

“I Felt Misunderstood by the World”: The Interplay of Fame, Adversity, and Identity in Bonnie (Mbuli) Henna’s Autobiography *Eyebags & Dimples*

Nonki Motahane

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5858-4203>
University of the Free State
MotahaneNS@ufs.ac.za

Oliver Nyambi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7080-9951>
University of the Free State
NyambiO@ufs.ac.za

Abstract

Bonnie (Mbuli) Henna’s autobiography, *Eyebags & Dimples* (2012), navigates the intricate and multifaceted interplay between fame, adversity, and identity in a uniquely South African post-colonial context. Through an ‘interested’ (re)memorialisation of her journey of becoming a black female celebrity, Henna unveils the complexities of becoming and being a celebrity in a transitioning society marked by pervasive historical legacies of institutionalised disadvantage, shifting notions of gender, and agency. Focusing on what is remembered and how it is remembered for specific aesthetic and perspectival effects, this article examines Henna’s identity project in *Eyebags & Dimples*. It explores how autobiographical memory in the text becomes, for Henna, a technology of the self she implements to grapple with profound internal struggles inhabiting her (celebrity) identity. Deploying theories of self-writing and memory, the article centres on Henna’s portrayal of adversity – its past location in the colonial home and township and its persistence in family relations – to understand the nature of memory-assisted self-(re)identification processes. The article argues that adversity emerges in *Eyebags & Dimples* as a transformative force that allows Henna to inscribe history, race, mental health, and family onto her consciousness of being famous. Within this context, Henna’s celebrity identity is completed as re-formed through the narrative stabilisation of the tension between her public fame and personal struggles.

Keywords: Bonnie Henna; fame; celebrity autobiography; identity; memory; South African life-writing

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Introduction: Conceptualising the Celebrity Autobiography and Identity Politics

Across the world, celebrities are public figures with symbolic social influence. As a socially mediated construction, celebrities' symbolic capital to influence emanates from and depends on the extent to which celebrities symbolise certain politics, moralities, lifestyles, ideologies and values that a given society can both relate to and interpret. Celebrities' social and (especially) commercial significance is produced through social interactions and, perhaps more importantly, through the symbolic meanings that such interactions generate in society. In this age of viral social media marketing, most celebrities have commercialised their fame through 'endorsements' where their appeal is marketed through the illusion of intimacy it generates in the public. These endorsements help affiliated businesses and other entities gain social traction. Beyond their performances of fame and infamy for commodification in public and commercial spheres, how do celebrities conceptualise their own identities and pitch them to influence? This question is at the centre of this present enquiry. Using the South African actress Bonnie Henna's autobiography *Eyebags & Dimples* (2012), the study examines the dynamics of celebrity identity performance as reflected in a narrative self-portrait of the actor as a(n upcoming) celebrity. Invoking theories of self-writing and memory, particularly those concerned with the phenomenology of autobiography as a creative performance of self-identification, the article reads *Eyebags & Dimples* as a narrative effort of self-constitution that attempts to harmonise the celebrity self and its evolutionary processes of becoming.

The autobiography has long functioned as a medium and space for (re)constructions of personal identity. The initial urge to write one's life points to an intention to influence the public's view of the autobiographer. The autobiography is, therefore, an instrument of self-identification where a desired self is generated and circulated through narrative. Writing one's life self-reflexively is complex and complicated, mainly based on recollection and experience. Reclaiming past events and experiences is purposeful and bound with emotions and intentions. It is, therefore, subjective. The subjective nature of biographical memory is undeniable since one of the major aims of self-narration is to serve a prior intention of the writing subject (Holmes 2009). The narrative unfolds through recollections of carefully curated past events in the present. Through this selective memory process, the autobiographer strategically chooses events and situations in their life that construct and interpret a desired identity. In Bluck's (2013, 113) words, autobiographers "use memory to [...] serve the function of self-enhancement". Javangwe's (2011, 7) notion of the autobiographical "agenda" is helpful to what this article seeks to achieve. For Javangwe, "despite claiming to authorize an authentic account [...] it [the autobiography] is partial. It is driven with its own contradictions that derive from mediations of memory and ideological and cultural biases that tend to promote the agenda of the individual subject". Noting this narrative utility of life-writing, this study examines Henna's "agenda"—not only to see how the autobiographical form in *Eyebags & Dimples* helps her to construct her identity as a

black female celebrity but also to find out what it matters that this identity is narratively constructed.

Despite the wide scholarly interest in autobiographical constructions of South African identities, virtually no studies have explored the life writings of celebrities in the entertainment sector. The available literature focuses mainly on black political male identities constructed through the ‘political’ autobiographical genre (see Paul 1993; Ndlovu 2012; Javangwe 2016). Most of these autobiographies, such as Mandela’s famed *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), are male-authored and centre on the political evolution of the self as an individual and a part of a family and nation. Ndlovu’s (2010, 18) study of such South African male autobiographies leads him to conclude that “[t]he autobiography has had a tremendous impact on South African social and literary landscapes”. This study seeks to understand this ‘impact’ by shifting focus to the hitherto unexplored sub-genre of the celebrity autobiography.

