

“Speaking as One African to Another”: Friendship as Politics in the Letters of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund, 1960-1969

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For my parents: Ingrid and David

And to the memory of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe: May it be for a blessing

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Friendship and Politics

Chapter 2 – Friendship and Sociability Under Colonialism and Apartheid

Chapter 3 – The Politics of a Friendship: Possibilities, Contradictions, and Limitations

Chapter 4 – Friendship and the Making of Non-Racial Africanity

Chapter 5 – Friendship as Politics

Chapter 6 – Friendship Between Men: Masculinity, Race, and the Letters of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Friendship and Politics

On 9 March in 2015 Chumani Maxwele, a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT), threw human faeces at the statue memorialising Cecil John Rhodes on UCT's upper campus in a protest action alongside other black students.^{1,2} Rhodes was a nineteenth-century mining magnate and a scion of Empire, implicated in brutal forms of colonial rule and dispossession.³ Thus, his memorialisation (and implicit celebration) at the centre of the university's main campus was particularly questionable. The protest was followed by several years of collective, organised activity, which came to be known as Rhodes Must Fall (RMF). This activity protested the ways in which UCT memorialised and reproduced the colonial and apartheid past through its naming practices, statues, memorials, art collections, pedagogy, curricula,^{4,5} and the composition of its still largely white professoriate some twenty years after the advent of liberal democracy.⁶ It also drew attention to how colonialism and apartheid had alienated indigenous people by pointing out that the land on which the University was built, and the labour to build it, was extracted from them through the exercise of colonial and apartheid dispossession and that it is still largely inaccessible to them (outside of the middle class) even up to the present day.⁷

The protests at UCT, which spread to other South African universities and expanded to include the issue of raced economic inequality and exclusion, under the banner of Fees Must Fall (FMMF), also challenged those tenets of South African social cohesion established in the early 1990s

¹ Racial categories are notoriously vexed because they refer to changing historical and social conventions rather than objective reality. In South Africa, for instance, black is often used to name only those who were also ethnicised through the colonial and apartheid state's assignation of tribal identities. Thus, the terms black and African are often understood to be coterminous. Unless otherwise specified, when I use the term black in this dissertation, I am referring to all victims of the racist orders of colonialism and apartheid. There are points in the thesis, however, when it becomes necessary to disaggregate this term to acknowledge the different positioning (and thus life chances) of people who would otherwise fall under the ambit of the term black. So, for instance, there are points in the thesis when it is necessary to talk about so-called coloureds and Indians.

² "Chumani Maxwele ignites the #RhodesMustFall Movement at UCT," South African History Online, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/chumani-maxwele-ignites-rhodesmustfall-movement-uct#:~:text=Dressed%20in%20running%20shoes%20and,lack%20of%20transformation%20on%20campus>.

³ See Paul Maylam, *The Cult of Rhodes: Remembering an Imperialist in Africa* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2005).

⁴ See Nomusa Makhubu, "On Apartheid Ruins: Art, Protest and the South African Social Landscape," *Third Text* 34, no. 4-5 (2020): 569–590, DOI: 10.1080/09528822.2020.1835331.

⁵ See Amrita Pande, Ruchi Chaturvedi, and Shari Daya, eds., *Epistemic Justice and the Postcolonial University* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2023).

⁶ RMF, "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," *Johannesburg Salon: Special Edition* 9 (2015): 8, https://studentsnotcustomers.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/vfinal_vol9_book.pdf. In 2012, the *Mail&Gaurdian* reported that over half of UCT's 934 string contingent of academic staff were white, with only one in five qualifying as black. See, Staff Reporter, "The Academic Staff," *Mail&Gaurdian*, May 14, 2015, <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-14-uct-and-transformation-the-academic-staff>.

⁷ The University's self-history tacitly, but inadequately, alludes to this dispossession by acknowledging that early funding for the South African College (a high school for boys that would go on to become UCT) was provided by the mining industry and that in 1928 land for the University was bequeathed by Cecil John Rhodes. It says nothing about how this land was secured or about the implication of the mining industry and Rhodes in colonial era dispossession. See "The Birth of an Institution," University of Cape Town, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://uct.ac.za/history-introduction#:~:text=UCT%20was%20founded%20in%201829,boost%20it%20needed%20to%20grow>. For a more critical account of the politics of Rhode's donation of the land and the dispossession inherent to the resources to do so, see Paul Maylam, *The Cult of Rhodes: Remembering an Imperialist in Africa* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2005).

during the country's transition from apartheid to liberal democracy. In a statement released a month after 9 March, the RMF framed the initial protest like this:

Exactly a month ago, the pain of one black student led to an action that implicated the university community and South African society as a whole; an action that called into question the neo-colonial situation and the rainbow nation mythology that is suffocating our country.⁸

