



The Role of Mothers and Fathers

The role of mothers and fathers is nebulous due to the impact of apartheid on the family structure. Apartheid emasculated black men and established white domination over the black society. The black man's lack of power is shown through Isaiah. His subordination to Miss Marriot is symbolic of white domination. She refers to him as 'boy' and is condescending in her tone to him. Apartheid robbed men of their manhood as is evident in Morris who through the exploitation and dehumanising of mine workers, is physically half a man.

Fathers, as victims of the apartheid system, are constantly leaving their families to find work, and rarely returning. This forces mothers to adopt dual roles of taking care of the family and working to provide for their families. Tsotsi's father left; Miriam's husband left; Gumboot Dhlamini will not return. The impact of absent father's is evident in Tondi's discussion of David's father with her mother. David's grandmother's comments suggest her dislike of his father as she does not consider him worthy as a man. The grandmother questions David's manhood at ten, and expresses her concern that he may grow up to be like his father. She expects David to behave like a man when his mother is arrested for not having her pass.

The absence of David's mother at a critical time of his development, robs him of his initiation into manhood and leaves him without an identity and a sense of belonging. David's need to sever all connection with the brutality of his father, forces him to disclaim his identity. Tsotsi is then initiated into manhood by a child, Petah, who provides Tsotsi with food and shelter and exposes him to a life of crime for survival. It is Petah who encourages him to create a new identity, like a mother will name her child.

Tsotsi in accepting responsibility for the baby takes on the role of mother and father. He cares for the baby and attempts to provide the baby with its basic necessities. Even when Miriam offers to take the baby from him, he objects because the baby belongs to him. Miriam understands the need for a mother in the life of a child, and though she barely has enough for her child, she is prepared to take on the child. Miriam, like Soekie and Rosie, gives insight into the desperate situations of women trying to survive against all odds. She performs the role of mother and father in caring for her child: she performs her domestic duties, queues for water and takes on jobs to earn some money. Tsotsi's attachment to the baby gives focus to the dilemma of the baby's mother when abandoning her child. It is the love that Tsotsi has for the baby that results in him sacrificing himself in the hope of saving the baby.