Henna: layering the black female celebrity identity

The term ‘celebrity’ is used in this study following Cashmore and Parker’s (2003, 215) definition of a celebrity “as a product, a thing that is produced and that can be consumed”. As an adjunct to this, Marshall (2010, 44) contends that celebrity entails “self-production”; that is, a celebrity produces a “representation of the self for public consumption” (see also Gready 1993; Douglass 1974). Marshall’s (2010) suggestion that celebrities often intend to construct and circulate particular identities echoes Javangwe’s (2011) concept of the ‘agenda’ in emphasising the functional purpose of narrativised identity. The ‘agenda’ constitutes a purpose or a preconceived intention that requires a certain level of ideation in what is remembered and forgotten in the narrative construction of the self as (becoming) a celebrity. Our notion of narrative ideation foregrounds autobiographical ‘creativity’ in understanding what Lloyd (1986, 170) has called “the uneasy unity of narrator and protagonist” in autobiographies. In *Eyebags & Dimples*, the ‘unity’ of the narrator and the protagonist or, rather, the narrative attempt to establish such a unity reveals the ideological functionality of the autobiography as a professional identity project or what Marshall (2010, 44) calls “self production”. The aesthetic and discursive strategies of establishing and sustaining the ‘unity’ of the narrator and the protagonist reflect Henna’s conscious negotiation of time as the defining factor circumscribing what notions of selfhood her past makes possible. In writing about herself, Henna establishes the connections between her personal history growing up in the social and economic margins of South Africa and how these conditions inform her present black female celebrity status. Her autobiography is as much the expression of her present self as it represents a past self. It can thus be argued that Henna’s autobiography illuminates her identity as a product of what Lloyd (1986, 170) has called the complex relationship and interconnectedness between truth, time, and selfhood.

Henna is a renowned South African actress and celebrity. Her career in the performing Arts has spanned over two decades. She blazed the South African screens from the age of thirteen when she was discovered by an advertising agent at a bus stop. She is mostly known in South Africa for her role as Zandi in the drama *Backstage*¹ and Ntombi in the soapie *Soul City*². She made an international mark when she acted in the films *Drum*³, *Catch a Fire*,⁴ and *Invictus*.⁵ These career opportunities shaped her reputation as a public figure in the film and television industry inside and outside South Africa. *Eyebags & Dimples* is not a mere narrativisation of Henna's experiences in the productions above. Instead, the autobiography draws on these experiences and others to create layers of meanings and "particular [...] versions" (Holmes 2009, 401) of herself as a celebrity beyond the identities in public circulation.

Marshall (2010, 45) argues that celebrities need to make their public and private worlds intersect for "the production" of a celebrity identity". Through its production as a constellation of publicly known and unknown facets of Henna's life, *Eyebags & Dimples* can be conceived of as an identity project that seeks to harmonise Henna's floating identities generatively that authorises a new subject. This new subject 'completes' her in public, where her fame only partially defines her. This re-identification process occurs in the context of age-long traditions and assumptions about the inherent inferiority of women, which marginalises female celebrities in the entertainment sector (see Williamson 2010; Jackson and Tiina 2015; Katja 2015; Patrick 2022).

Henna uses the autobiographical genre, particularly its power of harmonising popular disparate identities in the public sphere, to engage in self-(re)identification. Self-(re)identification occurs as a form of narrative self-emancipation where the memory of various adversities empowers Henna to self-fashion as an overcomer. Henna buttresses this view by writing, "I've used writing as a tool to understand my world and experiences" (Henna 2012, 241). In this light, *Eyebags & Dimples* is also an epistemological strategy of knowing a self that has hitherto been fractured and scattered in the many 'Hennas' constituted by the publicly consumed celebrity figure. Hall (1997, 58) supports Henna's notion of self-writing as an undertaking in self-discovery, arguing that with life-writing, "the past is [...] always retold, rediscovered, reinvented." This can be connected to Henna's wish that her life narrative would facilitate her desired social

1 *Backstage* is a South African, youth-targeted, soap opera produced by Bottom Line Productions. The series originally aired on e.tv from 1 May 2000 to 6 July 2007 on weekday evenings at 18:30.

2 *Soul City* is a South African health and social welfare education television series produced by Soul City Institute for Social Justice through Homemade Soul Productions, the series was conceived in 1992 as a project of the Institute of Urban Primary Health Care (IUPHC).

3 *Drum* is an international film which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2004, and did the rounds of international film festivals before going on general release in South Africa in July 2006.

4 *Catch a Fire* is a 2006 biographical thriller film about activists against apartheid in South Africa. The film is directed by Phillip Noyce, from a screenplay written by Shawn Slovo.