The metaphor of the “rainbow nation” promoted by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presented an image of South Africa as united in difference but failed to question the historical origins and destructive contemporary effects of the differences it sought to reconcile. Thus, the question of how or even whether to undo forms of difference such as ‘race’ (and ‘tribe’), the latter category making black Africans “strangers at home,”⁹ was not adequately addressed at the time.¹⁰ These categories were the product and the administrative anchor first of colonial and then of apartheid rule, and so in failing to address them as a source of ongoing harm an important dimension of colonialism and apartheid was left unexamined and unaddressed. In addition, the genealogical roots of the commission in colonial jurisprudence and commissions of inquiry and the effects of its location in this legacy were not questioned until much later.¹¹ Critique of the TRC and its concept of the rainbow nation remained, in the early 1990s, the marginalized position.¹² The events of 2015 took that disquiet and put it once again on the national stage. The unreconciled nature of everyday life in South Africa was addressed by student protestors both in the language of structural injustice and in the language of personal pain (or “black pain”), the latter referencing the often deeply troubled relationships between citizens (to say nothing of the relationship between citizens and ‘foreigners’) across various forms of historically produced difference such as race.

The project of reconciliation across racial difference was popularised by the country's TRC, which granted amnesty to individual perpetrators of apartheid violence in exchange for a full confession of their deeds. The project implicitly individualised the solution to the harms of the apartheid past lodging it in the healing of inter-personal relations through confession and forgiveness

⁸ RMF, “Rhodes Must Fall Statement Read Out at Today's Meeting and Before the Removal of the Statue,” *Johannesburg Salon: Special Edition* 9 (2015): 12, https://studentsnotcustomers.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/vfinal_vol9_book.pdf.

⁹ For the harms of the colonial and apartheid state's operationalisation of tribe see Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Michael Neocosmos, *From Foreign Natives to Native Foreigners: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006), 25.

¹⁰ For the criticism of the project of reconciliation from the early nineties, see Heidi Grunebaum, “Talking to Ourselves ‘Amongst the Innocent Dead’: On Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Mourning,” *PMLA* 117, no. 2 (2002): 306–310, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/823278>.

¹¹ For a critique of this nature, see Adam Sitze, *The Impossible Machine: A Genealogy of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

¹² See also Mahmood Mamdani, “Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC),” *Diacritics* 33, no. 3/4 (2002): 32–59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1566444>.

rather than (*or in addition to*) locating it in the undoing of apartheid's structural legacies.¹³ Thus white people, if not among the direct perpetrators of apartheid's violence, were able to imagine themselves as unimplicated. But in the early 1990s, the possibility of friendship was perhaps too easily assumed, and friendship's political tensions were swept aside in the public and official embrace of reconciliation.

Following the start of the RMF protests in early 2015, three events occurred that are germane to the politics of friendship (and friendship as politics) across difference that this dissertation considers. First, in late 2015, such friendship and its politics received a formal public treatment at the Ruth First Memorial lecture in Johannesburg. The two lectures, presented by public intellectuals Sisonke Msimang¹⁴ and Panashe Chigumadzi,¹⁵ focused on the harms black South Africans were still subject to in their everyday and personal relationships with whites connecting these to broader systemic issues.¹⁶ Both speakers—Msimang in a more open-ended fashion and Chigumadzi more fixedly—questioned the possibility and desirability of friendship across racial difference in a structurally unequal country still rife with white racism. Both Msimang and Chigumadzi spoke from the position of black women who had, through their location in the middle class, been through a process of unchosen assimilation into knowledge and fluency in the manners, modes of being, and ways of seeing the world common to white settlers (though not, it must be noted, without exceptions or complexities) or “the grammar of whiteness.”¹⁷

Perhaps as an avatar of the rejection of friendship and sociability with whites, in the question-and-answer session that followed the lectures, someone took the mic to shout “fuck white people” at the audience. The moderator, the late Eusebius McKaiser, took the decision to cut the speaker's mic. Chigumadzi responded to this by taking McKaiser to task on stage for policing black anger. In response to this incident, alongside others of a similar nature that followed in 2016, a heated dispute played out in the national press and on social media about what the attitude of black South Africans should be towards whites.¹⁸ In this debate a position emerged that took the rupture between blacks and

¹³ See Mahmood Mamdani, “Beyond Nuremberg: The Historical Significance of the Post-Apartheid Transition in South Africa,” MISR working paper no.23 (2015): 1–30,

<https://misr.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/publications/2018/02/MISR%20WP%2023%20Mamdani.pdf>.

¹⁴ Msimang is a public commentator, columnist, and author of the memoir *Always Another Country*.

¹⁵ Chigumadzi is a public commentator, columnist, and author of the novel *Sweet Medicine* and a collection of essays titled *These Bones Will Rise Again*.

