marriage. There's talk about periods, boys, bras, and developing bodies, with big questions about growing up, including what religion to be (if any). The author has had her books banned over the years, — including *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* by concerned parents and communities.

deliberately chosen to marry” (Lee 2015:234, 247, 249). While this may not have been the intention of the author, Maha’s excited sentiments about her marriage seem to reflect an intersection of feminism with anti-foundationalist movements including postfeminism and post-colonialism.

Writing about this intersection, Šnircová, (2018) sees the female coming-of-age novel as another contemporary genre that reflects the media-induced constructions of the postfeminist female identity. She writes (2018:19) that while the feminist Bildungsroman participates in the cultural atmosphere dominated by the second-wave feminists’ fight for women’s equality in private and public spheres of life, more recent female *Bildung* narratives reflect an important shift from feminist to postfeminist sensibilities. Postfeminism, as Šnircová has noted (2018:19), is “a term fraught with contradictions” reflected most clearly in the difference between the views that relate postfeminism to new theoretical developments in feminist thought and those who relate it to antifeminist tendencies detectable across popular culture. On the one hand, postfeminism is treated as “a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism” (Šnircová 2018:20). And on the other it is seen as a sign of a backlash against the gains of second wave feminism.

To critics like Brooks (Šnircová 2018) however, who emphasise intersections between feminist ideology and anti-foundationalist movements, postfeminism is a new and more mature stage in the history of feminism. It includes the “rejection of the assumption that feminism is based on a unified subjectivity, a universal sisterhood” (Šnircová 2018:19). This is an important and developing thread in analysing Maha’s relishing of marriage viz. being ‘under’ a man and his whims but wanting it: accepting his word that he would allow her to work and follow her passions after marriage. To add to this intersection between feminist ideology and anti-foundationalist movements like postfeminism, Maha begins to relish her faith and practising it, even though this is something that is typically viewed as patriarchal and subservient. She feels like “the path to redemption lay in turning over a new leaf” (Lee 2007:201) and finds comfort in her moments with God: “in my final moments of solitude...I prayed and then sat on my prayer rug” (278), “I recited

a few suitable verses of praise... took a deep breath” (279) “everything would go well inshallah” (280). This indicates a new and more mature stage in the history of feminism.

Therefore, it can be asserted that *The Story of Maha* may well be not just post-colonial, but a post-feminist *Bildungsroman* as well. We have drawn parallels between her story and the traditional archetypal trope hinting that the female *Bildungsroman* is an “extension” of the traditional coming-of-age genre (Maier 2007:320) rather than a stand-alone entity. We will now analyse Maha and her struggles with identity, her socialisation and what it effectively tells us about Girlhood in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.4 Growing Down or Growing up

Feminist studies of female *Bildung* in twentieth-century literature often focus on the adult woman protagonist who experiences an “awakening” and successfully liberates herself from traditional gender roles (Šnircová 2018:2). In her study on the British *Bildungsroman* between 1750 and 1850, Ellis (Šnircová 2018:15) rejects the belief that ““growing up female” has been in fact a ‘growing down’, ‘a choice between auxiliary or secondary personhood, sacrificial victimization, madness and death’”. Ellis maintains that a certain amount of “growing down”, a certain loss of personal autonomy, is an inevitable constitutive element of the maturation process regardless of the protagonist’s gender. She also criticises the attempts of some feminist scholars to establish more rigid distinctions between the female and male *Bildungsroman* (Šnircová 2018:15).

Furthermore, Ellis (Šnircová 2018:15) emphasises the common ground between the male and female *Bildungsroman*, asserting that the protagonist’s agency (active involvement in one’s development), self-reflection (ability to grow from one’s experiences) and eventual reintegration with society are the most central issues in the narratives of maturation. However, she does concede that some aspects are unique to the female situation when she states that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century heroine’s maturation “involves learning to see herself as others see her, learning how to experience herself as the object of the other people’s gaze”, which enables her to preserve some autonomy by manipulating others for her own gain (30). The apparent

submissiveness that the heroine learns to adopt as a part of her *Bildung* process, Ellis suggests, is to be seen as a “form of empowerment” (24) since it allows her to “create a manipulative form of control” (33).

Reflecting on this novel, I have identified characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* and conclude that the female *bildungs* is as an extension of the genre, rather than its own genre. While I have argued above that the post-colonial *Bildungs* may well be post-feminist too in its “rejection of the assumption that feminism is based on a unified subjectivity, a universal sisterhood”, I cannot ignore how Maha is manipulated in this novel to believe that her decisions are wholly her own. (Šnircová 2018:19).

What does this tell us about positive changes in the status and situations of girls that are central to second wave feminism? If Sameer disappoints Maha, and if he turns out to be a liar and abuser, or if none of his promises are followed through – Maha’s life outlook is bleak. While not limited to second wave feminism, we wish for Maha gender equality in all spheres of life, including but not limited to rejection of the public/private divide along gender lines and a critique of brutal and subtle forms of patriarchal dominance. At the end of this story, Maha’s happiness is dependent on whether her husband holds up his end of their marriage vows. She cannot rely on her family – right from her girlhood we know what they think of her: only because of being engaged “suddenly, [she] felt [she] was the Chosen one”; they tell her “No showing Adhman jaath and all”, (Lee 2015:235). *Adhman jaath* is a slur, indicating the immoral or uncouth behavior of mixed-heritage person. Maha’s family members remind her at her engagement celebrations of her half-caste categorisation, and that she does not conform to their purist identity.

In 1983, the feminist critic Susan Fraiman published her study of female novels of development, in which she highlights the different circumstances for the choice of marriage for the male hero and female heroine. Whereas the male hero typically marries when he is a mature young man who has decided upon a career choice and has found his place in society, the heroine typically marries when she is still a young woman who has not yet found her identity. Fraiman observes that “[f]or the male protagonist, marriage is not a goal so much as a reward for having reached his goal; it symbolizes his gratification” (129). Consequently, marriage does imply a barrier to self-

development for the male protagonist, as it does for his female counterpart. There is thus a gender difference to be found between the male *Bildungsroman* and the female variant as far as marriage is concerned. Maha and her various suitors are perfect examples of the different circumstances for female heroines and male heroines. Maha is a young girl who has just matriculated, while Walid is an established Middle Eastern businessman with resources which enable him to buy expensive gifts and find her in another continent (273). Her former suitors Adam (64) and Ameen (64) and even her businessman husband, Sameer, have all found their place in society and further illustrate this point.

Linked to such an important gender difference is the role of mentors in the story of men and women. Fraiman notes that the female protagonist typically has difficulties finding representative female role models, and instead generally finds a 'mentor' whom she eventually marries (Brändström 2009:7).

Rita Felski (Brändström 2009:10) notes that compared to her male counterpart who leaves home in search of an independent life, the female heroine typically leaves her parents' house for the home of the man she marries. As she comes to identify with her husband, making his destiny her own, her self-development is thus altered. In 19th century literature there are only two choices available to the female heroine, both of which are negative. She either leads an unhappy married life, or leads a life of solitude where she is withdrawn and often meets a self-destructive end. Felski (Brändström 2009:11) makes a comparison to the male hero's quest for self-discovery, and concludes, like Fraiman, that there is a marked gender difference. Felski does however observe that the contemporary female novel of self-discovery is a fundamentally optimistic literary form, which bears witness to women's identification of themselves as an oppressed group, and thus as a possible challenge to existing societal norms (ibid). Without powerful discussion, accompanying commentary or perhaps an addendum, it would be generous to call this novel a fundamentally optimistic literary form. While it broadens understanding of an adolescent experience, it does not subvert commonly held stereotypes.

1.5 Girlhood and Faith

Having discussed the postcolonial coming-of-age story and its similarities and differences with its predecessors, and reconceptualising the modernist era as a period of transition from male-centric discourses to post-colonial ones, there is an increasing need to develop appropriate feminist frameworks that can engage the diverse and complex ways that girlhood is experienced intergenerationally within South Africa. Not only are such frameworks important for understanding the differences — as well as recognising the commonalities — of girlhoods in South Africa; they can also provide an important means of resisting certain essentialist feminist paradigms and help challenge the universalisation of female gendered experiences.

Present-day Muslim girlhood experiences in South Africa have been shaped by the legacy of structural and social inequalities. As seen thus far in the analysis of *The Story of Maha*, apartheid laws and cultural practices facilitated the entrenching of deeply embedded social and psychological notions of hierarchical difference with regards to race, ethnicity, culture, and religion. Racialised religious identity is seen on a hyper-level in *The Story of Maha* and her life in Slumburbia. Religion is used only as a tool of control by her family. As she matures however, Maha begins to find her own connection to God and Faith: “I chatted with my Creator for a long time”, “I lifted my hands and bonded with my Creator” (Lee 2007:279). Maha’s personality endures, reconciling the difference between culture and faith, as well as human error like her father’s infidelity, by the time she is married.

This section explores whether religion has the potential to be turned into a positive force where girlhood is concerned. One of the most typical elements of the *Bildungsroman* is the presence of a mentor. As we have discovered, the *Bildungsroman* traditionally championed a male protagonist, also led by a male hero or mentor. Since this project investigates texts which highlight the nature of the female protagonist’s experience and the variation in her *Bildung* and quest as a result, perhaps religion could be considered Maha’s mentor. While Zeenat is the most stable female figure in her life, Maha finds she has been duped by Zeenat, as Zeenat had an affair with a married man (107). Fraiman alludes to how the female protagonist typically has difficulties finding representative female role models, and her ‘mentor’ is the man whom she eventually marries

(Brändström 2009:7). Traditionally, it is the mentor who teaches the young protagonist and directs his or her development in the right direction allowing her to reconcile her outsider status and reenter society. While the feminist *Bildungsroman* participates in the cultural atmosphere dominated by the second wave feminists' fight for women's equality in private and public spheres of life, more recent female *Bildung* narratives reflect an important shift from feminist to postfeminist sensibilities.

In past decades, there has been a gulf between faith-based and secular feminism. On one side were activists who found religion indispensable to their activism. On the other were activists who found religion outdated, superficial, or irrelevant to their activism. As a political movement, feminism seeks to transform society by challenging and changing social institutions. Conversely, religion seeks first to transform individuals through a personal relationship with God, which then results in a desire to work for the transformation of society. In this light, studies have found that religious 12th graders have significantly higher self-esteem and hold more positive attitudes about life in general than their less-religious peers. The findings were released in the report 'Religion and the Life Attitudes and Self-Images of American Adolescents' (Smith & Faris 2002). According to Christian Smith, principal investigator in this study, high subjective importance of faith and years spent in religious youth groups are associated with higher self-esteem and more positive self-attitudes even when statistical procedures control for the influences of numerous demographic and socio-economic factors. This seems true for Maha because she draws the confidence for her decision to marry Sameer from her spiritual life, referring to her conversations with God and religious mentors (Lee 2007:248) and saying, "I'd taken precautions and sought guidance" (276). Hunt (2004) is one author who looks at the alliance between spiritual conviction and social action. In her investigation, she found that on a personal level, early feminists overcame being called misfits and heretics by recognising that, in the larger view, they were extremely important to God. She concludes that this is the optimum mind-set for anybody who wants to undertake the hard work of social change, viz. in this case the recognition of girls' rights.

Labovitz (1988) approaches the female *Bildungsroman*, with a definition that follows a female protagonist from her adolescence to maturity focusing mainly on friendship and family, education and career, love and marriage. Like her male counterpart in her search for self-development and

self- knowledge, she goes through experiences that are both necessary and desirable. Unlike the male hero, however, the female heroine's quest for growth takes place under completely different circumstances: "*Bildung* would function from her life experience rather than from *a priori* lessons to be learned", Labovitz maintains (1988:246). Instead of learning by reason, by basing decisions on previous knowledge like the male hero, the female protagonist grows by learning from life itself. According to Labovitz (1988), a defining characteristic of the female *Bildungsroma*, is thus that "*Bildung* takes a greater toll on the heroine in that she embarks upon a quest of self-discovery, of discovering things she has known but cannot yet act upon" (150). The female protagonist's search for self-awareness has a more negative effect on her because she feels burdened by social injustices, and cannot yet take action to solve the problems. However, once she begins to discover her identity and place in society, then she can begin to develop. Maha's life story beyond marriage is unclear, yet her acquiescence "determined that the stuff crammed into the closet of my mind would remain there undisturbed", "far, far easier to cease thinking and simply slip into the Slumburbian social whirl" (Lee 2007:256) indicates her journey towards self-realisation will be hampered by her ideological upbringing.

Labovitz highlights another significant gender difference: whereas the typical hero has modelled himself on a mentor, the typical heroine has moulded herself on her husband. As a consequence, her quest is procrastinated. Being a female, the heroine feels burdened by the inequalities between the sexes that she becomes aware of. While these do not bother the male hero to the same extent. Experiencing an extra burden, the heroine must leave social issues open, temporarily anyway, as her primary goal is to find herself. This viewpoint seems supported by Maha's desire to experience happiness for once, "unashamedly milking my newly acquired status for all it was worth" (256), suspending her questioning nature to "go with the flow" (255).

The purpose of the NSYR study mentioned above was to research, identify and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in adolescents' lives in order to encourage sustained reflection about, and rethinking of, our cultural and institutional practices with regard to adolescents and religion. Rather than hinder her, religion gives Maha succor. In a postcolonial and postfeminist perspective, we should question whether or not she could come full circle in her journey with the aid of faith rather than a man or a mentor? Could faith be her mentor?

The question of religion and its role as a mentor for another protagonist will be examined in chapter three in the context of *The Paper House*.

