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and Anne Moody“

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Lisa Maria Gruber

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations will be used in the text. First the titles of the autobiographies of the two authors are chronologically listed by author, followed by other abbreviations in alphabetical order.

<i>CBS</i>	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>
<i>GTN</i>	<i>Gather Together in My Name</i>
<i>SSC</i>	<i>Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas</i>
<i>HOW</i>	<i>The Heart of a Woman</i>
<i>ATS</i>	<i>All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes</i>
<i>SFH</i>	<i>A Song Flung up to Heaven</i>
<i>MMM</i>	<i>Mom & Me & Mom</i>
<i>CAM</i>	<i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i>
AMA	The American Missionary Association
CAWAH	The Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage
COFO	The Council of Federated Organizations
CORE	The Congress of Racial Equality
NAACP	The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
SCLC	The Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

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1. Introduction

I am a black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstance
assailed
impervious
indestructible
Look
on me and be
renewed

(Mari Evans, "I Am A Black Woman", 21-33)

This is one stanza of Mari Evans's poem "I Am A Black Woman" published in 1970. On the one hand it expresses the hardship black women faced,¹ and on the other hand it celebrates black women's strength and resistance. Because of this twofold meaning expressed in the poem, which can also be observed in the texts that will be analyzed here, it was chosen as a means of introduction to this thesis.

Southern literature has always been an intriguing field of research and has not ceased to be of interest to this day. Featuring various different genres and many distinguished authors, my personal enthusiasm for this region and its literature was sparked after I had spent half a year in Alabama attending high school, later immersing myself in it during my English studies at university. For this thesis I chose two Southern black female authors, namely Maya Angelou and Anne Moody, who both published their autobiographies. Angelou did so very outstandingly with seven volumes of autobiography,² whereas Moody published only one.³ Life narratives have a long tradition in the Southern

¹ I am aware that racism is still going strong in the USA, but in this thesis, the focus is on Angelou's and Moody's lives.

² Angelou's autobiographies include the following books: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (CBS), *Gather Together in My Name* (GTN), *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (SSC), *The Heart of a Woman* (HOW), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (ATS), *A Song Flung up to Heaven* (SFH), and *Mom & Me & Mom* (MMM).

³ Moody's autobiography is called *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (CAM). However, it is known that unpublished material exists.

literature and pairing these two authors suggests itself in view of the many similarities of their lives. Both autobiographers grew up in the South during the Jim Crow era (Angelou in Arkansas, Moody in Mississippi) and their accounts give valuable insights into the circumstances of this momentous time. Having had a rough childhood characterized by poverty, racial inequality, and the like, followed by facing the reality of what it entailed to be a black woman in the United States, both nevertheless became strong and determined women who fought for and championed their beliefs. At later stages in life both came to work for the Civil Rights Movement, and Angelou's later volumes of autobiography furthermore shed light on the topics an African American woman was concerned with.

The focus of this thesis will be on the ensuing four pivotal questions: First, under which circumstances did they grow up? What role did their families play? Who were important people in their childhood? What about education, religion, and their economic situation? Second, how did they cope with the South under Jim Crow laws? The development from the children's first realization of races and segregation to reflections on this topic at a later time in their lives will be illustrated with significant racial events they experienced. The different stances of the two mother figures on racial inequality and their influence on their daughters will also be examined. Third, what effect did their contribution to the Movement exert on them? How did they come to terms when participating? Fourth, what kind of reflections does Angelou's experience in Africa provide as regards topics like home and origin?

The paper proceeds as follows: In chapter 2 the authors are briefly presented, followed by establishing a literary, historical as well as cultural context in chapter 3. Chapter 4 analyzes Angelou's and Moody's life writing, examining the aspects stated above and gradually answering the questions mentioned. Before that, a chapter on the language of the texts is given for each author as well as an overview of Angelou's multivolume autobiography at the beginning of chapter 4.1. Finally, the conclusion at the end of this thesis gives a résumé of the insights obtained.

2. Presentation of Authors

Although many details of the authors' lives will be revealed in the course of this paper, a quick overview of their biographies and their works proves may be in place.

2.1. Maya Angelou

This section is primarily based on Jaquin 11;13-14, Lupton 4-9; 15-17; 19-23, and Neubauer 114-115 as well as, in some instances, directly on her autobiography. Other sources are cited explicitly.

Born Marguerite Annie Johnson, Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. Her mother Vivian Baxter was a trained nurse and worked as a croupier. Bailey Johnson Sr., who was her father, was a meal adviser for the navy. She had one elder brother, named Bailey. When their parents divorced, Angelou, who was three, and her brother were sent to live with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, where she became an avid reader. During a stay at their mother's home in St. Louis, Mr. Freeman, her mother's boyfriend, raped her at the age of eight. Since Mr. Freeman died shortly after the trial, Angelou felt that her words were a threat to people and she decided to become mute for five years. The Baxters sent the children back to Stamps. In 1941, she and her brother left the South to live with their mother in California. Four years later, she received her high school diploma from George Washington High School. Shortly thereafter she gave birth to her son Guy.

Angelou made a living by taking on various jobs at restaurants as well as by working as a barmaid, dancer, and prostitute, leaving her son with a babysitter. In 1952 she married Tosh Angelos, but the marriage lasted only three years, then they divorced. However, it is the anglicized name that stuck with her and by which she is known today. She went on tour as a dancer to Europe and Africa with *Porgy and Bess*. Angelou then moved to New York City, where she worked as an actress and a writer, joining the Harlem Writers Guild. She also worked for Martin Luther King Jr. as a political organizer. She was introduced to Vusumzi Make, a South African freedom fighter, in 1961 with whom she had a liaison. Angelou and her son went to live with Make in Cairo,

Egypt, where she worked as associate editor for the *Arab Observer*. The couple separated and Angelou and Guy remained in Africa for a few years, where Guy attended university and she, among other things, contributed to the *Ghanaian Times* as a freelance writer.

In 1965 Angelou returned to the United States. In 1981 she was named the first Reynolds Professor of American Studies, a lifetime appointment, at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She also received numerous honorary degrees and doctorates from prestigious institutions, consequently she is also known as Dr. Angelou. She died at the age of 86, on May 28, 2014 after having spent 32 years at Wake Forest University (*Remembering Dr. Maya Angelou*).

Despite her seven volumes of autobiography “Angelou’s accomplishments [vary diversely] in a number of art forms—poetry; children’s books; musings; writing for theater, television, and film; directing; acting; and oral presentation” (Lupton 16). Thus she was a prolific writer. A high honor was accorded to Angelou when she read “On the Pulse of Morning,” one of her poems, at William Clinton’s inauguration ceremony on January 20, 1993, as the first African American female to do so, as well as when Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010 (D. Hudson). Among her musings, which are “collections of short, informal essays” (Lupton 23), *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (1993) and *Even the Stars Look Lonesome* (1997) are worth mentioning. Angelou left an extensive oeuvre.

2.2. Anne Moody

This section is based on Langer, Nelson 280-281, and Schmidt 369-370. In addition some details are taken from her autobiography.

Born on September 15, 1940 in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, Anne Moody was the firstborn of nine children. Her parents, Fred and Elmore Moody, were sharecroppers on a plantation. Moody’s given name was originally Essie Mae, but due to a lost birth certificate and a mistake she officially became Anne. Caused by the poverty of her family, she commenced to do domestic work in order to provide for them. In her early childhood she had her first experiences with whites and their hatred for blacks. She devoted herself to church activities,

such as teaching Sunday school and being the pianist at church. Moreover, she was a brilliant student and played basketball.

She received a basketball scholarship at Natchez Junior College in 1961 and graduated from Tougaloo College in 1964, earning a Bachelor of Science degree. During her last two years at college she joined some groups of the Civil Rights Movement, namely NAACP, CORE, and SNCC and became actively committed. She spent one year in Ithaca, New York, where she held the position of civil rights project coordinator at Cornell University. Austin Straus became her husband in 1967, but they divorced shortly after that. They had a child, Sascha. In 1972 Moody received a German Academic Exchange Service grant and lived in Berlin, Germany, for one year as artist-in-residence.

Having been an active member of the Civil Rights Movement ever since her college years, she decided to stop her commitment by 1967. It was her firm opinion that many southern whites' racist attitudes could not be changed in principle despite the achievements the Movement had reached in legislative matters. It was at this point of time in her life, struggling with utmost disappointment and reduced enthusiasm due to the sluggish changes in the improvement of the blacks' situation, when she wrote her story as the autobiography *CAM*, which was enthusiastically received. She started to lead a very secluded life in the early 1970s, which entailed that neither was she available for interviews nor did she deliver public speeches. She lived in New York City and moved back to Mississippi in the 1990s. There, in Gloster, she passed away on February 5, 2015 at the age of 74, having suffered from dementia according to her half-sister Frances Jefferson.

Apart from *CAM*, an acknowledged classic of civil rights literature, which has obtained national attention, was critically acclaimed and awarded the Brotherhood Award of the National Council of Christians and Jews and the Best Book of the Year Award of the National Library Association, Moody did not publish extensively. *Mr. Death*, a book of short stories, was published in 1975, and for her short story "New Hopes for the Seventies" she received a silver medal from *Mademoiselle* magazine. According to her half-sister, Moody also left some unpublished manuscripts.

3. Background

A literary as well as a cultural-historical background are fundamental to achieving a profound understanding of the context of the works they are embedded in. In order to reach this the following three topics will be examined: First, the genre of the texts and relevant issues will be discussed. Second, the culture of the South, divided into four different aspects, will be of importance. Third, a discussion of the race relations between whites and blacks will be presented. When relevant, Arkansas- and Mississippi-related facts will be highlighted.

3.1. The Genre “Autobiography” and Its Southern Tradition

In this section a definition of autobiography and some salient theoretical aspects will be presented. Then the origin of the genre will be traced, the tradition and the genre will be discussed as well as references will be made to other significant works. Finally black women autobiographers will be considered.

3.1.1. Definition and Basic Concepts

Autobiography ranges as a subdivision under the umbrella term “life narrative” (Smith and Watson 3). In their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* Sidonie Smith’s and Julia Watson’s working definition of the genre autobiography is the following: “a historically situated practice of self-representation. [...] [N]arrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory” (14). Hence, contrary to the layman’s belief that an autobiography is a simple and straightforward account of one’s life, the literary theory of the genre proves otherwise: some aspects will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

Regarding the narrative situation Smith and Watson distinguish even four different “I”s (59-63): The ‘real or historical I’, who stands for the author as a historical person. The ‘narrating I’ being the narrator, next comes the ‘narrated I’, who is the protagonist. Finally, the ‘ideological I’ “is the concept of

personhood culturally available to the narrator when he tells his story” (Smith 105 qtd. in Smith and Watson 61).

Another aspect is the so-called autobiographical truth. It is of importance because “autobiographical narration is so written that it cannot be read solely as either factual truth or simple facts” (Smith and Watson 13). Furthermore “it lies outside a logical or juridical model of truth and falsehood” (13). Therefore an autobiography cannot be taken for a true tale of one’s life (12). The reader must be aware of probable “inaccurate or distorted” utterances in life stories (12). Along these lines Peggy Prenshaw also states that “we nowadays tend to read more mindful of personal writing’s limits than credulous of its sweeping representativeness” (4). However, she then notes that “despite the inescapable mediation—the filtering, the constructedness—of life writing, the reader and the autobiographer still come to it expecting some level of nonfictive truth telling” (4).

The complexity of an autobiography is further sustained by factors like memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency, which are necessary to determine the autobiographical subjectivity (Smith and Watson 15).⁴ Also autobiographical acts, such as addressees and patterns of emplotment are enumerated and explored by Smith and Watson and need to be taken into consideration (50).⁵

3.1.2. Typical Aspects Concerning This Literary Genre

The origins of autobiographies in the southern context date back to colonial times and take on different forms, as “[f]rom the colonial period to the present, southerners and visitors to the region have created a rich body of autobiographical writing, whether in diaries and journals, slave narratives, family memoirs or formal autobiographies, revealing a remarkable diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives” (Watkins 34). The literature in the Old South includes the very famous and well-known slave narratives which “constitute the most distinct subgenre of autobiography to be created by southern-born authors” (36). Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of*

⁴ See Smith and Watson 15-48 for a detailed account on these five processes of autobiographical subjectivity.

⁵ See Smith and Watson 49-81 for an elaborate discussion of all the nine acts.

Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845) serves as a prime example (36). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by black author Harriett Jacobs is also worth mentioning as it is “the first autobiographical writing published by a southern woman” (Fox-Genovese, “Community” 26).

In the late Jim Crow era white southern autobiographies were published but did not become as famous as southern African American autobiographies (Watkins 37). Therefore the question poses itself whether there is a tradition of autobiographical writing among Southern African American writers and whether African American autobiography could be considered a genre in itself as well.

James Olney answers the first question, clearly claiming that “there is not a tradition of autobiography among white writers in the South; but yes, there is a tradition of autobiography among black writers coming from the South” (66-67). He explains this matter,

The individual autobiographies that corporately form a tradition are thus particular outcroppings or realizations of a whole people’s beliefs and customs, and they provide for the cultural continuity in social attitudes and institutions that define this people. The give-and-take from one account of a life to another, or the call and response from text to text and from life to life [...] provides the dynamics of tradition making. (67-68)

Hence it is this “dynamic process, this ongoing shaping of a tradition by one call and response after another” which is salient in the Southern black autobiography (68). Furthermore Olney mentions another difference between the black and white southern autobiographers, namely “the relationship of the individual talent of the autobiographer to a tradition of writing in this mode” (68).

The response to the second question is given by Roger Rosenblatt. “[I]t exists as a special form of literature because there are discernible patterns within black autobiographies that tie them together and because the outer world apprehended by black autobiographies is consistent and unique, if dreadful” (170). He identifies two uniform constituents in black autobiography, “They are the expressed desire to live as one would choose, as far as possible; and the tacit or explicit criticism of external national conditions that, also as far as possible, work to ensure that one’s freedom of choice is delimited or nonexistent” (170). Beyond that, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese talks about “the classification of black women’s autobiography as a distinct subgenre,” (“Statue” 181) hence going a step further.

It is also of interest to look at many black authors' motives to choose the genre autobiography which "has been the heart and soul of Afro-American literature from the beginning to the present time" (Olney 74). Olney gives a few possible reasons. First, he suggests that with being both American and black the experience of feeling a "twoness", a "double-consciousness" arises (75). What this complex state is like is often expressed in the authors' life narratives. Second, Olney offers an explanation of tradition as an "act of testifying, of bearing witness" (76). Here not the author individually but the collective experience of a group is evoked, "in the individual experience is to be read the entire group experience" (76). "This sort of testifying is an attempt to fix an historical reality, and as the reality was remarkably consistent, so the testimonial response from decade to decade and generation to generation displays much the same consistency" (76).

Likewise Selwyn Cudjoe speaks of this collective experience. The African American autobiography "is not so much a unique statement of a particular individual but part of the signifying practices of an entire people" ("Updated", 277). Dolly McPherson, too remarks that black writers "create and justify a connection between their individual present and the collective past" (3). Also due to the fact that personal opinions and speech of African Americans are highly valued in their community, the autobiographies come to reflect "a much more impersonal condition" (Cudjoe, "Updated" 279-280). "The autobiographical subject thus emerges as an almost capricious member of the group, selected to tell his or her story and to explain the condition of the group rather than to assuage his or her egoistical concerns" (280).

Apart from the already mentioned autobiographers a few selected examples of black autobiographers in chronological order are: Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Richard Wright's *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945), James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), Malcolm X's (in collaboration with Alex Haley) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), Nikki Giovanni's *Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement of My First Twenty-Five Years of Being a Black Poet* (1971), Angela Davis' *Angela Davis: An Autobiography—With my Mind on Freedom* (1974).

3.1.3. Black Women Autobiographers

“[M]ore often than not the autobiographies of Afro-American women have been written from within the cage” (Fox-Genovese, “Statue” 177). This statement is central here because it implies the core matter: the cage is a metaphor and stands for the cage of race and gender (Culley 7) as well as of class, one might add.⁶ The “interlocking structures of gender, class, and race” (Fox-Genovese, “Statue” 178) always come into play when dealing with black women autobiographers.

Examining the titles of the autobiographies written by black women reveals interesting results and “[t]he touchstone of contemporary criticism that we cannot conceptualize or utter anything except within heavily ideological conceptual and language systems (‘cages’) may be confirmed” (Culley 7). There is a clear difference between the titles of white women’s and black women’s autobiographies. Whereas whites’ titles often and heavily draw on signs of gender, i.e. using words like girlhood, woman, wife, girl, lady, or daughter, blacks’ titles reveal connections to race as they frequently make use of the ensuing words: colored, black, color, or dark, among others (7-8). Sometimes black autobiographers signal both gender and race, but it is not as frequent (8). Thus the dominant culture sign “black” is inscribed even in the mere titles already (9).

Other factors strongly connected to black women’s autobiographies are oppression, group experience, and tradition again. The mention of “black women’s writing as personal testimony to oppression” (Fox-Genovese, “Statue” 178) and Southern women autobiographers’ “will to resist oppression, the will to claim a place in the republic of letters” (Fox-Genovese, “Community” 36) are to be emphasized. Having mentioned Fox-Genovese’s suggestion to consider black women’s autobiographies a subgenre in section 3.1.2., she further details,

Autobiographies of black women, each of which is necessarily personal and unique, constitute a running commentary on the collective experience of black women in the United States. They are inescapably grounded in the experience of slavery and the literary tradition of the slave narratives. Their common denominator, which establishes their integrity as a subgenre, derives not from the general categories of race

⁶ Interestingly, Angelou’s first autobiography *CBS* also includes the word “cage.”

or sex, but from the historical experience of being black and female in a specific society at a specific moment and over succeeding generations. ("Statue" 178-179)

Having discussed black women autobiographers and turning now briefly to southern black autobiographers in particular, it may not come as a surprise that this narrowed-down group dealt with the same issues as black women autobiographers, i.e. race, gender, and class.

Both black and white southern women autobiographers have struggled with the same problems of female self-representation through dominant male discourses. But they have done so under conditions in which race, class, and regional identification have played as important a role as gender in their self-representations. (Fox-Genovese, "Community" 25)

Regional identification is another aspect mentioned in this respect.

One last paramount aspect, rather a rule of thumb, which should always be borne in mind with regard to autobiographies by black women, is: "To speak autobiographically as a black woman is not to speak as a 'woman' and as a 'black'. It is to speak as a blackwoman" (Smith and Watson 36).

3.2. The Culture of the South

A society defines itself through various factors which determine its culture. In this chapter a few of these factors relevant to the autobiographies at hand will be discussed to gain an understanding of the way of life in the South, namely black family, religion, education, and economics.

3.2.1. Black Family

The notion of the southern black family differs from the occidental whites' family culture in various ways. Not only do the innermost members of a family living under one roof count as the family, but other relatives are included into the nucleus as well (Whitehead 153). This is called the elasticity of African-American families, "In most Negro households, grandparents, nieces, nephews, adopted children, and others who are not related even by adoption, commonly form part of the family group" (Powdermaker 143). In order to survive, southern blacks, who had been located on the margins of society with regard to economy and politics for many decades, had to rely on other more distant members to obtain support (Whitehead 153). These other family members also came to protect, care, instruct and discipline the children –albeit these items being the

main duty of the parents— because informal adoptions, fosterage, and shifting residences were common (153).

It was also very characteristic of such extended black families that either a couple or one individual presided over the family (Whitehead 154). Ordinarily, it was one of the oldest pairs or individuals of the family, frequently a widow, who acted from this dominant position (154). Also many extended-family activities were centered on this powerful head (154).

As it was the widow who often took on this role, one should briefly trace the historic development of this matriarchal family organization. Reaching back to the 19th century, the black grandmother held a crucial position in the plantation economy during slavery (Frazier 146). In the case of selling off a slave family, usually the husband was sold away and the mother and the children were kept together (Powdermaker 143-144). Therefore it naturally led to the fact that family ties were more associated between children and women, including grandmothers, of course, who looked after the children when their mothers worked in the fields (143-144).

The black grandmother was held in great esteem by other slaves as well as by the masters. They frequently occupied the role of mammy in the master's house and helped with the childbirth of black and white children (Frazier 146,148). This woman was also a surrogate mother for orphaned and abandoned children and at the time of emancipation she asserted big influences on the generations to stay together (148). Finally, apart from the aforementioned "extended social support systems of the southern black family", Sunday dinner constitutes "a weekly 'small feast', which brings together the local primary relatives who do not reside together" (Whitehead 154).

3.2.2. Religion

Religion has always played a crucial role for blacks in the South. The four basic denominations of southern religion are the "Churches of Christ, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian – in all their bickering, splitting, sectarian manifestations" (Flynt 50). One of these subdivisions is, for instance, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church,⁷ founded in 1870 at Jackson, Tenn.

⁷ This is the Church Angelou was taken to as a child.

(Sernett 2302). Black religion nowadays stands out for its pluralism (Raboteau 38).

Historically seen, for many slaves, religion was the only pivotal point they could cling to and from which they could gain strength to endure all the atrocity imposed. They “took the biblical story of Exodus and applied it to their own history, asserting that they, like the children of Israel, would be liberated from bondage” (Raboteau 35). The church would hold a very important place in southern black life as a productive public institution (38), which was most significant to rural people alongside the rural school (Flynt 52). Due to segregation and its discriminatory consequences in many institutions and fields from 1865 onwards, for the blacks religion had become a stable point in their southern lives (Sernett 2304). Naturally the church met a vast variety of needs and purposes, namely “worship, education, recreation, and socialization” (2304).

Closely associated with the above-mentioned conception of religion as a help to flee from the tribulations is the notion of otherworldliness, i.e. religion “promised eternal reward for the oppressed in the afterlife” (Megna-Wallace 90). As a consequence it was criticized that this doctrine restrained and disheartened the blacks’ efforts from withstanding and showing dissent as a group to the discrimination they suffered in their earthly existence (90).