¹⁶ For the two lectures see Panashe Chigumadzi, “Why I call Myself a ‘Coconut’ to Claim My Place in Post-apartheid South Africa,” Ruth First Memorial Lecture (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, August 7, 2015), <http://wits.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Ruth-First-Lecture-by-Panashe-Chigumadzi-2015.pdf>; Sisonke Msimang, “With Friends Like These: The Politics of Friendship in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 31–47.

¹⁷ Eusebius McKaiser, “The 2015 ‘F*** WHITES!’ Olympiad,” *IOL*, August 21, 2015, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/the-2015-f-whites-olympiad-1903876>.

¹⁸ See Tokelo Nhlapo, “F*** White People is an Appropriate Expression of Black Pain,” *Daily Maverick*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2016-02-09-f-white-people-is-an-appropriate-expression-of-black-pain/>; Lwandile Fikeni, “Lwandile Fikeni’s Ruth First Speech on Rage in the Rainbow Nation is Indispensable,” *Mail&Guardian*, August 18, 2016, <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-18-protest-art-and-the-aesthetics-of-rage-social-solidarity-and-a-post-rainbow-sa/>.

whites – the impossibility and political undesirability of any friendship or sociability between them –, signalled by the sentiment “fuck white people,” to be the preeminent sign of authentic political radicalism.¹⁹ In the public domain, at least, the space for other modes of relating across difference seemed to close down.

Second, early in 2016, a protest against homelessness among black students took place on upper campus at UCT. This was called Shackville. Shackville involved the erection of a corrugated iron shack, like those found in the poorer parts of South Africa’s townships and in its informal settlements, placed so that it obstructed the traffic on the road outside of the Fuller and Smuts residences on upper campus. Students also protested how UCT memorialised the colonial past as though it were the basis of a common heritage²⁰ by spray-painting various slogans including “1652 Must Go,”²¹ “UCT is a Site of Conquest,” “Fuck White People,” and “Fuck Black Exclusion,” among other statements, on the nearby war memorial.²² During the Shackville protests various portraits and art works deemed to be colonial symbols and taken from the surrounding buildings were also burned, eliciting a heated and polarised public response.²³

Third, later in the same year, a scholarly volume on friendship across racial difference was published. Although open to friendship’s liberatory possibilities, *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* strongly emphasized the undesirability and, in some chapters, the impossibility of such friendship.²⁴ It also implicated non-racialism in the question of friendship across difference and critiqued it as an essentially liberal, and therefore inadequate, response to racist injustice.²⁵

Nevertheless, an element of complexity characterised friendship across difference on the ground. Public statements, such as the slogans described above, did not always reflect lived experience in uncomplicated ways. For example, in his honours project Jeremy Bradford, a young white student at UCT who participated significantly in the RMF protests and related events, describes how:

...the nature of my friendships and relationships would change relative to the spaces we were in. For example, during the occupation of Bremner House [the administrative block] in 2015 my friendships [could] be said to be ‘political’ and full of tension; friendships became something to temporarily put aside for the purposes of the political project of the movement. I

¹⁹ Eusebius McKaiser, “The 2015 ‘F*** WHITES!’ Olympiad,” *IOL*, August 21, 2015, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/the-2015-f-whites-olympiad-1903876>.

²⁰ Makhubu, “On Apartheid Ruins,” 577.

²¹ 1652 is the year in which the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) established its rule over the Cape.

²² Makhubu, “On Apartheid Ruins,” 577.

²³ Makhubu, “On Apartheid Ruins,” 577.

²⁴ See, for example, Shannon Walsh, “Afro-Pessimism and Friendship in South Africa: An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson III,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 70–99.

²⁵ See Franco Barchiesi, “The Problem with ‘We’: Affiliation, Political Economy, and the Counterhistory of Nonracialism,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 125–165.

say temporarily because with those same friends, *during* the time of the movement, we would have drinks at a local bar and it seemed as though the ‘political project’ was put aside for the purposes of friendship [...] The contrast between the two spaces along political lines and ethical lines is what is difficult for me to reconcile because in the one space (the bar) I am a friend; in another (Bremner) I am the oppressor.²⁶ (Emphasis in the original).