5 *Invictus* is a 2009 biographical sports film directed by Clint Eastwood.

function defined in her prayer to God: “that one day I, too, would be able to tell stories that would influence and inspire others” (2012, vii). Beyond constituting Henna’s ‘agenda’ in her autobiography, this inspirational imagination presents an opportunity to theorise the social function of the female celebrity autobiography. It gestures to the part of Henna’s autobiographical production where, despite the autobiography’s unravelling as a process of self-discovery, its functionality is envisioned in terms of its sociality. The social function manifesting as the conviction that a particular identity can inspire others comes from a place of self-introspection, censorship and invention. In this way, various meanings of Henna associated with her public and private life are harnessed, sifted and constellated.

The resultant meaning of the ‘new’ self in the public sphere can be linked to Achebe’s (1984) notion of “mapping out identity”. Achebe (1984) argues that “if an identity is unacceptable, you change it. Identity is not something which hangs like a millstone around your neck. It is something you can hold a dialogue with”. Henna’s selective memory in *Eyebags & Dimples* can be viewed as part of a process of “holding a dialogue” with her scattered images in creating a functional identity that can ‘inspire’. Henna, on her part, agrees; she says, “[m]y platform as an actress has been helpful in nurturing my writing. It helps me better relate to the different aspects of my creativity and personality” (2012, 242). This statement suggests that Henna understands that her narrative does not constitute an objective life history as a celebrity. Instead, Henna is alert to her autobiography’s creative dimension, which occurs as the physical manifestation of her mental dialoguing with her scattered self. We can, therefore, read *Eyebags & Dimples* as what Lara (1998, 49) calls “a new model of self-fashioning” where past experiences are harnessed in a creative process of generating a socially viable identity.

While Henna’s celebrity images in the public domain enhance her profile as an influential figure, their ‘industrial’ meanings tend to mask her ‘true’ identity shaped before and beyond her fame. Marked by a colonial past of disempowerment and limitation, this identity embodies a generative adversity that allows Henna to chart an ‘against all odds’⁶ narrative. This narrative fashions an overcomer identity that qualifies Henna as a ‘role model’. The past that naturalises Henna’s present as a significant personal achievement is characterised by entrenched patriarchal structures in the film industry as well as the dehumanising Apartheid system. In this light, we have to read Henna’s autobiography as a project of self-emancipation where her ‘overcomer’ identity is simultaneously shaped and naturalised by the formative years of colonial socioeconomic and political adversity.

In understanding the emancipatory dimension of Henna’s autobiography, it will be helpful to invoke Lara’s (1998) feminist theorisation of female-authored narratives as

6 We use this idiomatic phrase to highlight Henna’s portrayal of her celebrity success as realized despite the socio-political and economic adversities of Apartheid.

essentially “morally textured.” Lara’s (1998, 10) argument about the illocutionary force of feminist narratives in the public sphere views life-writings by women as mechanisms of dialogue for those who “are struggling for public recognition” (1998, 11). This theory helps us locate and explain Henna’s life, where fame, racial, social, economic and gender factors converge to shape both precarity and opportunity for self-emancipation. Self-writing for Henna can thus be understood in Lara’s feminist (1998, 31) theory as a mechanism of “creat[ing] new forms of power”. This ‘new’ form of power generated through narrative is fuelled by what Lara (1998, 28) calls the narrative “illocutionary force”, that is, the narrative’s capacity to move readers from their comfort zones and points of privilege to sympathise with the narrator’s quest to be recognised in some particular light. Based on Lara’s theorisation, we read Henna’s autobiography as “disclosive” – a term that Lara (1998, 4) uses to describe the ways through which female-authored autobiographies may become “communicative tools that provide new meanings” through “historiciz[ing] experience” (1998, 37).

Henna’s self-writing notion is closely related to Lara’s concept of disclosure. For Henna, writing the autobiography is an act of self-care, and releasing her ‘hidden’ story of becoming a celebrity is, in fact, a release from the demanding task of concealing it. Feeling the daunting task of nurturing a public profile that demands the constant suppression of her strife, Henna takes to self-writing as an apparatus of release. In Henna’s case, disclosure means something more than revealing a concealed part of her identity. In this instance, disclosure is a feminist mechanism of self-defence and self-care involving Henna’s rejection of societal prescriptions of what constitutes a viable celebrity identity. What Henna calls “African culture” (2012, viii) is evoked as yet another layer of social adversity that, in its demands of certain silences in the socialisation of femininity, limits female agency. Resulting from ‘cultured’ and ‘gendered’ expectations, identity concealment as a means of creating and sustaining social identity emerges as a form of oppression, as Henna reveals:

But to truly heal, I must tell my story – not that of others. African culture has always prized secrecy. We veil the truth in order to protect the group; we teach each other to value group safety above the safety of the individual; we cover our wounds for fear of what our neighbours and peers may say. But under such a veil wounds fester, and then we pass them on to the next generation... I have taken it upon myself to break the silence and let in the light. (2012, viii)