Another issue is emotionalism, a frequent phenomenon in the African American church. It refers to the emotions that are openly and freely expressed during church services, like groans, loud cries, shrieks of both the preachers and the attendants (Megna-Wallace 98). The African American preaching style also comes into play here, because the sermons are performed as call-and-response patterns (Lippy 60), which is a technique that elicits the feelings of the congregation (Megna-Wallace 99).

The last aspect to mention here is Sunday school. This institution taught children the principles of the dominant church of the region, but it was much more than that: “the dominant cultural attitudes on race relations, child rearing, male-female roles, and countless other topics” (Wilson 113). For blacks in particular it was “a place to uplift youngsters, instill middle-class values and

good manners, teach children to read, and strengthen members' commitment to the church and race" (S. McMillen 216).

3.2.3. Education

After the Civil War education for blacks had to be practically newly established. Due to segregation there existed "separate but equal" facilities for the black and white youth (Minter and Prettyman 859). With the involvement of various programs, funds, and initiatives, the expansion of black education was a slow and difficult process, or in the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, a black education leader, it was 'weary work' (Devore 47-48). Setting up schools was one necessary step towards the enlargement of the educational infrastructure in which Julius Rosenwald with his support and the Rosenwald fund with its pecuniary aid played a crucial role in the school construction program in rural areas (47-48). Temporary premises were churches which functioned as substitute classrooms, due to the dearth of sufficient funds (Minter and Prettyman 849, caption).

The education blacks should obtain was challenging, whereby different views and voices, mainly given by white northern philanthropists, white southern leaders, and black education leaders (e.g. Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois), were expressed (Devore 48). Nevertheless black teachers, community leaders, parents, and students were also involved in the development of advancing black education in the South (48).

Their goals, aspirations, and persistent work produced many of the gains achieved during the Jim Crow period, including increases in the percentage of school-age children attending school, in the number of school days, in per capita annual funding, in teachers' salaries, and in teacher quality. And by the 1940s, students were staying in school longer, as evidenced by a sharp increase in the number of black public high schools. (48)

This effort by the above-mentioned people was essential as the discriminatory southern state governments regularly underfunded black schools (Minter and Prettyman 854). Furthermore black education was rather restricted to elementary and grammar school, which was pushed ahead by white southern leaders and school officials (Devore 47), meanwhile state governments impeded the construction of black high schools. The proper start of the latter in southern states, however, did not take place until 1920 (Minter and Prettyman

855).

Even access to elementary school for black children was very restricted – it took until the 1930s for the majority of them to be able to attend (Minter and Prettyman 855). In 1934, almost 20 percent of black children had been to high school, whereas more than 50 percent of white youth could attend one in the South (855). High schools were more or less non-existent in the rural South until 1915 (855). The Great Migration, beginning in the 1920s, when people moved from the rural South to urban areas in the North, was a chance for blacks to obtain a better education in northern cities (858).

The case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 1954 and its ruling that “separate educational facilities for blacks and whites ‘are inherently unequal’” (McDearman 81) marked the beginning of several assaults on segregation in the field of education where inequality was at its extremest (Minter and Prettyman 859). However, the implementation of the decision, i.e. the instantaneous desegregation of public schools, failed to happen (McDearman 82). “To label the pace of school desegregation between 1955 and 1965 slow would be a gross understatement” (Devore 49). In 1965 not even 10 percent of southern black students attended integrated public schools due to the immense obstruction exercised by many southern states (McDearman 82).

President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s reluctance to endorse the *Brown* ruling ignited segregationists even more in their doings (Minter and Prettyman 859). When in 1957 Little Rock Central High School was to be integrated, Governor Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to rebuff the black students (859). A white mob was also present, blocking the nine black students ready to enter and denying them access to the school building (859-860). Eisenhower’s reaction was to dispatch the National Guard to impose order and to protect the black students (860). The Little Rock Crisis, as it is now denominated, was followed by another case (*Cooper v. Aaron* 1958), in which it was asserted that the school desegregation ruling must be upheld (860). It also incited and accelerated the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 (860).

With regard to higher education the demand for black teachers’ training was the start for the establishment of higher educational institutions (Minter and Prettyman 851). Only 40 colleges for blacks had been chartered by 1895 in the

South (851).

Hardly any of the historically black colleges and universities were founded by any other than missionary societies from the North (Minter and Prettyman 851). One such organization was AMA which sponsored a handful of colleges and universities, one of them Tougaloo College in 1869 (851) from which Moody graduated. These colleges had to struggle with many problems, such as size, underfunding, and undermanning, yet they presented the best chances for blacks to receive higher education – especially as they trained thousands of black public school teachers, too (Richardson 157). At the beginning of the 20th century every black college had to fight for survival – students attending these colleges were impoverished and southern whites expressed their hostility or indifference (157). The evaluation of black colleges by accrediting associations commenced only in 1928, disregarding them intentionally before that (158-159). However, all AMA colleges finally received the best evaluation possible (158-159).

The philosophy of the AMA colleges is education as a means of liberation (Richardson 159). Also, in the years of the uprising against inequality these colleges were also actively participating, their interracial faculties – because of their mere existence – opposing the restrictive laws of the “South’s racial code” (159). Moreover, oftentimes AMA colleges were used as head offices for voter registration campaigns, and students from each college participated in sit-ins (159).

The[se colleges] gave several generations of black youth hope, pride, knowledge, confidence, and opportunity. During the dark days of segregation, lynching, social and economic discrimination, and political powerlessness, the colleges never wavered in their belief in black intellectual equality and insisted that black Americans should and eventually would become first-class citizens. The colleges ‘functioned as multifaceted institutions’ providing educated African American teachers, ministers, physicians, dentists, attorneys, and social, political, business, and professional leaders for the black community. (160)

In short, these colleges had a tremendous impact (160).

3.2.4. Economics in the 1930s

In rural areas of the South many people worked in the sector of agriculture, especially blacks and women. The Great Depression meant severe years of

economic distress especially for rural Southerners.

Sharecropping was a very common phenomenon in the South. It involved the plantation landlord and the tenant farmer (Mertz 29). It represented one of the symbols of the South as viewed by the nation (29). Millions of southerners who worked as sharecroppers were extremely impoverished – they were exploited, ruined (29) and “[t]ied to their white landlords by chronic indebtedness” (Taylor 311). This crop-lien tenancy⁸ also stood for ruralism, paternalism, and cultural backwardness (Mertz 29).

At the beginning of the Great Depression black women’s jobs were almost restricted to only domestic and personal service occupations as well as to agricultural work; men were common laborers, and if not engaged as tenant farmers, they were employed in manufacturing and trade industries (Jaynes 832, Clark 9). In the 1930s “the worst economic crisis in American history”, namely the Great Depression, hit the United States (Cooper and Terrill 663). The swift increase of unemployment (Hamilton 1135) and the decline of earnings were two chief consequences. In the South the “per capita incomes fell by 44 percent” from 1929 to 1932, which meant that “southerners made less than half of what Americans outside the South made” (Cooper and Terrill 663). Because of their marginal political and economic status the blacks were particularly affected before other groups suffered from the ramifications of the problem (Hamilton 1134).

In Arkansas blacks felt the misery of the Great Depression. “In 1933, following the institution of cotton production quotas by the Federal Agricultural Adjustment Administration, thousands of sharecroppers—black and white—were removed from the land they worked” (Robinson 191). In Mississippi since the semi-feudal agricultural system of the Delta was still in use between 1900-1950, the New Deal caused planters to become richer while economic loss was brought to African Americans (N. McMillen 1820). The New Deal referred to federal programs initiated in 1933 as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s plan to quickly ameliorate America’s economy and the situation of many unemployed

⁸ Landlords “allowed [...] workers to farm plots of 20 to 40 acres on a crop-sharing basis. They also undertook the support of their tenants during the crop season by extending credit for food and living necessities, secured by a lien on their productions of the crop. Often this credit was arranged through rural store owners, or furnish merchants, who were also general suppliers of feed, fertilizer, and implements” (Mertz 29).

people (Hamilton 1135-1136). What had seemed promising from the beginning, turned out to be of disadvantage to the blacks. They had limited access to programs and entitlements, and discriminatory employment practices were common (1141).

Even after the Great Depression agriculture was still the chief employment sector for African Americans in 1940. "Two-fifths of black working men labored in agriculture, mostly as sharecroppers, renters, and day laborers, and 50 percent of the black population lived on farms or in farm areas of the South" (Jaynes 836).

3.3. Race Relations in the South

A tremendous impact on southern life in the 20th century was exerted by the segregated society with its so-called Jim Crow laws and all the consequences, effects, and far-reaching repercussions this bipolar system had on the population. This is why this section begins with a brief historical overview and some introductory facts, next tackles issues like etiquette, racial violence, as well as peaks in the Civil Rights Movement.

3.3.1. Historical Overview

White supremacy and white racism are key terms that characterized many centuries of southern history. It was white racism which was "the driving force, the great first cause of southern race relations" (Cell 187). After slavery had been abolished in 1865, the before-mentioned "inherently discriminatory" sharecropping system enabled whites to maintain dominance (188). It is also worth mentioning, however, that some whites had to bear the same system, too. In big cities white supremacy could not be established easily and directly, thus impersonal race relations were the consequence (188). The term "segregation" was not used in the 19th century, though some of its practices had existed before, but stood for white supremacy in the 20th century (188). The white southerners established legal segregation in the 1890s to further postpone resolving the race question, fearing to lose their dominance because industrialization and urbanization were likely to be in favor of blacks bringing down the system (188). A synonym for segregation is "Jim Crow" that "covered

all areas of life, love, work, leisure, and even death” (189). Various illustrations thereof are given by Cell.

Whenever black people left ‘their own’ areas, they were confronted at every turn by demeaning and often debilitating restrictions. Housing was segregated not only by custom, as it largely remains, but by law. The few blacks whose parents could afford it were born in black hospitals (whose administrators and better-paid doctors and even nurses were apt to be white). They went to black schools. When they rode public transportation, they sat in the black section in the rear. If they wanted to drink, eat, or go to the toilet, they might be lucky enough to find facilities reserved for them; otherwise they had to do without. Parks, beaches, golf courses, tennis courts, and swimming pools excluded them; again comparatively rarely they might find separate but undoubtedly inferior facilities. If they ran afoul of the law, they were sworn on separate-but-equal Bibles and, if convicted by usually all-white juries, were sentenced by white judges to segregated jails. When they died, they were embalmed in black funeral parlors (one of the most promising businesses for the black bourgeoisie) and buried in black cemeteries. (189)

This powerful system with its separate but equal doctrine, which was “largely a fiction”, prevailed until the 1960s (190).

3.3.2. Etiquette of Race Relations in the Jim Crow South

The term etiquette refers to the issue of how blacks and whites were supposed to behave upon encounter under Jim Crow. “[T]he definition of good manners depended on one’s race, [...] there were ‘accepted responses’ for blacks to use with whites and vice versa, and [...] rules of appropriate behavior applied to blacks with especially rigid force” (Ritterhouse 58). Generally, blacks had to “demonstrate their subordination and supposedly natural inferiority, while whites demonstrated white supremacy” (59). The following paragraph provides a few examples of the codes.

[W]hites denied blacks common courtesies, above all the titles ‘Mr.,’ ‘Mrs.,’ and ‘Miss,’ while insisting that blacks be polite, respectful, and even cheerful toward whites at all times. In addition to using racial epithets and calling blacks of all ages by their first names, white southerners often substituted generic names such as ‘George’ or ‘Suzy,’ ‘boy’ or ‘girl,’ or the somewhat more respectful (from the white point of view) ‘uncle’ or ‘aunt’. White men did not tip their hats to blacks, including black women, and to shake hands with a black person was a self-conscious gesture denoting unusual intimacy or noblesse oblige. Blacks, on the other hand, were expected to tip or remove their hats in the presence of whites, step out of whites’ way on sidewalks, and enter white homes only by the back door. [...] Blacks could also expect to be kept waiting in stores rather than being helped on a first-come, first-served

basis, and many stores that relied on black customers refused to allow them to try on hats, gloves, and other articles of clothing because to do so would make the items unfit to sell to whites. (59)

Thus, apart from the terms dominance and subordination, purity and impurity come into play (59), which connote sexuality, another interesting topic within the frame of race relations.⁹

3.3.3. Racial Violence

The attacking, beating, and killing of people are some of the forms in which racial violence occurred. Lynching, which “referred to a killing perpetrated by a group of persons working outside the law to avenge an alleged crime or to impose social order” (Hair and Wood 87), was one of the severest acts. The origin of lynching goes back to the American Revolution involving corporal and extralegal punishment but its deadly form developed before the Civil War (Hair 174). Lynchings were illegal but “often were not considered crimes socially” (Kotch 54). Hardly any of the perpetrators had to fear prosecution (Hair 175).

In Mississippi, “under JIM CROW [...], black Mississippians resisted oppression but generally avoided suicidal confrontations with white power” (N. McMillen 1820). The statistics show that Mississippi holds first place in lynching with 539 deaths of blacks out of 581 in total from 1882 until 1989 (Hair 175). “The threat of white violence in a state that led all others in unpunished LYNCHINGS could not silence black dissatisfactions, but it kept black protest either underground or safely nonconfrontational” (N. McMillen 1820).

“Lynch-law was supposed to be, in the blunt words of one advocate of the practice, ‘the white woman’s guarantee against rape by niggers.’ Ridding society of ‘black brutes’ who violated Caucasian females was indeed the most often mentioned justification for lynching” (Hair 175). However, in only approximately one-third of all lynching cases was the alleged crime rape or attempted rape; more often the victims were suspected of murder or attempted murder (175). “Most lynch mobs killed swiftly. The typical victim, after being hoisted with a rope tossed over a tree limb, trestle, or utility pole, would have his

⁹ For a discussion of sexuality, see relevant chapters in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, in various volumes of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, and in chapters in *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. For detailed references of these books the bibliography contains a number of cited articles.

death throes ended by a fusillade of bullets” (175). Regarding the question of who participated in these acts – “[t]he stereotyped image of poor ‘redneck’ whites making up the mobs who lynched blacks is only partially true. White vigilantes came from all strata of society” (175). It was generally known that often people held in high esteem also took part in these excesses of mobs (Cell 189).

Interestingly, “[by] the 20th century, however, lynching also came to stand for racial oppression at its most horrifying, a result of the vast numbers of lynchings committed against African Americans during the Jim Crow era as a means to instill racial terror and enforce white supremacy” (Hair and Wood 87). Especially the beginning of the Jim Crow period saw an increase in lynchings because—simply put—the traditional racial hierarchies seemed to be threatened (88-89). Another swift flare-up was to be noticed at the beginning of the Great Depression. More attention was drawn to lynchings in the Jim Crow era due to them being made a public event with a crowd of spectators (90). The sensationalistic interests of newspapers also resulted in reports revealing details; sometimes even pictures were taken, “often making them into postcards to send to family and friends” (90). In general the majority of the southern whites thought that lynching was “a significant deterrent to black criminality” (91).

3.3.4. Civil Rights Movement

Clayborne Carson (159-161) distinguishes several phases in the Black Freedom Movement, which will be sketched in short.

Albeit the fact that the blacks’ protest against the suffering of racial oppression had been a continuing event throughout history, the start of the Freedom Movement, which included the support of the masses, was heralded with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56, which was provoked by the famous, yet unplanned refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her seat for a white man. The bus system was desegregated in December 1956, and therefore was taken as an example for black movements in other cities due to the united blacks’ successful improvement of their situation. A short digression into Mississippi’s history follows. This state

was the arena for some of the bloodiest racial conflicts of the 1950s and ‘60s, as it became the symbol of intransigent white resistance to

changing federal social policy. In 1955, a fourteen-year-old African American from Chicago, Emmet [sic] TILL, who was visiting relatives in Mississippi, was lynched for whistling at a white woman. This act of savagery sparked national outrage. The state's NAACP branch, led by Medgar EVERS, began intense civil rights and voter registration efforts. The agents of change, it must be emphasized, were largely home-grown; in Mississippi, as elsewhere in the South, black protest originated at the community level. (N. McMillen 1821)

Returning to Carson's explanations, sit-ins at lunch counters by black students signaled the second phase in the struggle at the beginning of 1960. They were led independently (no NAACP, SCLC, and CORE involved) by student protest leaders, which then set up the SNCC. The Freedom Rides of 1961 initiated the next phase where "CORE sent 13 riders through the southern states on a bus trip that was designed to expose the extent of segregation in bus terminals." In the fall of 1961 the fourth phase started. Now it was a conscious decision by civil rights activists to attempt to involve blacks who had hardly participated in the struggle, achieving an enormous growth in its members. Demonstrations, marches, and rallies were organized by activists in order to achieve racial equality in various areas. In the rural Deep South the voter registration campaign was under way and many protests against the disenfranchisement of African Americans were staged. An example: "In 1940, 0.4 percent of all eligible black Mississippians were registered to vote, but despite intense black efforts, by 1964 the figure had risen to only 6.7 percent" (N. McMillen 1821).

Finally, in 1963, the protest movement in Birmingham caused President John F. Kennedy to move to action, which later resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Carson 160). The march on Washington in August 1963 with over 200,000 participants marks the culmination of the protests of 1963. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which "required equal access to public accommodations and outlawed discrimination in employment", the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which "suspended literacy tests in several states and strengthened federal protection of the right to vote", and the declaration of the unconstitutionality of a poll tax in state elections resulted in the fulfillment of almost all aspirations the Civil Rights Movement had been fighting for over the years (Ely 20). It marked the end of the de jure segregation.

4. Analysis

The main part of this thesis is dedicated to a detailed examination of the texts at hand. The two authors will be discussed separately and in various subsections. The issues under discussion touch on the focus of the thesis, i.e. the items stated in the introduction. Before that a brief analysis of language will be given concerning each author. Angelou's part will be granted more space than Moody's because of her serial autobiography versus Moody's autobiography comprising only one volume. In the conclusion both autobiographies will then be compared and contrasted and closing remarks will be made.

4.1. Maya Angelou

After presenting the overview of Angelou's multivolume autobiography, one section is devoted to the linguistic characteristics of Angelou's books. Then, issues like family ties, the circumstances of her time entailing education, religion, and economic situation, followed by racial issues and the time she was part of the Movement will be discussed. Finally, her time spent in Africa will be analyzed as well.

Whenever "Angelou the narrator" is mentioned in the analysis, this is put as "Angelou" for reasons of simplicity and clarity. I am fully aware that the narrator must not be confused with the author as the historical person.¹⁰

4.1.1. Overview of Angelou's Serial Autobiography

Angelou's seven-volume autobiography series was published within a span of 44 years, from 1969 to 2013. Covering many years of her eventful life, i.e. from age three until the age of sixty-three, this section establishes a survey of each volume including time spans, settings, and most important events. This serves as a basic guideline for the reader.

Her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (CBS)*, covers the years of her infancy and childhood until the age of seventeen. Spending most of her childhood at her grandmother's home in the segregated small town

¹⁰ Cf. narrative situation in 3.1.1.

of Stamps, Arkansas, she also briefly lived with her mother in St. Louis, Missouri. Shortly after her graduation from high school, she gave birth to her son, Guy, in 1945.

The second volume of her life story, which is entitled *Gather Together in My Name* (GTN), comprises her years as a young mother crisscrossing California as well as a short stay in Stamps. This is a span of approximately two years, which are characterized by her independence, work, and some love affairs. She took different types of jobs while she had her son stay with a full-time babysitter. She started her dancing career in show business, and glided into the world of drugs and prostitution.

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (SSC), Angelou's third memoir, traces her early twenties when she resided in San Francisco. She married Tosh Angelos, worked as a showgirl and as a performer in a nightclub after their separation. She was introduced to an artists' circle, and went on tour with the opera *Porgy and Bess*. Because of that Angelou had left her son with her mother, which is why both she and her son suffered from this separation.

The fourth volume, *The Heart of a Woman* (HOW), deals with the years around her 30th birthday. She started to write, moved to New York City in 1959, and joined the Harlem Writers Guild. Becoming involved in the American as well as the African struggle for justice, she was one of the producers of *Cabaret for Freedom* to support Martin Luther King, for whom she then also worked as a coordinator for the SCLC in New York. She met Vusumzi Make, a South African civil rights activist, with whom she had a relationship close to marriage. Angelou and her son moved with him to Cairo, Egypt. After their separation in 1962, she and her son went to live in Accra, Ghana. At the end of this book Angelou's son left for college.

The fifth installment, with the title *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (ATS), concerns itself with the years Angelou spent in Accra, Ghana, from 1962 to 1965. She was a member of a group of expatriates, which she called the "Revolutionist Returnees." She supported Kwame Nkrumah, President of Ghana, whereas she found Martin Luther King's non-violent approach in the US disheartening. Approached and encouraged by Malcolm X, she made plans to return to the US to work for him.

A Song Flung up to Heaven (SFH), Angelou's penultimate volume, recounts the events of her first years after her return to the US. Just before she commenced to work for Malcolm X, he was assassinated in 1965. She recovered from this shock in Hawaii, where she again briefly worked as a singer and performer. However, she then resumed her writing career in New York City. She could not fulfill her promise to work for Martin Luther King again, as he was shot dead exactly on the day of her 40th birthday in 1968.

The last book in her multivolume autobiography entitled *Mom & Me & Mom (MMM)* can be described as an homage to Angelou's mother. Exploring their growing mother-child bond, she talks about the love and the gifts she received. Quite a few previously covered stories are retold in greater detail and some new anecdotes are revealed. The autobiography concludes with her mother's death in 1991.

4.1.2. Writing Style

Angelou's texts exhibit a carefully crafted and style-conscious language. The editor's initial incentive to write an autobiography and her attitude towards this writing process reveal much about her linguistic abilities. Her choice of words, narrative situations, figures of speech, intertextuality, and the use of imagery characterize her style. Humor and religious allusions constitute an element in her work, too.