This passage suggests the complexity of the moment vis-à-vis friendship and politics across forms of historical and constructed difference such as ‘race’ on the ground. It also suggests, at least implicitly, that for some people drawn into the protests friendship and politics were discrete activities. Building on the insights of Leela Gandhi, this dissertation will try to complicate that division by suggesting that friendship may itself be a form of politics.²⁷ Such paradoxical friendships which do the momentary and imperfect work of instantiating justice and transcending or refusing difference are not entirely unusual. Some examples include the friendship of Carl van Vechten, author of the controversial *Nigger Heaven*, a book that favourably depicted the life of African Americans living in Harlem against the lives of those in the American south, and poet and playwright Langston Hughes;²⁸ black consciousness leader Steve Biko and anti-apartheid socialist philosopher Richard Turner;²⁹ writer Bessie Head and liberal activist and member of both the LAPSA and the African Resistance Movement (a membership that itself was contradictory or paradoxical), Randolph Vigne;³⁰ and Edward Said, Palestinian American literary critic and musician and Jewish-Israeli, Daniel Barenboim;³¹ Inhabiting contradictory relationships or life worlds, as Sidharthan Maunaguru points out in his contemplation of the friendships between people with fundamental ideological differences in the Tamil resistance movement in Sri Lanka, is possible.³²

Richard Turner’s friendship with Steve Biko is a particularly apt example of how friendship can take place in a social and political landscape of injustice, fleetingly refusing the structures of that landscape through its existence and the aspirations it embodies *and* at the same time some of the ideas and norms its friends might seek to undo can be reinscribed by the behaviour of those same friends.³³ Biko and Turner’s friendship is recalled by Mamphela Ramphele, a close friend and co-activist of

²⁶ Jeremy Bradford, “Politics, Ethics and Friendship Across Difference,” (Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 2017), 5.

²⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁸ See Emily Bernard, ed., *Remember me to Harlem: The letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

²⁹ See Mamphela Ramphele, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1995), 62.

³⁰ See Head’s letters to Vigne in Randolph Vigne, ed., *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991).

³¹ This friendship, and its musical collaborations, is documented in Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*, ed. Ara Guzelimian (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

³² Sidharthan Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics,” *American Ethnologist* (2019), <http://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/the-intimacy-of-dissent/being-a-friend>.

³³ Ian Macqueen, “Black Consciousness in Dialogue in South Africa: Steve Biko, Richard Turner and the ‘Durban moment’, 1970–1974,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 49, no. 5 (2014): 511–525, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909613493609>; See also Billy Keniston, *Choosing To Be Free: The Life Story of Rick Turner* (Chicago: Jacana Media, 2014).

Biko as well as his lover.³⁴ According to Ramphela, Richard Turner would visit the Alan Taylor residence at the then University of Natal-Black Section, where he became friendly with many among the black consciousness student leadership, including Biko.³⁵ However, Ramphela complicates this friendship, revealing a contradiction between Turner's critique of white liberalism³⁶ and the white liberal in Turner himself, by recalling an incident that took place at the black consciousness New Farm Settlement project in Durban. Black consciousness student activists went to great pains to organise the local community. As part of their community development efforts, student activists convinced each household to contribute R2 for the provision of a clean water tap, with the students committing to make up the shortfall. Turner was also involved at the time and his group of socialist students "offered to provide all the money required for the clean water project, sapping the community's motivation for self-help which the BCM activists had been at pains to nurture."³⁷ Ramphela continues: "The involvement of predominantly white activists in this project [Turner's group's community development project] also reinforced BC fears of white domination. Their entry was seen as an example of the refusal of whites to accept that blacks could do things on their own. The disappointment was greater because Turner had up to that point been regarded by BC activists as one of the few white radicals who understood their views about white racism and economic domination."³⁸ Whether the Turner-Biko friendship continued after this is unclear.

Friendship, while it may subvert or momentarily refuse racial difference, also sometimes reinforces it, or speak in its terms. This, however, does not negate the value of such friendship. Friendship in these contexts and those that I explore below may be a way to forge a practice of justice in the everyday in relationship to others, however fleeting, partial, imperfect, or flawed that practice may be. Indeed, friendship may be all that we have vis-à-vis justice in certain kinds of political moments where bigger structural changes cannot or have not yet been won. It may also be the food of a struggle for justice: what keeps friends going, what gives them succour, in their quest for a more just world; what makes life worth living even under unjust conditions.

In situations of great and systemic injustice such as those I have describe above—America, Israel, South Africa (all settler or former settler colonies)—claims to friendship across the contextually relevant forms of difference can arouse strong reactions. One reason is that there is a tradition of invoking friendship between oppressor and oppressed that offers the relation of friendship

³⁴ Mamphela Ramphela, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1996), 62.

³⁵ Ramphela, *Across Boundaries*, 62.

³⁶ See Richard Turner, "Black Consciousness and White Liberals," *Reality* 4, no. 3(1972): 20-22, <https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/rejul728>.

³⁷ Mamphela Ramphela, "Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development," in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, eds. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphela, Malusi Mpumlwana, and Lindy Wilson (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 156.

³⁸ Mamphela Ramphela, "Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development," in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, eds. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphela, Malusi Mpumlwana, and Lindy Wilson Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 158.