1.6 Conclusion

Socio-political forces and familial relationships influence the girlchild's development. Female bonding, like Maha's sisterly bond with Zeenat, does however play a significant role in Maha's perception of her circumstances and influences her ways of dealing with such forces, for example her racist aunts, uncles and cousins. With nurturing and effective female mentorship, girls could find belonging among the different influences of gender, interpersonal and socio-political relationships, achieving autonomy and identity as they mature. Female mentorship directly conveys the message of social stratification to the young protagonists and in Maha's case does not entirely fail to inspire a coherent identity for her during her childhood. This is because she has someone to relate to her adolescent woes, if not the racial abuse she suffers. By adopting and reworking the *Bildungsroman* to depict the postcolonial, postfeminist experience, the writer has illustrated the complexity of a young woman's identity formation in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province of South Africa from girlhood to womanhood.

We do not know how Maha's story will end, however there is a sequel titled *Maha Ever After* (Lee 2009). In the sequel, Maha's life is not quite the happily-ever-after she had envisaged. She discovers her husband's infidelity and demands a divorce, thereby risking the ubiquitous disapproval of her community. Her future as a shameless divorcee appears bleaker than her childhood as a half-caste, so she embarks on the next part of her journey to selfhood and independence. Up to this point however, we are able to identify universal themes in the *Bildungsroman*: agency (active involvement in her development), self-reflection (the ability to grow from her experiences) and reintegration with society by the end of the novel. We find that Maha's girlhood in a postcolonial context highlights how women are socially trapped by having their education and marriage goals dictated to them since girlhood. Girlhood for African girls has to overcome societal issues, such as identity and acceptance, before selfhood can be celebrated. As for whether Maha grows down to grow up unlike her male counterparts: yes, she gives in to

her fate, one that is dictated by her family network. Essentially, her personal mission becomes that of marrying a suitable boy – just as literature of the Victorian-era reinforced a cultural stereotype of submissive femininity. One can only hope she is able to lean into a more reliable mentor, perhaps Faith, as marriage, just like her Victorian counterparts, marks the beginning of her self-development. At the very least, through this process she moves from total unbelonging as a child to almost belonging by virtue of being a ‘married’ woman.

Chapter 2

***What about Meera* by ZP Dala (2015).**

2.1 Introduction

What About Meera by ZP Dala (2015) tells the tale of Meera Narain, a 22-year-old woman from Durban who escapes her abusive arranged marriage to run away to Dublin, where she takes up a job as a caregiver at a school for autistic children. After years of abuse at the hands of her husband, an alcoholic doctor and his family in KwaZulu-Natal, Meera escapes to Ireland. Her fractured and damaged psyche sends her spiralling into a doomed relationship with Ian Gallagher, the father of one of her autistic patients. The obsessive affair uncovers the trauma of Meera's childhood, and the experiences she underwent on a farm in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The childhood abuse at the hands of a religious elder, coupled with an abusive marriage, sets her on a destructive path of alcoholism and hallucinations. It is in this dangerous state that Meera, feeling broken and unwanted commits a horrifying act. She deliberately leaves her young ward, Stuart, to wander into the room of an older mentally unstable patient, leading to his death. She is thus ostracised from a world where she thought she would find happiness and finds herself back in KwaZulu-Natal as a hospital porter, estranged from her family.

Zainub Priya, or ZP Dala is a freelance writer and a psychologist at a school for autistic children. She has been the runner-up in several short story competitions, including an Elle short story contest in 2012, the SA Writers' College Short Fiction Contest in 2013, and the Woman & Home Short Story Contest in 1999 and 2012. She was awarded second prize in The Witness True Stories of KwaZulu-Natal competition and was long-listed for the Orange Prize for short fiction. She has lived and worked in Dublin, Ireland, and currently lives in Durban. During her promotion for this, her debut novel, she was attacked for expressing admiration for Salman Rushdie and admitted to a mental health institution, allegedly under intense pressure from her local Islamic community and asked to renounce her admiration of [Rushdie's] works (Smith 2019). The fact that the author herself was entrapped will lend to a brief discussion on how female *Bildungsromane* are often autobiographical.

Secondly, in the female coming-of-age narrative, unlike the male child's narrative of "travel and action, of self-assertion and discipline, of filling one's life diary with the account of glorious and

victorious deeds, of creating in the smithy of one's soul the as-yet uncreated conscience of one's race", *becoming* a woman means to comply with the prescribed cultural definition of the feminine as the male other (Gjurgjan 2011:110). Whereas the *becoming* of a man is defined by the norms of ideal manliness as expressed in outwardly traits such as being, "“enterprising, self-reliant, self-sufficient and self-controlled”, female *becoming* is defined by a different set of cultural stereotypes, in particular being ‘nurturing and mothering’” (Gjurgjan 2011:110). When Meera cannot do this for herself, she creates alter egos who ‘care’ for her without knowing how, thus perpetuating the trauma and violence she experienced throughout her girlhood.

2.2 Novel analysis

To the best of my knowledge there is no critical scholarship on this relatively new novel, *What about Meera*⁴, let alone through the lens of girlhood in terms of trauma, becoming and belonging. Thus, it becomes imperative to render her basic story in the words of the author to acclimate with Dala's writing and central characters. The story begins in Dublin. Meera's stream of consciousness at the opening of the novel in Dublin indicates that she feels like an insecure outsider. People find her “exotic” and find it “strange that a girl from Africa could also be an Indian girl”. (Dala 2015:174).

Dala writes of her protagonist's state of mind: “she cowers into her lack of tertiary education, her dumbness, and pretends that she banters too much about sonnets in canter and the slow rhyme of psychosis.” (387) and how she uses unfulfilling sex with strangers as a form of escape from this mental state: ““Open a window. Open a window,’ she pleads to the naked Barry, who lunges at her heaving chest and holds her down in the stale smelling sheets. Meera suddenly wants to escape, immediate escape. She can't do this.” (447).

The story moves back to her childhood on a farm on the outskirts of Tongaat, “a dry dusty town with one main street that bisected the village into two unequal halves”, and we gain insight into

⁴ I am using the Kindle version of the novel, as the print version is currently out of print. Dala ZP, *What About Meera* (2015). Umuzi, edition 1. Amazon Digital Services LLC. Rather than page numbers [Location numbers/loc] will be offered, as they are referenced in the Kindle edition.

the beginning of her childhood trauma (482). At this point, it is of significance to mention that this novel is postcolonial in respect to how the author explains the history of the sugar industry in KwaZulu-Natal. Colonial settlers from the British Empire and the Dutch East India Company had created a lavish lifestyle for themselves in Tongaat in grand manor houses, and Meera's family were from indentured Indian labour who were housed in barracks on these farms (488). The farm where our protagonist, Meera Rekha Narain was born was called Emona (95). Dala writes how these indentured labourers, grateful for a roof over their heads "kowitzed" to the Barons and their wives, and their children "who had fully grown horses as pets" and "happy golden retrievers" (488).

It is on the Emona farm that a religious man appeared who was deemed by her indentured, superstitious and religious dwellers a blessing, a saint of sorts: "No one questioned Indian Swami....He lashed with a thin piece of bamboo...Dirty farm children they were called. Low-caste, dark and ugly children. Filthy naughty-eyed children they were called. India Swami was relentless and ferocious" (542). The details of the verbal, emotional and physical as well as sexual abuse on these vulnerable girls are related in detail:

The girls must be married off before they are eighteen,' professed India Swami, who concluded that the girls had wandering eyes and needed to be 'put right'...It all began with long-nailed pinches. Naughty farm children had grown up into dirty adults. ...Dirty women never spoke of what happened inside the dark prayer rooms. 'Say after me, gell say after me ... I am dirty, I am ugly, I am naughty... (613).

Meera and the girls on the farm grew up knowing they were dirty: "They blossomed into ugliness. They took overdoses of painkillers and blood-pressure medicines" (613). Meera particularly grows up believing she is dirty, filthy and unworthy of happiness and a bright or promising future. When her parents are offered a marriage proposal for her by the mother of a wealthy, alcoholic, divorced doctor from the wealthier part of town, they believe it is the best she will ever do: "Rajesh, with his medical degree, his father's massive mansion and his money, was indeed royalty for Meera, the ugliest, strangest of the farm girls. India Swami watched her hooded eyes as he fondled her. And he knew" (622).

Nothing is mentioned in the novel of any protection afforded to Meera by her parents, poor farmworkers from the predatory India Swami. Dala does however express sentimentality towards Meera's father who cries behind a pillar, out of sight on her wedding day (712). Insofar as paternal concern, Meera's father himself feels imprisoned:

He looked with a side glance at the wild-haired child he had fathered. She seemed lost in the world around her...His limber, tiny-boned girl. The daughter he knew nothing about. Knew not how to talk to... In two days' time he would give her away to another man... He hated himself. For giving her away... With a sharp mind, a kind, soft heart, and a beauty that only a father could see. She must go. (698).

Her religious parents are practicing Hindus and vilify Muslims, including Meera's schoolfriends. On the day of her wedding, her friend Aisha (Ashes) comes to stop her getting married to the drunk and previously married, Rajesh, who we discover has an Oedipus complex towards his mother Anjali (1204). The poor, misguided farm labourers mock Aisha and regard themselves as culturally superior:

Go tell all the old goats that Aisha Vawda is here, wearing her black bin bag, here to see her friend not her married ... Aunt Sita –She's a Muslim! And a meat beef eater. Polluting this pure wedding with her beef eating mouth. (849).

Her schoolfriend Aisha is fiercely protective and begs Meera not to give in to the Swami and her parents' wishes. Here we get a hint as to why Meera's later hallucinations feature white women. Aisha tries to convince Meera to be braver and more independent like a 'white girl'. Meera's response to Aisha is: "...we're not white girls. We're Indian girls. White girls are too sharp" (835).

The story then moves to Meera's life as a married woman, hearing the hawkish Premchand uncle talking about Indians needing to collaborate with PW (Botha); the treatment and abuse of domestic workers; and the family obsession with fair skin. Her sister-in-law, Anusha, a successful doctor burns her skin in her quest for a fairer complexion to attract Vivek Patel, a Gujarati, jeweller:

She had lathered a thick layer of skin-lightening cream on her face the previous night and had woken up in the morning with a festering visage. Anusha was a dark girl. The fairness in the family had, in a twist of fate, landed on the faces of her brothers, who didn't really need fair skin at all. Anusha's life had been peppered with attempts to lighten her skin. She had endured her mother's haranguing as she grew into a teenager, a mother who locked her in her bedroom during sunny days and placed thick dark-brown drapes on her windows, a mother who had ritualistically scrubbed her face on Sunday mornings with a concoction of turmeric and rose water, and who had made her bathe daily in a brew made of bitter syringa leaves. All to try to make her fair-skinned (1063).

Meera continues to endure insults about her skin colour from her mother-in-law, as well as bruising, bleeding, and rape from her drunk husband:

For four years she had endured the beatings from Rajesh, who showed her no tenderness. She had silently endured the harassment of Anjali, of Moti the Parrot and of the Fair One, Rajesh's sister-in-law. But Meera's mind was reeling. Cogwheels turning and turning, into a non-stop day-night machine song: 'I can too. I can too ...' (994).

Life back on the farm is no better. The indentured minds wreak the whip of injustice on anyone who does not conform to a dominant culture, as can be seen on her visit:

...as she neared the house she soon realised that the straggly group of uncles and aunts was not there to welcome her after all. A man was being sjambokked in the driveway. Her uncles took turns swinging the long snaky whip upwards into the skies, and then, as if casting a fishing rod, bringing it lashing down on a contorted black body jumping on the ground. Caiphus 'Smiley Montezuma' Zuma – the gardener. Being beaten senseless on the day Meera arrived home from a loss of virginity and a loss of sanity" (1154).

Even as a married woman she is not safe from the Indian Swami who asks her: "How was it gelll? Tell me ... Did you enjoy it, dirty gelll? Did you lift your hips? Your hipppps? Did you?" 'Get

out!’ Meera yelled, and threw a shoe at India Swami’s head” (1165). At some point in the traumatic marriage, Meera begins to converse with voices in her head. She invents an alter ego, a white woman, because she and Ash both believe white women “take no shit” (835). First Susan, a blond, appears – zesty, kind, caring and nurturing. She enquires:

"Who are you? ‘Susan, pronounced Soo-zun.’ She cannot recall exactly when the hallucinations began. But here they were ... a white woman in her mother-in-law’s kitchen! What are you doing here? What do you want? Are you real? Susan, are you real? Am I losing my mind? ‘I walked out of the walls, love.’ Stands on the dirty floors. Sniffing at the dust. I’ll clean them tomorrow. ‘Cook the bloody egg, doll!’ I ... It’s spoilt. ‘It’s fine. Pick out the shells. Cook it. Eat it. Listen to me, I know. Cook it!’ (1643).

Then Berdina Garcia Marquez (Berdie) appears to Meera. This imaginary person is also white, but a brunette instead of a blond:

"‘Well!’ huffs Susan, clearly the alpha female. ‘You should’ve chosen one.’ Too late. Butter blob melting fast in hot oil, egg in, egg out, egg on plate. ‘You should put a steak on that. Bruise. Got any steak? Let me check that freezer, hey.’ I don’t ... I am Hindu ... we are forbidden to eat ... cow. ‘Forbidden?’ huffs Susan. Twitching batwing arms. ‘Forbidden indeed. Are your men forbidden to hit you, then? Well, are they?’ ‘What?’ asks Berdina, rummaging through the freezer, clearly not following the barrage of words. ‘These Indian women and their forbidden this and forbidden that.’ ‘Oh, like yoga music, hey, mystical!’ says Berdina, pulling out a packet crusted with ice. Not really. Not really like yoga music at all ... We are forbidden to listen to music too. Huff. Puff. Rolling eyes. Forget the steak. Peas in a packet it will be. ‘Oh, let’s do a pot of tea then,’ Susan bosses, and nods Berdina in the direction of the kettle. Peas in a pod, then. Mind your peas and queues then. ‘Ja, but you Indian girls, you just take too much from your men, hey.’ Blonde, brunette ... heads nod.” (1643).