Imagining self-writing as a healing mechanism implies a belief in the emancipatory potential of personal memory. We are, however, more interested in the quotation above in Henna’s version of disclosure as “break[ing] the silence and let[ting] light in” (2012, viii). The metaphor of ‘light’ and its implied opposite of darkness highlights the discomfort caused by the tension between Henna’s personal and public selves. This discomfort manifests, among other ways, in Henna’s strife as she struggles to harmonise her conflicting private and public lives, as shown when she says:

It hasn't been easy. My modus operandi was always to hide my true self, exposing only what I thought would be accepted. In this way I gave different parts of me to different people, switching masks all the time while the true me remained an elusive phantom... this book is a candle. (2012, x-xi)

The conflict between Henna's private and public selves reveals her fragmented identity and elusive sense of authenticity. This scattering of identity is portrayed as an ailment from which Henna can heal through self-writing. Self-writing as feminist disclosure thus entails a conscious attempt to fashion, from the fragments of a scattered and concealed identity, a rogue and non-conformist identity that reconnects Henna's sense of authentic identity beyond social and commercial expectations.

The Homefront of fame: tracing the Intersections of Home and Identity

In *Eyebags & Dimples*, the home is a site of memory that archives Henna's pre-fame identity, which she brings into dialogue with her celebrity identity in a way that reveals possibilities in a feminist drive. As Thompson and Tyagi (1996, 91) assert, "the concept of home seems to be tied in some way with the notions of identity". In this light, recollections of home and the experiences of home can say something about Henna's childhood identity and how it relates to her adult (celebrity) identity. The first significant memory of Henna's childhood home that she shares characterises the socio-political factors that Henna grew up in, which shaped her aspirations to be influential. As a formative space, the childhood home is generative of a feminist resolve that would later find fulfilment – not in Henna's celebrity self per se, but in how the celebrity identity prepares the public for her inspiration. Henna remembers her childhood home as a place of origin and a space that shaped her earliest perceptions of self and a sense of belonging. The self that emerges from this home locates Henna's aspirations to inspire in a historical context of systematic colonial oppression where her present fame reflects the nature of her resolve. The home is portrayed as a part of a community so that both concepts reflect (on) each other. Henna's association with this home and community makes their challenges part of her formative identity. The interconnectedness between Henna's personal childhood experiences, the old home and the community under Apartheid shape a sense of material consciousness that is congruent with her aspiration to inspire. An excerpt from her autobiography can illustrate this point:

Our house was second from the corner, opposite the Blue Flame bottle store, a well-known landmark. It was part of a strip of shops that serviced a large part of the neighbourhood. I always wondered why the bottle store was the largest of all shops. (Henna 2012, 11)

In this textual evidence, the home is conceptualised as part of a larger location – a symbolic larger 'home' which identifies (with) its inhabitants. Henna's Soweto home, characterised as an embodied image of the neighbourhood, reflects a collective identity which shapes Henna's identity. We validate this contextual framework by noting Bickhard's (1992, 20) insight that the "influence of society and culture on personhood

is constitutive” (see also Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson 2010). Now that she is a public figure, the neighbourhood ‘networks’ Henna’s home and her sense of self, inscribing, onto her consciousness of place, a sense of belonging which manifests as a duty to inspire successful negotiations of the limiting effects of space. The familial yet communal and, indeed, national challenges inhabiting black spaces can best be understood in the context of the symbolic significance of alcohol as a social outlet from the vagaries of colonial oppression. Understanding this function of alcohol in this colonial context helps us to make sense of “why the bottle store was the largest of all shops” (Henna 2012, 11). The bottle store is also “a well-known land mark” (Henna 2012, 11). Its popularity is symptomatic of its significance and influence on the people, their identities, and the place identity of Soweto as a segregated black township under apartheid. As an inhabitant of Soweto, Henna, by association, assumes Soweto’s place’s identity and the colonial limitations of what her kind could achieve. Place and personal identities converge to reflect (on) the kind of socio-political constraints that Henna had to overcome on her way to becoming a famous actress. In this way, memories of the colonial home facilitate Henna’s reconstruction of herself as an overcomer, qualifying her moral claim to inspire.