³⁸ Ramphela, "Empowerment," 158.

in lieu of justice.³⁹ In other words, instead of offering justice, friendship is offered in its place; and, thus, structural justice becomes vulnerable to permanent postponement and injustice is justified by arguing that the oppressor and oppressed are friends. In the context of colonialism and its aftermaths, when friendship is offered *in lieu* of justice, an attempt is arguably being made to preserve the existing power structures by, as Walsh and Soske put it, “making claims on the affective life of the colonised.”⁴⁰ However, as I hope to show in what follows, this is not the only light in which friendship under colonialism and apartheid can be read and does not descriptively exhaust the kinds of friendship that were practiced in such contexts.

Friendship as Politics: Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund

It was against the backdrop of the student protests that I came across the letters of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund. Sobukwe was among the founders of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and its first president, held in solitary confinement by the apartheid regime on Robben Island between 1960 and 1969. Pogrund was a member of the Liberal Party of South Africa (LPSA) and a journalist at the *Rand Daily Mail*, a liberal English language newspaper that operated between 1902 and 1985.

The PAC was launched in 1959 on April at Orlando Communal Hall in Soweto. Sobukwe was the organisation’s first president alongside Potlako Leballo⁴¹ as first Secretary General. Its members – younger Africanist activists formally in the African National Congress (ANC) and hailing mostly from the townships of the Eastern Cape and the Transvaal – broke from the ANC over the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955.⁴² Their objections to the Charter were based on its use of multiracialist language in its affirmation that South Africa “belonged to all who lived in it – Black and White,”⁴³ but also had a longer history in internal opposition within the ANC by some of the younger members to the organisation’s collaboration with Indians and Communists (the later frequently also white).⁴⁴ Jon Soske writes that “[the] Africanists rejected the projection [of the Freedom Charter] that a significant section of the white population could be persuaded to abandon its privileges – only a mass, spontaneous wave of protests by Africans could disrupt the current system and create a truly

³⁹ Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske, “Thinking about Race and Friendship in South Africa,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 3–4.

⁴⁰ Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 3–4.

⁴¹ Leballo we will meet again in chapter 3 when I explore the ways in which Pogrund juxtaposed him to Sobukwe in his biography of the latter. Leballo was born in 1924 in what is now Lesotho to an Anglican minister. He was educated by missionaries at Lovedale college and is reputed to have concealed his age in 1940 in order to enlist in the non-European transport unit of the South African Army and serve in the Second World War, an experience which radicalised him politically and disposed him to Africanist political sensibilities. After a brief stint teaching in the Transvaal in the late 1940s and early 50s, where he was active in the ANC Youth League, Leballo moved to Johannesburg. By 1954 he was the leader of the Orlando Branch of the ANCYL and was regularly publishing in *The Africanist*, a pan-African nationalist publication. In 1959, he became the first General Secretary of the nascent PAC. See “Potlako Leballo,” South African History Online, accessed November 17, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/potlako-leballo>.

⁴² Jon Soske, “‘Wash Me Black Again’: African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944–60” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 200.

⁴³ “The Freedom Charter, 1955,” Gandhi Luthuli Documentation Centre, accessed November 16, 2023, <https://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/hist/freedomchart/freedomch.html>.

⁴⁴ Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 255.

democratic government. It was necessary therefore to develop African independence from foreign influences (such as Indians and Communists) and sharpen anger against the white minority “ruling class.” Sobukwe’s ideological position within the PAC was, as I show in coming chapters, more complex than a brief description of the organisation’s politics here can allow. He had, for a start, a more open-ended orientation to politics and political others, as his friendship with Pogrand attests, than the rhetoric of the PAC in the 1960s suggests.

Both Pogrand and Sobukwe would spend time in prison over the course of the 1960s. Though Pogrand’s several stints in prison, for his reporting on the apartheid regime, were not as arduous as Sobukwe’s confinement on Robben Island. In social terms both men had points of commonality in their backgrounds. Brought together by colonial modernity, both men received a liberal English medium education. Both were raised in Abrahamic religious traditions: Pogrand in Judaism and Sobukwe in Christianity. Both became active as adults in the anti-apartheid struggle in the late 1950s. But where Pogrand was produced by the state and society as white and was drawn in adulthood to a liberal political identity, Sobukwe was produced by those same forces as black, forcibly tribalized by the apartheid regime, and, as a Pan-Africanist, was a fierce on-record critic of white liberal politics and offers of political solidarity.⁴⁵ The dissertation takes their friendship as its epistemic object to think about friendship *as* politics.

The friendship is taken here as a productive challenge to ideas about friendship and politics that were prominent during the more spectacular moments of the RMF and FMF movements and their aftermath. The ideas about friendship as conceptualised in the RMF and FMF times include, in *some* cases, a foreclosure on the political possibilities of friendship or friendship *as* politics, an understanding of the racial identities produced by colonialism and apartheid as fixed and determinative, and a preference for structural change as the preeminent marker of whether an activity is political or not. My goal here is not to refuse the critique of friendship, sociability, and non-racialism, or the accent placed measuring politics through its structural impacts, that these movements and moments presented. Neither do I seek to deny the experience of racial identity as, if not fixed, then heavy. Rather, I seek to explore how much more complicated such critiques, conceptions of politics, and identities can become in the world of lived experience. I want to take seriously not only friendship’s political limitations but *also* its political possibilities. I also want to allow for small moments of defiance and refusal realised in everyday and personal life as an important element of politics even though the effect of such minor moments cannot be quantified in the way that organised and public struggles leading to structural change can be.