In *SFH* the story behind the compilation of the volumes of her autobiography is narrated. She told the editor Robert Loomis who had called and asked about writing an autobiography that she was a poet and playwright, that she had just turned 40, and that she had a job that would consume her time in the following weeks. They had another conversation on the phone at the end of that job in which Loomis told Angelou this, "And I must say, you may be right not to attempt an autobiography, because it is nearly impossible to write autobiography as literature. Almost impossible" (*SFH* 170). Upon this, the following is stated. "I didn't think. I didn't have to. I said, 'Well, maybe I will try it. I don't know how it will turn out, but I can try.' Grandmother Henderson's voice was in my ear: 'Nothing beats a trial but a failure'" (170). Thus, Angelou undertook the experiment of writing an autobiography as a piece of literature which was a challenge for her.

It is worth mentioning how Angelou worked on her books as far as it is known (Sarler 216-217). She had a fixed routine of going to a rented hotel room very early in the morning and staying there until lunchtime. There were no pictures in the room. She would have the Bible and *Roget's Thesaurus* with her. She would drink sherry, write a lot and edit as well as reduce the text in the evening, from approximately twelve pages down to four. Hence, her text became a denser and more compressed version. Mary Lupton remarks that "[i]n fact Angelou's most valued technique as a stylist may be the precision with which she describes objects or places, a precision so sharp that readers carry the descriptions with them, even when the book is closed" (69). Knowing this, I believe this discipline and her approach to writing a text makes us understand how her elaborate, complex and accurate writing style came about.

Regarding the choice of words, she sometimes makes use of formal and rare words, emphasizing the literary quality of her autobiographies. Examples thereof are: "inordinate rage" (*CBS* 8), narrating "flamboyant escapades" (*CBS* 66) in her mother's family, "insouciance" (*ATS* 174), describing her brother as "beauteous" (*SFH* 86), mentioning the "largesse" of her friend and sponsor (*SFH* 108), and trying to be a "guileless schoolgirl" (*CBS* 285). From these examples it can be observed that her mode of expression features some French influence. It is also interesting to observe that Angelou, as is common for autobiographies, "[u]s[ed] the persuasive authority of first-person testimonial" (Watkins 34), but she also often employed "our-isms" instead of "me-isms" as denominated by Cudjoe ("Statement" 10), i.e. instead of first-person singular pronouns she used first-person plural pronouns. This allowed her to include the story of the blacks in general and it moves the text up onto a different level. An example will be given in 4.1.7.

In addition to the first-person narrative situation, another issue with regard to what Smith and Watson call patterns of emplotment will follow (72). The term emplotment refers to the "temporal patterns both of the narrator's telling and in the telling." The questions to be asked are: From which moment in life does the narrator tell the story? Is it "relatively fixed" or does the narrator tell from various points in his or her life? There are several examples in *CBS* that reveal the narrator's standpoint, one suffices here as another will be given in

4.1.3., “It didn’t occur to me for many years that they were as alike as sisters, separated only by formal education” (CBS 94). The narrator reflects on Mrs. Bertha Flowers and Angelou’s grandmother and makes it obvious that this thought came many years later than the events dealt with.

Furthermore figures of speech can be frequently found in her texts, such as a chain of alliterations like “They bragged often about the binding quality of the Baxter blood” (CBS 67) and a personification as in “the Depression [...] did not discriminate” (CBS 50). Another example are synesthesia and anaphora used in, “Some words are spoken and not heard. Because the ears cannot accept them, the eye seems to see them. I saw the letters D E A D. Who was dead? Who was dead now? Not Malcolm again. Not my grandmother again. Not my favorite uncle Tommy. Not again” (SFH 154).

Turning to imagery, it is “a rather vague critical term” that simply put often refers to the figurative language in literary work (Baldick 121-122). Imagery can also be said to be an umbrella term for metaphors and similes (122). Undoubtedly, Angelou’s most prominent feature is her iterated use of this rhetorical device. Already the dedication in CBS is its first evidence. “This book is dedicated to MY SON, GUY JOHNSON, and all the strong black birds of promise who defy the odds and gods and sing their songs”, referring to black people who lead a bold, self-determined, and independent life. At the same time it refers to the title of the autobiography, which in turn is one verse of a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar called “Sympathy.” This is a good example of intertextuality.

Another typical use of intertextuality is the following sentence. “And my seven-year-old world humpty-dumptyed, never to be put back together again” (CBS 54). It refers to a famous English nursery rhyme, in which Humpty Dumpty is the figure (Opie and Opie 215).¹¹ This rhyme is also very well-known because of its appearance in Lewis Carroll’s *Through The Looking-Glass* (1872). Angelou’s world is turned upside down when one day her father arrived in Stamps without prior notice. Like the nursery’s allusion to an egg which once

¹¹ Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses,
And all the king’s men,
Couldn’t put Humpty together again. (Opie and Opie 213)

broken cannot be made whole again, so is her life shattered by her father's appearance. It is, however, interesting that Angelou transformed the figure into a verb, which is very innovative. There is another instance of reference to this figure in "unmendable Humpty-Dumpty" (CBS 95). "[T]he Cheshire cat's smile" (CBS 107) is also mentioned, this cat being a prominent figure in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

Turning back to imagery, a few other examples are the following. When Bailey or she were naughty, "[Uncle Willie] would thrust the culprit toward the dull red heater, which throbbed like a devil's toothache" (CBS 10). When white girls showed disrespectful and humiliating behavior towards her grandmother but she still treated them with respect, Angelou wrote, "I burst. A firecracker July-the-Fourth burst" (CBS 32). The emotions Angelou felt and the comparisons made speak for themselves. At a wine party she let the reader know how she felt, "Alone, seated in a strange house filled with strangers, I felt as if I were in dangerous waters, swimming badly and out of my depth. I was plankton in an ocean of whales. The image was so good I toasted it with another glass of wine" (SSC 92).

Angelou often included funny moments and thoughts. She narrated them in a humorous way with a lot of "skillful use of comic irony and self-parody" (McPherson 125). The *Sunday Times*' comment on the edition cited in the bibliography of GTS's and SFH's book cover reads along those lines, "Told with the humorous, unsentimental wisdom that has gained Maya Angelou such a devoted following." One example for a comic thought can be found at the end of *HOW*. When she and Guy lived on their own for the first time, she expected to be very emotional, but was not overwhelmed. "The first thought that came to me, perfectly formed and promising, was 'At last, I'll be able to eat the whole breast of a roast chicken by myself'" (HOW 346). This is also the very last sentence of this volume and I am sure it conjures a smile on every reader's face, not only on mine.

Since religion played a crucial part in Angelou's childhood, it is no wonder that she makes extensive use of religious allusions throughout her work as the following examples illustrate. During her marriage with Tosh Angelos she writes, "Our home life was an Eden of constant spring, but Tosh was certain the

serpent lay coiled just beyond our gate” (SSC 36). Similarly she remarks, “After a year, I saw the first evidence of a reptilian presence in my garden” (SSC 37).

A remarkable example in which the imagery is paired with religion is the conspicuous metaphor she uses for the description of the pain she experienced when she was raped by her mother’s boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, as an eight-year-old girl. “Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can’t. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot” (CBS 78). The metaphor refers directly to a quote in the Bible. “And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God’” (Matt. 19.23-24; *The English Standard Version Bible*). Angelou compares her private parts to a needle’s eye while Freeman’s private parts are like the camel which goes through the eye of the needle. Through this comparison the horrific act of rape and especially Angelou’s experienced pain are depicted in a dreadful yet vivid way, or as Lupton puts it, “the use of metaphor to communicate overpowering pain” (68).

A second example in this category is, “Of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child has, the one that must be satisfied, is the unshaking need for an unshakable God. My pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come” (CBS 23). Angelou explained the necessity of faith in her life out of her loneliness. With the words “my Kingdom Come” she alluded to the Lord’s Prayer, interpreting it further and giving her feelings for her brother more intensity by comparing him to the hereafter. This was at an early stage of the children’s lives and since they had such a strong bond, at that time her God was her brother. This means that she regarded him as a holy person, somebody she held very dear at heart, and in who she had faith unconditionally.

All in all, Angelou used a wide repertoire of literary devices. She knew where to place figures of speech and thus how to make particular situations more stirring and memorable to the reader.

4.1.3. Relationships Among Family Members

Angelou's childhood was characterized by a strong bond to her brother Bailey, a good relationship with her grandmother, a constantly growing relationship with her mother, and a very marginal father. These relationships will now be discussed in detail.

It is simple, comprehensible, and logical why Angelou had an intimate relationship with her brother. When Bailey was four and Angelou three, they were sent on their own from California to Arkansas by train to go and live with their grandmother. Their parents' relationship had ended and neither wanted to take care of the children on their own. Deprived of parental presence, the children clung to each other and became a strong union. "Since the adults [their grandmother and uncle] were strangers to us, Bailey became head of a family that consisted of just us two. He was quicker to learn than I, and he took over teaching me what to do and how to do it" (*SFH* 14). It comes as no surprise then that in troubling situations Angelou thought of her brother and about what he would do – for example when she was cut by her father's lady friend (*CBS* 249-250). He was her role model and her hero. On one occasion she even says, "[m]y pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come" (*CBS* 23) – a quote, which was seen in greater context in the previous section. It is evident that her brother meant everything to her.

This becomes even more obvious when she describes her brother as "the greatest person in [her] world" (*CBS* 21) and compares herself with him in their physical appearances. "Where I was big, elbowy and grating, he was small, graceful and smooth. When I was described by our playmates as being shit color, he was lauded for his velvet-black skin. His hair fell down in black curls, and my head was covered with black steel wool. And yet he loved me" (22). When people made fun of Angelou's appearance, Bailey would take revenge on her behalf, and the two would later snicker and laugh about it. Since Bailey was "the pride of the Johnson/Henderson family" (22), he was seldom punished for his behavior.

Although the two were inseparable, on one occasion Angelou would have loved to be separated from him. "I would have been willing to return to Stamps even without Bailey" (*CBS* 203). This happened under certain circumstances,

which need further explanations. When the children left Stamps to live permanently with their mother in California while their father also resided in California so that they would be near him as well, their grandmother accompanied Angelou and Bailey, staying with them in Los Angeles for six months, while their mother arranged a permanent home for them in San Francisco. When Angelou found out about her grandmother leaving before their move to San Francisco, she was devastated. At this point she would rather have returned to Stamps with her grandmother than move in with her beloved brother and their mother. This is because Angelou had many questions and doubts.

There were foggy days of unknowing for Bailey and me. It was all well and good to say we would be with our parents, but after all, who were they? Would they be more severe with our didoes than she [Grandmother Henderson]? That would be bad. Or more lax? Which would be even worse. Would we learn to speak that fast language? I doubted that, and I doubted even more that I would ever find out what they laughed about so loudly and so often. (CBS 203)

It can be seen that Angelou regarded her parents as strangers, in particular her mother, with whom she was about to live. This skeptical view of her own parents can hardly be held against her since she had struggled with her parents' absence for many years.

It was her brother who gave her a different name that stuck with her. "They also told me how I got the name 'My.' After Bailey learned definitely that I was his sister, he refused to call me Marguerite, but rather addressed me each time as 'Mya Sister,' and in later more articulate years, after the need for brevity had shortened the appellation to 'My,' it was elaborated into 'Maya'" (CBS 68).

When Angelou was raped at the age of eight, that was the first time when she kept a secret from her brother. However, it must be said that she was intimidated and threatened by Mr. Freeman, her mother's boyfriend and rapist. If she told anyone, it would have meant Bailey's death. Mr. Freeman died shortly after the trial in which Angelou was questioned. She did not tell the truth at the trial and her eight-year-old mind was unable to understand the links and circumstances (that her grandmother's work was the real cause for his death) so she deduced that her telling a lie resulted in the killing of Mr. Freeman. After that she stopped talking because she believed that her words had the power to

kill other people. However, she made one exception – the only person she kept talking to was her brother. “The only thing I could do was to stop talking to people other than Bailey. Instinctively, or somehow, I knew that because I loved him so much I’d never hurt him, but if I talked to anyone else that person might die too” (*CBS* 87).

Bailey also granted her sister a special treatment when they were back in Stamps after their stay in St. Louis. “For a while I was the only recipient of Bailey’s kindness. It was not that he pitied me but that he felt we were in the same boat for different reasons, and that I could understand his frustration just as he could countenance my withdrawal” (*CBS* 91). Again, this speaks for the bond that had been developing between them from when they were little up to their teenage years.

Then, however, when Angelou was around fourteen years old, their relationship deteriorated because they went different ways and grew apart. Before Bailey moved out, he remembered their bond for a second, beautifully expressed in this personification, “At some point he noticed me still in the doorway, and his consciousness stretched to remember our relationship” (*CBS* 260). Angelou “never lost [her] complete trust in Bailey” (*SFH* 16) for he “had been [her] counselor and protector for as long as [she] could remember” (*SFH* 14). It was Bailey who advised Angelou not to tell their mother about her pregnancy in order to finish high school and get the diploma, which her mother probably would not have allowed under the circumstances.

As adults and though their contact had become scarce, Angelou knew that she could always count on her brother. For instance, after Malcolm X’s death,¹² when Angelou was dejected and had locked herself in, she opened the door when Bailey stood on the other side of it. “Bailey rescued [her]” (*SFH* 32), i.e. he managed to lift her spirits a bit after this tragic event. She would also ask him for advice about decisions regarding her life, so she comments, “Certainly I couldn’t change history; however, I could trust Bailey to have thought out some of my future” (*SFH* 38). Finally, in *MMM*, she says about him, “He always was the most precious person to me in my life” (180).

Living ten years at her grandmother’s house, Angelou had a good

¹² Malcolm X was one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

relationship with her grandmother. She was her surrogate mother in the shaping years between the age of three and thirteen. As their paternal grandmother the two children called her “Momma.” She led a humble, devout, hard-working and disciplined life. Her principles and strict parenting, however, did not mean that kindness was absent.

Physical contact in the form of kisses or caresses did not exist on the part of Grandmother Henderson. It were her deeds and her behavior towards Angelou that demonstrated her love for her. An example thereof is a memory that Angelou recounts in her last autobiography *MMM*.

My grandmother never kissed me during those years. However, when she had company, she would summon me to stand in front of her visitors. Then she would stroke my arms asking, ‘Have you ever seen arms more beautiful, straight as plank and brown as peanut butter?’ Or she would give me a tablet and a pencil. She would call out numbers to me in front of her company. ‘All right sister, put 242, then 380, then 174, then 419; now add that.’ She would speak to the visitors, ‘Now watch. Her uncle Willie has timed her. She can finish that in two minutes. Just wait.’ When I told the answer, she would beam with pride. ‘See? My little professor.’ (*MMM*, prologue)

Once, when Angelou and her grandmother worriedly went out into the dark night to look for Bailey, who had not come home, she took the child’s hand. Angelou, frightened, “loved her with a rush” (*CBS* 115). Her grandmother did not say a word, but her behavior spoke for her love, which Angelou comments as, “Just the gentle pressure of her rough hand conveyed her own concern and assurance to me” (115). Similarly on the journey to visit a dentist Angelou comments, “The trip was uneventful, except that she put her arm around me, which was very unusual for Momma to do” (*CBS* 191-192). Finally, when it was known that the children would leave Stamps, a comment about her grandmother reads like that, “She would have been more surprised than I had she taken me in her arms and wept at losing me” (*CBS* 57).

In later years in Angelou’s life it becomes apparent how Grandmother Henderson had shaped her and what it was that stuck with her. When she was working as a prostitute – although she failed to see it as that at that moment – her inner guiding principle flared up. “The woman who came in daily at five o’ clock to cook reminded me of my grandmother and I had to avert my eyes when she placed dinner on the table” (*GTN* 174). In the next paragraph she says, “I

reassured myself. I was helping my man" (*GTN* 174). Once, when Angelou was provoked, "[she] gritted [her] teeth and held on to the sternness of [her] long-dead grandmother" (*HOW* 309). Likewise, when she learned about her son's accident, "[she] used the control [she] remembered in [her] grandmother's voice when she heard of a lynching" (*HOW* 333). An intact moral system as well as sternness and control were some of her grandmother's character traits. In *GTN* Angelou reveals how much she loved her grandmother talking about the couple at whose home she lived. "Their home and their ways reminded me of the grandmother who raised me and whom I idolized" (67).

Lastly, her grandmother also left her several sayings to take along on her way ahead. One was already mentioned with regard to the decision of writing an autobiography in chapter 4.1.2. Another is quoted in her next to last autobiography. "As had happened so many times in my life, I had to follow my grandmother's teaching. 'Sister, change everything you don't like about your life. But when you come to a thing you can't change, then change the way you think about it. You'll see it new, and maybe a new way to change it'" (*SFH* 38). Put in a nutshell, Grandmother Henderson left a non-deniable and indelible mark on Angelou.

The relationship with her mother Vivian Baxter, who Angelou got to know well when living with her from the age of thirteen onwards, needed developing. Feeling extremely disappointed and hurt when she was abandoned by her own parents, and experiencing the extreme differences in behavior between her mother and her grandmother, who she was used to, were the reasons for Angelou's initial distrust. In fact, Vivian Baxter was not a good mother for young children, which Angelou herself said a few times. "Well, she was a poor mother for a child. She didn't know what to do with kids, except feed us and things like that" (Paterson 121). However, she was an excellent mother for Angelou, a reliable and caring one, when grown-up.

Being abandoned by one's parents and experiencing emotional distress can be described as displacement. As children Angelou and her brother failed to come to terms with that situation and thought they themselves were to blame when asking themselves, "Why did they send us away? and What did we do so wrong? So Wrong?" (*CBS* 53). Furthermore the fact that the story of her brother

and her traveling alone to Stamps is a recurrent topic in all the seven autobiographies, the sorrow and anguish felt by Angelou that went along with this dramatic experience are emphasized. In the final autobiography *MMM* the reader eventually discovers the mother's perspective and her motives for sending the children away. She explained to them her relationship with their father and how their grandmother offered to care for them. She told them, "I missed you but I knew you were in the best place for you. I would have been a terrible mother. I had no patience. [...] It didn't mean I didn't love you; it just meant I wasn't ready to be a mother. I'm explaining to you, not apologizing. We would have all been sorry had I kept you" (*MMM* 23). When Angelou was an adult and the topic came up again, her mother said to her, "I did the best I knew to do and I can't undo history" (*MMM* 183).

A point related to all that is Eileen Jaquin's contention that "[t]he first volume, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, finds the child Maya crisscrossing the United States from place to place with no permanent sense of home" (18). Her brother actually did not feel at home. "Bailey adored [their mother] but he was unable to always forgive her for sending him away. He could not banish the memory of the lonely Arkansas years, when he never felt at home" (*MMM* 184). It is very probable that Angelou had a similar experience. An interesting fact to be also mentioned here is that this kind of displacement found its continuation in Angelou's son. "In his nine years of schooling, we had lived in five areas of San Francisco, three townships in Los Angeles, New York City, Hawaii and Cleveland, Ohio" (*HOW* 35).

Another factor that came into play was Angelou's answer upon being asked where she was from. In her entire autobiographical work, the question appeared several times, and to my surprise her answer was never one and the same. She gave different replies. For instance, when Martin Luther King was told that she was a "Southern girl" and then asked her about her exact origin, she explained that she was from Stamps, Arkansas (*HOW* 116). On the other hand, asked by a bartender in New York City, she told him that she was from California (*HOW* 124). Reflecting about her origin when she was in Africa, she remarked, "Admittedly, my ancestors had come from Africa, but I was my own person from St. Louis, Arkansas and California" (*ATS* 119-120). When the

Southern white pianist at the Parisian bar at which she was going to do a show every night asked her where she was from she replied San Francisco (SSC 200). Another time during the tour with *Porgy and Bess* her thoughts went as follows. “I was myself. That is, I was Marguerite Johnson, from Stamps, Arkansas, from the General Merchandise Store and the C.M.E. Church” (SSC 230). Summing up one can say that Angelou did not commit herself to one place of origin. Depending on who had asked her she would say the place she wanted the other person to know where she was from – like choosing which identity she would want to assume for that person, as, for instance, when she obviously did not want to let the Southern white pianist know that she was from the South, too. It seems as if she took on different identities related to her origin, which she would use with different people and at different times. This also suggests – as a consequence of her displacement – that she never had a fixed sense of home.

After this digression on her displacement and her sense of origin, our focus is now back on the relationship with her mother. Angelou did not know what to call her mother when she came to live with her. At first she called her “ma’am”, which her mother told her not to use since she was not in Arkansas any more. Upon being asked what to call her, Angelou herself answered with “Lady”, “[b]ecause you are beautiful, and you don’t look like a mother” (MMM 16). Her mother replied, “Well, that’s it. I am Lady, and still your mother” (16). Angelou would wait for Bailey to arrive in California to discuss what they would call her in the future. Bailey immediately called her “Mother”, though. Angelou started liking her – it was simply not possible to not like her as Angelou once said that “[i]t was difficult to resist her” (31) – and Vivian Baxter was subsequently referred to as “my Mother” or only “Mother” throughout the narratives. However, Angelou called her “Lady” until she said to her two months after she had given birth to her son, “Mother, I am going to move” (70). It is important to know what happened in Angelou’s head afterwards.

I walked away and was back in my bedroom before I heard my own words echoing in my mind. I had called Lady ‘Mother’. I knew she had noticed but we never ever mentioned the incident. I was aware that after the birth of my son and the decision to move and get a place for just the two of us, I thought of Vivian Baxter as my mother. On the odd occasion and out of habit, sometimes I called her Lady, but her treatment of me

and her love for my baby earned her the right to be called Mother. (MMM 71)

This definitely constituted a pivotal point in their relationship.

Once, when Angelou was desperate, she called her mother with a yet different name. "I went back to my hotel and called my mother. I didn't use 'Lady' or 'Mother'. 'Mom, I need mothering. If you have ever done any, I need it now'" (MMM 164). This happened when she was in Stockholm, working at the shooting of her screenplay, where she had troubles with some of the actors. Her mother flew to her that same day and stayed the whole time. Angelou was forty years old at that time.

The difference in behavior of the two mother figures is best illustrated with the following quote.