Susan and Berdie accompany Meera daily, they chat with her and keep her imaginary company. There is however an indication that she tries to quieten their voices and summon them only in her

moments of extreme pain, like when she has an abortion, she beckons: “Susan. Get out of the walls and talk to me. It is three in the morning: the blood and clots are calling out to you. Dot gone, Susan. Dot gone.” (1946). These women, the voices in her head, keep her company in her moments of loneliness and pain, offering her comfort and suggestions: “Susan blonde, Berdie brown ... prepare to open a bottle of fine Chardonnay, and settle their frames on a dirty couch, not dusted in days, picking at breadcrumbs like beggars. ‘Hit him back!’ Susan puffs on a cigarette.” (1729).

Finding no way out of an abusive marriage, Meera tries to go back home, but her family will not have it. Thus, “In misery, Meera began to sink into a deep, dark depression. Rejected and outcast, she lived out her days wondering what was to become of her...She existed in a no man’s land, a place where a thousand Baboo(n)s could accost her and call her prossie” (2191). From her childhood, to her helplessness and trauma within her marriage, and trying and failing to run back to her parents, the story switches to Dublin where Meera becomes obsessed with Ian, a parent of a special-needs child. While Ian is initially enthralled with Meera, he quickly tires of her clinginess and obsessive need. He finds her too expectant, telling her: ““Meeee-aaaa ... I want to leave a place for my boy in this world. I can’t be consumed by you and your madness. You’re eating me up, you hungry hungry child.”” (2337).

Meera expresses little emotion toward the children in her care, and goes as far as expressing hopelessness and disdain for them. Here it becomes evident that the abuse at the hands of the Swami has made Meera indifferent and unsympathetic, a half-formed victim of her childhood/girlhood trauma. She seemingly ascribes little value to them in her thoughts, as illustrated below, just as the Swami did to her and the girls on the farm:

There is no point. Nothing touches these children. They remain distant and gnarled, and they skim the surface of puberty, fading into their own eventual funerals. They come out of dusty cupboards, from the cottages of grey-green Kerry and the council houses of County Kildare. This School, their very last resort. The last outpost before they are eventually retired into the stuffy bedrooms of their ageing parents. Nothing. Nothing becomes of them. (2404).

While on the one hand she does not connect with the innocent and helpless children and expresses a numbness to everything around her in Dublin, on the other she does desire and respond to physical touch, albeit reservedly. As the narrator points out:

Sex was never the hard part for Meera. It was the sex, of it all, that was easy. Minutes, maybe an hour, of contorted pleasure wrapped up in a foreigner's body, enveloped in his scent. Nothing could compare to it. She had made it easy for herself. She made love with a serious detachment, a moment followed by a moment of quiet introspection, a slow, steady wrapping-up within herself. Ian loved the quietness of her. He enjoyed her subdued sighs, her ability to hide her pleasure behind closed eyes, arms crossed over her chest, arms thrown over her eyes. (2538).

Further insight into her mental state is expressed by Dala via her supineness:

Their affair sustained itself by its ugliness, its silliness, its still moments where no words needed to be exchanged. Meera never touched him. She would undress and lie supine on the pure white sheets, looking out of the window, waiting for his first touch, one that was always on her inner thigh, prising the thighs open with a sharp shove. It always happened that way. (2577).

One begins to wonder whether Meera is essentially healing, growing, bonding or at the very least coming to peace via her relationship with Ian. From transactional sex they begin to care for one another. Initially, this appears to be the quintessential re-entry into society, typical of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Ian begins to need Meera too.

Meera knew this before Ian. Ian fought it. He kept telling himself it was just sex, just physical pleasure that he craved from Meera's body. But things were changing inside his mind. And today, today was different. She could tell. Today, he needed her. Not for sex. But for comfort. And she revelled in all that it meant. His arrival at her door signalled another dimension in their togetherness. Meera smiled. The time was coming. Soon, she smiled. Soon. (2660).

No sooner do these threads of hope begin to spin than we are brought back to the harsh reality of girlhood trauma and Meera's victimhood. It is a fresh wound that refuses to heal. Meera calls her mother in a state of love for Ian; of feeling wanted and needed. She tells her mother:

Mummy, Mummy. He loves me. I am in love. Mummy. He loves me.' The line was ominously silent again. And then her mother cleared her throat. And spoke. 'Come back. They will take you back. That man, his family. If you beg, if you plead, confess you were wrong, they will take you back.' Meera felt a world drop into heartbreak. 'But, Mummy ...' was all she could croak into the distant line. (2722).

Inevitably she is seized by the mania of the voices in her head, the consequence of unsupportive parents and a cycle of repressed anguish, "And her mother's mania became her mania. She felt a loss of control. The control that had kept the voices of white women safely hidden in their homes, and away from the whitewashed walls and ovens of her mind, began to crack." (2730).

Susan, the carer who knows nothing about caring for Meera beyond self-preservation reappears as a voice in her head: "She felt Susan's breath on her neck even before she heard the South African accent. Even before she saw the flash of a flowery summer dress in an Irish April." (2730). Meera begins to panic:

She pressed a bitten thumb nail into a button that cut the long-distance call. Bitterness, anger, grief, rage bubbled upwards to chase the spring away. 'What now, doll? What you going to do, huh?' Susan laughed and glared into her face, blowing smoke rings into her welling-up eyes. Meera threw the phone at Susan's face. (2730).

In this panic she calls on Ian, as he has begun to make her feel accepted and worthy of love and affection. Ian, who is cheating on his wife with Meera, cuts her off coldly. Meera's wanton sensibility begins to fray and the voices of the people in her head mock her:

‘What now, dollface?’ Fu*k you, Susan. Leave me alone. Go away! Padraig screamed. Meera howled. Susan laughed. And a million little pixel dots appeared in front of her eyes. Hedgehog-shaped pixel dots. Deleted dots. Deleted dots on black screens. In her howls, she foamed at the mouth. No one cared. No one heard the outside-ly howls. This place was saturated with howls of despair. She dialled his number again. He didn’t answer. And again, and again, and again. A feral, senseless woman punching the dial button on a cellphone repeatedly. And repeatedly being rejected. (2754).

While Susan’s voice torments Meera, Ian sends her a text message to end their relationship which reads as follows:

‘We must end it. It is over. I won’t leave her. I have to think of my son.’ That was all. That was all he had said to her. In her greatest moment of need and desperation – we must end it. End it all. She filled up with rage, an anger bubbling and boiling inside her, the knots in her stomach gnarled into a movement, a killing, hating type of movement. Destroy him! He has destroyed me. How? ‘Where’s the son, then?’ Susan whispered in her ear. It became a song. ‘Where’s Stewiestewiestewieeee ... Stew? Find him.’ (2754).

Padraig Douglas is a fifty-year-old autistic man at the care-home where Meera works. Meera is urged on by Susan’s voice in her head, her lifelong rage constant rejection and insidious hate to punish her lover, Ian Buckley, by pushing his fragile child Stewart into Padraig’s room and locking the door behind him. The excerpt below describes Padraig, an involuntarily violent man who was unable to tolerate anyone in his room, and what he did to Stewart when Meera locked him inside Padraig’s room:

"Never, I say Never. Go Into His Room. They had warned everyone. He only tolerated the presence of a large guard called Vincent. He grew violent, violent and scary, if anyone else entered his room. Violent. Especially in his pleasure pain. He had grabbed the clicking angel and flung him like a ragdoll against the walls. Once, twice, maybe ten times. Until the sound of the hedgehog in the boy’s hand had died with a wheezing sound. Howls. No more clicks. Stewart was dead, his tiny body flung too many times against a hard wall,

shattering his ribcage, piercing his heart. His fragile bird-bones broken in too many places to keep him alive. ‘What have you done?’ A million questions. Meera answered no one. She fell to the ground, and reached out for Susan’s hand. ‘Meera, what have you done?’ ‘Nothing.’ ‘He stole my keys.’ Lies. (2793).

There seems to be no accountability on Meera’s part for the murder. Even though she is asked to leave the care-home due to negligence, she still attends Stewart’s funeral without remorse. Perhaps she feels no one ever took responsibility for her pain, so she was free to pursue revenge. Meera who was once the victim is now Meera the perpetrator of pain and trauma.

The novel moves back to Durban, KwaZulu-Natal straight after the murder. Meera comes back to her cousin Shalini for two weeks. After she is asked to leave, she is at the mercy of her poverty, sharing a room with nurses and renting from an abusive landlord. Since her arrival “Meera called home twice. Once to tell her mother she had arrived. And once again to tell her parents she never wanted to see them again” (3051).

The novel ends fifteen years after Meera returns to Durban. She seems to reconcile herself to her fate and re-enters society on her own terms. She still offers no remorse for Stewart’s murder:

Meera had arrived back home, like an exile from ice-cold Dublin. Like an exile in Durban too. Back where she came from, back to hiding in corners. She had to come back; there was nowhere else she could go. Dublin had chewed her up and spit her out. She realised too late that, in any town, it is so easy to lose who you are. (3070).

Meera works at a hospital. She spends her days eavesdropping on nurses and doctors, as a spectre in the mortuary, and on her good days talking to the patients. Her hallucinations in the form of Susan’s voice do not abandon her:

She enjoys her job at a wasted hospital, the one that proudly bears the name of a Mahatma...

She spent hours with Susan. They spoke about the dreams, dissecting them like cadavers of people whose bodies had never been claimed. Susan held her head every night, on the pancake-thin sponge mattress. It was Susan who told Meera, ‘I will never go away from you. I will never abandon you.’ (3121).

While she forgets Ian, his face and body and Dublin, her subconscious mind subjects her to dreams of the funeral. To avoid these dreams, she hardly sleeps (3128). Dala seems resigned to leave Meera here, as a product of her circumstances rather than a murderer, and does not seek accountability for her. Meera finds contentment in her daily trudge from ward to ward, wheeling patients to and from theatre and to the mortuary. While the murder is never mentioned again, it is never removed from Meera’s subconscious: “We are a product. We become the things we cut out with scissors and paste with glue onto the canvases of what we think are our lives.” (3114).

This ends an overview of the novel through the lens of girlhood trauma and marital trauma. The quotes and extracted passages are lengthy because this novel has never been literary analysed, thus the need to familiarise the reader with Meera’s voice and fragmented stream of consciousness.

2.3 Trauma and Postcolonial Girlhood studies

Writing about a traumatised Meera who leaves her young ward to die, in the context of postcolonial trauma studies, may lead to various forms of analysis. What is of interest is how the author makes no excuses for Meera. We are told she becomes a silent stalker of mortuaries toward the end of the novel, a creepy, fearful character, with a propensity for murder, rather than a mentally traumatised girl (3118). With *The Story of Maha* there was an assumed narrative, a documentary representation of social experience and circumstance. However, with Meera, her story does not fit snugly into postcolonial fiction because it does not conform to a typical story of injustice. Postcolonial novels situated within the compass of postcolonial studies come to be read as either social documents or allegories that bear either direct reference or less direct performative trajectories to history, geography, genealogy, and identity.

Since Meera does not fit these trajectories, *What about Meera* could be viewed as a form of decolonisation of trauma. Decolonising trauma theory has been a major project in postcolonial literary scholarship ever since its engagements with trauma theory. Trauma theory, as conceptualised in the 1990s by Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, generated a lot of critique due to “the theory’s many controversies, contradictions, and limitations” (Visser 2015:264). Since then, trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies have been at odds. While trauma theory has “undoubtedly yielded numerous insights into the relationship between psychic suffering and cultural representation, postcolonial critics have been arguing for some time that trauma theory has not fulfilled its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement.” (Andermahr 2015:500). Rather than forging relationships of empathy and solidarity with non-Western others, a narrowly Western canon of trauma literature has emerged, one “which privileges the suffering of white Europeans, and neglects the specificity of non-Western and minority cultural traumas.” (ibid). The depoliticising and dehistoricising tendencies of dominant trauma theory are also deemed major obstacles (Visser 2015).

According to Craps (2013), such a decolonised trauma theory would redress the marginalisation of non-Western and minority traumas; challenge the supposed universal validity of Western definitions of trauma; provide alternatives to dominant trauma aesthetics; and lastly, address the underexplored relationship between so-called First and Third World traumas (2013:5). *What about Meera* could possibly be viewed as a form of decolonisation of trauma, in viewing Meera’s unrepentant, unlikable character through the lens of girlhood trauma.

Sandrina de Finney et al. (2011) argue that unless we decolonise not only the frameworks of research that are associated with white feminism, but also the very practices of territorial displacement in which they participate, studies of racialised girlhoods will continue to replicate this misrepresentation and the disenfranchisement of girls. In this way, decolonisation is not an empty signifier, but a practice of repatriation. If girls are not approached as problems-to-be-solved or subjects-to-be-rescued, but as potential agents who face systemic barriers to their own agency and autonomy, one can cease linking them to research constructions that re-colonise their subjectivities and experiences. Meera could easily be understood as a problem child and thus problem adult, “minoritizing” her experience because the social realities that underpin her

behaviour remain hidden (de Finney et al. 2011:14). Unaddressed, what she does or has done is marked within dominant discourses, as “deviant or deficient” (ibid, p. 3) ignoring systemic barriers to her own agency.

That said however, trauma studies are central to this project because they establish a foundation for analysing literary girlhood trauma. These are not just the physical or sexual abuse, both which Meera experiences acutely, but also microaggressions -- emotional violations, such as ongoing verbal abuse by the Indian swami, her parents, her relatives, her in-laws -- but also the undermining, neglect, shame, humility and ridicule she internalises. What is interesting is the representation of the cumulative effects of trauma in how they silence this young victim and the complicitous bystanders. Her friend, Aisha Vawda withstanding, no one else defends decisions that are made for Meera, thereby forcing her to create Susan and Berdie. Literature is uniquely positioned to capture this dynamic, and analysing and recognising these quintessential girlhood experiences are essential for effecting social change.