Throughout the dissertation, I attempt to hold a series of contradictions or paradoxes together as part of an ethical commitment to face the complexities of raced being and belonging in everyday life that both recognises and opposes racism *and*, at the same time, is alert and responsive to the fact

⁴⁵ I cite from Sobukwe’s speeches to substantiate this in chapter 3.

that even in conditions of racist oppression forms of identity, relationality, and mutuality emerge between people which may facilitate life-affirming political and social possibilities. Thus, I am interested both in how the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship refused the racist norms of its times vis-à-vis who could form social, communal, and emotional ties with whom and, at the same time, how some of those norms were re-inscribed even within the same context of their active refusal. What makes such complexity important to surface and engage is that it takes the struggle against racism seriously even when it cannot be read through the lens of anti-colonial (or anti-apartheid) nationalism.

I consider the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship against the backdrop of settler colonialism and apartheid. Apartheid was an heir of the conservative colonial project that took shape in the mid-eighteenth century in response to rebellions against the so-called civilising mission in India and the Caribbean.⁴⁶ At an administrative level, this new era heralded the end of a previous period of liberal colonial rule.⁴⁷ In South Africa, liberal colonialism included the tradition of the qualified franchise in the Cape under British rule, and, as elsewhere, an evolutionary view of social change at the pinnacle of which was ‘Western’ civilisation, and a commitment to the trusteeship of whites over Africans (an implicitly racialised category) until such time as they were fully ‘civilised.’ In the mid-nineteenth century, colonial rule shifted from the telos of assimilation of the ‘civilised’ few (under direct rule) to the production and management of difference (ethnic, racial, religious) of the many (under the conservative mode of indirect rule).⁴⁸ It moved from a liberal conception of trusteeship – in which whites as the civilisationally superior few had the duty and obligation to take charge of the ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ people they colonised until such time as those people were deemed ‘developed’ and ‘mature’ enough to preside over their own affairs – to a conservative conception of trusteeship in which black difference was to be brought into being, ‘developed’, and managed separately and in perpetuity by whites.⁴⁹

Against this backdrop the friendship seems unlikely. However, it is important to remember that despite a shift in how trusteeship was conceived between the colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa, the liberal assimilationism that marked British rule of the Cape Colony from 1795 to 1910 and shaped the subjectivities of white English speakers, and elites among black Africans and

⁴⁶ I am thinking here specifically about the 1857 Indian Mutiny and Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1965. Both can be understood as rebellions against an earlier form of colonial rule that privileged the “civilising mission” as its telos. Both occasioned a shift to more conservative modes of rule that aimed to make-over colonial subjectivities by emphasising and in some cases inventing forms of ethnic and cultural differences so that colonised people were fractured into many separately governed entities attributed to their alleged native cultures. Apartheid with its policy of separate development and its Bantustans (ethnic homelands in which black South Africans had pseudo-citizenship but outside of which they were citizenship-less) has strong continuities with this form of colonial rule. See Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), and Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 1–2.

⁴⁸ Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*, 43.

⁴⁹ Christopher Allsobrook and Camilla Boisen, “Two Types of Trusteeship in South Africa: From Subjugation to Separate Development,” *Politikon* 44, no. 2 (2017): 265–285.

“subject races”⁵⁰ alike through a common education and, sometimes, a shared Christianity, did not go away over night when Afrikaner nationalists came to power in 1948 and began to gut the legacy of the liberal period and its mission schools through the Bantu Education Act of 1953.⁵¹ This is because liberal trusteeship wasn’t only a matter of policy or rule, it was also a feature of the cultural life and attitudes of English speakers in South Africa. It wasn’t only reproduced and preserved through policy and administration, which were then moving in more conservative directions, but was also given life in the homes and businesses of whites as they related to their black domestic employees, in schools and libraries as both whites and Others assimilated into the liberal project pursued the literature and aesthetics of the liberal colonial world, and, of course, in personal lives through the friendships and forms of sociability that arose between white and (assimilated) black people. A further complexity was that, through mission education, many black English speakers came to be assimilated into some of these values and worldviews, albeit in complex and contradictory ways.