Henna, the ‘overcomer’, is a historically layered identity that interconnects and interrelates her fortunes in time and places. Soweto is remembered in democratic South Africa, where Henna’s fame and celebrity status project the enabling environment of liberation in a way that reflects the disabling nature of the apartheid era. The following excerpt edifies the symbolic significance attached to Soweto as a physical and historical space that not only shapes the socioeconomic status of Henna’s childhood home but, more importantly, significantly influences how she understands her adult fame in terms of the challenges she had to overcome to attain it:

Soweto was a tough place. Its malnourished scenery was a far cry from the opulent suburban world I travelled through on my way to school. Compared to the lush white suburbs, it was barren, grim and uninspiring. There were no street names, pavements, parks or anything that beckoned to the soul. No beauty inspired one to do or become more, and this was no coincidence - it was part of the plan. (Henna 2012, 17)

The imagery of malnourishment best describes Henna’s attempts to link the colonial home to Apartheid’s racial limitations and circumscription of achievement. The home, Soweto, is evoked as a typical Apartheid-era township, which is “part of the plan”. Henna’s notion of the Apartheid ‘plan’ here historically echoes the Group Areas Act of 1950 – an Apartheid law which classified residential areas based on racial categories. The Act and the segregated townships and “lush white suburbs” (Henna 2012, 17) it legislated constitute and configure privilege on space and race. The spaces function as discursive spatial repositories of disabled and abled agency (respectively), which archive memories of officially limited opportunities for the famed older Henna.

A ‘home’ with nothing that “beckon to the soul” (Henna 2012, 17) symbolically models black people’s struggles in a way that inflects Henna’s journey to fame with ‘against all

odds' intonations. The colonial home thus provides moral space for Henna to construct herself as the epitome of dedication and conviction – the qualities that define and qualify inspiration. Henna uses the Apartheid Soweto, particularly the vicissitudes of its colonial history and temporalities, to re-constitute her fame in terms of its making as a product of struggle. Hence, besides the limitations of Apartheid Soweto as the place where “nothing beckoned to the soul” (Henna 2012, 17), Henna can “speak of beautiful things to come” (Henna 2012, 17) and this makes her father declare that “[m]y daughter will be famous and her name will be known across the world” (Henna 2012, 32).

Henna's memories of the colonial home and its symbolic significance as part of a colonially charted space sync with the African nationalist grand narrative of Apartheid. This synchronisation of the personal and the national(ist) memories of Apartheid's spatial oppression allows for seepages and osmotic transferences in perspectives and emotions. This narrative proximation 'historicises' Henna's story, which acquires a verisimilitude that reinforces the morality of her struggle to achieve fame. There is a marked similarity, for instance, in how Henna's portrayal of Apartheid Soweto echoes that of Nelson Mandela in his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela speaks of home in Soweto as “a place where [he] had a house and not a home” (1995, 10). This visual imagery of home reflects a deep sense of belonging to Soweto, which emanates from Mandela's alienation from it. On her part, Henna describes the system as a “bully [that] intended to rip [her] out of her birthplace and inheritance” (2012, 20). The metaphorization of Apartheid as a 'bully' evokes its systematic restrictions in a way that frames Henna's successful negotiation as inspiring heroic resilience. As such, in the same way that Mandela's nationalist heroism is shaped by his refusal to be bullied by Apartheid, Henna's 'against all odds' story constructs a heroic narrative of refusing colonial containment.

As Whitehead (2008, 2) has remarked, “[m]emory is concerned with the personal and is inherently bound to identity. Through memory, the individual's past can be revived or made actual again, in the sense of being brought into consciousness.” In this notion of memory, the past is 'revived' for its potential utility in illuminating the present. In Henna's memoir, Apartheid is a political and economic adversity that systematically curtailed black families, and achievement is not portrayed as something that is located in the past. Instead, Apartheid is evoked as a haunting spectre whose memory torments the present, constantly rehashing the racialised curtailments of black achievement. The following excerpt reveals how the trope of Apartheid as a spectre that haunts the black 'family' generates the discursive space for Henna to reinforce her 'against all odds' narrative, shaping an 'overcomer' identity:

I didn't recognise at the time how the years of trauma visited on my community jabbed at my self-worth and my sense of collective identity. My will was strong, but in deep, secluded corners, I carried the shame of being labelled an inferior. Because of this I nurtured an unacknowledged hatred of South Africa and all that it represented. And perhaps some of this feeling still lingers. (Henna 2012, 20)

In this textual evidence, Henna's contemplative introspection reveals how her memory of the Apartheid trauma has impacted her sense of identity and self-perception. The contemplative tone invites us to connect Henna's thoughts to her emotional experiences and their source – the lingering spectre of Apartheid. This tone helps Henna forge a sympathetic connection between her and the reader, which can foster an empathetic understanding of both her unyielding fears of a haunting Apartheid and her will to overcome it. So, while Henna acknowledges the enduring consequences of years of trauma under Apartheid on her consciousness of self and its (im)possibilities, her assertion of her willpower emphasises her resilience and 'overcomer' identity. Similarly, we can see how Apartheid is evoked in the aforementioned quotation as the historical trigger that activates Henna's resolve, where her feelings of "shame" for being labelled an inferior human reveal a complex internal struggle. However, while her 'struggle' is internal, its significance as a product of group trauma caused by Apartheid is collective, hence Henna's assertion that the "trauma visited on my community jabbed at my self-worth" (Henna 2012, 20). In this light, memories of Apartheid re-connect the personal with the collective, where Henna's sense of "shame" at being labelled an 'inferior' challenges her to prove herself on behalf of the collective. Fame is thus re-imagined as the outward manifestation of Henna's internal struggle to deal with her 'shame'. Apartheid emerges as the ultimate adversity to self-fulfilment. Achieving fame against Apartheid odds epitomises a distinctive resolve that affirms Henna's attempt to self-identify as a role model.