Scholars have discussed the many challenges that make representations of girlhood trauma difficult to both write and identify. Firstly, social codes of discourse dictate silence about girlhood trauma. Glenn (Stella 2013:10) discusses voice, or the lack thereof, as a construct that is part of a greater communication system produced by a “dominant group”. In many situations and cultures this dominant group is white men, who have historically silenced the female experience, particularly when that experience challenges established patriarchal systems. Glenn argues: “Throughout Western social history, all people gendered feminine (or weaker) have been systematically muted if not silenced” (Stella 2013:10). Sexual assault survivors Susan Brison and Nancy Venable Raine (Hall, 2000) discuss how this silencing is accentuated in experiences of sexual violence, which not only further traumatises victims, but also serves to facilitate the continuation of the violating systems. Meera is abused by a man who is revered by her community – a poor community that lives on a farm working for a white landowner. She is subjugated by those poor and subjugated themselves – indentured labourers. She never recovers and goes on to perpetuate violence.

Secondly, the repressed and fragmented nature of trauma memories makes remembering, narrating, and recognising trauma difficult. Trauma scholar, Bessel van der Kolk (Stella 2013:282), explains that traumatic experiences “may totally resist integration” into the victim’s mental schema. Furthermore, because trauma is “initially organized on a nonverbal level,” most traumatic memories are “experienced as fragments of the sensory components of the event” (Stella 2013:282). This is seen towards the end of the novel where Meera forgets Ian, but has dreams about Stewart’s funeral (Dala 2015: 3128).

Thirdly, trauma studies have largely focused on large-scale historically located traumas, such as wars, genocides, and the Holocaust, or what Laura S. Brown calls the “normal” or “agreed-upon” traumatic events (Stella, 2009:101). However, relatively little critical attention is paid to “insidious trauma,” Brown (1995:107) defines as “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment, but that do violence to the spirit and soul”. This is the type of trauma that many feminised individuals experience under intersecting systems of oppression. Stella (2013) notes that it is the cultural commonness and insidiousness of sexual-based girlhood trauma that make it difficult to both write about and discern.

Historian Dominick LaCapra (Gilmore, 2001) emphasises that the cultural practice of discussing trauma from an objective, scientific point of view, rather than with empathy, inflicts a double trauma on victims that serves to perpetuate both the trauma and the silence. Women and girls often absorb oppressive and violating cultural images that not only constrain them, but also carry out the work of the patriarchy. For individuals who fall within intersecting systems of oppression, self-determination and trauma become even more complicated.

Representations of trauma experienced by children are further complicated by the disruption of identity and the struggle for identification that characterise the experiences of victims within this demographic. As fiction writer Paolo Giordano explains (Stella 2013:5), that one difference between young and adult traumas is that children and adolescents do not have the level of experience or tools for coping with and overcoming their traumas as adults do. He argues that children and adolescents need to see their own pain reflected in someone else. Only in this way

will they start to understand and analyse it. However, this identification and healing process – and, thus, identity formation – is challenged for young girls identifying with other oppressed feminised figures, many of which are often performing according to patriarchal dictates. Meera has no one to look up to. Discussion about her mother, aside from being a vehicle for her birth, is virtually non-existent in the novel. Even when she calls her mother to express her healing, her mother is only concerned with her re-entering her traumatic marriage (Dala 2015: 2722).

An analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in women's fiction about girlhood trauma has yet to be conducted (Stella 2013:5). Studying stories like Meera's is significant because they address the ways in which people's identities – their beliefs, attitudes, and values – are created and maintained. According to Stella (2013:6), analysing stories about traumatised girls can reveal, firstly how most girls, and individuals in general, are socially educated to assimilate sexual-based traumatic experiences (their own or another's) into greater cultural narratives that dismiss, devalue, and/or silence these traumas. Secondly, how victims struggle to cope with their traumas while the general public struggles with identifying these traumas due to this education. Furthermore, unlike straightforward critical information, narrative representations are unique in their power to pull the reader into the inner lives of characters, evoke the reader's conscience and challenge the reader's complicitous behaviours, silences, and beliefs.

Related to how childhood trauma affects Meera pushing her to a murderous act, Edwards (2005) notes that PTSD has been and continues to be a significant problem for public health in South Africa, affecting individuals in all sectors of society and as much a concern with respect to children as to adults. Further, the absence of a feminist model of female delinquency has meant that girls' victimisation and the relationship between that experience and girls' crime has been systematically ignored.

Rhetorical spaces in these texts like the ending of *What about Meera* interrupt and challenge readers' positions and participations within violating cultural systems by means of defamiliarisation. This entails readers stopping to analyse not only the characters' complicitous acts and silences, but also their own as they identify with or distance themselves from these

characters. Thus, the implication of rhetorical gaps in some trauma narratives is arresting and challenging to the cultural systems in which these traumas occur.

2.4 Defamiliarisation through Susan: The White-saviour complex

Meera and Ash both believe white women” take no shit” (Dala 2015:835), to the extent that Meera’s saviour appears as two white women, Susan (a blonde) and later Berdie (a brunette). While Meera and Ash see whiteness as something positive and aspirational, Dala uses them as an example of the ills of the white saviour complex. This is especially noteworthy in classifying this as a postcolonial novel that requires the process of Defamiliarisation. Through this novel, readers are asked to defamiliarise their existing perceptions within studies of racialised girlhoods. Otherwise, the misrepresentation and the disenfranchisement of girls will continue to be replicated. The “White Saviour Complex” has manifested itself in many different ways throughout history. Whether it is through time or money, many people of privilege want to “give back” to communities that are underserved and marginalised in order to balance out the injustices in the world. These short-lived actions, no matter how well intentioned, do not disrupt the very reason this need for rebalance exists in the first place.

Defamiliarisation refers to the literary device whereby language is used in such a way that ordinary and familiar objects are made to look different (Mamrol, 2016). It is a process of transformation, where language asserts its power to affect our perception. It differentiates between ordinary usage and poetic usage of language and imparts a uniqueness to a literary work. If the primary aim of literature is to disrupt the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse and everyday perception, and to disrupt our passive complacency and force us into a critical analysis of the world, this becomes an effective form of decolonisation of girlhood novels. Susan and Berdie are a figment of Meera’s imagination, characters she conjures up through her subconscious when she is feeling most vulnerable, lonely, resentful, enraged or rejected. Dala uses them to show that while Meera sees them as assertive saviours, particularly the alpha Susan, in reality they are not.

Earlier in the chapter it was mentioned that the author of *What about Meera* underwent public scrutiny when this novel was published for voicing her admiration of Salman Rushdie. The stress

surrounding the incident made her seek refuge in a mental health facility. Citing Sidonie Smith, Hajer (2015: 309) writes about how the life of women within patriarchy tends to be a silent space of a non-story, and is determined by men in a way that does not threaten male dominance and interests:

Since the ideology of gender makes a woman's life script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture, the ideal woman of self-erasing rather than self-promoting, and her natural story shapes itself not around the public, heroic life, but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that according to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography. From that point of view, woman has no "autobiographical self" in the same sense that a man does. From that point of view, she has no "public" story to tell. (Hajer 2015:309).

That Dala went against the narrative of a non-story and wrote about her voluntary incarceration, could be a form of defamiliarisation, thus a decolonisation of her personal trauma. Dala's reaction, in refusing to be silenced by the men in her family and community, is an expression of an independent alternative selfhood, unlike her protagonist, Meera, who balances between marginality and inclusion, and then final invisibility.

Reinforcing the idea of the woman writer and her significance in the literary canon, Eagleton (1996) references the power of the female writer when she quotes Mitchell's assertion that the woman writer "must at once 'be feminine ... and refuse femininity'" (Eagleton 1996:139). She elaborates by noting that: "She [the woman writer] creates a woman's world within her novels while, at the same time, rejecting that world through the authoritative act of writing. She has to work within the dominant order, what is termed the 'symbolic', for to be outside the dominant order is to be mad or dead. But equally, she must disrupt that symbolic order." (ibid).

Dala's approach to defamiliarisation highlights a field of interest in race/colour as well as the gender/genre debate specifically how women writers "can subvert the male-dominated forms" (Eagleton 1996:139). According to Eagleton, this subversion can come about in several different

ways, for example, in appearance in the texts, by disruption of a linear narrative as seen in *What about Meera*.

2.5 Changes to the traditional *bildungsroman*

Modernist novelists' relationship with the genre of *Bildungsroman* is repeatedly represented as one of “recuperation”, “return”, “recapture”, etc. Selin Ever (2013) argues that modernism's relationship to the tradition of *Bildung* and the genre of *Bildungsroman* is far more complex and vital than a simple, arbitrary “return.”. Ever's main argument (49) is that it is not simply by means of characters' failure to attain a harmonious unity with society, but through irony, the (*Bildung*'s fantasy of autonomy and self-determination) that the modernist *Bildungsroman* presents a critique of the classical genre.

Through a close reading of *What about Meera*, specifically through the lens of trauma, it has been demonstrated that the tensions buried in the unconscious narrative of organic development erupt as formal problems in modernism: the classical *Bildungsroman* meets its demise through a relentless dehumanisation of form. That is, if the *Bildungsroman* presents us with “the image of man in the process of becoming” (Bubikova 2011:10), we find in *What about Meera* that the *Bildungsroman* enacts the dissolution of that process in its very form through a traumatic girlhood, thus arrested development.

2.6 Conclusion

Fictional representations of ‘becoming’ are essential in critical discussions regarding girlhood trauma for numerous reasons. Foremost, they capture common social dynamics that may otherwise be difficult to recognise as connected to the dehumanisation of girls and the phenomenon of sexual-based violence. Dala's representation of Meera captures the truth of girlhood trauma with her depictions of trauma as fragmented and confusing. The way the story jumps timelines and countries contribute to the cloudiness. As a result, readers experience trauma memories in the same way that victims might. Dala succeeds in creatively providing insight into the psychic reality of

trauma and evokes empathy. That Meera's trajectory is violently provocative draws readers into the text so that they wrestle with the events and characters in order to piece together the plot and the social dynamics generating the denouement. In this fashion, readers are compelled to genuinely reflect on the characters, culture, and dynamics represented in their texts; and what needs to happen or change culturally in order for these sexual-racial-culturally based traumatic events *not* to occur. Meera unsettles her reader by defamiliarising her/him to harmful cultural constructs – constructs into which we are assimilated and, therefore expect. A good example is a happily-ever-after ending to a novel, or one with a hopeful ending like *The Story of Maha*. However, in *What about Meera*, with defamiliarisation and provoked thought, the author interrupts systems of gender oppression.

Interestingly, girlhood trauma in this novel is mostly told from a first-person point-of-view, talking about girlhood trauma in a manner that cedes power to girls or children. Catherine Lumby (in Stella, 2013) insightfully notes that children are dehumanised equally by conversations in which they are sexualised and those in which they are denied sexuality while being overprotected. In both discourses, Lumby claims that children are simply blank pages on which adults write. Thus, critical to discourses regarding girlhood trauma is a study on how to conduct these discourses with integrity – or in a manner that honours the agency, individuality, and sexuality of children.

Works of fiction that realistically represent the experience serve as an important social tool for understanding, disrupting, and challenging systematic sexual-based violence and the accompanying trauma. With authors' creation of works of literature that function as tools for understanding and recognising moments of systematic oppression and violence, readers are empowered to interrupt these moments and the violating dynamics that transcend the literary works themselves.

Chapter 3

***The Paper House* by Dalena Theron (2015).**

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the context-specific “coming of age” or *Bildungsroman* conditions of girls who grew up in KwaZulu-Natal and to deepen our understanding of the familial and societal influences around girls and young women in South Africa. This section analyses the novel *The Paper House* by Dalena Theron (2015). Like the previous chapters that examined how family and society shape girlhood, this chapter looks at the influences in Anna’s childhood. Anna is a girl from a privileged, liberal upbringing, from an Afrikaans, faith-conscious, (Calvinist) Christian background. Placing a narrative of a white Afrikaner girl alongside the Indo/Muslim narratives is merely a geographical comparison: race-ethnic minorities in KwaZulu-Natal.

When we meet our protagonist Anna, she is a twenty-something reporter at a local newspaper in a small town in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Her jittery, unfulfilled existence is foregrounded by the unconventional family she was raised in. After her biological parent’s divorce, she is raised with Calvinist values by her eccentric gay father and his male partner. She lives under the scrutiny of conservative Afrikaans family members and the sustained curiosity of various neighbours. She also has a half-sister and a menagerie of pets with biblical names. Anna has just completed her university studies in Pretoria, while living with her mother, and is now managing the ailing health of her biological father. She finds working the reporters beat challenging and at times harrowing. She tries to remain a supportive daughter but wants to live her own life. The plot involves a fairly tepid story that covers a short time in the characters’ lives and includes some domestic drama alternated with journalist-style cover stories, and insight into the prejudice her religious Ouma and seemingly liberal father have instilled in her. Anna also manages the borders of *ordentlikheid* within Afrikaaner girlhood and then finally breaks away to Cape Town to begin a life on her own terms.