I had not received one kiss in all the years in Arkansas. Often my grandmother would call me and show me off to her visitors. 'This is my grandbaby.' She would stroke me and smile. That was the closest I had come to being kissed. Now Vivian Baxter was kissing my cheeks and my lips and my hands. Since I didn't know what to do, I did nothing. (MMM 12)

Angelou was thus greeted effusively upon her arrival to live with her mother for good, and it left her at a loss how to react to such an exuberance of love that simply overwhelmed her. Unlike in Stamps, the Baxter family never asked the children about school and "[o]n Sundays instead of going to church we went to the movies" (CBS 204). The differences were huge in terms of lifestyle. One night their mother even woke the children. They were invited to a party, i.e. her mother's party, where the children were the only guests. At 2:30 at night they ate freshly made biscuits and drank milk chocolate. Vivian Baxter danced and sang. "What child can resist a mother who laughs freely and often, especially if the child's wit is mature enough to catch the sense of the joke?" (CBS 206)

It soon becomes very clear that the children adored their "beautiful and wild" (CBS 205) mother despite the ache she had caused them when they were little. "Nothing could have been more magical than to have found her at last, and have her solely to ourselves in the closed world of a moving car" (204). She is described as a "goddess" (204), whose "beauty made her powerful and her power made her unflinchingly honest" (206), and who "supported [the children] efficiently with humor and imagination" (207). She was jolly, fair, and sometimes even merciless (207).

Of what has been said about Vivian Baxter, one could see that she was a strong woman who became a good mother for her daughter when she was older. To highlight this, a few selected examples will be given. Her reflections when she left her mother's house with her two-month-old baby became more abstract, revealing the following,

On the day we moved from her house, Mother liberated me by letting me know she was on my side. I realized that I had grown close to her and that she had liberated me. She liberated me from a society that would have had me think of myself as the lower of the low. She liberated me to life. And from that time to this time, I have taken life by the lapels and I have said, 'I'm with you, kid.' (MMM 71)

This demonstrates how her mother helped Angelou not to apply to herself the white society's view of blacks as scum to herself. Her mother regularly instilled into her the self-worth she should feel for herself by telling her how much she thought of her as in these two examples: First, "My mother spoke highly of me, and to me" (MMM 168). This was in Stockholm as mentioned before. Second, when they were once walking in the streets, her mother told the twenty-two-year-old Angelou,

'Baby, I've been thinking and now I am sure. You are the greatest woman I've ever met.' I looked down at the pretty little woman, with her perfect makeup and diamond earrings, and a silver fox scarf. She was admired by most people in San Francisco's black community and even some whites liked and respected her. She continued. 'You are very kind and very intelligent and those elements are not always found together. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, and my mother—yes, you belong in that category. Here, give me a kiss.' (MMM 78)

Angelou then thought about it. "I welcomed her and her wisdom. Now I thought of what she had said. I thought, Suppose she is right? She's very intelligent and often said she didn't fear anyone enough to lie. Suppose I really am going to become somebody. Imagine" (MMM 78-79). Her mother saw her potential and communicated it to her. It made Angelou self-confident since she knew that this was an honest remark that came from her.

In particular situations Angelou became an incarnated version of her mother, a powerful woman with a strong personality, when she needed just these qualities. In Stockholm when one of the actors wanted to quit after four weeks, she begged the actor not to leave the shooting and even knelt before him. When the actor thereupon insulted her in an obscene way, we read, "I stood up and became Vivian Baxter" (MMM 164). The words she then uttered

were sharp and the actor decided to stay.

The above-mentioned wisdom of Vivian Baxter also manifests itself in her being a woman who “had a litany of morale building sayings” (*SFH* 98), which she often shared with her children. When she was about to give “a sit-down talk-to” (*MMM* 13), she usually said, “Sit down, I have something to say” (*MMM* 28).¹³ Without any further context here is some of her wordly wisdom that she passed on to her daughter: “Anything worth having is worth working for” (*GTN* 32). Similarly, “Anything worth doing is worth doing well” (*GTN* 101). “Remember this: Your reputation is the most important thing you’ll ever have” (*MMM* 29). “Don’t let anybody raise you from the way you have been raised” (*MMM* 70). “You are going far in this world, baby, because you dare to risk everything. That’s what you have to do. You are prepared to do the best you know to do. And if you don’t succeed, you also know all you have to do is try it again” (*MMM* 121). “Make sure that everything you say is two-time talk. That means say it in the closet and be prepared to say it on the city hall steps” (*MMM* 139). “Baby, let me tell you something: A horse needs a tail more than one season” (*MMM* 165).

A final point on the Baxter family is necessary here. There is a certain Baxter philosophy that went along the lines: ‘You do it on your own, you are too proud to ask for help.’ Angelou also inherited this attitude – when she once visited the Baxters with her baby son, she was disappointed by their non-support but thought, “I was, after all, a Baxter and playing the game. Being independent. Expecting nothing and if asked, not giving a cripple crab a crutch” (*GTN* 36). Her mother also taught her to be independent. “You’re my daughter. Don’t take tea for the fever. You are your own woman” (*MMM* 169).

Angelou’s father Bailey Johnson Sr. only played a very marginal role in her life. When the children lived in Stamps, one day – out of the blue – their father arrived and took them to their mother in St. Louis. Angelou comments, “He was a stranger, and if he chose to leave us with a stranger, it was all of one piece” (*CBS* 60). Since she was so little when she was sent to Stamps, she did not remember her parents at all and for her they were unknown people.

¹³ It might surprise the reader why these statements and the ensuing illustrating quotes are almost entirely quoted from *MMM* although Angelou’s mother gave that advice much earlier. Cf. the information on *MMM* in 4.1.1.

Angelou even asked her brother in Pig Latin¹⁴ if he thought that this was her father or if they were being kidnapped – a humorous scene since her father understood her and asked her back in Pig Latin who would want to kidnap them (CBS 59).

When Angelou and Bailey briefly lived in Los Angeles before they moved to San Francisco permanently, “Daddy Bailey visited occasionally” (CBS 202). Angelou once spent three weeks during a summer break with her father when she was fifteen years old, during which things did not go too smoothly between them and between Angelou and her father’s lady friend (CBS 226-250). Her father acted carelessly and did not take good care of her.

There is one interesting statement at the beginning of the first volume in relation to her father. “Not only did I not feel any loyalty to my own father, I figured that if I had been Uncle Willie’s child I would have received much better treatment” (CBS 13). First, it tells the reader clearly how she felt about her father. Second, from a literary-theoretical viewpoint the following questions arise: From which perspective does Angelou say so? Is she the little girl who cannot remember her father and only knows that he abandoned her? Or is it the adult Angelou who is speaking to us in hindsight, knowing that she never developed a close relationship with her father and that is why she said so? Personally I am uncertain about this matter although I am inclined to the second perspective, but I believe that this is a subject of mere speculation.¹⁵

Once after her son was born, she visited the Baxter family, i.e. her aunts and uncles. They were not warm-hearted at all and “[t]heir relief was palpable” (GTN 36) when she left that same day again. Thinking of her father, she says that he “would give me a colder reception than the one I’d just received” (GTN 37). This clearly reveals the relationship between them.

4.1.4. Personal Circumstances at That Time

This chapter includes the following three topics: education, religion, and economic situation in Angelou’s life.

¹⁴ Pig Latin is a language game usually used by children to create secrecy. It is made by swapping letters and/or adding syllables.

¹⁵ See chapter 4.1.2. for details on emplotment.

4.1.4.1. Education

Two types of education have to be distinguished in Angelou's life, namely formal education at school as well as informal and autodidactic education.

The first school Angelou attended was Lafayette County Training School in Stamps. There she graduated from the 8th grade at the age of twelve, then went on to Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School in St. Louis. Furthermore, she attended a high school for girls in San Francisco the name of which is never mentioned. Then, George Washington High School in San Francisco, from which she graduated, was "the first real school [she] attended" (CBS 215). She got a scholarship to the California Labor School where she took drama and dance classes. Her top qualification was her high school diploma. She received it when she was already pregnant with her son at the age of seventeen. Her achievements during her life, however, caused many universities to grant her an honorary degree or even a doctorate. Therefore she is often referred to as Dr. Maya Angelou.

What we are told about the school in Stamps in CBS refers to teachers and the facilities. Angelou comments on the teachers' level of education which was the same as hers, "it didn't worry me that I was only twelve years old and merely graduating from the eighth grade. Besides, many teachers in Arkansas Negro schools had only that diploma and were licensed to impart wisdom" (CBS 171-172). Joanne Megna-Wallace confirms that by stating that "[t]eachers were poorly prepared and underpaid, receiving about one-half the salary earned by white teachers" (53). The comparison with the white school in town clearly shows racial inequality in schools, "Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy" (CBS 170). Apart from that, the toilet was an "outside job" (CBS 143) which also alludes to the building's facilities. Megna-Wallace offers a few more facts about the situation in Arkansas: "Cost of instruction per child enrolled for African Americans [...] was approximately one-third the sum spent on white students; 63.1 black students were enrolled per teacher versus 39.9 white students per teacher" (53). The picture that emerges from Angelou's description and from the facts is clear.

Turning to informal education, leisure activities for children were scarce when Angelou lived with her grandmother in the quietude of the rural South. This is why she and her brother became avid readers at that time. At the Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School in St. Louis, "Bailey and [she] did arithmetic at a mature level because of [their] work in the Store,¹⁶ and [they] read well because in Stamps there wasn't anything else to do" (CBS 63).

Apart from the teachings and wisdom imparted by her mother figures, a very important person for Angelou's educational development was Mrs. Bertha Flowers (CBS 93-99). She is described as "the aristocrat of Black Stamps." Angelou got to know her at the time when she was back in Stamps again, being mute, after Mr. Freeman's death. Mrs. Flowers was "the lady who threw [her] [her] first life line", i.e. who made her talk again. She is described by Angelou as follows. "She was one of the few gentlewomen I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be." She acted very educated, spoke properly and clearly and "she appealed to [Angelou] because she was like people [she] had never met personally." Angelou received "lessons in living" from her. When Angelou was at her house for the first time, Mrs. Flowers made her think with the following words. "Now no one is going to make you talk—possibly no one can. But bear in mind, language is man's way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals." She added, "Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning."

Mrs. Flowers regularly gave books to Angelou, which she told her to read aloud. She, for instance, also read to her a poem and told her to have a poem prepared to recite the next visit. At the time when she was about to leave Stamps to live with her mother, she reminisces, "I wouldn't miss Mrs. Flowers, for she had given me her secret word which called forth a djinn who was to serve me all my life: books" (CBS 200). Hence, Mrs. Flowers constituted an important person in Angelou's early education by reading poetry and supporting her love for books.

¹⁶ General Merchandise Store, owned by Grandmother Henderson, see chapter 4.1.4.3.

In later years Angelou's autodidactic nature became obvious when she prepared herself for a television series for PBS's station KQED about African American culture. When she found out that she was the chosen writer for the series, she immediately went to the library.

I pored over books about television documentaries. I read instructions on how to write television plays and accounts of producing and directing television. I studied hard and memorized phrases and words I had never used. Boom and speed and camera angle, tripod and seconds and reverses. After a week I had an enlarged vocabulary. When I wasn't reading about television, I was writing for television. (*SFH* 166)

She got a job for which she had no training. Her commitment and ability to educate herself, however, made it possible for her to begin the work at a professional level. Lupton also discerns that "part of her genius [was] that she was virtually self-taught" (16).

4.1.4.2. Religion

It is apparent that faith had a strong position in her life. She not only included many religious allusions into her autobiographies as seen above, already the first scene in *CBS* takes place in a church. In addition, her grandmother was an extremely religious person and therefore, religion was firmly anchored in her childhood.

I had grown up in a Chris-tian [sic] Methodist Episcopal Church where my uncle was superintendent of Sunday School, and my grandmother was Mother of the Church. Until I was thirteen and left Arkansas for California, each Sunday I spent a minimum of six hours in church. Monday evenings Momma took me to Usher Board Meeting; Tuesdays the Mothers of the Church met; Wednesday was for prayer meeting; Thursday, the Deacons congregated; Fridays and Saturdays were spent in preparation for Sunday. (*SSC* 18)

Her whole life basically revolved around church especially during that period in her life. She also attended a revival meeting at that time in which people were assured that

they were going to be angels in a marble white heaven and sit on the right hand of Jesus, the Son of God. The Lord loved the poor and hated those cast high in the world. Hadn't He Himself said it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven? They were assured that they were going to be the only inhabitants of that land of milk and honey [...]. All the Negroes had to do generally, and those at the revival especially, was bear up under this life of toil and cares, because a blessed home awaited them in the far-off bye and bye. (*CBS* 129)

This clearly stands for the otherworldliness as mentioned in chapter 3.2.2., which was commonly preached. The idea was that “[i]t was better to be meek and lowly, spat upon and abused for this little time than to spend eternity frying in the fires of hell” (*CBS* 131), like the whites would.

It is of importance what Angelou commented a few pages earlier, namely, “I find it interesting that the meanest life, the poorest existence, is attributed to God’s will, but as human beings become more affluent, as their living standard and style begin to ascend the material scale, God descends the scale of responsibility at a commensurate speed” (*CBS* 120-121), which can be understood as a criticism of the predominating doctrines preached to the believers.

There is one chapter in *CBS*, which describes her Sunday routine and some outstanding church services. Emotionalism, which was mentioned in chapter 3.2.2., is brought to an extreme level by Sister Monroe here. It is another instance of Angelou’s comic irony. “The church ladies were warming up [...] with a few hallelujahs and Praise the Lords and Amens, and the preacher hadn’t really moved into the meat of the sermon” (*CBS* 39). Sister Monroe, known to be a loud member during service, walked to the altar and tried to get a hold on the Reverend, then said, “I say, preach it!” (42). She followed the Reverend, hit him with her purse so that his teeth fell out. The children could no longer hold themselves. They burst into laughter and screamed. It was an incredibly funny situation. Then “Bailey and I received the whipping of our lives” (44).

When it was Angelou’s graduation day from 8th grade, in the morning she “thanked God that no matter what evil [she] had done in [her] life He had allowed [her] to live to see this day” (*CBS* 175). This statement is a reference to the rape and the continuous self-reproaches that followed and accompanied her throughout many years.

In later years, when she was married to Tosh Angelos, she would secretly go to church on a Sunday once a month. Her husband did not believe that there was a God, which led to discussion between him and Angelou. Her thoughts were, “I knew I was a child of a God who existed but also the wife of a husband who was angered at my belief. I surrendered” (*SSC* 37). So she found

excuses to leave the house and went to church. She went to different ones each time and joined these churches, writing down her maiden name. She described two services, and it was obvious how much they meant to her.

The spirituals and gospel songs were sweeter than sugar. I wanted to keep my mouth full of them and the sounds of my people singing fell like sweet oil in my ears. When the polyrhythmic hand-clapping began and the feet started tapping, when one old lady in a corner raised her voice to scream 'O Lord, Lordy Jesus,' I could hardly keep my seat. The ceremony drove into my body, to my fingers, toes, neck and thighs. My extremities shook under the emotional possession. (SSC 38)

This quote illustrates how she was literally moved by the service. At that time in her life, faith played an enormous role. However, she let her husband take control over her and her activities, and she stopped going to church when he finally found out. She "allowed a little more of [her] territory to be taken away" (SSC 46). The marriage did not last long and she regained control over herself and her life. So faith would play an important role throughout her entire life.

4.1.4.3. Economic Situation

With regard to the economic situation, the time Angelou lived in the South at her grandmother's home is of greatest interest. Not only her family's situation but also that of the town's people will be discussed.

Her grandmother owned and ran a General Store,¹⁷ to be exact "the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store" (CBS 6). It was "the only Negro general merchandise store since the turn of the century" (CBS 104). As Thomas Clark comments, "No rural southern institution gathered about itself a warmer aura of human nostalgia than the general or country store. Seated at crossroads all across the South, the stores were combination merchandising and farmers' markets [sic]; [...] newscenters; resorts for sage advice; and eternal places for gossiping" (10). As Edgar Thompson remarks, "[t]he store operated as a general gathering place every day except Sunday" (17), which also trickled through in CBS, when the cotton pickers came in the morning (CBS 8) or when the box fight between the white and the black boxer was broadcast on the radio and many people assembled at the Store to listen to it (CBS 133). Supposedly, nobody owned a radio himself or herself.

¹⁷ In CBS it says that the Store "was always spoken of with a capital s" (CBS 6), this is why in this thesis it is always capitalized as well.

Angelou's grandmother was not a poor woman. She possessed money and she was clever. When the Depression came to Stamps, "[s]he was trying to find a way to keep her business going, although her customers had no money" (CBS 51). Since welfare agencies provided black and white families with food during that time, her grandmother let people exchange this food for money at her Store. People came to the Store with their food, handed it over and received money for it. Angelou comments, "We were among the few Negro families not on relief, but Bailey and I were the only children in the town proper that we knew who ate powdered eggs every day and drank the powdered milk" (51).

Although Angelou's grandmother owned money, even land and houses, the children were taught to be frugal. "[E]ach day Bailey and I were cautioned, 'Waste not, want not'" (CBS 50). Their grandmother sewed the clothes for the children and for herself, only Uncle Willie wore "ready-to-wear clothes" (CBS 50). Angelou states that "[d]uring the summer we went barefoot, except on Sunday, and we learned to resole our shoes when they 'gave out,' as Momma used to say" (CBS 50). They have to wash outside using the "ice-cold, clear water" from the well every night regardless of the weather (CBS 27). Remembering that time, she says, "In Arkansas we had drawn water from a well, and for baths we had heated it on a wood-burning stove. We slept on mattresses stuffed with feathers from chickens we raised and killed and ate, and used a shack away from the house as a toilet" (SFH 92). Furthermore they sometimes closed the Store to save electricity and Angelou slept in one bed with her grandmother.

The before-mentioned cotton pickers illustrate the rural Southerners' economic situation appropriately. "Southern life [...] is one of harshness and brutality" (Cudjoe, "Statement" 12). After work "the people dragged, rather than their empty cotton sacks" (CBS 8). They were tired and worn out.

Brought back to the Store, the pickers would step out of the backs of trucks and fold down, dirt-disappointed, to the ground. No matter how much they had picked, it wasn't enough. Their wages wouldn't even get them out of debt to my grandmother, not to mention the staggering bill that waited on them at the white commissary downtown. (CBS 8)

Some of the workers had to sew their sacks at home. "[Angelou] winced to picture them sewing the coarse material under a coal-oil lamp with fingers stiffening from the day's work" (CBS 9). The next day "they would face another

day of trying to earn enough for the whole year with the heavy knowledge that they were going to end the season as they started it. Without the money or credit necessary to sustain a family for three months" (*CBS* 9). Angelou summarizes that "[i]n cotton-picking time the late afternoons revealed the harshness of Black Southern life" (*CBS* 9).

4.1.5. Racial Issues

Race, racism, inequality between whites and blacks, and related aspects are items that are very prominent in Angelou's work. Sometimes these aspects are subtly woven into the stories she tells, sometimes it is just one sentence that serves as a side note, at other times race is the predominant topic. In the following Angelou's experience and reflections will be analyzed. A crucial point worth considering in this discussion is Cudjoe's critical remark on *CBS*, "One of the shortcomings [...] revolves around the manner in which the story is told from the point of view of an adult, who imposes the imagination, logic, and language of an adult upon the work and thus prevents the reader from participating in the unfolding of childhood consciousness as it grows into maturity" ("Statement" 16). This makes the analysis difficult and restricts it to a certain point because we do not get the child's perception but Angelou's adult and mature view on situations she experienced as a child.

In the introductory pages Angelou already subtly weaves the topic of race into her opening scene (*CBS* 2-3). Once as a young child she was wearing a dress that would make her "look like a movie star." The key sentence is, "I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world." Angelou possibly had in mind Shirley Temple, a US child actress who was born in the same year as Angelou. We can deduce from that that Angelou knew that being black would be a difficult life-long task to manage since a black girl was not everybody's dream and definitely not welcome in the world she grew up. She dreamed of being a white girl, she wanted to be accepted by society, and wanted to be considered ordinary. The dress, however, was not very pretty, it was "a plain ugly cut-down from a white woman's once-was-purple throw-away." Realizing that, her dream had ended and reality seeped in. Yet again, she could not let go of the dream and dreamed on.

Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light-blue eyes were going to hypnotize them, after all the things they said about 'my daddy must have been a Chinaman' (I thought they meant made out of china, like a cup) because my eyes were so small and squinty. Then they would understand why I had never picked up a Southern accent, or spoke the common slang, and why I had to be forced to eat pigs' tails and snouts. Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil. (CBS 2-3)

It is very interesting that we get to hear this wishful thinking of hers at the beginning of the autobiography. Later in this chapter we will get to know Angelou's completely opposite view of herself.

One of the first realizations about race Angelou possibly had was when one night the "used-to-be sheriff" came to their house in Stamps (CBS 17-18). He told her grandmother, "Annie, tell Willie he better lay low tonight. A crazy nigger messed with a white lady today. Some of the boys'll be coming over here later." The reaction of Angelou's body was one she would never forget. "Even after the slow drag of years, I remember the sense of fear which filled my mouth with hot, dry air, and made my body light." It was "too humiliating to hear" that when the Ku Klux Klan was expected, every black man would do just anything to hide, for example lying in chicken droppings under one's house. Angelou was convinced that they would have lynched her uncle if they had come that night.

Stamps was divided into two separate worlds due to segregation (CBS 25-26). Angelou and her brother "were explorers walking without weapons into man-eating animals' territory" when going into "whitefolksville" on rare occasions. Angelou comments that because whites did not mingle with blacks, the majority of black children "didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like." She adds, "Other than that they were different, to be dreaded, and in that dread was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed." Being a child, for Angelou it even went so far as to believe that whites were not "really real." She would not and could not consider them to be people, as folks - "[t]hey were whitefolks." Growing up in such an environment shaped her and contributed to the distrust she had towards whites when she

later got into contact with them more and more.