The past in/and the present

Citing Susannah Radstone's argument that "memory means different things at different times" (cited in Whitehead 2008, 2), Whitehead (2008: 2) presents a notion of memory that, besides "emphasis[ing] its (memory's) historical vicissitudes... stress[es] that memory's meaning and value transform radically in different historical periods." In this concept of memory, the meaning of what is remembered is contingent on when it is remembered. Henna writes at a time of personal internal strife caused by her conflicting identities as a celebrity and a private individual. The past is portrayed in Henna's memoir as pervading the present but not as an all-powerful haunting force that dictates the course of her life. The past in Henna's autobiography is an archive of her struggle that mainly serves one typically 'autobiographical' purpose – defining her resilience. The past in the present, therefore, carries symbolic significance as a resource from which the celebrity Henna 're-sources' events, situations, and experiences that affirm her identity.

Henna states that she "[is] a ground breaker" (Henna 2012, 77). However, it is important to note that adversity, which forms the causal platform from where Henna's resiliency becomes noteworthy, is not only colonial. It is also cultural, emotional and physiological. Henna remembers events in her life from when she was five years old. One of the most important memories which prove definitive in her adult life as a celebrity concerns her mother's struggle with clinical depression, a condition that Henna

inherited and would struggle to shrug off in her adult life. In their book entitled *Abnormal Psychology*, Barlow, Durand, and Hofmann (2012) describe clinical depression as an extremely dangerous condition that can affect a person's physical function. The symptoms may cause a sufferer to be unable to perform daily activities. Blatt (2004) asserts that Clinical Depression is the more severe form of depression that, when left untreated, can cause problems in relationships and social activities such as school and work (see also Beck 1967). This layer of adversity to Henna's achievement allows her to delve into her past to reconfigure her identity in a way that attunes her to the role model function of celebrity status. She begins this memory with the following sentence, "I was five when my mother became suicidal" (Henna 2012, 7). Henna describes how she does not "remember a time when [her] mother was happier" (2012, 9). She was only five when her "mom became increasingly irrational and neurotic" (Henna 2012, 27). When Henna marries in her adult life, she suffers the same fate, which takes a toll on her, impacting every facet of her life as she says, "[being] newly married, supposedly in the honeymoon phase, yet I had no energy for anything, not for getting up, sex, eating or even – perhaps – talking to my husband" (Henna 2012, 134). The severity of Henna's depression in the description above is suggestive of the health odds she had to overcome. These odds are reinforced and intensified through the trope of maternal lineage, where Henna's role model identity is fashioned out of the foil, she creates between her ability to survive depression and her mother and grandmother's fateful incapacity to do the same.

Henna's description of the tragic effects of depression on her mother and grandmother creates the impression that the condition is building up in severity through the lineage to a point where, at Henna's own 'turn', it seems unbeatable. Henna, for instance, describes her grandmother, who died in her fifties from alcohol addiction, as "a tormented woman" (Henna 2012, 10). During the depressive states, her grandmother would have violent episodes with Henna's mother. Henna recalls how, at one point, "apparently unprovoked, my grandmother began to hurl insults at her. Mom ignored her [...] but granny didn't stop: Suddenly she was attacking Mom with a hot iron" (Henna 2012, 9). The genealogy of depression-induced violence continues, moving on to Henna's mother, who also experiences uncontrollable urges to deal violently with her daughter. Henna recalls, for instance, how she "was expected to keep the house sparkling clean, and failure would result in severe beatings" (Henna 2012, 19). Realising that her mother was displaying the same symptoms as her grandmother, Henna remembers how:

It baffled me that this behaviour was so similar to the things Mom had told me her mother did to her; some were in fact identical. She'd related numerous stories of my grandmother's cruel words, and deep hurt and sadness she'd experienced when her mother treated her with such contempt. Yet here she was, visiting the very same horrors upon me. (Henna 2012, 29)

This citation characterises depression as Henna's maternal side experienced it in her family tree. The trope of inheritance culls, from the debilitating experiences described

as ‘cruelty’, ‘horrors’ and “deep hurt and sadness”, an incremental state of vulnerability that Henna is bound to acquire through genetic inheritance. The genealogy of depression, whose severity manifests in the death of Henna’s grandmother and the near-total social dysfunctionality of her mother, suggests that Henna is not merely inheriting a condition. Instead, the evolutionary trajectory of the condition through Henna’s maternal lineage reveals its worsening intensity as a physiological, social and psychological adversity that can only take a remarkable character to overcome. The disease, particularly its portrayal as a severe condition with potentially dire consequences, effectively functions as a health adversity that creates a discursive site for Henna to model a survivor personality that feeds into her role model identity.