The author, Dalena Theron, is an award-winning journalist who holds degrees in journalism and social anthropology from the University of Pretoria. Born in KwaZulu-Natal, she has lived and worked in Pretoria and São Paulo, and currently lives in Cape Town with her husband and son. She also writes short stories and *The Paper House* is her first novel. The title of the novel, also available in Afrikaans as “Huises van Papier”, comes from one of Anna’s girlhood memories of

her paternal grandmother teaching her how to fold a house out of paper. She explains the significance as follows:

One of my favourite things was when Ouma taught me and the cousins how to fold a paper house. ‘Okay, each one of you tear out the double page on the inside of your book,’ she’d say. ‘Now let’s draw a door here, a window here, and remember to colour in the roof.’ And once our little paper houses were standing, the sides tucked in by her careful knobbly hands and stuck together with glue, she would leave us to play in the garden with them. We’d set them up to make a little town, and put our dolls inside. Sometimes I would make more than one paper house. ‘Why do you have three? Are you rich?’ asked one of my cousins. I shook my head. ‘No.’ ‘So?’ ‘I have three homes. That’s what Ouma says. Mom’s house, Dad’s house, and Ouma’s house.’ (Theron 2015:915).⁵

This extract speaks to the heart of Anna’s upbringing. Her identity lies with her girlhood experience, with her sense of exclusions: belonging/unbelonging. Christi van der Westhuizen, author of *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Melber, 2018) concurs in that “white Afrikaans identity work, specifically gender contestation, has intensified on the home front, re-entrenching the historical centrality of the family in the production of ‘the Afrikaner’” (203). If we add gender contestation on the home front to the already complex and dynamic process of girlhood, girls straddle even more ambivalent and contradictory positions in their subjectification and embodiment of girlhood. Van der Westhuizen’s findings suggest that despite commitments to gender equity in South Africa, girls are still socialised to know their place. In the findings of Van Wyk (2015) through her case studies, intense levels of surveillance are employed by family and immediate society as a measure to regulate normative femininity and the ‘respectability’ of girls. Surveillance includes self-surveillance, monitoring and control by their parents, and scrutiny by other girls, boys/men, community members and teachers. From the girls’ stories in her study, it is evident how these forms of surveillance regulate the respectability of the girls, thereby keeping the “good” girl intact (Van Wyk 2015:153).

⁵ I am using the Kindle version of the novel, as the print version is unavailable. Theron, D 2015, *The Paper House*. Umuzi: Amazon Digital Services LLC. Rather than page numbers [Location numbers, or loc] will be offered, as they are referenced in the Kindle edition.

This novel affirms just how the meaning and negotiation of girlhood, and thus femininity is a socially constructed process. Anna draws on narratives about girlhood/womanhood from her mother, grandmother and women in her work community to inform their gendered practices. Anna's mother is a "strict" "unconventional" (1466) and a preoccupied artist, who finds the bonds of Afrikaans motherhood constrictive. Her church-going grandmother who believes what South Africa needs for success is "a Christian state" (Theron 2892) is overly protective of her son and husband. Anna's half-sister, Mia, leaves home early to avoid their domestic drama. Anna's girlhood is achieved, regulated and policed by her parents, fathers and community. Her journalist boss sees Anna as a child rather than an adult in her own right, and her neighbours gossip constantly about their alternative lifestyle. She has very few friends and those at school believed "Black people bomb us" (892). She is afraid to choose a boyfriend who will challenge her father's masculinity and sexual orientation. She is bound by the smallness of the town where she grows up without feeling the town itself is a yolk as she states: "Small towns make us humans more beautiful, I think...because the town is only so big, and you only have so many friends, and company is precious." (2326). She spends a lot of time at home, organising the domestic sphere.

The novel draws attention to how Anna embraces traditional gender roles and aspires to be a good girl/woman, which is synonymous with being a good mother and wife one day. Hence, this study illustrates the intractability of the myths of motherhood and how this keeps girls in their place. In spite of a lack of valorised motherhood, Anna finds competencies at household chores, which are perceived as empowering for women and enhances their standing in the Afrikaans community. Anna's girlhood experience and her sense of unbelonging allows for men, her father in this case, to exert his power and privilege on her. This serves a dual purpose: to regulate normative Afrikaans femininity and surprisingly also motivate her to be an independent and self-reliant woman one day. Methodologically, this makes the home and parents and a sense of *ordentlikheid* a fertile ground for the co-construction, reproduction and performance of femininities.

3.2 Novel analysis

The analysis of the novel focuses on Anna's moulding to be a 'good girl' raised with 'respectability' and a sense of mothering. This re-entrenches the historical centrality of the family in the production of "the Afrikaner" (Henning, 2018:203). Right at the beginning of the novel, Anna's stepfather Stefan calls her to the hospital when her biological father (Ben) collapses. Her 'mothering' of her father and the expectation to fit the role of maternal carer becomes evident early on in the novel. Anna panics and feels responsible for him, leaning into what her grandmother went through: "I'm thinking of how Ouma found Oupa, Dad's father, that night on the bathroom floor" (Theron 2015: 25). Anna shows us how she embodies not just a daughter's thoughts, but also those of an older female family member.

Anna's real maternal relationship, the one with her mother, is a complicated one. As an adult she sides with her father, faulting her mother for her lack of convention and her absentness from *ordentikheid* mothering. She explains their relationship thus:

Mom and I had a strange relationship. She was always very worried about me, but through most of high school I felt that she was just too caught up in her writing, in her marriage that wasn't working out, to notice things. She was always so strict, even when I was a little girl, yet at the same time completely unconventional and unpredictable. Not like the other moms, who attended hockey practice and baked for the church fêtes. And since I'd spent nights listening to Dad's version of all the stories, I was left feeling that everything that went wrong was her fault. (1466).

From a young age, Anna blames her mother (an artist and writer) for not conforming to her father's, grandmother's and society's expectations. Not once does Anna think that her father's closeted homosexuality has anything to do with her mother's distance from him. In her mind, her mother's retreat into her writing and pottery, and the will to find quiet time was a fault and flaw: her absentness from *ordentikheid* mothering (1468).

Apart from her stepsister Mia, Anna does not have many female friends or role models. Her description of a new work colleague tells us she focuses on ethnicity and religiosity as factors for compatibility:

We were unlikely friends. She comes from a good English family: she doesn't swear; she goes to church. But we hit it off instantly. Emma is a BA graduate like me and our discussions quickly went from 'What did you study?' to how people in South Africa are so quick to step on each other's toes. How they don't mean it, and how, if everyone had a background in philosophy and social anthropology, we would be a better country. (83).

As the above extract illustrates, identity politics matter to Anna. After studying adolescent Afrikaans literature, Anker and Geldinhuys (2018:354) conclude that an adolescent's self-identification positions her within her culture. According to them, "how an adolescent defines herself in terms of race, gender, and class often determines her access to power in her specific position" (ibid). Anna's biological Afrikaans father, though seemingly liberal, demonstrates a hardhandedness when his opinions are challenged, lending to my abovementioned theories on Anna's girlhood experience as to how her father exerts his power and privilege on her which serves to regulate normative femininity. An example of this is illustrated below in a situation where Anna and her stepsister take umbrage to the presence of apartheid-era memorabilia being used decoratively in their home, but are unable to voice disgust and rather passively accept it as a quirky hobby. Anna explains that:

Dad has always loved flags, which means he's always had too many of them. So they had one of the tannies in town make them a bedspread and two pillowcases with the old and new South African flags. Now the entire queen-size bed is covered by a huge, colourful, new South African flag, but the two pillows have the old Oranje Blanje Blou flag on them. Behind the bed there is a massive print of the Blood River Battle. On the two walls on either side of the bed are a picture of Paul Kruger, a document signed by him for some or other reason (still in Dutch) and a picture of Melrose House. 'What the ...' we muttered, staring at the décor. 'Don't you girls like it?' 'Er ... yes, of course we do. It's just ... er ...

different,' said Mia. This was all new to her, after all. Her dad is a doctor, not a collector of artefacts (Theron 2015:120).

Her father's adoration of the radical inequity and brutality perpetuated by Verwoerd seems a proud moment for him, and in the excerpt below he dismisses Anna's opinion:

And next to the dining-room table there are two sculptures of Verwoerd. Yes, that Verwoerd. 'Dad, who's this?' I asked one night. 'Verwoerd.' 'What? But ... aren't you embarrassed to have him here?' 'What do you mean? Why would I be embarrassed?' Dad was indignant. 'Well, what must Thandi think?' 'What do you expect me to do – throw them away?' 'No, I just ...' 'Don't you have any respect? They're art! Coert Steynberg made them.' 'Yes but—' 'Look, I don't agree with Verwoerd's ideas. I hate them! I hate that I had to go to the army!' 'Dad, relax—' 'But it doesn't mean you can just throw our history away. These are beautifully sculpted. And it tells us about things in our history which we must never, never forget – even if we are uncomfortable with it.' (133).

Even if a reader could overlook his Verwoerd and old South African flag rationale as 'remembering our past', his condescension toward their domestic worker Thandi reveals his superiority complex. When respectfully (with *ordenlikheid*), Anna asks her father if it's fair to have apartheid-era memorabilia that a black domestic worker is expected to clean, his response is careless. He argues thus:

Thandi, she is welcome to ask me about them if she wants. But I think if you spend some time with her, you'll realise that what she needs is for her boyfriend to pay child support and buy food to put on her family's table, not some political ideas to mess around with her head.' (142).

Anna explains her father's suspicion of the English as follows:

Of course, he would have less to catch up with if it wasn't for the fact that he reads two Sunday papers, two dailies and The Herald, which is biweekly. Dad says it's because he can't just read the Afrikaans news, he has to know what the English are thinking too. (30).

This suspicion of the English could be explained historically. According to Van der Westhuizen (2019), by the late 1800s the Boers were regarded as an inferior. They were depicted by European visitors as indolent, slow-witted, simple, ignorant and even dirty. Stereotypes about Afrikaners abounded, for example she summarises white English-speaking attitudes to the Afrikaner, listing stereotypes such as Afrikaners being simple and warm, and negative ones such as them being savage, uncultured, superstitious and lacking in efficiency (Van der Westhuizen 2019:154). With these pejorative terms for Afrikaners being rife could explain why Anna's father maintains that he needs to read "English" papers to keep an eye on what the English are thinking, and why Anna notes that her colleague Emma is "English".

The concept of *ordentlikheid* also encompasses how Anna, even as an adult, is schooled by her father about who to respect. He displays no respect for their female domestic worker, arrogantly displaying "two sculptures of Verwoed" in their home for her to clean (2015:133). He thinks Anna's female boss is running a social project at The Herald rather than an actual newspaper, something to just report "potholes" (1396). He doesn't encourage Anna to have a good relationship with her mother, and blames her mother for the divorce to the extent that Anna feels "Growing up, Mom was the enemy" (1460). He questions Anna belligerently about her journalistic attention to a black politician, comparing Malema to a formidable white woman who behaves respectably in his opinion. He asks Anna: "'Julius Malema? Oh please, I don't care what that clown does. Did you see what he said about Helen Zille last week? No respect whatsoever.'" (703). Verwey and Quayle (2012) explore the dynamic of this 'backstage' talk that is usually reserved for fellow whites or Afrikaners. According to them it points to constructions of post-apartheid Afrikaner identity, an "ongoing, self-conscious, and contested discursive activity" (2012:557) that he pushes on to his daughter. Anna's father's sentiments are reminiscent of the sentiment expressed by Afrikaans author Annelie Botes in a 2010 interview. She shocked South Africa when she said: "I

don't like black people. I know they're just people like me. I know they have the same rights as me. But I don't understand them. I don't like them. I avoid them." In the course of the interview she characterised blacks as angry, violent, uneducated, unskilled, incompetent, baboon-like, and criminal (Verwey and Quayle 2012:551). Through his insidious *ordentlik* conditioning, Anna's father displays the "rejecting of apartheid, but resurrecting apartheid ideology" (Verwey and Quayle 2012:568), as well as a desire to control how his daughter, a white Afrikaans woman, thinks and acts. Van de Westhuizen (2019) sees this as a reinstatement of an Afrikaner male historical identity configuration, and their women as a site for reparation.

Anna's outsider status as a result of her upbringing is expressed when she is asked to go to church by her new work colleague, who we know from an earlier description is English (Theron 2015:83). Anna's reticence to accept the invitation illustrates how her self-identification positions her:

'Listen,' Emma says suddenly, 'I've been meaning to ask you. Would you like to come to church with me?' I freeze. 'I um, er ... no. Thanks. I mean, I'm a Christian, I went to church with my grandmother and all, but ... no.' She looks puzzled, but she doesn't say anything. 'Emma, you know my dad is gay, right?' 'Yes. What's that got to do with anything?' I frown. 'Well, I don't believe he's going to hell, for one thing.' (265).

Anna's reaction to Emma's invitation correlates with Anker and Geldinhuys' (2018:354) suggestions of how an adolescent's self-identifications positions her within her culture. According to them, how an adolescent defines herself in terms of race, gender, and class often determines her access to power in her specific position. What makes this ironic is that Anna is technically not an adolescent, nor a 'girlchild', at this stage in her life, yet her reaction is typically juvenile and in line with this novel being classified as a "coming-of-age" story.

The 'good girl' Anna continues to mother her father and makes excuses for his bad behaviour. The following excerpt shows her concern for his excessive drinking and his responsive bullying and silencing of her. Out of concern she asks:

‘Are you allowed to drink that? Dad?’ ‘Yes, three a night.’ ‘Three a night? I don’t think so, Dad, not even healthy people are allowed to drink that much alcohol. Don’t bullshit me!’ He stomps off into the kitchen, making big eyes at me. I’m sure their friends think I’m a bitch. Even Sunette, who’s known me almost all my life. She throws me a glance, tucking a strand of bright red hair behind her ear, but choosing to ignore the tension. I corner him in the kitchen, where he’s checking on the stew. ‘Dad, seriously, let’s talk about this.’ He sighs. Puts down the dirty spoon. ‘Anna.’ ‘Dad, I—’ ‘No, you listen to me. I am a grown man. I did not move to this town and away from Pretoria so that one day my daughter could take over from my father and the church and tell me what to do and how to live. Now drop it! You’re embarrassing me in front of our friends.’ (Theron 2015:279).