Angelou had one very disturbing experience at the age of ten. It was a situation in which her grandmother was subjected to the impudence of whites and in which she had to endure painful humiliation (CBS 30-33). Angelou watched from the inside of the Store when three white girls mocked her grandmother. The latter sang a slow hymn and “did an excellent job of sagging from her waist down, but from the waist up she seemed to be pulling for the top of the oak tree across the road.” She did not stop singing and her “knees seemed to have locked as if they would never bend again.” Angelou could not hold back the tears. These “made the front yard blurry and even more unreal. The world had taken a deep breath and was having doubts about continuing to revolve.” This last sentence clearly shows the extent of this significant event for Angelou. The girls called her grandmother by her first name, which made Angelou furious, “but [she] knew [she] was as clearly imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside were confined to their roles.” This is an interesting sentence as it is an apt simile comparing the happenings with elements of theater/filming. The culmination of the humiliation came when one of the girls did a handstand wearing no underwear. Angelou asked herself how long her grandmother could hold out. The girls finally left and addressed her with her first name again. “Momma never turned her head or unfolded her arms, but she stopped singing and said, ‘Bye, Miz Helen, ’bye, Miz Ruth, ’bye, Miz Eloise’.” Angelou was enraged. “How could Momma call them Miz? The mean nasty things. Why couldn’t she have come inside the sweet, cool store when she saw them breasting the hill? What did she prove? And then if they were dirty, mean and impudent, why did Momma have to call them Miz?” Coming inside the Store, Angelou noticed, “She was beautiful. Something had happened out there, which I couldn’t completely understand, but I could see that she was happy.” Her grandmother hummed, “Glory, glory, hallelujah, when I lay my burden down.” Angelou resumes, “Whatever the competition had been out front, I knew Momma had won.”

I believe the fact that they were children, whites in this situation, makes this incident even worse. The reader is capable of grasping and imagining what the racial and hostile world looked like in Angelou’s childhood. It is interesting

that this scene is written from Angelou's child perspective and not from her adult perspective. Therefore Angelou, the child, could not understand her grandmother's behavior. First of all, her grandmother did not hide when seeing the girls approach. She was brave and bold, and she proved that she was not a coward. Second, her posture, i.e. her firm standing facilitated her to endure the disrespectful behavior and it was also her way of resistance. Fred Hobson calls this "quiet dignity" (273). She proved that she could face it and fought it. I even dare say that the statement, "She did an excellent job of sagging from her waist down, but from the waist up she seemed to be pulling for the top of the oak tree across the road" can be explained as her feet representing her bodily presence and rootedness to the ground, but at the same time her torso standing for her mind and spirit, which were set out to withstand.

Hobson points out that "[s]he becomes aware of the curious intersections of race and class when her proud grandmother is taunted by [...] poor white girls who can find security only in race" (273). It was a decisive event as Angelou thought that her "lifelong paranoia was born in those cold, molasses-slow minutes" (CBS 30).

As a girl in Stamps she shortly worked for a white woman, Mrs. Cullinan. The latter mispronounced her name – she called her Margaret instead of Marguerite – and, incited by her women friends, she then decided to not bother and started to call her Mary, which was shorter. Angelou comments, "It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks" (CBS 109). By calling her by a different name for her convenience, Mrs. Cullinan "den[ied] her individuality" (Cudjoe, "Statement" 8), and Angelou's initial undecided reaction of either laughing or crying resulted in anger. She knew she had to quit working for such a vicious person, so Bailey helped her to forge a plan, in which she dropped Mrs. Cullinan's favorite china, "shock[ing] Mrs. Cullinan into (re)cognition of her personhood" (8-9) – upon which she furiously called her Margaret again.

Another experience, which she had at a fairly young age, was her graduation from Lafayette County Training School. Angelou had a premonition. At the graduation ceremony a white school official, Edward Donleavy, gave a

racist and denigrating speech. Angelou comments, "The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises" (CBS 179). The discrimination is indisputable, but it is even more striking for black girls. Being black and being female was a double constraint imposed on them. She "underst[ood] that to be Black and female is to be faced with a special quality of violence and violation" (Cudjoe, "Statement" 14). Angelou furthermore remarks, "The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power" (CBS 272).

Angelou's next question, "[W]hat school official in the white-goddom of Little Rock had the right to decide that those two men must be our only heroes?" (CBS 179) is legitimate. It is a first sign of Angelou questioning the rules of the society she lived in, but she had to admit that she as "Negro" had no control over her life (180). "It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense" (180). After the other speeches she felt downcast. Then they sang the Negro national anthem and she regained her strength, and came to the conclusion that "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death" (184). She knew then that she did not want to lead a restricted life dominated by whites. Her spirit had been lifted again, for now she thought, "We were on top again. As always, again. We survived" (184). Her concluding statement, "I was no longer simply a member of the proud graduating class of 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (184) now made the transition clear – she no longer desired to be white (as in the first scene), she was content to be black.

Sometime later Bailey had a shocking experience, which he described in a paralyzed state. It was the incident that was the most likely reason why Angelou and her brother were sent to live with their mother for good. It highlighted the "White ritualistic violence against the Black male" (McPherson 33), when Bailey saw a bloated, castrated, dead black man who had just been retrieved from the pond. All the black men took a step back, "but the white man

stood there, looking down, and grinned" (CBS 197). Bailey started to ask many questions about the whites' hate towards them, which "were dangerous for a black boy in 1940 Arkansas" (GTN 81). Angelou comments about her brother, "He was away in a mystery, locked in the enigma that young Southern Black boys start to unravel, start to *try* to unravel, from seven years old to death. The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate. His experience raised the question of worth and values, of aggressive inferiority and aggressive arrogance" (CBS 198). Angelou was clearly horrified as well.

One interesting occasion refers to the before-mentioned box fight that appeared in CBS (135-136). It is not a mere description of what happened in the fight. Angelou inserts comments, which relate to the bigger picture of what was at stake when losing or winning the fight – however, it must be read figuratively.

‘It’s another to the body, and it looks like Louis is going down.’ My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed. It was hounds on the trail of a man running through slimy swamps. It was a white woman slapping her maid for being forgetful. (CBS 135)

Equating Louis' moment of weakness in a fight with the whole black race clearly cannot be understood literally – and as an incidental remark it shows Angelou's skillful use of imagery in a broad sense. The message that is conveyed, however, is that winning the fight was important to all the blacks. They needed every single victory as not to despair completely. One reads, "If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true, the accusations that we were lower types of human beings", and it illustrates exactly this point that with each small positive event they could gradually start to believe that they were someone as well and not inferior to the others. What came with the black boxer's winning over the white is that the people who had come to the Store to watch and "who lived too far had made arrangements to stay in town. It wouldn't do for a Black man and his family to be caught on a lonely country road on a night when Joe Louis had proved that we were the strongest people in the world." This was the reality of the segregated South. Blacks had to be cautious.

Dealing with the experience with race in Angelou's later life I would like to mention that she wanted to become a conductorette for the streetcar in San

Francisco at the age of fifteen. Her mother told her that they did not hire colored people. She was disappointed, indignant, and then her mind was set – she was stubborn, too. When Vivian Baxter realized her “determination to challenge this discriminatory situation, she [gave] her unflagging support” (Megna-Wallace 119). Angelou turned to “Negro organizations” (*CBS* 268) for help, she fought for the job and she finally got it. Angelou “learn[ed] that White racism [was] not merely a problem of the South but an evil that penetrate[d] most aspects of American life” (McPherson 34). After she had left the job to return to school, her mother told her that she had enough power and determination to go anywhere and everywhere with those two things (*MMM* 50). From the beginning to the end – her mother strengthened Angelou and her belief in herself.

When Angelou lived in San Francisco as a young mother, she had several strange experiences with a white woman at a record store (*SSC* 6-13). Angelou regularly went to the store and the white part owner once gave her a record to take home, saying that she had started an account for her. Angelou pondered over the white woman’s behavior. She could not understand why she trusted her with her property. “She couldn’t have been seeking friendship; after all she was white, and as far as I knew, white women were never lonely, except in books. White men adored them, black men desired them and black women worked for them. There was no ready explanation for her gesture of trust.” When Angelou came to the store again, the white woman offered her a job. Immediately, Angelou thought of cleaning her house. However, she wanted her to be a salesgirl at the record store. She accepted and observed the white woman, thinking that one day her racism would show. “After two months, vigilance had exhausted me and I had found no thread of prejudice.” She was happy and even got a raise. She did not show her gratitude to the owners but always maintained a cool and respectful air towards them. It was her “first introduction to an amiable black-white relationship”, and she soon afterwards married a white man, Tosh Angelos.

The last experience I would like to highlight took place in Fresno, at a newly integrated hotel (*HOW* 28-31). Angelou was thirty-one years old, it was the year 1959. Her mother suggested to stay at this hotel, she was not afraid of trouble unlike Angelou, who hesitated, but knew she could not convince her

mother to stay at a different hotel. Angelou walked in on her own, knowing that her mother would be at the bar already. "My entrance stopped all action. Every head turned to see, every eye blazed, first with doubt, then fury." She went to the bar. "The crowd made an aisle and I walked through the silence, knowing that before I reached the lounge door, a knife could be slipped in my back or a rope lassoed around my neck." Upon being asked by her mother what the matter was, she could not tell her that "the whites in the lobby had scared [her] silly." They checked in, and the receptionist "stared at us as if we were wild things from the forest" (*MMM* 138-139). This is an interesting statement as it portrays the dehumanization of blacks (cf. Lupton 68). "The hotel's color bar had been lifted only a month earlier, yet she [Vivian Baxter] acted as if she had been a guest there for years" (*HOW* 30). When they were in their room, her mother told her,

Animals can sense fear. They feel it. Well, you know that human beings are animals, too. Never, never let a person know you're frightened. And a group of them . . . absolutely never. Fear brings out the worst thing in everybody. Now, in that lobby you were as scared as a rabbit. I knew it and all those white folks knew it. If I hadn't been there, they might have turned into a mob. But something about me told them, if they mess with either of us, they'd better start looking for some new asses, 'cause I'd blow away what their mammas gave them. (*HOW* 31)

The last sentence refers to Vivian Baxter carrying a gun in her purse. It is again a moment, in which her mother gave her a life lesson. On the one hand the whole scene demonstrates Angelou's fear of whites although there was nothing illegal in staying at the hotel. On the other hand it shows her mother's fearlessness that set an example to Angelou on how to behave in such a delicate situation.

4.1.6. Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

Angelou was involved in the Movement at different times which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In *HOW* Angelou tells how she was offered the position as a coordinator for the SCLC. Bayard Rustin had held this position and he suggested Angelou as his successor (*HOW* 107-109). They had met when Angelou had worked on the show *Cabaret for Freedom* to raise money for Martin Luther King in the name of SCLC. Rustin and his team wanted her as their successor because they believed

she had administrative skills. They had seen how the actors had listened to and respected her when she had talked to them during the preparation for the show. She took the position. She was a bit over 30 years old. As coordinator she basically was a fund-raiser.

After two months in this job, she met Martin Luther King personally. He said to her, "We're so grateful for the job you all are doing up here. It's a confirmation for us down on the firing line" (*HOW* 116). This perfectly describes what needs to be stressed here. Angelou worked for the Movement in New York City, in the North, i.e. in a safe environment as compared to those working in the South for the Movement. "[She] carried a briefcase, and sat on subways, sternly studying legal papers" (123). She took notes at business conferences, talked a lot on the phone, rode in taxis and wrote "serious letters reminding the mailing list that freedom was costly and that a donation of any amount was a direct blow against the citadel of oppression which held a helpless people enthralled" (123). Her days were filled with tasks and activities like these. She often worked until late and also sometimes worked on weekends. She described herself as a "too-often-absent mother" for Guy (135). "Martin Luther King was sacred and fund-raising was [her] calling" (123) was what she said about that period.

Speaking highly of Martin Luther King, she later realized though that "[r]edemptive suffering had always been the part of [his] argument which [she] found difficult to accept. [She] had seen distress fester souls and bend peoples' bodies out of shape, but [she] had yet to see anyone redeemed from pain, by pain" (*HOW* 117). Yet later when she lived in Africa, she and 'her birds of a feather' ridiculed and disapproved of Martin Luther King's approach. "We scorned the idea of being spat upon, kicked, and then turning our cheeks for more abuse. Of course, none of us [...] had even been close to bloody violence, and not one of us had spent an hour in jail for our political beliefs" (*ATS* 134). She admits that "when [she] worked for him, [she] had been deluded into agreeing with Reverend King that love would cure America of its pathological illnesses [...]. But all the prayers, sit-ins, sacrifices, jail sentences, humiliation, insults and jibes had not borne out Reverend King's vision" (*ATS* 134). She was part of a radical group at that time.

She also got in contact with the struggle in Africa. She met Vusumzi Make, a South African freedom fighter. When she considered going to Africa with him, she questioned that idea. "Leave Martin King and my own struggle" (*HOW* 144), "[b]ut all the black struggles were one, with one enemy and one goal" (144-145), she thought. Furthermore when Angelou learned that Patrice Lumumba, one of the three African leaders, who "radical black Americans held dear" (183), had died, she knew that she had to act. She committed herself to making a statement because of this loss (186-208). With members of CAAWAAH she organized a standing-up at the United Nations where Lumumba's death would be announced. They informed the masses and thousands came. Out of a planned silent protest a riot and then a march resulted.

After she had been living in Africa for a few years, Angelou decided to leave this continent and come back to the States in order to work for Malcolm X, who wanted to "create a foundation he called the Organization of African-American Unity" (*SFH* 5), and she wanted to be part of building it up. The organization was in need of an "experienced coordinator", who "had the organizational skills to set up and run an efficient office" (*ATS* 212), which would be Angelou's position. She went to San Francisco for a month to see her mother and brother to adapt to being back in the United States before going to New York to commence work. She was determined that change was around the corner.

The passion my people would exhibit under Malcolm's leadership was going to help us rid our country of racism once and for all. The Africans in South Africa often said they had been inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1958. Well, we were going to give them something new, something visionary, to look up to. After we had cleansed ourselves and our country of hate, they would be able to study our methods, take heart from our example and let freedom ring in their country as it would ring in ours. (*SFH* 7)

However, Angelou received a phone call from a friend when she was still in San Francisco, who informed her of Malcolm X's death. She was devastated. When she walked out on the streets and saw that people acted as usual, she could not believe it. She thought at first that people did not know about his death, but they knew and simply did not care. She would have gone mad if Bailey had not been with her. Her reaction to Malcolm X's death shows what it meant for her to lose the leader in this struggle. She was upset and said that she could have

coped with his death more easily if racists had killed him. "But he was killed by black people as he spoke to black people about a better future for black people and in the presence of his family" (*SFH* 32).

In 1968, she met Martin Luther King again at a concert in honor of W. E. B. Du Bois, at which he also delivered a speech. He asked her for one month of her time to work for him for the SCLC. Her task would be to visit many black preachers over the country and to convince them to donate one Sunday's collection to the march he was planning, the poor people's march. She agreed to do so but told him that she would only be available after her birthday, which was April 4. On her birthday she was informed that Martin Luther King had been shot. She was in complete shock, then her thoughts were, "the world capsized. If King was dead, who was alive? Where would we go? What was next?" (*SFH* 154). Mourning, she stayed at home for a few weeks.

4.1.7. Topics of Concern During Angelou's Time in Africa

This is the only chapter that will have no counterpart in Moody's analysis. The reason for this is that Moody's autobiography stops after the Civil Rights Movement unlike Angelou's serial autobiography, which goes on until she is an older woman. Her reflections about home and the remarkable events that took place during her stay in Africa will be discussed now.

A dominant aspect of Angelou's time in Africa is talking about being accepted by the Africans (*ATS* 19-24). There is a community of black immigrants in Accra, Ghana, where she lived, of which Angelou was a part. She called the members "Revolutionist Returnees." The term "returnees" refers to them being black Americans who had "returned" to Africa where their ancestors had come from. This group had "terrible yearnings to be accepted" and "under no circumstances did [they] mention [their] disillusionment at being overlooked by the Ghanaians." "Since [they] were descendants of African slaves torn from the land, [they] reasoned [they] wouldn't have to earn the right to return, yet [they] wouldn't be so arrogant as to take anything for granted. [They] would work and produce, then snuggle down into Africa as a baby nuzzles in a mother's arm." "[They] felt that [they] would be the first accepted and once taken in and truly adopted, [they] would hold the doors open until all black Americans could step over [their] feet, enter through the hallowed portals and come home

at last.” These quotes epitomize the group’s utmost desire of being accepted in their homeland and their understanding of it.

A huge and critical issue in Angelou’s reflections is the part about coming home (ATS 19-24). She “hoped to live out the Biblical story” in Africa. This means that like the return of the prodigal son in Luke, Angelou views herself in the light of her ancestors as “[t]he prodigal child, having strayed, been stolen or sold from the land of her fathers.” At first, there are several instances in which she claims to have come home, e.g. “So I had finally come home.” She explains that she adored Ghana because “[o]ur people had always longed for home. For centuries we had sung about a place not built with hands, where the streets were paved with gold, and were washed with honey and milk.” In the form of an excursus at this point must be mentioned Angelou’s use of the pronouns “our” and “we” instead of “my” and “they”.¹⁸ This is note-worthy as she establishes with that a frame for her personal story in the (hi)story of the blacks. In the words of Cudjoe, the autobiography is “a *public* rather than a *private* gesture [and] *me-ism* gives way to *our-ism*” (“Statement” 10). Fox-Genovese similarly remarks that “all autobiographies result from the efforts of an individual to interpret his or her self in relation to community” (“Community” 24). Angelou frequently used the first person plural to do so and in this way “she records the history of a generation of American expatriates in Africa” (McPherson 104).

Turning back to the strong sense of having come home, she later came to realize though that maybe she could not simply come home, return, and claim Africa to be her home as is apparent in the following three statements. New black Americans in Ghana “didn’t want to know that they had not come home, but had left one familiar place of painful memory for another strange place with none” (ATS 44). “I doubted if I, or any black from the diaspora, could really return to Africa” (84). “I would not admit that if I couldn’t be comfortable in Africa, I had no place else to go” (39). However, when she once traveled to a small village over the weekend, where people took her to be from Bambara, Liberia, she “had proved that one of their descendants, at least one, could just briefly return to Africa, and that despite cruel betrayals, bitter ocean voyages and hurtful centuries, we were still recognizable” (116).

¹⁸ Cf. 4.1.2.

Resuming the concluding thought of the last quote, there is a set of remarkable events that took place during a trip to another small village that deal with that issue (ATS 214-226). First, at one moment during a day trip by car, all of a sudden she had the urge to get out of the car – no matter what. She and her company were approaching a bridge that she felt she could not drive across. Her feelings were very strong, so she walked across. Her behavior was inexplicable even for herself. She was later told that this bridge was not very sturdy and in the past people had tended to walk across because “[i]n a crisis, only people on foot could hope to reach the other side.” Second, she was told that a town named Keta would disappear because the sea would swallow it. “When I heard the dire story, I again surprised myself. I felt as if I had just been told a beloved relative was dying. Tears came to my eyes and threatened to run down my face.” This was another inexplicable reaction. Third, the most startling event occurred when she was at a market and a woman began to speak to her. Angelou could not understand her. When she saw her face in the light, however, she was astounded because “she had the wide face and slanted eyes of my grandmother. Her lips were large and beautifully shaped like my grandmother’s, and her cheek bones were high like those of my grandmother.” The woman began to weep and wanted Angelou to follow her. She showed her to different women who all started to mourn when they looked at Angelou. She told each of them that Angelou was an American Negro. The man, who accompanied her on the trip, explained to her then that she “remind[ed] them of someone, but not anyone they knew personally.” He told her about the village having been burnt down and people beaten and made to slaves. He continued, “And you, Sister, you look so much like them, even the tone of your voice is like theirs. They are sure you are descended from those stolen mothers and fathers. That is why they mourn. Not for you but for their lost people.” Angelou’s reaction was this:

A sadness descended on me, simultaneously somber and wonderful. I had not consciously come to Ghana to find the roots of my beginnings, but I had continually and accidentally tripped over them or fallen upon them in my everyday life. Once I had been taken for Bambara, and cared for by other Africans as they would care for a Bambara woman. Nana’s family of Ahantas claimed me, crediting my resemblance to a relative as proof of my Ahanta background. And here in my last days in Africa,

descendants of a pillaged past saw their history in my face and heard their ancestors speak through my voice. (ATS 226)

Hence Angelou's years in Africa, especially her time in Ghana, became an important milestone for her identity. She gained a lot. "If the heart of Africa still remained allusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings."

Lupton observes that "Angelou [...] is unable to resolve the contradictions between being an African American but identifying with Africans, for whom she remains a stranger" (37). However, I am inclined to contradict this claim because her final reflection before leaving Africa to come back to the US was:

[N]ow I knew my people had never completely left Africa. We had sung it in our blues, shouted it in our gospel and danced the continent in our breakdowns. As we carried it to Philadelphia, Boston and Birmingham we had changed its color, modified its rhythms, yet it was Africa which rode in the bulges of our high calves, shook in our protruding behinds and crackled in our wide open laughter. I could nearly hear the old ones chuckling. (ATS 228)

It seems as if she had found a way of coming to terms with Africa and all the emotions and notions this brought with it. By chance she had found her roots and she became aware that black Americans still had maintained many 'Africanisms' in their lifestyle as could be seen in the quote above. Being aware of her ancestors, she dedicates the subsequent volume among others "to [her] entire family wherever and whoever you are" (SFH, dedication), which definitely includes the Africans she descended from.

4.2. Anne Moody

Just like in Angelou's analysis, the same points except for the last subchapter will now be discussed for Moody.

It must be noted that since Moody only wrote one volume as her autobiography, it suffices to give only the quotations' page numbers in parenthesis. Again, the issue of Moody, the narrator, and Moody, the historical person, will not be distinguished in the analysis but need to be kept at the back of one's mind while reading.

4.2.1. Writing Style

Moody's language might be described as pretty straightforward and rather simple. Its characteristics are repetitions, graphic language as well as the frequent use of vernacular, colloquial, and obscene language in dialogues. The structure and narrative situation of the autobiography will also be touched upon.