Cohler Bertram (1991), in a study of the life story, resilience and response to adversity, observes that adversity plays a significant role in life writing. It often allows the author to reflect on their challenges, particularly as they inform their personal growth and resilience. For Cohler (1991), beyond functioning as a platform of self-definition for the author, adversity also allows readers to connect with the memoir writer’s shared human experiences. What informs the sharedness of the experience of adversity is its resonation as a highlight of the strength of the human spirit and the human capacity for resilience, transformation and growth despite challenges. In Henna’s memoir, adversity begets opportunity – not only to prove resilience and a remarkable show of the strength of the human spirit but also how these definitions of character sync with her fame. The intensity of the strength of Henna’s human spirit – that which ‘remarks’ it – owes to the intensity of the adversity it overcomes.

We have already seen how the portrayal of Henna’s grandmother drinking herself to death reflects the severity of depression as a health threat that Henna inherits. We have also noted how, in Henna’s view, the ‘large’ bottle stores in her community are a marker of the psycho-social identities of the township. Perhaps a more symbolic depiction of the severity of depression as adversity in the memoir is when its effects on Henna’s mother transform her into a toxic figure that Henna fails to recognise and has to grow away from as a matter of survival. Henna’s memory of her afflicted mother struggling with depression evokes her as yet another loss to her. As a layer to adversity, the loss operates at a symbolic level where it signifies the absence, in Henna’s childhood, of psychosocial support and affection. At a psychological level, the ‘loss’ of her mother to depression is more damaging to her psyche than the physical death of her grandmother. Although her mother does not physically die, she dies in Henna’s consciousness as their relationship degenerates to a point where Henna feels she could be safer in death than as her mother’s daughter. The toxic relationship between mother and daughter becomes a window into Henna’s challenging upbringing, where her struggles reflect a remarkable resilience that defines her ‘purpose’ – becoming a role model. The following textual evidence reveals the psychosocial impact of the mother’s ‘loss’ to Henna ‘loss’ of her mother to depression and, more importantly, how it creates a discursive opportunity for Henna’s narrative of self-discovery where the ‘loss’ of a mother inscribe on Henna’s eventual recovery, associations of remarkability that define her purpose:

Mom became increasingly neurotic and irrational as the years progressed. Everything seemed to agitate and overwhelm her... I too began to wish I would die. I fantasied about dying, for surely death was better than this torture that had become my life. I just wanted her to love me, to see me, to be glad that I existed. I craved her affection and her approval but I had to content myself with beatings – they were her only real engagement with me. Her words were always hard, critical and uncaring, abrasive to my soul. I was convinced she hated me. The mere sight of me irritated and disgusted her, and she'd often say so, her inching slowly, coldly over me in disapproval...I kept everybody at arm's length, and vowed to myself that I wouldn't need anyone ever, not even my mother. (Henna 2012, 28)

As evoked in this quotation, depression manifests a relationality that is inimical to fame and the vocation of celebrity. This curtailing relationality is marked by alienation and isolation. The symbolic nature of the relationship between a mother and a daughter amplifies the curtailment. The aporia of hate sitting where love should exist heightens Henna's challenge with her sociality—the most inherent requirement for a celebrity.

An essential part of Henna's story that has a bearing on how she becomes a celebrity is her femininity. Henna's formative identity as an aspiring actor living in a black township under Apartheid is a coalescing of multiple identities that are inherently doomed by health issues, culture, politics and economics to flourish. She is a poverty-stricken black child under Apartheid, a troubled teenager suffering the strain of diminishing maternal affection from a depression-afflicted mother and, in her adulthood, must, herself, fend off depression. These curtailing identities coalesce and exacerbate their adversity under Henna's femininity, where they produce vicissitudes of gendered social, emotional, and relational complications. The metaphor of 'production' here is important, not least because it suggests an episteme of knowing Henna's celebrity identity in terms of its becoming a temporally and variously conditioned process. Cashmore and Parker's (2003, 215) conceptualise the celebrity as "a product". Henna's life story re-theorises the 'productness' of the celebrity, adding to layers of its normative synonymy with commercial consumption and associations of origins. By 'origins', we refer to Henna's processes of becoming famous, particularly how they are portrayed in *Eyebags & Dimples* for effect. In Henna's autobiography, the celebrity is not merely a 'product' that is commercially 'consumed' as part of a career of fame. This identity identifies Henna in the social sphere, and its incompleteness prompts her to write *Eyebags & Dimples*. Lloyd (1986) has noted how the autobiography is one of the most convenient forms to 'complete' incomplete identities in the social sphere:

Autobiography purports to present the truth of a self as grasped by itself. It tries to present the self as an object grasped from its own perspective, thus achieving a coincidence between subjective and objective in the putative unity of the narrator and the protagonist. Through its own creative act, the self is constituted as an object, accessible to the perception of others. (1986, 171)

In our discussion of Henna's representation of her femininity as a critical component of the famous 'product,' we are more interested in Lloyd's notions of "the truth of a self as grasped by itself" (1986, 171). We are also interested in how, as facilitated by Henna's selective memory, this 'grasping' becomes a technology of constituting femininity to complete a self that is "... accessible to the perception of others" (Lloyd, 1986, 171).