Despite her father’s rudeness and dismissiveness, she still makes excuses for him: “I feel sorry for the Dads. Two girls, two dads, two angry ex-wives. It couldn’t always have been easy.” (495). With Anna’s response to being inappropriately chided, it seems appropriate to reiterate Fraiman’s (1993) opinion that girlhood in the *bildungs* genre is a deformation and disorientation for the girlchild.

It is also interesting how her father has no interest in her boyfriends, even though such a relationship forms part of the purity and respectability of the Afrikaans woman. This may correspond with a modified version of hegemonic masculinity, a “patriarchal overseer” who protects the family by keeping “femininity in check” (Melber 2018:135). Anna however bases her boyfriend selection according to his comfort/discomfort. She is aware of this and notes:

Funny how he can be so interested in Thandi’s love life but never wants to know a thing about mine. Dad always gets this uneasy grin on his face when I bring someone home. Like he still thinks I’m twelve, not twenty-two. He shouldn’t be so nervous, though. I never bring just anyone home. I always check the homophobic factor first: if they’re incredibly jock-like and drink a lot of beer, that’s usually the first sign. (Theron 2015:396).

An Afrikaans male figure, liberal, yet an apartheid apologist, manages to shape his daughter with a dual purpose: firstly, to regulate a normative Afrikaans femininity and secondly, this eventually

motivates her to be self-reliant. The only way she manages to do this is to leave her home and her father at the end of the novel and finally feels like her life is beginning.

The last day's drive is nine hours. The road swims like a long, straight snake in front of me. I call Mia for company. Then I call Mom, and I even call Dad (who doesn't really want to talk to me, but still tells me that the dogs are in mourning because I left, and how could I do this to them, who will take them for a walk now?) (2490).

Anna's coming-of-age is delayed to her early twenties, when she frees herself from her father's expectations. This supports earlier observations by Rita Felski (Brändström 2009:7) that the female protagonist has to struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing herself from marital subordination and male dependence. Again, her observation (ibid) that while the male *Bildungsroman* mainly covers the protagonist's childhood and adolescence, the female variant has a wider time span. However as stated earlier, the protagonist's involvement in her own development, her self-reflection and introspection, and reintegration into society (Maier 2007:318-319) still make this novel a female *Bildungsroman*. By the end of the novel Anna finds the courage to re-enter society on her terms. The following excerpt captures her thoughts after she has left KwaZulu-Natal and is entering the Cape provinces: "to see vineyards instead of rolling sugar-cane ... if your heart can learn to love a new place the way it loves its first place...this road is just beginning now" (Theron 2015:2497).

Through the lens of girlhood studies and novels of development, home and parents, and how girls are shaped to think and self-express through *ordentlikheid*, *ordentlikheid* can be seen as a fertile ground for the co-construction, reproduction and performance of girlhood, and thus femininities. This will be discussed further in the next section.

3.3 *Ordentlikheid* (respectability and decency)

According to Anker & Geldinhuys (2018), before 1990 Afrikaans youth novels (this novel was originally written in Afrikaans) tended to portray a traditional, patriarchal core family who adhered to the current social norms of that time and age. They write that more recent novels, after the 1990s, tend to move away from that image and towards the description of a more complex, fluid

social structure with a more equal power base for men and women. Also evident is the change to more independent, powerful female protagonists with more freedom to make their own choices. They are part of alternative or “dysfunctional” families that undermine and question the previous portrayal of Afrikaans society and family life.

This novel only veers away from the conventional novels by having a gay couple in it: Anna narrates how she found out about her father’s sexual orientation thus: “I got to the top of the stairs and found them kissing. Mom wrung her hands, fiddling with her new wedding ring and studying my face. ‘So him and Stefan are together, like boyfriend and girlfriend, and it’s normal?’” (Theron 2015:205). However, Anna’s father and his mother do not present an alternative or more equal power base for their daughter. Rather, Anna is raised to conform to an ideal and this will be explored under the theme of *ordentlikheid*.

Anna is raised and socialised to conform to Afrikaans society and Christian family life by her grandmother (915, 611, 1930). According to Van de Westhuizen, this conformity (respectability and decency) viz. *ordentlikheid*, is difficult to translate. Its meaning includes presentability, good manners, decency, politeness and humility with a biblically Calvinist thread (2019:146). Historically, Afrikaner identity has drawn heavily on Afrikaner nationalism which “centred on themes of religious, racial, and cultural purity, superiority” (Verwey and Quayle 2012:553). Van de Westhuizen (2019) focuses on the post-apartheid context where former Afrikaner nationalism is in disarray, and Afrikaaner identity is being (re)crafted at the intersectional nexus of *ordentlikheid*. She believes *ordentlikheid* is applicable to both men and women and executed in a way that “aims at making a white, bourgeois, heteropatriarchal power formation respectable again” (2019:148).

Van der Westhuizen further expands on the many versions and forms of *ordentlikheid* (respectability and “decency”):

It can be restorative in support of hegemonic, oppressive structures in more or less efficient disguise, claiming the right to protect one’s own cultural identity (in the singular) – equated with the only “legitimate decency” that exists – from onslaught by “others” (be they black,

migrants, refugees, sexually different – you name it). Or it can be a truly humanist, all-embracing decency, which realises the need to recognise and benefit from the interaction with “otherness.” (Melber 2018:135.)

For the Afrikaans man, according to Van der Westhuizen (Melber 2018:135) this corresponds with a modified version of hegemonic masculinity, aptly described in its various forms as a “patriarchal overseer” who protects the family by keeping “femininity white and in heterosexual check”. For girls in real life (rather than novels) “good girlhood” in the Afrikaans community is evaluated on how accomplished girls are at household chores and whether they behave respectably outside the home (Melber 2018:134). While her father is not heterosexual himself, this supports his need to maintain himself as a “patriarchal overseer” who protects his daughter (and thereby his family) by keeping her femininity in check. His commitment to his Afrikaans heritage and desire to pass on all its traditions, serious and silly (like having a copy of a tabloid magazine *Huisgenoot* around as well as a thick, hard copy of the telephone directory), is expanded in the following excerpt:

“‘But I just can’t help it. It’s because I’m Afrikaans.’ ‘Because we’re Afrikaans?’ He nods. ‘Yes. All us Afrikaners have that in the house, no matter what kind of Afrikaner you are: the Bible, the telephone book and the *Huisgenoot*.’.” (Theron 2015:317).

Religion factors into Anna’s upbringing. Her father rebels against just how deeply religion colours every aspect of their lives by naming all the dogs biblically. Anna’s words below explain and condone her father’s behaviour, again in a mothering manner, but reveal little about how she views the Church and religion. It is understood however that she does pray with her Ouma, but religion does not ‘mentor’ her as it does Maha in *The Story of Maha*. Anna explains her father’s anti-religious stance below:

And he especially liked using God’s name, because that infuriated Ouma, or perhaps as a last swipe at his own parents – God-fearing farmers, who never went to university. Oupa never outwardly rejected religion, but from a comment here and there, one could gather that it wasn’t exactly the centre of his life the way it was for Ouma. He hated the way the government tried to put religion into everything, and it got him into trouble at the university

where he lectured in History. Some people said he was ahead of his time, but to his family he was mostly difficult to understand. (640).

Anna's father is an outcast and a rebel against his former government because he "hated the way the government tried to put religion into everything" (640), a government that followed combined elements of seventeenth-century Calvinist doctrine with a "chosen people" ideology based on the Bible. Despite this, he still manages to belittle and mock Anna for having an opinion that contradicts his. When she condemns the Verwoed sculptures in their home and asks him: "aren't you embarrassed to have him here" (132), he responds by inverting her disdain: "Don't you have any respect? They're art! Coert Steynberg made them" and lectures her on the beauty of sculpture. (133).

The term "*Bildungsroman*" (novel of "formation," "cultivation," or "development") has as one of the most typical elements the presence of a mentor. A mentor is a male figure in both the male *Bildungsroman* and the female variant (Brändström, 2009). While reading Young Adult Literature (YAL) a reader is confronted with implicit social, political and cultural norms, power structures, stereotypes and sexism which form part of their world and could have an influence in forming their identity and gender roles.

In *The Paper House*, Anna struggles with belonging. Religion and churches could easily fashion themselves as places of belonging for the traditional Afrikaner girl as imbued by a sense of *ordentlikheid* as Anna. However, in her life, religion as well as *ordentlikheid* re-channels the remnants of her father's not-yet fully sobered up nationalist discourse. Rather than belonging, for Anna they fail to fulfil the expectations they raise.

It is worth mentioning at this stage that Anna's experiences of *ordentlikheid* in an Afrikaans culture is vastly different to those of non-white Afrikaans communities in South Africa. Salo (2018) examines how women in Manenberg township, on Cape Town's inner periphery, manoeuvre to redefine themselves as gendered persons deserving of dignity, through the common practices of *ordentlikheid*. Salo shows how reclamation of dignity for young women of Anna's age and

younger is an intergenerational and gendered process that involves the expression of brutal physical and social exclusion of individuals through embodied and social violence.

Compared to Anna's *ordentlikheid* policing which is completely non-violent, economically marginalised Afrikaans girls have a vastly different experience of *ordentlikheid*. Salo's (2009) findings suggest that this is due to their being defined through "lack" (Salo 2009:20). This is explained through the racial "lack" of whiteness, that then looks to their local, gendered narrative of morality with *Respectable Motherhood* (Salo 2009:20) to sustain their self-perceptions as worthy persons.

Salo found that in a post-Apartheid, neo-liberal South Africa "linear narration of neo-liberal economic progress" continually comes up against "continued material constraints of economic deprivation and spatial marginality" (Salo 2009:15). Her study shows that the trope of *Gendered Respectability* (ibid) was used during apartheid to assert non-white Afrikaans speaking women as civilized, embodying the "performance and efflorescence of motherhood." Such *Gendered Respectability* set the boundaries of local communities and dictates the gendered norms of behaviour. (Salo 2009:15). In the post-Apartheid moment, she asserts, the moral story of gendered personhood and respectability continues, except now it is being contested by specifically younger women's innovative, gendered norms. Anna, the protagonist in *The Paper Houses*, is also trying to break away, albeit in a confined *bildungs* context from her father's control.

Anna's policing happens through her father's expectations. Salo's study (2009) of "*Onnosel en onbeskof* - young rebels challenging the boundaries of *ordentlikheid*" (16) in a township like Manenberg, shows that young women's morality is judged especially by the older generation of women, "Respectable Mothers", and by the spaces they are seen to be occupy in the local area. According to these "Respectable Mothers", "Good Girls" attend school, dress modestly and occupy the domestic space exclusively during the day, doing house chores or running errands accompanied by friends. By contrast "Slegte dogters" or "slatternly/spoiled girls" were the ones displaying too much flesh in tight fitting clothes, who wore make-up, heels, were willing to cross social and physical boundaries of the community and sought out spaces of leisure. (Salo 2009:16).

These “slatternly girls” pushed the envelope of *ordentlikheid*, or respectability, and deliberately transgressed its norms rather discreetly manipulating them. They were contemptuously regarded as *onnosel*, or foolish, by the older generation of women and their more acquiescent peers. Salo’s study of a girl called Lindsey illustrates that young women who dared to cross the boundaries of the old apartheid social and racial spaces are defined as slatternly and blamed for their own misfortune if they were the victims of assault.

Her study highlights how sixteen-year-old Lindsey was cast out from the circle of friends after she was raped while she was returning home from Nyanga one Saturday evening after she had visited some friends. While Lindsey’s peers were given some freedom to explore spaces during the day, she was forbidden to hang out with them there. She was expected to spend most of her free time indoors, assisting her mother to care for her baby brother, with assorted household chores. When she was allowed outdoors, she had to provide her mother Monica with a detailed plan of where and how she would spend her time. Salo notes (2009:16) that despite the fact that most residents in Manenberg were from creolised religious, cultural and linguistic origins, the Afrikaans language and the Christian ideal of monogamous marriage and the nuclear family were considered to be the codes of respectability and belonging. In order to mitigate the street gossip and to prove her own and her household’s respectability, Lindsey’s mother, Monica regulated Lindsey’s behaviour very severely. As a result, she was unsure of her status in the group. This could be compared to Anna’s outsider status, (Theron 2015:83) when her friend invites her to church and she does not know what to do or say in response. Further similarities can be drawn in how Anna’s father accuses her of leaving home to run after boys, and accuses her of being sneaky about her earnings because she does not report the amount to him: ““Tell me what they’re offering!’ Dad thunders. ‘You haven’t given me any details about this job yet and you’re about to leave.’” (2411) and “‘you know,’ puffing a cloud of smoke, ‘I expected more of you. Running after a boy when your father is so sick.’” (2424).

After Lindsey had been raped, she said that it was not easy for her to provide the police officers with a statement because her mother constantly intervened, scolding her and reminding her about the numerous times she had been told not to leave the confines of her immediate environment

(Salo 2009:17). She said that she felt ashamed because her mother repeatedly asked her, “What will the people say about me now? You don’t listen to me! Now look what has come of your own disobedience!” (Salo 2009:17). This can be compared to Anna’s father’s reaction to her leaving her home and hometown confines: he refuses to speak to her (Theron 2015:2490) and is only preoccupied with what her absence meant for the smooth running of his household.