Many people who became political active during the 1950s at the dawn of apartheid, as Pogrund and Sobukwe did, were socialised under the norms of liberal colonialism and trusteeship particularly if they were educated in English medium schools and/or were practising Christians. Thus, the time in which the Sobukwe-Pogrund friendship unfolded was one shaped both by the conservative project to produce, manage, and separate difference that the apartheid state embodied and at the same time the lingering cultural salience of the English liberal colonial worldview and its values, including liberal versions of trusteeship. This liberal colonial worldview, maintained through religion, English-medium education, and the culture of middle-class English language speakers, albeit with its own share of discontinuities over time, is an important one for plotting and thinking about the Sobukwe-Pogrund friendship. Without wanting to suggest that this (unequally) shared context determined the friendship’s possibility, it certainly shaped its protagonists and how they related to one another as will become clear when I cite from their letters to each other in subsequent chapters.

If one understands the structure of colonialism and apartheid, and their resultant identities, only in binary terms, then Pogrund was colonizer (or settler) and Sobukwe colonized (or native).⁵²

⁵⁰ “Subject races were either nonindigenous immigrants, like the Indians of East, Central and Southern Africa, or they were constructed as nonindigenous by the colonial powers, such as, for example, the Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi.” See Mahmood Mamdani, “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 4 (Oct., 2001): 656, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2696665>.

⁵¹ English liberal colonial rule was guided, as I have indicated above, by the mission to assimilate colonized elites or those who could be turned into them into British culture and society, albeit as permanently junior partners. Afrikaner nationalism on the other hand pursued a policy of separate development and apartheid (apartness/separateness), according to which each ethnic group was to follow its own development (closely watched over and guided by the state) in its own homeland separate both from other ethnic groups and racially segregated from the races – whites, coloureds, and Indians – who were not defined ethnically by the apartheid state. Both forms of rule were paternalistic in the sense that both assumed a racially superior presence (whether English or Afrikaner) presiding over the affairs of Africans, whether designated as a race and/or as a collection of ethnicities. All of this was often figured in the language of parents (the state) and children (colonized subjects). However, where English paternalism allowed some form of movement – one could go from ‘uncivilised’ to ‘civilised’ – Afrikaner nationalism presumed a much more fixed and permanent difference between Europeans and Africans and indeed between the African ethnic groups designated by the state. As a result, the latter can be said to be more conservative than the former.

⁵² There are complexities here that I want to acknowledge but that are beyond the scope of the dissertation: for instance, Afrikaner Nationalists who took power in 1948, did not see themselves as colonizers but (opportunistically) constructed their

While this is true, the problem with a strictly binary view of these historical formations and the identities they produced—the truth it occludes—is that it does not allow us to grapple with what the historian Durba Ghosh describes as “the fundamental sociality of colonialism and the ways that the shared experience of colonialism generated many alternative forms of being”⁵³ and, indeed, relating and belonging. This is even more true of the liberal period and its on-going legacies through the lives of people socialised in its habitus but coming of age at the dawn of the apartheid state. Liberal colonialism aimed, after all, at a kind of contact-through-assimilation between colonizer and ‘civilised’ colonised subjects. Considering the friendship in the context of the legacy of liberal colonialism in apartheid South Africa is one way in which to explore both the possibilities and the limitations of the other forms of being, belonging, and relating to which Ghosh refers.

The Sobukwe-Pogrud friendship is impossible to contemplate if one understands the distinction between colonizer and colonized in the more unassailable form in which it is rendered in the work of great anti-colonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon and which were taken up in the more spectacular moments of student protest in the recent past.⁵⁴ A relationship such as the Sobukwe-Pogrud friendship poses a challenge to the binary model of sociality under colonialism *and* at the same time illustrates how the context of the enduring legacy of liberal colonialism (among English speakers particularly) shaped affections and affinities across racial difference, often hand in hand with racism.

In this dissertation I seek primarily to contribute to the literature on the politics of friendship that grapples with how friendship and forms of sociability could become sites for alternative forms of being and relating, as Ghosh puts it, and even political solidarity and revolution in the colonial world as Leela Gandhi explores in her work on *fin de siècle* British India.⁵⁵ As Gandhi asks: what made some of Europe’s citizenry “betray the claims of possessive nationalism in favor of solidarity with foreigners, outsiders, alleged inferiors?”⁵⁶ What made some of these people take “small, defiant flights from the fetters of belonging toward the unknown destinations of radical alterity.”⁵⁷ For Gandhi, and for me, these “small, defiant flights” constitute a “politics of friendship,” where friendship is understood “as the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging.”⁵⁸ I seek to understand those aspects of the

identity as native to South Africa. See Suren Pillay, “Where Do You Belong? Natives, Foreigners, and Apartheid South Africa,” *African Identities* 2, no. 2 (2004): 215–232, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472584042000310919>.

⁵³ Durba Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer: The Conundrum of Friendship and Intimacy,” *Itinerario* 42, no. 1 (2018): 7, doi:10.1017/S0165115318000104.

⁵⁴ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.

⁵⁷ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 10.