The simplicity of language appears in her sentence structure and the length of the sentences. These often only consist of main clauses and they are frequently very short, too. The first four sentences of the autobiography may serve as an illustration, "I'm still haunted by dreams of the time we lived on Mr. Carter's plantation. Lots of Negroes lived on his place. Like Mama and Daddy they were all farmers. We all lived in rotten wood two-room shacks" (3). This is why her language may be considered straightforward and matter-of-fact. Yet, matter-of-fact does not automatically imply lack of emotion because she does transmit feelings when she, for instance, assesses her mother's situation, as in the following statement, "Mama was about to have another baby. She would soon be the mother of seven. She always chose the wrong time to have babies" (118).

However, Moody frequently also employs longer sentences. The one I want to use as an example highlights the repetitions she oftentimes includes, too. "I couldn't go on working for Mrs. Burke pretending I was dumb and innocent, pretending I didn't know what was going on in all her guild meetings, or about Jerry's beating, or about the Taplin burning, and everything else that was going on. I was sick of pretending, sick of selling my feelings for a dollar a day" (147). Here, the gerund "pretending" is used three times, the past continuous "was going on" and the adjective "sick" twice. Moreover, the convoluted sentence structure shows a repetitive pattern. The following sentences are a prime example of the repetitious use of the same word in close succession, "Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me – the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears" (132). The noun "fear" appears four times in total – the reader can almost feel this profound and disturbing emotion. Broadly speaking, by employing this feature Moody powerfully gets across the message she wants to convey.

McPherson touches upon Moody's writing style, stating that she "brought to life, in graphic moving language, the sights and smells and suffering of rural poverty" and the like (12). This is best exemplified by the description of the Taplins' burnt-down house,

We sat in the car for about an hour, silently looking at this debris and the ashes that covered the nine charcoal-burned bodies. A hundred or more also stood around—Negroes from the neighborhood in their pajamas, night-gowns, and housecoats and even a few whites, with their eyes fixed on that dreadful scene. I shall never forget the expressions on the faces of the Negroes. There was almost unanimous hopelessness in them. The still, sad faces watched the smoke rising from the remains until the smoke died down to practically nothing. There was something strange about that smoke. It was the thickest and blackest smoke I had ever seen. (143)

It is a scene that touches the audience, and a picture of it can be easily drawn in one's mind.

Moody's style features vernacular, colloquial as well as obscene language in dialogues. This is very well illustrated by the following sentences, uttered by Emma, her father's girlfriend, "Him and Janie wouldn't be fightin' if Wilbert could get a good job and make enough money to take care of them children. If these damn white folks ain't shootin' niggers' brains out they are starvin' them to death. A nigger can't make it no way he try in this fuckin' place. Don't y'all go blamin' Wilbert for this" (226). Generally speaking, this is a pretty accurate depiction of the actual language used by blacks, thus transmitting the message more strongly to the reader. It also establishes a closer and more intimate relationship with the reader.

An important question must be raised in this context: Why is Moody adhering to such a simple linguistic style? One possible reason might be that by doing so she narrates the happenings in her life without disguising and distorting anything. As Lupton states, Moody "tells it like it is, without obeying the strictures of language" (77). Language for her is merely a tool to accomplish the task she set out for herself. She does not consider any literary style necessary to adorn her story. On the contrary, the raw and basic language is exactly what she wants in order to depict her experiences. Consequently the events become the only center of interest to her without causing distraction by an elaborate and/or difficult-to-read writing style.

As regards structure, *CAM* is divided into four main parts – entitled “Childhood”, “High School”, “College”, and “The Movement.” This restricts the narrating of events to a clear, chronological structure, following one thread only. So the structure is along the line of simplicity as well.

Moody’s autobiography is told by an adult narrator looking back. Nonetheless she narrates early events from her childhood with a naivety and innocence as if she were experiencing it for the first time. For instance, when she does not understand where Uncle Moody was going and why she had to say goodbye to him when he was at the point of death, “I didn’t understand why Mama was so sad if Uncle Moody wasn’t going to be sick anymore. I wanted to ask her but I didn’t. All the way to see Uncle Moody, I kept wondering where he was going” (17). Moreover Moody, the child, often describes what she observes and hears without being able to deduce any meaning from this information, e.g. when she saw that her mother’s “belly kept getting bigger and bigger” (11). Thus she simply describes her mother’s weight gain, seeing it through the eyes of a child who has not yet the knowledge of a growing baby in her mother’s womb.

4.2.2. Relationships Among Family Members

Unstable family ties and troublesome relationships within her family overshadowed Moody’s childhood in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. She was her mother’s firstborn, had various siblings and later a stepfather, too. Her biological father Diddy was a marginal figure in her life. The most important relationships will now be discussed.

Moody’s parents separated when she was still a little girl. They lived on a plantation¹⁹ where both her parents worked as farmers. Shortly after her mother’s little brother set fire to their shack, her father began to develop temper tantrums on a regular basis. The harvest was looking to be meager and he probably could not feed his family. His “inability to provide the basic needs cause[d] frustrations and possibly anger” (White 45), which he expressed by always yelling and snapping at his family. In addition his best friend had died and the only time he was happy was when he gambled and won. However, he

¹⁹ Its name is never given in the memoir.

gambled away all his money and it was then revealed that he had had an affair with his deceased best friend's widow. "I remember he and Mama had a real knockdown dragout session" (11), but he kept going to the widow's place. Her mother's third child was born and the "[n]ext thing I knew, we were being thrown into a wagon with all our things. I really didn't know what was going on. But I knew something was wrong because Mama and Daddy barely spoke to each other and whenever they did exchange words, they snapped and cursed" (12). Her father left them at the house of her mother's aunt and drove away. Moody then realized that he was not coming back. Her mother "cried all that night" (12).

From then on she lived with her mother, called Toosweet in the narrative, and her siblings in many different houses in and around Centreville because of her mother's fast-changing jobs. "Every time it was to a house on some white man's place and every time it was a room and a kitchen" (28). Moody experienced frequent displacement, commenting, "It seemed as though we were always moving" (28). This definitely was not a stable environment for a child. They finally settled in the house her stepfather Raymond had built for them when she was twelve years old.

Moody's relationship with her father was not solid let alone profound. Due to her parents' separation, she hardly saw him anymore. When Moody was chosen to be eighth grade's Homecoming Queen, she needed a dress, which her father gave to her upon having been asked by her mother. "I hadn't seen him since the day he was squatting in the yard when Granddaddy died" (106), which was several years before. "I wanted to hug Daddy and kiss him and thank him for it, but I just couldn't draw myself to do it" (106). She thanked him, they talked shortly, and she left the house running home full of excitement.

After Moody had left Raymond's house at the age of sixteen, she decided to go and live with her father in Woodville for a while, "I stood there looking at him as though he was a complete stranger who was nosing into my business. In thought, I had considered him my daddy even after he left us. But now he didn't seem like my daddy at all. Standing there, I hated myself for running to him" (213-214). Moody reveals at this point that in her thoughts she had always regarded him as her "daddy", but face to face she just could not bring herself to call him that or show any signs of affection towards him, which speaks volumes

about her feelings. While she was living with him and him being happy that she was there, she finally “managed to choke out ‘Daddy’ for a while”, because “[she] knew he wanted [her] to call him Daddy”, but then moved on to addressing him with “you” only (216-217).

After her graduation from high school, she left his house to go to New Orleans, saying goodbye to him. “I had expected him to object to my leaving so soon after graduation but he didn’t. He just told me that I should try and get into college in New Orleans and that he would help me as much as he could. That night I felt closer to him than ever” (230). After that, she was only in contact with his girlfriend Emma, with whom she exchanged some letters, but never directly with her father. Summing up one can say that he was a very marginal figure in her life.

After having had three children with Moody’s father, her mother was having yet another baby. There was no mention of her mother seeing somebody, probably because Moody had never been introduced to nor had she been informed about another man in her mother’s life. One day she delivered this baby, and with it, Raymond and his family were introduced into Moody’s life. This is indeed a crucial fact because of later events. Raymond and his family were lighter-skinned, “[t]hey were real yellow people” (26), which was decisive for their family life. For this reason they felt they had a higher social status and regarded Moody and her family as inferior, which Eleese White denominates as “the presumed ‘class’ difference between her family and his” (49), and which they openly displayed. Miss Pearl, Raymond’s mother, for example, did not even say a word to Toosweet when she came to see her new grandchild Virginia, the second child to Raymond. Toosweet said to herself, “She got some nerve coming in my house and not even speaking to me. How dare Ray bring her in here and run over me” (57). Moody realized that her stepfather could have changed the whole situation.

‘He is not a man at all. He could easily put a stop to this. No, he’s too scared of hurting their feelings.’ I sat there on the steps wishing that Mama had never moved in with him. Looking at him now, I could see he would never break with his family for Mama and they would never accept her, no matter how hard she tried to make them like her. (58)

It then crystallizes that Toosweet and her three children from Diddly somewhat formed a unity on their own within the family, as Moody comments, “I was more

aware than ever that we were two families living under the same roof" (67), when Raymond drove them to their old church and left again with his two biological kids after dropping them off. Toosweet and Raymond finally married shortly before their third baby was born. Her mother had "made up her mind that she and Raymond would finally get married with or without Miss Pearl's consent" (97-98). Her stepfather "looked very sad and scared" – after all, he was marrying a woman who had darker skin than he had. Both "looked just like they were going to a funeral" (98). Thus their marriage was not very happy and harmonious – their different skin tones were overshadowing their lives.

From the insight the reader is provided with, it seems that Moody's relationship with her mother, who she calls "Mama" in the narrative, was not very intense in her early childhood years. This can be attributed to a number of reasons. Her mother was working most of the time, trying to make ends meet. Moody was often angry with her because of the poverty they were experiencing and its effects: for instance, when her mother had no choice but to sometimes leave Moody's siblings alone at home. Once, upon returning from school, Moody found them playing in the sand, naked, and the other children coming home from school made fun of them. "I was ashamed to go in the house or recognize Adline and Junior as my little sister and brother" and she was mad at her mother for not being able to look after her children (28). In another example Toosweet was too proud to take any money from Diddly, Moody's father, shortly after their separation. Moody was angry at her because with it they could have bought meat, but without it their every-day meal was beans (19).

Moody and her siblings suffered from loneliness due to their mother having to work. Toosweet could not spend very much time with her children, "[d]uring the very important formative years, they were without the nurturing and protection of parents" (White 46). Moreover she had many babies after Moody, her firstborn, who kept her on the move, and which meant that she was having more hungry mouths to feed. "For young Anne, who witness[ed] her mother's desperate emotions with each swelling belly, pregnancy equal[ed] suffering" (A. Hudson 284). On top of all that her mother was very busy with herself, in the sense that she had to come to terms with her own emotional state. She suffered because of her husband's absence and even more so due to Raymond's

behavior and that of his family, which meant exclusion and isolation, “[T]he adults hardly spoke to Mama. Miss Pearl and Raymond’s older sisters would pass right by her without saying anything, and Mama would be so hurt. Sometimes she would sit on the porch and stare over at their house as if she wished she could just go over there and talk to them” (49).

Not even when she was more mature did there develop a good rapport between Moody and her mother. It became apparent that Moody had been disapproving of Toosweet’s submissive behavior towards Raymond, “I *told* you once, Mama! I *told* you he wasn’t no good. He ain’t *no* good! I hear him fussin’ at you *every* mornin’ and you don’t say *nothin’* to him! What do you say? You just sit there and take it and let him walk all over you! Um *tired* of him walkin’ all over you and treatin’ us like we’re dirt or somethin’” (206). Later, after Moody had left the house, they only had little contact. Toosweet wanted her to come back home, “trying to make [her] feel sorry for her and guilty about leaving home” (216) with the notes she sent her at first. At her graduation ceremony, Moody saw a woman who looked like her mother but “looked much too old” to be her (231). It was her, though, and “she seemed even older, she had lost weight and an air of sadness surrounded her” (232). Moody felt very guilty of her behavior, of not having written to her, and of having neglected her feelings. It is obvious that her mother suffered severely from her firstborn’s absence. When Moody decided to spend just a few days with her before heading to New Orleans, Toosweet “smiled and for a second she looked young again” (232).

When Moody was at college, she sometimes wrote to her mother, but it was almost always because she was in need of money or food. “Despite apparent philosophical differences between her mother and daughter, Toosweet responded to her needs when she could” (White 51). The more Moody became involved in the Movement, the fewer their contacts were. It even developed into a complete loss of communication for reasons which will be explained in 4.2.5.

The relationship between Moody and her stepfather Raymond defines itself through his behavior towards her, her mother and the children who were not his own, which was already discussed above. She “hated Raymond because he let [his family] treat Mama like dirt” (202). The most important incident between Moody and him was in the making when Moody realized that

he started looking at her longingly, “giving [her] wanting eyes” (201) when Moody was approximately sixteen years old. She had had problems with her basketball coach and white men in the streets because of her new and self-confident appearance.

It became a burden for Moody to be in the house when Raymond was there as well. She tried avoiding him and stopped wearing sexy clothes. She supposed that “he thought that I had begun screwing around when I was in New Orleans because I had matured so” (201). She knew that he was jealous of her basketball teacher and he did not want anybody to touch her. She had wanted to finish high school, but then made plans to only finish the semester and go to New Orleans. “I planned to take Adline with me because I didn’t want to leave her there around Raymond” (204). However, one day the situation escalated between them.

‘Goddamn! Can’t see no fuckin’ peace ‘round here,’ he said, slamming the screen door. Something inside me popped. ‘You mothafucka! I’m *tired* of you! What’s wrong with you, you can’t see no peace? What have I done to you? *You’re* the one. Can’t nobody see no peace for you going around here cussin’ and fussin’ all the time.’ I ran up on the porch and picked up the piece of broken mirror Mama had left there. ‘I’ll kill you! You son of a bitch! You *need* to be dead!’ (205)

She abruptly decided to leave the house that minute, which she did, “Mama, um goin’. Um leavin’ this town” (206). Raymond and her mother did not let her into the house to get her clothes, which she had bought with her own money, so the only way she thought that she could get them was by getting the sheriff to go with her to the house. The whole scene attracted attention from the neighbors, which bothered her mother tremendously, but Moody did not care. She told her mother that she would never set foot again in the house and that in case they saw each other again one day, it would certainly not be in that house (210). In this instant Moody had lost her home.

4.2.3. Personal Circumstances at That Time

The topics education, religion, and economic situation in Moody’s life will be analyzed in this chapter.

4.2.3.1. Education

Moody was the first person in her family to graduate from college. Her first years in school, important people, who helped her along, as well as her higher education will be dealt with.

She was five years old when she started attending Mount Pleasant School, having to take an eight-mile walk per day to do so. Fifteen students went to this school, which was “a little one-room rotten wood building” (14). They “were cold all day” because it had “big cracks” and “the heater was just too small” (14). The school did not have its own toilet facilities, they “used the toilets in back of the church” (15) which was next to it. Her teacher was Reverend Carson, of whom she was very scared, so that she was even too scared to listen to him. She did nothing and did not say a word in class. Her first few years of schooling were spent in fear and under miserable circumstances.

The high school she attended was Willis High, “the only Negro school in Centreville” (27). It “had only been expanded into a high school the year before I started there. Before Mr. Willis came to town, the eighth grade had been the limit of schooling for Negro children in Centreville” (27-28). Moody was a brilliant student, mentioning oftentimes how she made straight A’s throughout her high school years. She “had a straight A average—the highest of all the seniors” (229) when she graduated from Johnson High School, which she attended for the last semester because of leaving her home. Melissa Flanagan’s conclusion for Moody being an excellent student is that she was actually a self-taught person, having been educated in an unfair and inferior educational system, excelling nevertheless (27).

Her homeroom teacher at Willis High, Mrs. Rice, was an important person in her life because she dared to talk to Moody about racial issues, which was forbidden and therefore a dangerous undertaking. Moody’s mother did not answer her daughter’s questions and always got angry when asked about such delicate matters. “With a Mama like that you’ll never learn anything” (134), Moody realized. Since Mrs. Rice did not deny her access to information, she had assumed a “nurturing role” and “had given [her] time and attention—social and survival skills—when her mother did not or perhaps could not. Twosweet [sic] was too busy just trying to provide the family with their basic needs.

Employing time and energy to nurture the emotions and the intellect were luxuries for many of the poor” (White 50).

One of the first women Moody worked for was Mrs. Claiborne. She and her husband taught her many things and treated her with respect.

When I was doing the dishes Mrs. Claiborne came to help me and she told me that Mr. Claiborne thought that I was very smart. She said that she didn't know many ten-year-old girls who worked to keep herself and her sister and brother in school. After that Saturday, I ate with them every time I was there for a meal. They started treating me like I was their own child. They would correct me when I spoke wrong, and Mrs. Claiborne would tell me about places she had traveled and people she met while traveling. I was learning so much from them. Sick or well, I went to work. I was afraid if I stayed at home I would miss out on something. (42)

Furthermore she instilled into her the only little hope that she could achieve great things in her life, “Mrs. Claiborne had told me how smart I was and how much I could do if I just had a chance” (90). “Anne’s associations with ‘middle class’ folks stimulated her desire to experience the same joys and benefits” (White 50). Moody’s mother, however, believed that “Mrs. Claiborne [...] had ‘ruined’ Anne because [her] associations resulted in such ‘hopeless’ desires and ‘impossible’ dreams. Toosweet had never been treated in the same way or made to think that she could live that way” (White 50). Her mother did not see what Moody gained from these experiences, namely “her social and intellectual development” (White 50). She was not supportive of her daughter’s aspirations since she and her family “had not experienced this, they simply could not accept it as reality” (White 50).

Mrs. Crosby, Mrs. Burke’s mother for whom she worked several years later, was another woman who encouraged her to study hard (165). She would help her when she was ready to go to college (169). Thus Moody had quite a lot of encouragement outside her family to strive for a better future, which she put into effect when she heard about a basketball scholarship in order to be able to go to college.

She applied for this scholarship for Natchez College, a Baptist school, in Mississippi, which she received. Again she was a superior student, she “made the first straight-A average that had been made at Natchez in many years” during her second year at this historically black institution (252). Yet she felt like a prisoner there because it was very conservative. The president encouraged

Moody to take a test in order to receive a scholarship to continue her studies, which was tangible due to her very good grades. She got a full-tuition scholarship to “Tougaloo College, the best senior college in the state for Negroes” (258) in Jackson, Mississippi.

Moody had many doubts about this college, because a girl at Natchez had told her “that Tougaloo was not for people [her] color” and that one had to be “high yellow with a rich-ass daddy” (259). It turned out that she had a white roommate and only one black teacher. Being scared of the white teachers, a colleague told her that they were not bad at all since they were not from the South. They were nothing like the whites Moody knew from her hometown.

Moody sometimes had to ask her family for money, upon which her sister Adline once replied “that she was sorry [she] had gone to Tougaloo when [she] knew [she] could not afford it” (272). She could not have made it without her family, “but they still possessed a mentality that caused them to perceive Anne’s goal as too advanced for such a poor person” (White 52). She received good grades there as well and graduated from the school as “the first person in [her] entire family” to do so (419-420), thus completing her formal education.

4.2.3.2. Religion

Moody grew up in typically religious surroundings, her denomination being Baptist, and became an active member there. Apart from this, she later on only sometimes mentioned religion and her relationship with God in the narrative. Assuming, though, that faith must have played a significant role in her life, it was not presented with overriding importance in her autobiography.

She had been attending Mount Pleasant Church with her mother, but later on went to Centreville Baptist Church which her step family also attended. Toosweet, though, did not change churches, she continued at the “ramshackle rural establishment with which Anne wanted no further associations” (A. Hudson 285), mainly because of Miss Pearl. One day her mother was able to convince Moody to accompany her to her old church, but “it is a ploy to have her baptized, despite Anne’s plain disgust for the more primitive church” (A. Hudson 285). She was baptized in a pond which was full of cow manure – she was in revulsion at the muddy water and was “mad as hell” (79).

Just as I began to feel the heaviness of the mud, I was lifted out of the water. I tried to open my eyes but mud was stuck to my lashes, so I just left them closed. I felt shitty all over. As they were leading me out of the water, I could hear the cows mooing, Jack laughing, and everyone singing, 'Take Me to the Waters.' Everything sounded far away. It took me a minute to realize that my ears were stuffed full of mud (79).

As can be observed, the baptism scene is quite amusing for the reader, yet it definitely was not for Moody personally.

She was later busy teaching Sunday school and at B.T.U.²⁰ (158), first she was the regular substitute pianist for Sunday school, later she became a regular pianist, earning \$4 each Sunday (183). The question of her motives for her involvement in church are worth looking at. It can be said that her actions were not so much religiously motivated as was her wish to keep herself purposefully occupied – she welcomed almost anything that kept her from thinking about the antagonistic environment that she was experiencing and enduring during her youth (158).

When Moody was already deeply involved in the Movement, there was an incident which made her question her belief in God. It was the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, in which four Sunday school girls were killed (346-347). Upon hearing this, she talked to God, recollecting, "We were taught how merciful and forgiving you are. [...] and I believed in you. I bet those girls in Sunday school were being taught the same as I was when I was their age. It [sic] that teaching wrong? Are you going to forgive their killers?" She wondered about God's skin color, "if I ever find out you are white, then I'm through with you. And if I find out you are black, I'll try my best to kill you when I get to heaven." A complete turn-around in her belief was clear when we read,

I'm through with you. Yes, I am going to put you down. From now on, I am my own God. I am going to live by the rules I set for myself. I'll discard everything I was once taught about you. Then I'll be you. I will be my own God, living my life as I see fit. Not as Mr. Charlie says I should live it, or Mama, or anybody else. I shall do as I want to in this society that apparently wasn't meant for me and my kind. If you are getting angry because I'm talking to you like this, then just kill me, leave me here in this graveyard dead. Maybe that's where all of us belong, anyway. Maybe then we wouldn't have to suffer so much. At the rate we are being killed now, we'll all soon be dead anyway. (347)

²⁰ B.T.U. stands for Baptist Training Union.