3.4 Girlhood suspended

When examining Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Mitchell (2017) contends that we cannot understand how one ‘becomes’ a woman without first and simultaneously undertaking the task of understanding the situation of the girl. Although the protagonist Anna is technically a woman, her story is a coming-of-age one, substantiated by the fact that she has a suspended girlhood leading to her arrested development. Her jittery, unfulfilled existence is fully shaped by the unconventional family she was raised in. Mitchell (2017) proposes that per the schema of development outlined in *The Second Sex*, a boy-child will eventually become an adult but the girl-child becomes something else—she will become a woman and that this “implicitly conjures a sense of waiting” (Mitchell, 2017:273). The experience of the girl is characterised through language that explicitly and implicitly conjures a sense of waiting: a ‘frozen existence’ (De Beauvoir 2010:351); ‘her youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for man.’ (De Beauvoir 2010:353); ‘she is still suspended between the moment of childish independence and that of feminine submission’ (De Beauvoir 2010:359). Conceived less as arrested development and more as a loss of hope and confidence in her body-as-situation, the girl stays put since there is nowhere meaningful to take herself. Her urge for freedom is curtailed by the vocation of femininity (Mitchell 2017:273).

Mitchell offers the theories of Catherine Driscoll (2002), an important voice in the field of Girlhood studies, who has argued that feminist theory tends to overlook the question of what it is to be a girl; that is, feminist discussions rarely consider girls, and if they do, it is almost never on their own terms (2002:9). To consider the girl as merely woman-in-process is not good enough according to Driscoll; the girl needs to emerge from these pages in her specificity. Driscoll argues that the girl is either neglected completely or approached in the field of girlhood studies only via certain concepts, such as post-feminism or girl-power.

Anna is still suspended between the moment of childish independence and that of feminine submission, unwittingly connected to a legacy of apartheid and white privilege, at the “intersectional nexus of *ordentlikheid*” (Van der Westhuizen 2019:148). This highlights even more acutely the necessity for an intersectional analysis within the genre of Girlhood studies. Intersectional analysis asks for “attention to contradictions in peoples’ identifications, sliding of meaning in their stories, and tensions in representations.” (Boersema 2013:31).

Anna’s feminine submission, if viewed in light of Van de Westhuizen’s (2018) study where women meet their role expectations through *ordentlikheid*, as well as conforming to being a contemporary version of *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation), is expressed through the extract below where Anna is discouraged by her boss from writing about Black politicians or gory accidents. Rather, she is asked to write about church and flowers, as illustrated below, her boss tells her:

In any case, our job as a community newspaper is to recognise the good that happens around here. Now, the flower show was a whole month ago – and that is the problem! On Sunday I attended a commemoration of the local Anglican church and one of the ladies, a dear friend of mine, told me that her sister came home with the prize this year. And not a word in our paper! I had a business meeting up north yesterday and I expected to see it in today’s edition. That is why I appointed you. (Theron 2015:706).

Anna does not challenge her boss, rather responds by keeping “her eyes and ears open” (710) for more news on upcoming flower shows.

Anna serves her father, just as she watched her grandmother serve her grandfather, with an inherited sense of feminine duty and good manners: “Ouma would put the coffee in front of him at the dining-room table and he’d pour a little out into the saucer, then pour it back into the cup until it was cool enough to drink. Ouma used to whisper in my ear, ‘Don’t you do what Oupa does with his coffee, okay? It’s not good manners.’” (613). Juxtaposed against this is her father, who is happy to behave like an irresponsible adult and dad: “After they sent me and Mia home to our mothers, the Dads got up to fantastic sports with Tannie Gloria. We only heard about it later,

though, when we were teenagers and accusing them of not spending enough time with us. They'd said life is much more fun when you don't have to be so responsible all the time." (209).

Anna's reaction to this vocational femininity and servitude is to remain mute. She unwittingly gives in through *ordentlikheid* to her father's rant about his students, transformed into a form of paternalism:

How can they go out into the world like that? Not even understanding how their own ancestors came to settle here? The other day someone mentioned Steve Biko in class. Do you realise half the class didn't know who he was? I mean, how is that possible? How, in this country? (437)

Anna's only concern is mothering her father: "'But, Dad, should you be doing physical work when you're still sick?'" (354). This is a thread throughout the novel as she pleads with him to stop smoking and drinking (30) and tries to comfort him when he is afraid in hospital, saying "Dad relax, you're fine, you're going to be fine." (2063).

Her father bemoans unequal education, poverty and corruption and has a "a preoccupation with a projection of the self as moral, a whiteness eager to distance itself from racism, and also pinning racism on white others/elders to deny its own complicity" (Van der Westhuizen 2018:41). To distance oneself, "racism is acknowledged, but personally disavowed and attributed to others, both white and black" (Van der Westhuizen 2018:45), for example his students not knowing who Steve Biko is.

De Beauvoir characterised the experience of the girl as a 'frozen existence' (2010:351). She believed that for the girl 'youth is consumed by waiting... for (a) man.' (De Beauvoir 2010:353). Anna's suspended and state of waiting is not of the romantic kind, but rather one of waiting for her father's action and responding with the appropriate (*ordentlik*) reaction. Her father scolds her: "Anna, go back to your room and do not say a word! He said. 'That's final.' 'Fine.'" (Theron 2015:563). Here Anna is an adult but obeys her father without question. Van der Westhuizen (2018:147) notes how male supremacy is confirmed in post-apartheid South Africa through women: through her silence, division of household labour, reproduction, and to establish a space for male leisure. Anna's father silences her, thereby depoliticising her. He counts on her to make

their house a home and believes that "She's throwing away a perfectly good job to go live God knows where on fuck-all money'" (Theron 2015:2375), and thus revitalises *ordentlikheid* "through the normalisation of the woman as "sexual and gender other" (Van der Westhuizen 2018:148).

Van der Westhuizen examines *ordentlikheid through* intersectionality: "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (2018:24). She explains its usefulness which "allows for the discernment of the productive interactions between various social markers of difference - particularly class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age" (2018:60).

Even though so young, Anna's preoccupation is with being a domestic anchor. This leaves Anna with no room for self-development and independence. In conversation with her stepsister Mia she explains why she won't leave her dads: "What will I do with my life? Will I always be the one to stay up after they've passed out, closing the doors and putting off the lights? 'I'm sorry,' I finally say, remembering Mia on the other end. 'It just feels like leaving them is giving up on them.'" (Theron 2015:2041). Van der Westhuizen refers to this as the weaponisation of Afrikaner women, making them "spiritual soldiers" guarding the "inner-room" of the late apartheid Afrikaner home (Van der Westhuizen 2018: 147).

When Anna decides to leave, she does it without knowing how things will turn out. She goes "to bed, angry, frustrated. I love Dad so much, but I don't want to deal with this anymore. I don't have to. And I don't know if Dad is ever going to forgive me for leaving, but I'm doing it" (Theron 2015:2386). She does however feel the love of her deceased grandmother, and to feel close to her goes to church with her colleague Emma, letting "the music flow over her" (2393) and "thinking of Ouma's bright smile and her knitting and her paper homes" (2393). This indicates that she still feels a sense of *ordentlikheid* – being respectable and good, and that her choice to leave is redeemable in the sight of her community: "today – with this coffee and these smiles that remind me of Ouma – it makes me feel good" (2403).

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to explore how the concept of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) is used to police the borders of girlhood for Anna, as well as the role it plays in her feminine development. This concept is reflected in how she is expected to ‘mother’ her father (Theron 2015:25); how her opinion has little weight compared to the man of the house (120, 279); how her romantic interests and sexual development is bypassed by her father (396); how her grandmother is expected to imbue her with homey Calvinist values that she can perpetuate (915, 2034); in living her adult life by her father’s guidelines and expectations (279), and in being expected to seek happiness and fulfilment in the home zone (2490). By the end of the novel, where her journey only begins as an adult, we find no indication that her father will ever reconcile with her decision to leave home.

Through the study of the novel and relevant theories of Van der Westhuizen, Mitchell and Anker *et al*, I have attempted to show that one cannot understand how one ‘becomes’ a woman without undertaking the task of understanding the situation of the girl. To consider the girl as merely woman-in-process is not good enough. However, when we look at how Anna leaves and begins her life despite her *ordentlikheid* background and her father’s power over her, we are left with some hope that girlhood is not “an obstacle to overcome or a rite of passage to pass through”, but rather “a question of understanding the structures and relations that implicate the girl in her own division and alienation” (Mitchell 2017:17). In Anna’s case, her familial socialisation serves a redeeming dual purpose. Despite *ordentlikheid* regulating her normative femininity, it also motivates her to eventually be an independent and self-reliant woman. This is positive development for Girlhood studies. That Anna is able to develop skills towards her own independence is iterated by Mitchell (2017) who examines the figure of ‘the girl’ as a moving image within feminist philosophy.

Anna starts to see the spectre of her father and this compels her compassion, as well as her desire to move out: “Dad is scared. Dad is a big man, about two metres tall with a size eleven shoe. His hands are almost twice the size of mine. How can you be so big, yet so small, I wonder” (Theron 2015:2063). Yet she remains resolute about her decision to move to Cape Town, even though her father intimidates her: ““And you know,” puffing a cloud of smoke, ‘I expected more of you.

Running after a boy when your father is so sick.' I drop the box. 'I am not. Running. After. A. Boy!' I yell. I head for my room. I need to breathe." (2424). By the end of the novel she is fully standing up to her father's bullying: "Tell me what they're offering!" Dad thunders. 'You haven't given me any details about this job yet and you're about to leave.' 'Dad, it's because you didn't want to talk about it. Did you think if you ignored it that I would decide to stay?' I say, my hands on my hips, mirroring Dad, who is standing, I know, in exactly the same pose." (2411).

When elaborating on how *becoming* is in itself ambiguous, Mitchell interrogates the specificity of "lived experience" from the perspective of the girl (2017:8). The interesting paradox of the girl, since she is at the same time both being girl and *becoming* a woman is that there is a "temporality" (10) with the girlchild constituted by a "nexus of choice and culture" (11), accumulating "lived experience" and a future narrated before her. All this has a bearing on how we understand the concept of *becoming*. In Anna's words: "I don't know what the hell I'm doing, I think. All I know is that I have to do it." (Theron 2015:2461). Finally, the fact that she thinks of what her mother would do in this situation is a hint that during her suspended girlhood experience, she had the *lived experience* of an independent mother (2475).

Here one wonders about Anna's other female mentor — her mother — who is characterised by her absentness. If the traditional characteristic of a Bildungsroman is that she is directed towards her goal by a mentor, her grandmother and (her faith) is closer to one than her mother. When Anna is leaving the town and pondering the beauty of small-town life during her final church visit she notes that "sometimes I think that's how God wanted us all to be in the first place. Broken, but loved anyway, or perhaps loved because of it" (2326). When faced with a choice and decisions to assert her will, Anna's strength of character is wholly her own. She does not choose absentness, reclusiveness and solitude as her mother does. This iterates that girlhood is more "a question of understanding the structures and relations that implicate the girl in her own division and alienation" and that the girl is a moving entity in her personal development (Mitchell 2017:17).

Evidently, we cannot underestimate the cultural significance of *becoming* and the conflict and ambiguity of *becoming*, the sense of 'waiting' or 'frozen existence' it amplifies can be unsuspended. In Anna's case to later on in life: "I take my bag, leave the money in the kitchen,

throw the key through the window, and I drive out.” (Theron 2015:2482), “I have no idea where I’m going ...this road is just beginning now.” (2497).

Anna’s girlhood experiences with *ordentlikheid* under the bildungsroman umbrella leaves the reader with hope. Girls in other Afrikaans communities, in hopeless hardship like those in Salo’s (2009) study, still labour for a sense of decency. What *ordentlikheid* [decency] means for them “in a context where it’s underscored by material poverty” is way more visible, prevalent, and long-standing, “especially in those communities that value Christian notions of respectability” (Ross 2010:129).

These girls of urban poor live by a different set of politics and economics and experience becoming “ordentlike mense” (Ross 2010:129). They fight for decent housing and lodging, while being punished for not living in the cages of decency, long before if ever they can discover the concept of *becoming* and selfhood.

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation presents post-colonial contexts in South Africa, using an unexamined body of literature to highlight the complexities and diversities of South African girlhoods. What is obvious from the structure of this research study is that girlhood studies is a developing inter-discipline and is widely intersectional. The examined literature has showcased that the girlchild's quest for a sociocultural identity and belonging is inextricably linked to issues arising from her home life, and her home life cannot be extricated from the repression, violence or exploitation that results from colonialism. That girls have historically been excluded from most social analyses on account of their gender, and then further excluded generationally from feminist discourses on account of their age, has led to the genesis of girlhood studies. The obvious challenge is to narrow down the discipline, or at the very least sub-categorise its offshoots. Though this is still a work in progress, it is essential, lest girlhood studies remain an undeveloped academic discipline.

In Chapter One, the *Bildungsroman* genre is discussed and then expanded to determine the extent to which family and culture affect the shaping of the girl child using *The Story of Maha*. The discussion draws a conclusion on whether 'growing up female' is a 'growing down' and a binary choice between auxiliary or secondary personhood. I cite scholarship that maintains that a certain amount of "growing down", viz. a certain loss of personal autonomy, is an inevitable constitutive element of the maturation process regardless of the protagonist's gender. Despite the social challenges, this contemporary, postcolonial female novel of self-discovery is an optimistic literary form, which bears witness to women's identification of themselves as an oppressed group, and thus as a possible challenge to existing societal norms.