Henna's fame in the social sphere is gendered, not least because she is famous for acting as a particularly feminist character (Portia) in the drama *Gaz'lam*,⁷ where she is an HIV-afflicted woman whose positivity is framed to des-stigmatise the condition. Henna's fame is also gendered or rather 'feminised' as steeped in a past of '*becoming*'⁸ where her transcending of socio-economic adversity to achieve fame is remarked by her femininity. Markedly, Henna traces her career as an actor back to a woman. She remembers how, at thirteen, a random female stranger approached her at a bus stop on her way to school and handed her a pamphlet with the words "Do you want to be a superstar?" (Henna 2012, 40). For Henna, the question "[d]o you want to be a superstar?" (Henna 2012, 40) is a call to become one as she recalls that "[d]eep inside, something seemed to catch fire. I found a voice I'd never heard before. It had something to say, and it spoke with an undeniable certainty" (Henna 2012, 42). This encounter at the bus stop does not represent a mere discovery of talent by a random acting scout. Instead, the motif of finding a voice makes the encounter an empowering and emancipatory event. This dimension of the event is gendered – not only by the fact that it is a woman who presents Henna a platform to voice but also precisely by the fact that the voice that is offered an outlet has been actively seeking one to chart an escape route from various forms of intersecting constraints. As remembered by Henna, the scout encounter portrays a moment of sisterhood where female solidarity is epitomised by support, opportunity and empowerment. In the context of the symbolic chapter title '*Becoming*', the encounter with a scout is both defining and formative in how it sets Henna off on her journey to becoming a superstar. How Henna frames this moment of sisterhood is instructive of how she recollects the past to 'complete' her identity, as the following quotation reveals:

No matter how I tried, I couldn't drown out the echo of her [the scout's] voice. Her words circled like bees in my mind, pollinating my heart with possibilities. I was in a daze. Had that really happened? Had someone seen something in me that wasn't in somebody else at the bus stop that day? Was I unique? Special? ... That moment created a hunger in me, a hunger for more of those sweet words, words that called me out to take my place in the assembly line of purpose. (Henna 2012, 41)

In this textual evidence, the motif of (re)production of 'bees' and 'pollination' symbolically and metaphorically engenders the formation of fame, which constitutes it

7 *Gazlam* is a South African drama exploring relationships, love and sex against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS which aired from 2002-2005.

8 The title of Henna's Chapter 6.

as a ‘product’ we cannot fully grasp outside its processes of becoming. In this light, what Henna calls “the assembly line of purpose” encapsulates aspired fame, which, as remembered by Henna in her famous adult life, locates its completeness in the dialectical relationship between her fame and the past constituting its acquisition.

Conclusion

This study indicates that *Eyebags & Dimples* is part of Henna’s complex cultural paraphernalia of managing fame. Leitmotifs of what, in Henna’s past, highlights key processes of becoming famous revealed how *Eyebags & Dimples* functions as a cultural yet professional tool that Henna uses to re-constitute, in a way that completes, her (celebrity) identity. The autobiographical form of the text allows Henna to interrelate her unknown past with her famous present in a manner that makes the past and the present reflect dialectically (on) each other. Triangulated theories of self-narration, memory, feminism and celebrity helped us uncover how, as a product of creativity that is consciously meant to influence public perceptions of Henna, the celebrity textuality manifested (as) autobiographical identity performance. We have shown how, through the performative act of re-collecting her life story, Henna can conveniently remember and ‘forget’ certain aspects of her past in the creative process of personalising and customising that past to qualify her present identity as a black female celebrity. Inscripting adversity on her past poverty-stricken childhood under Apartheid, a restricting township home, inherited mental health challenges and toxic relationships, Henna fashions an against-all-odds-narrative that naturalises her self-construction as a role model/celebrity. Thus, *Eyebags & Dimples* is not a mere narrative attempt at amplifying Henna’s fame. Perhaps more importantly, it is an act of ascribing, producing and reproducing certain meanings of the celebrity. Our final analysis is that *Eyebags & Dimples* does not only help us understand Henna’s famous self as a product of a past that is not in the public domain. Instead, beyond the defining function of selective memory shaping Henna’s adversity, the autobiography is her narrative mechanism of regulating her identity, reconstructing and reconstituting it in the context of her authenticity crisis fuelled by social and commercial demands for certain identity performances.

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