As Angela Hudson aptly summarizes, she experienced “a profound loss of faith. She not only rebels against God, she rejects Him outright. It could be said even that she exiles God, banishes Him from her life, and forecloses the possibility of Christian fulfillment by closing off her belief in the power of God’s love” (291).

Sometime later on in *CAM* Moody revealed her latest opinion on and her thoughts about God.

More than ever I began to wonder whether God actually existed. [...] Maybe my upbringing in Church had had a lot to do with the God I knew before. The God my Baptist training taught me about was a merciful and forgiving God, one that said Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, and a number of other shalt nots. Since I had been part of the Movement, I had witnessed killing, stealing, and adultery committed against Negroes by whites throughout the South. God didn’t seem to be punishing anyone for these acts. On the other hand, most of the Negroes in the South were humble, peace-loving, religious people. Yet they were the ones doing all the suffering, as if they themselves were responsible for the killing and other acts committed against them. It seemed to me now that there must be two gods, many gods, or no god at all. (371)

It is interesting to observe that in this quote the word “God” was capitalized in the beginning and was written in lower case letters in the end. She seriously doubted God’s existence, which was her final commentary on this matter.

A last point to be addressed concerns the blacks’ faith with regard to their struggle for justice. Talking about the “old Negroes” she states that “most of them had given up here on earth. They seemed to be waiting just for God to call them home and end all the suffering” (330). She later observed just the same, namely that she “knew that it was the idea of heaven that kept [the older Negroes] going. To them heaven would end their troubles” (408). Their motto was, “When we get to heaven things will be different, there won’t be no black or white” (408). The doctrine of a better afterlife was palpable. Moody noticed a different attitude among the younger blacks, which was similar to her rejection of and doubts about God, namely that “they felt that the power to change things was in themselves. More so than in God or anything else” (408).

4.2.3.3. Economic Situation

All the years Moody covers in her autobiography are characterized by abject poverty.

Some economic details about her early childhood were already

mentioned, such as the shacks and her parents being preoccupied with providing for their family when they “[a]in’t gonna have nuthin’ left when [the plantation owner] take out his share” (10), alluding to the tenant farming system, which kept them in poverty. White remarks upon this that “the father’s situation reveals the economic and social strains, in addition to the emotional and physical pains, intentionally inflicted upon him and his family as by-products of racism” (45). After her parents’ separation, her mother provided for her family on her own, earning little, bringing dinner leftovers, which “was all we had to eat”, working at a café earning “twelve dollars a week”, stealing corn from a cornfield at night (13), living in houses with no toilet (14) – the list is long. Generally speaking, the basic needs could hardly be met. This is why Moody started contributing to her family’s income as early as at the age of nine. She worked for white women, regardless if they were nice or mean to her, because she and her family needed the money desperately.

When they moved into Raymond’s five-room-house, their economic situation looked somewhat better. “There were only a few things that kept us from being middle class—the outdoor toilet, the wood stove, and the tin bathtub” (48). Toosweet told Moody that “Ray will be able to take care of us now” (45). Moody continued working for Mrs. Claiborne, though, because she learned much from her and was treated very well by her. When her stepfather turned to farming, however, she had to quit her job and “work in the field all day” during summer vacations (82). Although she was scared of the hard work in the sun, which she eventually even started to like, she was sure that it would not be her calling. “I had learned a lot about farming, but the more I learned, the surer I was that I would never become a farmer. I couldn’t see myself becoming totally dependent upon the rain, sun, and earth like most farmers” (89). When there was nothing more to do on Raymond’s land, Moody worked “at two dollars a day for big-time farmers in the area”, who “were among the few Negroes who had worked over the years to build up successful farms” (89). The reader catches a glimpse of some black individuals who were the exception in farming. The majority was not able to overcome their persistent poverty in this sector.

Having been more and more involved in farming, Moody states that “Mama and Raymond had been hooked to the soil since they were children, and

I got the feeling, especially from Mama, that they were now trying to hook me” (89). She realized, however, that farming “was the hardest way [...] of making a living” (90).

So whenever Mama started one of her long lectures on the pleasures of farming, I would drown her out with my thoughts of Mrs. Claiborne and all the traveling she had done and the people she had met. Mrs. Claiborne had told me how smart I was and how much I could do if I just had a chance. I knew if I got involved in farming, I'd be just like Mama and the rest of them, and that I would never have that chance. (90)

When she finally saw that “[o]ut of all that work we had put into the cotton, we didn't even make enough money to buy school clothes” (90), she rejected the possibility to become a farmer for good. As A. Hudson comments, “Accepting such an intimate connection to the land registers in Anne's mind as acceptance of the socioeconomic position prescribed for her by her race, gender, class, and location” (286). Her aspirations were higher and she was willing to fight for them. Hence she wanted to take the little chance she had to break the confines set by her mother and stepfather and to ameliorate her status. “[T]he fear of becoming a stereotypically poor and pregnant rural black woman” (A. Hudson 284-285), which her mother had epitomized her entire life perfectly, was an ever present thought.

Moody spent her summers working in Louisiana (once in Baton Rouge, then in New Orleans routinely), earning money to buy new school clothes and saving up. One summer she ended up working at a chicken factory, a brutal job, which exacted utmost strength and physical endurance from her. Not knowing what was going on, she was not aware of the reasons for all the vacancies there. On her first day she found out that many black workers had quit their jobs and were on strike for more pay. They yelled at Moody and the others, “Scabs! Strikebreakers! Hicks! Country niggers! Go back to Mississippi!” and they had signs protesting against slave labor (178). Despite that, she worked there for a month. Kieran Taylor explains, “Scabbing – taking the jobs of striking workers – provided a rare opportunity for African Americans to break the color line in some southern industries” (311). This is interesting as in Moody's case it was the blacks who were on strike and whose jobs were taken on by even more desperate blacks. Moody, who belonged to the latter category, expressed this with the words, “You just didn't make \$9.60 anywhere” (180). This experience

left an indelible impression on her, “I couldn’t think of eating chicken for years after working in that factory and I still don’t eat boxed chicken today” (181).

Moody’s economic situation during college and the time she worked for the Movement was the same as ever. She remained poor. Scholarships and the meager financial support from her family were hardly enough to keep her going. She had to go hungry when she started a boycott at Natchez upon discovering a leakage in the kitchen’s pantry and maggots in the grits, sharing her remaining money with the other students to buy food for the first days of the boycott (253-257). Working for the Movement in Canton, she could not always afford to buy food either.

4.2.4. Racial Issues

Already as a young girl Moody found out about races, segregation, and white supremacy. Getting in touch with white people and living through quite a number of outstanding racially motivated events, she experienced conflicting emotions between silently enduring and speaking out loudly, which later on she could not repress anymore. It became more and more apparent that she was a budding activist.

The issue of race is mentioned a few times beforehand in the autobiography, but the first real batch of awareness shook Moody at the age of seven when she suddenly understood the reasons for why the children she had been playing with went to separate schools and why they sat downstairs in the movie theaters.

I had never really thought of them as white before. Now all of a sudden they were white, and their whiteness made them better than me. I now realized that not only were they better than me because they were white, but everything they owned and everything connected with them was better than what was available to me. (34)

At that moment Moody became aware of class differences in her community and their relations to poverty and wealth, at the same time being connected to the distinguishing characteristic of skin color, which meant a different life and disparate opportunities, or as Flanagan puts it, “this event signifies a fundamental change in her perception of her social identity” (29).

A topic that bothered Moody extensively in her early childhood was miscegenation within her extended family. She was excited to meet her aunt

and uncles one day. When she arrived at her grandmother's house, "two white boys about my size stood at her [aunt's] side. I looked around for Sam and Walter. But I didn't see them" (23). A few seconds later we read, "I stood dead in my tracks with my mouth wide open as the two white boys jumped when [her aunt] Alberta yelled Sam's and Walter's names" (23). She was apprehensive at first, but then she saw that they were treating her as an equal. She was still in shock, though, and pondered on their different skin color the whole day as well as on the fact that they could be her mother's considerably younger siblings. Moody asked Toosweet about it, who shouted at her at last, "'Cause us daddy ain't that color! Now you shut up! Why you gotta know so much all the time?" (26). So they were not actually white, but very light-skinned.

Moody had a similar experience during her last year at high school. When she got to know Emma, her daddy's girlfriend, who was light-skinned, too, she remarked, "she was the first high yellow Negro I had seen who didn't think or act like she was any better than darker Negroes" (214). When she was supposed to meet Emma's family, she was not eager to do so "because I thought they were all high yellow and would treat me like Miss Pearl them" (219). To her dismay she discovered that Emma's mother was even darker than Moody herself.

Because Emma looked like the product of a mixed marriage and her mother turned out to be so dark, I wondered about Poppa [i.e. her father]. I knew of cases in Centreville where white men lived openly in common-law marriage with Negro women. Even though they were not allowed to marry because of the state law against mixed marriages, the children bore the name of the father. (220)

When she saw Emma's father then, she was not startled by him being white. Because of her including experiences with interracial relationships and biracial children at various points in her narrative, Moody directs attention to these topics in her account.

As mentioned in 4.2.3.1., Moody's mother was always incensed when her daughter demanded answers to racial matters that bothered her. She was repeatedly reprimanded for asking about these issues and she was continually told to remain silent, an attitude White describes as silence as "a code of behavior" (53). By keeping herself and her family silent, Toosweet wanted to ensure their safety, since reticence was strongly connected to "a minimal

degree of safety”, maintaining one’s job, and staying alive (White 53).

The lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955 triggered a new phase in Moody’s racial awareness (127-130). “I enter[ed] high school [...] with a completely new insight into the life of Negroes in Mississippi. I was now working for one of the meanest white women in town, and a week before school started Emmett Till was killed.” The vicious woman she worked for was a Mrs. Burke, a racist. Moody found out about fourteen-year-old Chicago boy Emmett Till when she overheard some high school boys talking about him, saying that he had supposedly whistled at a white woman. Again, her mother got angry when she asked about him and told her that these boys “better watch how they go around here talking. These white folks git a hold of it they gonna be in trouble.” Before Moody went to work that evening, Toosweet told her, “And don’t you let on like you know nothing about that boy being killed before Miss Burke them [sic]. Just do your work like you don’t know nothing.” Still many questions revolved around in her head, as she was not quite understanding yet the methods and rules of the Jim Crow South.

At Mrs. Burke’s, though, she could not act as usual, she was very jumpy. Then, when she was eating, Mrs. Burke sat down with her and asked her if she had heard about Emmett Till, which she negated. She told Moody that “he got out of his place with a white woman” (132) and then asked her how old she was. Mrs. Burke told her, “‘See, that boy was just fourteen too. It’s a shame he had to die so soon.’ She was so red in the face, she looked as if she was on fire” (132). Mrs. Burke’s words had a tremendous impact on young Moody.

I went home shaking like a leaf on a tree. For the first time out of all her trying, Mrs. Burke had made me feel like rotten garbage. Many times she had tried to instill fear within me and subdue me and had given up. But when she talked about Emmett Till there was something in her voice that sent chills and fear all over me. Before Emmett Till’s murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears. (132)

It dawned on Moody what it entailed to be black in the segregated South. This was a drastic new insight for her.

Her follow-up reactions to this “awakening” at the age of fifteen were “anger and action” (A. Hudson 286). She hated all the white men who had killed blacks, but she also hated blacks, “I hated them for not standing up and doing

something about the murders. In fact, I think I had a stronger resentment toward Negroes for letting the whites kill them than toward the whites" (136). This statement shows Moody's discontent with her community's cowardice and passivity as well as her desire for a change – preparing her future activism.

After Emmett Till's murder, the number of Guild²¹ memberships was growing. The whole community in Centreville was then concerned with "maids raids", in which it was detected "what white man was screwing which Negro woman" (139). Then, however, "new gossip emerged—about what Negro man was screwing which white woman", which caused terrible fear among the black men (139). As Moody asserted that such a relationship "was almost impossible [...] to take place" and that she knew of no such case (139), Flanagan points out that Moody "brings attention to the fact that the [whites] are using this falsely constructed and distorted image of the black man as a scapegoat for what they are really concerned about, and that is blacks attaining civil rights" (63). A tense atmosphere reigned in Centreville until a black boy, Moody's classmate Jerry, was accused of having repeatedly called and threatened a white operator. Some white men almost beat the innocent boy to death – the act described strongly resembled the scene of a lynching (Flanagan 63-64).

Another incident that devastated her was the burning down of a black family's house, the Taplin's house, that was done by the whites (141-145). It happened shortly before the summer vacations and she describes it as "the most shocking and unjust crime of all." It happened in the middle of the night, when she was woken up by screams. Her mother also woke up, already suspecting that "[i]t must be a house on fire or somethin' 'cause of all the screamin'. Somebody must be hurt in it or somethin' too." Moody and her family drove up to the house, which was ablaze. A crowd had already gathered. They were told that the Taplin family of nine was inside the house, burning to death. Furthermore there was talk about the smell of gasoline and the strange way the house was burning down. The official explanation given was improbable and it then came to light that one of the neighbors of the Taplin family was "a high yellow mulatto man" who had been seeing a white woman. This relationship

²¹ Moody mentions the Guild several times in connection with Mrs. Burke, who held guild meetings on a regular basis, in which they supposedly discussed how to keep the black community oppressed and unorganized.

was discovered, and the neighbor “escaped his punishment” as the fire had been intended for his house. “Significantly, Moody writes that the punishment for a black man having a consensual relationship with a white woman is death” (Flanagan 66). By this incident “Moody’s sense of the oppressive environment in which she lives is compounded” (A. Hudson 386).

These events were hard to digest for Moody. She had many headaches after the Taplin burning and she could no longer abide in Centreville. She arranged to stay with her uncle in Baton Rouge for the summer. “I had to go [...], if only to breathe a slightly different atmosphere. I was choking to death in Centreville. I couldn’t go on working for Mrs. Burke pretending I was dumb and innocent, pretending I didn’t know what was going on in all her guild meetings [...], or about the Taplin burning” (147). She found it harder and harder to remain reticent while these experiences affected her deeply – to the extent that her body reacted to them as well.

Upon her arrival back in town she heard that a black boy and his mother had been chased out of town because the boy allegedly “was screwing [a] little poor white girl” (153). She immediately “felt as bad as if [she] had never gone to Baton Rouge for the summer” (153). Her condition of feeling frightened had come back. She made herself busy again with piano lessons and basketball in order not to have much time to think about the tensions between blacks and whites around her, since she stated, “I had to keep a lot of things in the back of my mind until I finished high school” (158). She resumed work at Mrs. Burke’s house, who asked her to additionally tutor her son Wayne (and his white classmates) in math due to their having searched for an instructor to no avail, and she accepted. That Moody, a black girl, was tutoring a racist white woman’s son is remarkable, as with this task Moody surely held a power position to a certain degree. Mrs. Burke “especially didn’t like that Wayne was looking up to me now as his ‘teacher.’ However, she accepted it for a while” (160). She always kept an eye on Moody and watched the math sessions conspicuously, never fully trusting her.

The experience of tutoring white teenagers engendered confidence in her (Flanagan 28). This was decisive as it would be leading towards a turning point. She had always found it difficult to obey the code of silence (White 53) imposed

on her by her mother – “People got a right to talk, ain’t they?” (130), “What’s wrong with people talking?” (154). Through tutoring, “courage was growing in me too. Little by little it was getting harder and harder for me not to speak out” (163). When one evening she was asked by Mrs. Burke about her opinion on integrating the schools, she then suggested indirectly that she was in favor of it. Mrs. Burke was furious, but did not fire her contrary to her expectations. Moody was very frightened and expected any cruel deeds ordered by Mrs. Burke in the following days, “I just knew that out of any car five or six men could jump and grab me” (165). As Flanagan points out, Moody was “a developing political persona who [was] in the process of realizing that political transformation can begin only when someone breaks silence” (28). After a few days, though, Mrs. Burke tried to lay the blame of the disappearance of her wallet on Moody, who realized her ulterior motive, “So, that’s how she’s trying to hurt me” (167). She decided to quit the same day after Mrs. Burke had found her wallet. Her plans for the summer were to leave Centreville again, but this time “I was not up tight with anxiety the way I had been the year before” (172). She had gained more confidence in her association with whites, although she still became very scared in delicate situations.

Shortly before her breaking-off with her stepfather Raymond, Samuel O’Quinn was killed, which made her think of all the previous murders and crimes. “I hated myself and every Negro in Centreville for not putting a stop to the killings or at least putting up a fight in an attempt to stop them. I thought of waging a war in protest against the killings all by myself, if no one else would help” (202-203). She was in a fury and her words made it clear that she would soon become active in the struggle for justice, i.e. joining the Movement. Sometime after his death, it became known that Samuel O’Quinn had been an NAACP member and had tried to organize the blacks in Centreville, which was not tolerated by the white supremacists.

When Moody got involved in the Movement, she met a number of white people who were active in the cause. One person, who needs to be pointed out, was Reverend King, a white civil rights worker and friend of hers, of whom she stated at the end,

I looked at Reverend King. And silently, I asked him to forgive—forgive me for doubting him when he first came to Tougaloo. I think because he

was a white native Mississippian almost every student at Tougaloo doubted him at that time. We had never before had a white Southerner on the faculty. His wife, Jeanette, was from Jackson. I remember, I used to look at her going in and out of the chapel after visiting Reverend King there and just hate the thought of a white Southern minister and his wife taking over the most beautiful and cherished building on campus. Now sitting across the table from them I realized I had more respect for them than any of the white Northern teachers on campus. And for that matter, any white persons I had ever known. (417-418)

Moody had learned in her teenage years that not every white person was a racist. It appears, though, that she was still cautious of every white person she met until each one of them gained her trust, just as it happened in Reverend King's case. As the quote indeed shows, she came to highly respect him and his wife the way she could not do with any other white person.

4.2.5. Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

As touched upon in the previous chapter, Moody came to join the Movement. Although she reported everything she experienced in great detail, this chapter deals with selected aspects and events of this turbulent time.

Through her roommate Trotter, Moody became involved with the Tougaloo chapter of the NAACP. Even before joining, she expressed misgivings about it, wondering what it would mean for her and her family, recollecting the attacks and crimes of the past that had made a lasting impression on her. "But I knew I was going to join, anyway. I had wanted to for a long time" (269). She then got to know Joan Trumpauer, a white student, who worked for SNCC. Moody started to canvass for it in the Delta, i.e. in Greenwood and Greenville, Mississippi, as part of a voter registration drive (273). Already at this early stage of her activism she had high hopes and committed herself entirely as we read, "I could feel myself beginning to change. For the first time I began to think something would be done about whites killing, beating, and misusing Negroes. I knew I was going to be a part of whatever happened" (276).

One of her most courageous acts was her spontaneous sit-in at a bus station. Together with another student, they both bought the tickets and waited for the bus in the area designated for the whites. Soon there was a crowd around them that turned into a mob, causing them to miss two buses. Just before it got violent, they ran away and were rescued by a black minister in a

car who “worked at the bus station part-time. He asked us not to ever try and sit-in again without first planning it with an organization” (280). This is described in the last scene of the penultimate part in the memoir.

The last part entitled “The Movement” starts with the NAACP’s annual convention in Jackson. Toosweet forbade her daughter to attend it, burnt the leaflet her daughter had sent her, and told her to never again send anything related to this kind of activism. She was scared that something might happen to her family in Centreville – even the sheriff knew of her “messing around with that NAACP’s group” who had previously said that she could not return home if she continued this work (283). Of course “I didn’t want Mama or anyone at home to get hurt because of me” (284), but she desperately wanted to attend. “Then it occurred to me—how did the sheriff [...] know I was working with the NAACP chapter on campus? [...] Now I knew I could never go to Centreville safely again. I kept telling myself that I didn’t really care too much about going home, that it was more important to me to go to the convention” (284-285). The memory of her second visit at home during college time struck her now (284). In retrospect she understood why her mother had seen to it that she had stayed in the house. Toosweet had been afraid of something happening to her.

Moody greatly enjoyed the convention and pursued her activism since she “had a good excuse to stay on campus for the summer and work with the Movement” due to some open credits from Natchez restricting her to graduate from Tougaloo in 1963 (285). “[A]nd this was what I really wanted to do. I couldn’t go home again anyway, and I couldn’t go to New Orleans—I didn’t have money enough for bus fare” (285). Because her family had not supported her financially during her last year, she was poor. Nevertheless, “I had to prove that I could finish school, even if I had to go hungry every day. I knew Raymond and Miss Pearl were just waiting to see me drop out” (286). Her thoughts gave us an insight into her change of perspective, “But something happened to me as I got more and more involved in the Movement. It no longer seemed important to prove anything. I had found something outside myself that gave meaning to my life” (286). With this statement the personal significance of her work became obvious.

When a series of “sit-in demonstrations were about to start in Jackson”,

she was chosen to be the spokesperson for a group at such an event (286). This has become known as the famous Woolworth lunch counter sit-in of May 28, 1963, in which Moody and the other demonstrators sat down “at the previously segregated Woolworth’s lunch counter” (287). They were denied service and soon a crowd gathered that turned into a mob, when “all hell broke loose” (288). They were thrown from their seats, Moody was slapped in the face and thrown “against an adjoining counter”, dragged by her hair, another one was kicked against his head (288-289). Other people joined them at the counter, one of them was white Joan Trumpauer. “The mob started smearing us with ketchup, mustard, sugar, pies, and everything on the counter” (289); the whole sit-in lasting for three hours until the store was finally closed. The then president of Tougaloo College, Dr. Beittel, was the one who led the demonstrators out.

Moody realized that she had escaped death, “After the sit-in, all I could think of was how sick Mississippi whites were. They believed so much in the segregated Southern way of life, they would kill to preserve it” (290). Her mother had begged her not to participate in the sit-in, but Moody’s view was, “I had to live my life as I saw fit. I had made that decision when I left home. But it hurt to have my family prove to me how scared they were. It hurt me more than anything else—I knew the whites had already started the threats and intimidations” (291-292). As A. Hudson explains, “She expresses extreme guilt for the actual and potential reprisal her family suffers in Centreville and agonizes over decisions fraught with consequential connections to her home community” (290). Moody was aware of what could happen to her, thinking of the other individuals who had tried to bring about change in her hometown. On that topic we read, “I waited to hear in the news that someone in Centreville had been murdered. If so, I knew it would be a member of my family” (292).