In Chapter Two, trauma, including physical violence and internalised microaggression, is shown to shape the protagonist in *What about Meera*. The scholarship on the subject leads towards decolonisation in girlhood studies as a practice of repatriation. *What about Meera* shows us that if a girlchild is not approached as a problem-to-be-solved or a subject-to-be-rescued, but rather as a potential agent who faces systemic barriers to her own agency and autonomy, we can cease linking girlchildren to research constructions that re-colonise their subjectivities and experiences.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the trope of “good girlhood”, especially in the Afrikaans community under study in *The Paper House*. We learn how an adolescent defines herself in terms of race, gender, and class, and this in turn determines her access to power in her specific position. Postcolonial theory does present a convincing argument about access to power and subsequent emotions (across genders) in the study of whiteness. In post-apartheid South Africa, this emotional tension births uncertainty and ambivalence, even among the dominant race. This translates to a Peter-Pan childlike expressiveness for our third protagonist, who while technically an adult accepts no responsibility or heartfelt constructive thoughts on her relationship to apartheid, or her white privilege. It is not clear if this is the author’s intent, viz. to write about moral challenges for Afrikaners in the present connected to the apartheid past and whether it is related to racism or white privilege. However, it does ask for attention to contradictions in girlhood studies -- in identifications, sliding of meaning in girls’ stories, and tensions in representations. Like the first novel of this study, *The Paper House* also reflects the postcolonial novel of development as a positive and optimistic literary form. The repressive, controlling father manages to shape his daughter Anna to be surprisingly self-reliant. Still, she escapes, without acknowledging her connection to a legacy of apartheid and white privilege and still very much attached to the intersectional nexus of *ordentlikheid*.

I initially drew resources which examined repression, trauma, belonging and postcolonial identity from the likes Susan Fraiman, Cathy Caruth and Domenic LaCapra. However, the limitations of this body of scholarship with regards post-colonial “Girlhood Studies” in South Africa quickly became clear. To navigate these gaps, I looked to the works of Mary Anne Ferguson and Claudia Mitchell, as well as very recent publications by Christi van der Westhuizen and Soňa Šnircová, and the unpublished (digitally available) work of Stephanie Marie Stella and Bronvin Van Wyk. This allowed me to better explore and express changes and inclusions in the novel of development, particularly the arc of girls within this genre, as well as continuities and discontinuities between girlhood and womanhood in feminist studies. Thus, the angle of “defamiliarisation” of trauma within the *Bildungsromane* genre was presented, wherein rhetorical gaps in trauma narratives actually interrupt and challenge the cultural systems in which girls and girlhood are understood. The need for a feminist model of delinquency (if Meera remaining uncharged for second-degree

murder is to be challenged) and the consequential relationship between that experience and girls' crime has been systematically ignored.

It would be remiss to ignore the shortcomings of this literature study, namely that none of the protagonists are black. In an American context, Monique W. Morris (2016) challenges society's deeply entrenched expectations of black girls being labelled and suspended for being "disruptive" or "defiant" if they ask questions or otherwise engage in activities that adults consider affronts to their authority, and how policies and practices often unite to "save" black boys and boys of colour while black girls seldom generate public concern. South African black girlhoods in postcolonial literature is a chasm of unexplored material. Thus, it could have been more fitting to look at novelists who wrote on black girlhood and un-belonging in KwaZulu-Natal. I counter, that this is a beginning in such an exploration, secondly, that this analysis uses an entirely unexamined body of work, and thirdly, that traumatic or discursive coming-of-age stories are not specific to KwaZulu-Natal.

It must also be noted that our Afrikaans protagonist in the third novel is white, and that of the seven to eight million people who speak Afrikaans as a first language in South Africa, more than half are what the apartheid classifiers categorised as "coloured". The representation of Afrikaners as one people in this study asks us to be carelessly unaware of this homogenising perspective in literature. Boersema (2013), Van der Westhuizen (2018) and Salo (2009) highlight the fragmentation of the nationalist narrative, and the intense public debate among Afrikaners about their place and role in the new South Africa. The fracturing of a nationalist collective reveals the dysfunctional mechanisms of change and the emotional rollercoaster of Afrikaner life in South Africa after apartheid.

References:

Abel, E., Hirsch, M. and Langland, E. eds. 1983. *The Voyage: Fictions of Female Development*. London: University Press of New England.

Aboulela, L. 1999. *The Translator*. New York: Grove Press.

Andermahr, S. 2015. Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism—Introduction. *Humanities*, 4, pp. 500–505.

Anker, J & Geldenhuys, I. 2018. Litnet Akademies: 'n Joernaal vir die Geesteswetenskappe, Natuurwetenskappe, Regte en Godsdienswetenskappe, 15 (1), pp. 352 – 380.

Austen, RA. 2015. Struggling with the African Bildungsroman. *Research in African Literatures* 46 (3), pp. 214-31.

Blignaut, C. 2019. The decontamination of post-apartheid Afrikaner identity through white Afrikaans women's ordentlikheid. *Historia* 64 (1), pp 172-189.

Blume, J. 2014 [1970]. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Boersema, JR. 2013. *Afrikaner, nevertheless: Stigma, Shame & the Sociology of Cultural trauma*. [Online] Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam. Available from: <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=07b10f0c-6d67-4d90-845d-bc16f7500c3c>. [Accessed 5 September 2020].

Boes, Tobias 2006, *Modernist Studies and the Bildungsroman: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends*. *Literature Compass*. 3 (2), pp. 230 - 243.

Brändström, C. 2009. *Gender and Genre. A Feminist Exploration of the Bildungsroman in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Martha Quest*. [Online] Gävle: Högskolan i Gävle. Available from: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:303315/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed 7 March 2019].

Brown L.S. 1995. Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma. In: Caruth C. ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 100–112.

Bubikova, S. 2011. The Literary Image of Man in the Process of Becoming: Variations of the Bildungsroman Genre in English and American Literature. *American and British Studies Annual* 4 (10), pp. 9-23.

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble—Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Chapman and Hall, New York: Routledge.

Carlson, K. 2013. The Bildungsroman Project - Academic Digital Humanities Project. [online]. Available at <http://bildungsromanproject.com>. [Accessed: 3 July 2019].

Cann, V. 2018. *Girlhood Studies*, 11(3), vi-xxi. New York: Berghahn Books.

Caruth, C. 2016. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Craps, S. 2013. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Christensen, A. 2003. Belonging and Unbelonging from an Intersectional Perspective. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 13 (1), 2009: 21–41, Sage Publications: Los Angeles.

De Beauvoir, S. 2010. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage.

De Finney, S., Dean, M., Loiselle, E., and Saraceno, J. 2011. All Children Are Equal, But Some Are More Equal Than Others: Minoritization, Structural Inequities, And Social Justice Praxis. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*. 11 (3), pp. 361-384.

Dala, ZP. 2015. *What About Meera*. Umuzi: Amazon Digital Services LLC.

Driscoll, C. 2002. *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Eagleton, M. 1996. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Edwards D. 2005. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as a Public Health Concern in South Africa. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 15(2), pp. 125–134.

Elareem, H. 2015. *A Quest for Selfhood: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Female Identity in Doris Lessing's Early Fiction*. [Online] Besançon: Université de Franche-Comté. Available at: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01528318/document>. [Accessed 17 May 2019].

Ellis, L. 1999. *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British bildungsroman, 1750-1850*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

Ever, S. 2013. *The Modernist Bildungsroman: End of Forms Most Beautiful*. [Online] Durham: Duke University. Available at: <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu>. [Accessed 11 August 2019].

Ferguson, MA. 1991. *Images of Women in Literature*, 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

Felski, R. 1989. Feminist Theory and Social Change. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 6(2), pp. 219–240.

Fraiman, S. 1993. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gilbert, H. & Tompkins, J. 1996. *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London: Routledge.

Gilmore, L. 2001. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Gjurgjan, LI. 2011. The (Im)possibility of Women's Bildungsroman, *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagradiensia*. [Online] Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet. Available from: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/101806>. [Accessed 5 November 2019].

Glenn, C. 2002. Silence: A Rhetorical Art for Resisting Discipline(s). *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, 22 (2), pp. 261-291.

Hall, K. 2000. *The National Women's Studies Association*, 12 (1), pp.187-190.

Hajer E. 2015. *A Quest for selfhood: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Female identity in Doris Lessing's Early Fiction*. [Online] Besançon: Université de Franche-Comté. Available at: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01528318/document> [Accessed: 23 October 2019].

Hughes L. 1967. *Poems from Black Africa: Ethiopia, South Rhodesia, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Kenya, Gabon, Senegal, Nyasaland, Mozambique, South Africa, Congo, Ghana and Liberia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hunt, HL. 2004. *Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance*. New York: Atria Books.

Kearney, MC. 2009. Coalescing: The Development of Girls' Studies. *NWSA /Feminist Formations*, 21(1), pp. 1-28.

- Labovitz, EK. 1988. The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century: Dorothy Richardson, Simone De Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf. *American University Studies*, 19(4). Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing.
- LaCapra, D. 1998. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Lazzaro-Weiss, C. 1990. The Female Bildungsroman: Calling It into Question. *NWSA Journal*, 2(1), pp. 16-34.
- Lee, S. 2005. *The Story of Maha the Mad*. [Online] Cape Town: University of Cape Town. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y5qgggp8>. [Accessed: 31 Jul. 2019].
- Lee, S. 2007. *The Story of Maha*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Lee, S. 2009. *Maha Ever After*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Luckhurst, R. 2008. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge.
- Maier, S. 2006. Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female Bildungsroman in Victorian Fiction. *Literature Compass*, 4(1), pp. 317 - 335.
- Mamrol N, 2016, Defamiliarization: Literary Theory and Criticism. [Online]. Available at <https://literariness.org/2016/03/17/defamiliarization/>. [Accessed: 23 Sept 2019].
- Melber, H. 2018. Book Review: Christi van der Westhuizen, *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa*. *Africa Spectrum*, 53(1), pp. 133–136.
- Mengel, E., & Borzaga, M. 2012. *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African novel: Essays*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Mitchell, C. 2016. Charting Girlhood Studies. In Mitchell C. & Rentschler C. (Eds.), *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Mitchell, C, & Rentschler, C (Eds.) 2016, *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Mitchell, E. 2017. The Girl and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: Feminine Becomings. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 32 (93), pp. 259-275.

Moletsane, R., Smith, A., and Chisholm, L. 2008. *Methodologies for Mapping a Southern African Girlhood in the Age of Aids*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Morris, MW. 2016. *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. New York: The New Press.

Murray, J. 2017. 'And They Never Spoke to Each Other of It': Contemporary Southern African Representations of Silence, Shame and Gender Violence. *English Academy Review*, 34(1), pp. 23-35.

Noomé, I. 2004. Shaping the self: A Bildungsroman for girls? *Literator*, 25(3), pp. 125-150.

Norman, SN. 2014. Situating Postcolonial Trauma Studies. *Postcolonial Text*, 9(2), pp. 2-21.

Patel, N. 2013. Exploring South African girlhoods: The Self-Identifications of Young Muslim Female Learners in Post-Apartheid South African High schools. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 26(1), pp. 61-81.

Pratt, A. 1981. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rogers, L & Meltzoff, A. 2016. Is Gender More Important and Meaningful Than Race? An Analysis of Racial and Gender Identity Among Black, White, and Mixed-Race Children. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 23(1), pp. 323-334.

Ross, FC. 2010. *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, Housing and Everyday Life in a Post-apartheid Community*. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

Salo, ER. 2009. Coconuts do not live in Townships: Cosmopolitanism and its Failures in the Urban Peripheries of Cape Town. *Feminist Africa, Body Politics and Citizenship* 13 (1), pp.11-21.

Salo, ER. 2018. *Respectable Mothers, Tough Men And Good Daughters: producing persons in Manenberg township South Africa*. Langaa RPCIG: Cameroon.

Saul, E. and White, B. 1986. Growing up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction. *History of Education Quarterly*, 26(4), p.631.

Sebald, W.G. 2001. *Austerlitz*. New York: The Modern Library.

Shklovsky, V. 1925. Art as Technique: *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Comp. David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Skeggs, B. 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage Publications.

Smith, C. and Faris, R. 2002. Religion and the Life Attitudes and Self-images of American Adolescents. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (41), pp. 597 - 612.

Smith, D. 2019. *South African Author ZP Dala Allegedly Coerced into Mental Hospital*. [Online] London: The Guardian. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y4zqra97>. [Accessed: 14 Aug. 2019].

Šnircová, S. 2018. *Girlhood in British Coming-of-Age Novels: The Bildungsroman Heroine Revisited*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Stella, SM. 2013. *Rhetorics Of Girlhood Trauma In Writing By Holly Goddard Jones, Joyce Carol Oates, Sandra Cisneros, And Jamaica Kincaid*. [Online]. Wisconsin: Marquette University. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9cnh4m9>. [Accessed: 14 Aug. 2019].

Svensson, K. 2009. *Old Traits and New Fiction. The Role of the Bildungsroman in Contemporary Fiction*. [Online] Sweden: Lund University Libraries. Available at: <http://lup.lub.lu.se/>. [Accessed: 16 Aug 2019].

Theron, D. 2015. *The Paper House*. Umuzi: Amazon Digital Services LLC.

Thamarana, S. 2015. *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, 3(4), pp. 537-541.

Van der Westhuizen, C. 2018. *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Van Der Westhuizen, C. 2019. 'Afrikaner Women' And Strategies of Whiteness In Postapartheid South Africa: Shame And The Ethnicised Respectability Of Ordentlikheid, *The Intersections Of Whiteness*, (1), Pp.146-162.

Van Wyk, B. 2015. "It's Hard Work to Be A Girl": Adolescent Girls' Experiences Of Girlhood In Three Low-Income Communities In South Africa. [Online] Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University. Available At: <https://Scholar.Sun.Ac.Za>. [Accessed: 26 August 2019].

Verwey, C. and Quayle, M. 2012. Whiteness, Racism, and Afrikaner Identity In Post-Apartheid South Africa, *African Affairs*, 3(445), pp 551–575.

Visser, I. 2015. Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects. *Humanities* 4, pp. 250–265.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. Intersectionality and Feminist Politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), pp. 193–209.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2011. Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging. In: Harcourt, W. (ed). *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.