When Moody spontaneously took part in a pray-in, she and others got arrested contrary to their expectations (294-296). They “would have been torn to bits by the mob” as the whites “had murder in their eyes.” The majority of the ministers was “scared stiff” because they had never been in jail. Moody, delighting in their misery, commented, “I just got my kicks out of sitting there looking at the ministers. Some of them looked so pitiful, I thought they would cry

any minute, and here they were, supposed to be our leaders.” This was a first criticism voiced by Moody and directed at the personalities of the leadership of the Movement.

While she was in jail the riots went on, in which four hundred high school students were arrested, who were “taken to the fairgrounds and placed in a large open compound without beds or anything. It was said that they were getting sick like flies” (297). She observed, “From the way everyone was describing the scene it sounded like Nazi Germany instead of Jackson, USA” (298). After having been in jail a second time, a letter from her mother reached her. She reported to her another visit from the sheriff and that he had told her Moody “must never come back there. If so he would not be responsible for what happened to” her (299). These words were the final and ultimate warning. After breaking off with Raymond, through which she had lost her home, with the sheriff’s second visit at her mother’s house, she was now losing her hometown. In the same letter her mother “told [her] not to write her again until she sent [her] word that it was O.K.” and that she would write her through Adline, her sister, just as she had done with this letter (299). Adline had also written a letter to her, informing her about the events which her mother had decided not to tell her. Her brother Junior had almost been lynched, one of her older uncles had been beaten up, and “they couldn’t sleep, for fear of night riders” (299).

After a few days “Jackson became the hotbed of racial demonstrations in the South” (299). Soon afterwards Medgar Evers, the Jackson integration leader, was killed, of whom Moody said that he had been about “to become for Mississippi what Martin Luther King had been in Alabama” (300). She was speechless and in bewilderment when she tried to recruit students from the nearby college for a march to protest against his death, but they were totally impassive. She thought it a shame, getting angry, “This morning Medgar Evers was murdered and here you sit in a damn classroom with books in front of your faces, pretending you don’t even know he’s been killed. Every Negro in Jackson should be in the streets raising hell and protesting his death” (301). Being outraged and feeling sick, she asked herself, “How could Negroes be so pitiful? How could they just sit by and take all this shit without any emotions at all?” (301). She felt let down and totally misunderstood.

When Moody was then arrested again, she was not taken to the city jail as usual, but to the fairgrounds in a paddy wagon. Moody and the others “were sitting and lying all over each other inside the wagon” (303) because the police had packed in too many. Sudden stops while driving were made on purpose as well as leaving them in the wagon for over two hours with the heater turned on although it was a hot day. They all realized that “they had planned to do this to our group” as she and some others “were known to the cops” (304). When they were finally let out, she commented, “The fairgrounds were everything I had heard they were” (305). The openings of the large buildings “had been closed up with wire”, which “reminded [her] of a concentration camp” (305). The policemen, who functioned as guards, were armed. “As I looked through the wire at them, I imagined myself in Nazi Germany, the policemen Nazi soldiers. They couldn’t have been any rougher than these cops. Yet this was America, ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’” (305). What had sounded to her like Nazi Germany, she now saw with her own eyes. The comparison seemed apt and the scene in the wagon was an act of mere, deliberately executed cruelty. The conditions were horrible there; she did not eat, therefore lost weight until she was let out in time to attend Medgar Evers’ funeral. When thousands of blacks came, she thought, “Maybe Medgar’s death had really brought them to the Movement” and that he had died for a reason (306).

Whereas the organizations seemed to fall apart in Jackson, with a new CORE office in Canton, Madison County, Mississippi, she went to work there despite the warnings about the prevailing delicate situation there. She had the urge to go there, feeling tough as she had been raised in Wilkinson County (311). Moody and the other workers had a rough time with the brainwashed and indifferent blacks there – they could motivate only few to join them, mostly teenagers. “I think they knew as well as I that it was for themselves and themselves alone that they were working—because within a few years they would be the ones who would have to deal with the whites” (320). The very few they persuaded to register to vote lost their jobs, which disheartened others.

At one point her mother wrote to her with news from the whites in Centreville, who knew where she was and who had plans to kill her. Toosweet was not able to relate to her daughter’s activism, even discouraged her by

repeatedly telling her “that after [she] was dead things would still be the same as they were now” (321). These were not the only threats, “Almost every night someone came running by to tell us the whites planned to bump us off” (323). Because Moody and her co-workers did not produce registered voters, they did not receive much money. Hunger and weight loss were the consequence and she soon “realized [she] was cracking up” (324).

When Moody attended “the August 28 March on Washington” (333), she criticized the leaders of the Movement again. When “it was announced that the march to the Lincoln Memorial was about to start”, “[t]housands of people just took off, leaving most of their leaders on the podium. It was kind of funny to watch the leaders run to overtake the march. The way some of them had been leading the people in the past, perhaps the people were better off leading themselves, I thought” (334). Furthermore she “listened to the speakers, to discover we had ‘dreamers’ instead of leaders leading us. Just about every one of them stood up there dreaming. Martin Luther King went on and on talking about his dream. I sat there thinking that in Canton we never had time to sleep, much less dream” (335). Later she would completely reject Luther’s non-violent approach after the bombing of a church in Birmingham, as she states, “If Martin Luther King thinks nonviolence is really going to work for the South as it did for India, then he is out of his mind” (348). “Her growing disillusionment with the progress of the Civil Rights Movement” and “the descent into doubt and uncertainty about the realization of the goals for which she has sacrificed everything” will not leave the reader completely surprised at the tone in which the memoir ends (A. Hudson 292).

As was already hinted at, the civil activists were kept awake in Canton due to nightly threats. We read, “I had really forgotten what it was like to be out of an atmosphere of fear and threats” (335) when she was away for the march. The threats became worse, especially when word had got out that only girls were residing at the Freedom House.

Just about every night cops were flashing lights on the house. If they weren’t flashing lights, they were out there talking loud and laughing, trying to keep us awake. One night a man came by with a truck-load of big bloodhounds and K-9 police-type dogs. He let them out in front of the Freedom House and they ran all around scenting everything. He left them there a while and then drove back and whistled for them to jump up

in the truck. This frightened the hell out of us. Night after night, the dogs were brought to the house [...]. I knew that this was the Klan's doing. I figured they were probably planning to burn down the house one night and run us out to be devoured by the dogs. (359)

Physical problems caused by emotional stress followed soon, such as losing weight and hair, besides her nerves were “torn to shreds” (359) and the agony she experienced, because she could not return home, increased (342). The other girls and she became downright scared and panicky. She commented, “I took three sleeping pills and still was unable to sleep” (367). The choking feeling came back, but her frightened state culminated when discovering her own face on a Klan blacklist (371). Her physical problems increased, and she decided to take a break from the Movement as she was “on the verge of a breakdown” (375).

After President Kennedy's death, which came as a shock to her as he “had made ‘Real Freedom’ a hope” (389), she started to work for CORE in New Orleans again, then returning to Mississippi, “[w]here they knew, as I knew, the price you pay daily for being black. Where I felt I belonged” (397). A year had passed since the Woolworth sit-in, which, if she had not been told, she would have believed to have happened years before (401). She was very enthusiastic about a Mississippi Summer Project sponsored by COFO,²² feeling that “something was actually going to be accomplished” (403). She returned to Canton and it seemed an entirely different city to her because many blacks had become active (406). She was overcome with positive feelings, “[s]tanding there looking at [the teenagers], all of my hopes in the future came to life again. I could see them as men and women living a normal life as a real part of this world, as a group of people that belonged—belonged because they had fought the battle and won” (408).

Nevertheless, the situation grew increasingly tense in Canton, and Moody became depressed again, feeling “like the walls of Mississippi were closing in on [her]” (422). She needed to “let the world know what was happening to us” (422), spontaneously boarding a bus that was going to

²² This “was a statewide program designed primarily to encourage qualified Negroes to register and vote. However, in addition [...] Freedom Schools and community centers were to be set up to teach courses in remedial reading, government, humanities, and other scholastic and vocational subjects” (402).

Washington, where they would testify “what Mississippi is all *about*” (423). The excited crowd on the bus sang the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome”, whereas Moody just listened, feeling very old (423). Recollecting the incidents during her teenage years and her time with the Movement, she wondered with tears in her eyes whether they “*shall overcome some day*”, as the lyrics suggested (424). Moody’s last two sentences in the autobiography were, “I WONDER. I really WONDER” (424). This demonstrates that she rightly harbored severe doubts about the aftermath and the outcome of the Civil Rights Movement.

Moving away from her contribution to the struggle for equality, a glimpse into Moody’s life after her memoir deserves our attention at the end of her analysis. Fairly little is known about it, but A. Hudson (293-295) presents some details. It is interesting to know that “[s]he did not return to Mississippi for over ten years.” In 1974 she visited C.O. Chinn, a colleague, who was also mentioned in her narrative. The second time she came to Mississippi was in 1976 in order “to visit her dying mother.” It was at this time that she commenced the project of a sequel to her autobiography, entitled *Farewell to Too Sweet*, which unequivocally alludes to her mother and this second visit. Moody gave further information on this second volume in an interview, “The book began with her in the hospital room; it ends with her death. And in between I’m sitting there, and I’m reviewing my life, the part of my life that I’ve lived since COMING OF AGE with her” (Spencer 52).

Apart from that, Moody stated in a lecture at Millsaps College, Jackson, that this volume also deals with “the essence of what living in Mississippi for twenty three years has done to my psyche” (Moody quoted in A. Hudson). Moody also mentioned a third installment “that chronicles her life from 1974-1984” (A. Hudson 294), of which she said,

In the sequel, FAREWELL TO TOO SWEET, my marriage is introduced, but I found that it was so much; it was a whole life in itself, and it deserved special treatment. A third volume has arrived and I just called it tentatively COMING OF AGE IN NEW YORK, and that discusses my marriage, ten year marriage, to Sasha’s [her son’s] father. (Spencer 59-60)

We also know about Moody’s post-autobiographical life that she needed time to recover from her experiences, she married, had a son, and lived in Germany for

some time (A. Hudson 294-295). She also wrote various other books (Spencer 60, 65-67), and gave some talks at colleges, because she thought it necessary for the younger generations to know about the horrific time she had to live through (Spencer 19-22). All in all, however, she mainly led a secluded life. She had the desire to publish all her books (Spencer 70), but so far her manuscripts have remained unpublished to this day.

5. Conclusion

Maya Angelou and Anne Moody, two southern women who led turbulent lives, reproduced and documented their experiences in their autobiographies. Since their lives shared a substantial degree of similarity, this thesis discussed certain selected topics within their narratives. The analysis will now be brought together by way of comparing their autobiographies.²³

With regard to writing style, it can be said that they had completely different approaches to writing their life story. Angelou's goal and personal challenge was to compose her autobiography as a piece of literature. Evidence proves she achieves precisely that through her linguistic abilities, including her deliberate style as well as her abundant use of literary devices. In contrast, Moody's purpose was to focus mainly on the events of her life, while language was of secondary importance only. The language and the structure of her narrative are clear, simple, and straightforward, emphasizing the incidents she experienced. Despite these differences, both definitely succeeded in conveying powerful emotions and vivid images. By publishing their memoirs, they gave a voice to the poor black women who grew up in an oppressed and antagonistic environment that constituted the Jim Crow South.

Sharing some similarities, Angelou's and Moody's families undeniably played a fundamental role in their childhood. One point of connection was the absence of their fathers, who filled very marginal roles in their lives, and who both called strangers at one point. Another was that they both experienced

²³ The reader must be reminded at this point that Moody's autobiography spans her life only until the age of 24. Therefore the conclusions drawn refer only to these years told in her narrative unlike Angelou who documented almost her entire life in her serial autobiography.

frequent displacement as they never had a stable home. Angelou had a special bond with her brother, because suffering from loneliness and from the abandonment by their parents while they lived with their grandmother, they formed their own little family. She adored her brother, whom she thought of as a hero. Moody, however, never developed such a special bond to one of her siblings. Nevertheless, she made it obvious that she cared for her sister Adline, who was her mother's second child, when she thought about leaving the house and taking her with her. Angelou's surrogate mother figure, her grandmother, with whom she lived for ten years, and with whom she had a good relationship, was another important person in her childhood. After her difficult start with her own mother, who she adored more and more, she later enjoyed a supportive, love-filled, and life-long relationship with her. Moody had quite an ambivalent relationship with her mother, which even included a deliberate communication stop on the side of her mother once. Her mother failed to understand Moody's aspirations, e.g. education-wise, which were alien to Toosweet's horizon. Their relationship did not have a turning point to the better. Generally speaking, it might be concluded that Angelou's familial ties were more profound and more stable than Moody's, leaving Angelou with a better support system.

For the black girl growing up in the racially segregated South, education, especially attending high school and college, was not a matter of course. While Angelou only finished high school, Moody graduated from college. It is interesting that both Angelou and Moody can be said to be self-taught, though on different terms. Angelou was a superior student, devoured books in her childhood, and later did extensive research on her own in order to perform her jobs professionally. It was argued in Moody's case that although her education compared to the whites was unequal and inferior, she was nevertheless a brilliant student, which is why she can be called self-taught, too (Flanagan 27). Both received extracurricular support as well. For example, Mrs. Flowers encouraged Angelou to read more books and poems, while Mrs. Crosby told Moody to study hard. In conclusion, they both excelled and therefore had the chance for a sophisticated and a better future.

Both grew up in a society in which religion played an essential role. Angelou's early childhood at her grandmother's home revolved centrally around church activities since her grandmother was an extremely devout woman. Her

relationship with God was abiding throughout her entire life. Moody was born into a religious family, too, although her later motivation to be involved in church may have been for non-religious reasons. A calamitous event caused her to seriously question God's existence, leaving her in state of doubt about it. Both women brought up the subject of the blacks' entrenched belief in a better life awaiting them in heaven, as well as shared some personal anecdotes with the reader concerning religion. Having been brought up in religious surroundings was definitely a decisive factor for their self-determined faith later on in life.

Glimpses of the economic situation of the time as well as their personal economic situation were presented in their autobiographies. Growing up in the rural South, the difficult agricultural sector was pointed out by both, giving insights into the hard work of the weary laborers and farmers. While both women came from a poor background, we can find a clear distinction between the two. Angelou's grandmother was not a poor woman, but she deliberately led the life of one and imposed this lifestyle upon Angelou. Growing up in really destitute circumstances, Moody was often famished, and had to work in domestic service as a young girl to help her family make ends meet. As young adults, they both struggled to manage on little money earned by themselves – Angelou because she was too proud to ask for support, having inherited the Baxter philosophy, while Moody's family had no means to support her. Economically speaking, times were rough in the segregated South. The whites often exploited the blacks and oftentimes did not treat them well as is apparent in both memoirs.

This leads us to a huge topic in both women's lives, namely race and all the issues connected to it, which they perceived differently at different points of time in their lives. Since racial segregation was so complete and domineering in Stamps, Angelou did not believe in the authenticity of the whites as a young girl, living in a black bubble one might say. Moody, however, understood early that skin color was an all-decisive factor in one's life, and that being black meant inequality, inferiority, and oppression. Apart from some shaping experiences for Angelou, like her grandmother's silent endurance of humiliation, her later racial experiences took place in California, which constitutes a drastic difference to Moody. For Moody, who grew up only in the South, miscegenation was a topic that preoccupied her as a young girl, but it was at the age of fifteen, when a new

phase started in her racial awareness. She was scared of getting killed just because of her skin color for the first time. Since Moody was taught by her mother to be silent, pretending to not know anything about the racially motivated crimes of the time, she kept herself busy to repress her desire to speak out. It crystallized in her teenage years that she would become active in the struggle for equality because of her strong feelings to protest against white supremacy.

Moody's teenage years were unquestionably more infused with fear than Angelou's, which can be attributed to their residing in different parts of the country. However, when the 31-year-old Angelou once in California also came into a situation with whites in which she feared for her life, her mother, who had been supportive of her in all her efforts of challenging the prevailing system, had control of the situation because of her fearless behavior, teaching Angelou how to be a brave black woman. One needs to take into account the different settings by acknowledging that Moody's mother feared for her life and that of her family's, when Moody had stopped to be passive about the racial environment, which is why she wished nothing more than her daughter's reticence, i.e. her acceptance of the system. On the other hand, residing in 'safe' California, Angelou's mother was a bold woman who supported her daughter's behavior and dissenting voice by being a leading example herself. Although their mothers maintained disparate stances, which clearly exerted an influence on them, both autobiographers championed the cause.

The two autobiographers did so by becoming involved in the Movement. The most striking difference in that is that Angelou worked in the North in relative safety, whereas Moody worked in the South in the midst of the events. Since hostility and threats to Moody's life were on her daily agenda, she was in a state of fear most of the time. On the other hand, Angelou did not have to cope with fear in New York City. What goes hand in hand with this is the fact that "Angelou's civil-rights story [...] lacks the immediacy found in Moody's autobiography", as "Moody was far closer to the grass roots movement" (Lupton 37). Consequently not only the authors experienced this time differently, however, the reader's intake of and his reaction to their experiences also differ considerably. Yet, there are two apparent similarities. First, it is interesting that both were dissatisfied with their leaders at one point, agreeing on the rejection of Martin Luther King's non-violent approach. Second, they were both grief-

stricken and watched in shocked amazement the impassivity of the other blacks when one of their important leaders had died – Malcolm X in Angelou’s case, Medgar Evers in Moody’s. Despite these minimal parallels, their distinct settings proved decisive for their very different experience.

Angelou’s time in Africa gave the reader intriguing insights into an African American woman’s reflections on home and origin, and on her “growing confrontation with her double-consciousness: her American and African selves” (McPherson 113). While she struggled with issues like being accepted by the Africans and the growing doubt about the possibility of coming home, her experiences with potential ancestors enabled her to discover a more profound sense of her identity, an important step in the growth of an African American woman.

Exploring Angelou’s and Moody’s autobiographies, I was often overcome with awe for their resoluteness, their strength, their boldness, and their intrepidity, all of which bear witness to the personal growth they underwent. Coming full circle to the title of this thesis, growing up as a southern black woman during this historic time equaled bearing many hardships. However, by overcoming these and by showing commitment in fighting for their firm beliefs, they grew into two remarkable, independent, and strong women. They let the world know about their unique experiences in their narratives by speaking also as representatives of the collective experience of all the black women at that time.

Comparing Angelou’s and Moody’s autobiographies is clearly of scholarly value since it is known that Moody wrote further installments to her autobiography (cf. A. Hudson 293-295). If this material will get posthumously published, the field of southern autobiographical studies would be enriched by an analysis of Moody’s manuscripts in comparison to Angelou’s serial autobiography. Especially so, since it was seen at the end of 4.2.5. that issues like her relationship with her mother and her marriage come up in her sequels, which Angelou also extensively dealt with in hers. The analysis of both their multivolume autobiographies would doubtlessly be an intriguing matter. This would also have been of interest to me but definitely goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

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8. Appendix

The appendix contains the thesis' abstract in English followed by its German version.

8.1. English Abstract

Maya Angelou's multiple autobiographical narratives and Anne Moody's autobiography trace important chapters in the lives of two Southern women who show many parallels as well as differences. After establishing a literary and cultural-historical background, an overview of each of Angelou's installments of her life story serves as a guide to the reader.

The two autobiographers have very different writing styles – Angelou's is literary, while Moody's is factual. Their troubled family ties feature similarities as well as differences. Their personal circumstances at this historic time are analyzed: Both were excellent students and self-taught. They were very religious, although Moody experienced a severe crisis of faith. Their economic situation differed – Angelou's poverty was a lifestyle imposed on her by her grandmother, whereas Moody lived in conditions of abject poverty.

Another big topic in their life stories are racial experiences mainly in the Jim Crow South. These events and occurrences described comprise their childhood as well as their adulthood. Both the authors' contribution to the Civil Rights Movement is also discussed, the most striking difference between them being the setting and its consequences. Finally, Angelou's time in Africa is dealt with from various angles. Through the discussion of all these topics their growth into becoming outstanding and impressive black women is traced in this thesis.

8.2. German Abstract

In dieser Arbeit werden Maya Angelous mehrbändige und Anne Moodys einbändige Autobiografie behandelt, die wichtige Lebensabschnitte einer Südstaatenfrau beschreiben und deren Leben viele Parallelen sowie auch Unterschiede aufweisen. Nachdem ein literarischer sowie kulturell-historischer Hintergrund geschaffen wird, dient ein Überblick über Angelous einzelne Bände als Orientierungshilfe für den/die Leser/in.

Die zwei Autobiografinnen haben einen sehr unterschiedlichen Schreibstil – Angelous ist literarisch, Moodys ist sachlich. Die schwierigen Familienbeziehungen der beiden weisen Gemeinsamkeiten sowie auch Unterschiede auf. Ihre persönlichen Umstände in dieser historischen Zeit werden analysiert: Sie waren ausgezeichnete Schülerinnen und Autodidaktinnen. Obwohl Moody eine Glaubenskrise erlebte, waren beide sehr religiös. Beide haben ihre Wirtschaftsverhältnisse besprochen – Angelous Armut wurde von ihrer Großmutter auferlegt, während Moody in Verhältnissen bitterer Armut lebte.

Ein weiteres großes Thema in ihren Memoiren sind die Erfahrungen mit Rassenproblemen im rassengetrennten Süden von frühester Kindheit an, die sichtlich ihre Spuren bei ihnen hinterließen. Ihr Beitrag zur Bürgerrechtsbewegung wird auch behandelt, wobei der am meisten auffallende Unterschied zwischen ihren Erlebnissen der Ortsunterschied und dessen Folgen sind. Darüber hinaus wird Angelous Zeit in Afrika aus verschiedenen Perspektiven beleuchtet. Aufgrund der Abhandlung all dieser Themen wird ihre Entwicklung zu beeindruckenden und bemerkenswerten schwarzen Frauen verfolgt.