⁵⁸ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 182.

Pogrud-Sobukwe friendship that constitute the “small, defiant flights” refusing a filiation based on raced belonging.

Methodology: Archive, Biography, and Letters

The dissertation takes the biographical (specifically the intimacies and minutia of everyday life) as a site of inquiry. It is in this arena that the “small defiant flights” of the Sobukwe-Pogrud friendship, which I argue constitute a politics, took place, rather than publicly and in an organised fashion as the location and character of politics is more frequently imagined. The primary source for the dissertation is the archive of the correspondence of Benjamin Pogrud and Robert Sobukwe, which is held by Wits Historical Research Papers in Johannesburg after being donated by Pogrud in the early 1990s. In this section, I reflect on the methodological issues relevant to working with archives, biography, and letters. I begin with a physical description of my archive.

The Robert Sobukwe Papers in which the letters between Pogrud and Sobukwe are lodged comprise some 2656 items and include personal correspondence such as letters and telegrams between Sobukwe and Pogrud, Veronica Sobukwe (Sobukwe’s wife), figures from the liberal resistance to apartheid such as Peter Hjul, Eulalie Stott, and Nel Marquard, as well as other struggle figures such as the novelist Bessie Head, permits to visit Soweto and Robben Island, correspondence between Pogrud, Veronica Sobukwe and various government and prison officials, and a raft of research materials collected by Pogrud for his biography of Sobukwe. Approximately 500 of the items in the Paper’s are personal letters between Pogrud and Sobukwe. These are mostly written between 1960 and 1969 when Sobukwe was imprisoned. As such, the letters were subjected to censorship, the intended and unintended consequences of which I explore in chapter 5. This censorship took the form of the confiscation of entire letters rather than redaction of certain portions of a letter. All of the items in the Papers have been digitised and are publicly available save for Sobukwe’s letters to his wife, which have been subsequently published by Derek Hook in *Lie on Your Wounds: The Prison Correspondence of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe* but remain unavailable in the digitized archive. I accessed the archive in its digital version and made one trip to the Historical Research Papers Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand to check the paper version of the collection. Having described the physical archive I now pass to the theoretical and methodological issues that pertain to archives and more specifically to letters.

Historian Ciraj Rassool argues that scholars have tended to treat documents (and by extension the archives in which they are lodged) as straightforward windows onto the past. By now the critique of treating documents and archives in this way is a well-known and established one.⁵⁹ Briefly, the

⁵⁹ For some examples, see Verne Harris, “The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa,” *Archival Science* 2: 63–86; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); and Premesh Lalu, “When Was South African History Ever Postcolonial?” *Kronos*, no. 34 (November, 2008): 267–281, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41056610>.

argument, which owes an intellectual debt to the work of Michel Foucault,⁶⁰ is that archives do not simply constitute places where documents of the past are stored but are more fruitfully viewed as a “the system of statements, or rules of practice, that give shape to what can and cannot be said.”⁶¹ The project in relation to the archives and their documents then becomes to write histories of this law of what can and cannot be said rather than histories of events per se.⁶² The event, as such, is held to be inaccessible to us particularly in contexts such as the formerly colonised world in which the archives were an instrument of state power and are therefore less than reliable sources as to what actually happened (events) but richer in terms of providing a record of how colonial power operated to produce new subjectivities through particular modes of rule.⁶³ There are of course important counter-statements to this position, such as “Chandra’s Death,” in which the historian Ranajit Guha reclaims documents from the colonial archive (legal and scholarly) to tell a different story from the one rendered in the official archive.⁶⁴

In the tradition of political history and biography of which Rasool is critical, documents are treated as though they transparently represent the ‘facts’ of what happened. Having acknowledged this particular complexity that arises in the context of a colonially produced archive, I want to follow Bhekizizwe Petersen in cautioning against too strong an application of the injunction to write discursive histories, and Jonathan Hyslop in observing of the archive—colonial or otherwise—that “all sorts of documents of popular expression make their way into the files which, despite the officials’ best efforts, are often more like a beach full of flotsam and jetsam than a well-regulated highway.”⁶⁵ As Petersen points out, there are valuable forms of oppositional knowledge and experience in the tin-trunks and attics of many South Africans which were not *necessarily* subject to the same logics, processes, and workings of power to which the administrative archive was.⁶⁶ It may then be a mistake in theorising the possibilities and limits of the archive to assume that all archive was produced under the same circumstances as the official colonial administrative archive, or even that the colonial archive doesn’t house its share of documents on the basis of which counter-statements can be made.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁶¹ Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh, eds. *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2002), 9. See also Ann Stoler’s *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶² For an example relevant to South Africa’s colonial archive see Premesh Lalu, *Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009).

⁶³ For an example of a book that explores the colonial archive as a productive source of new subjectivities see Nick Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ See also Ranajit Guha, “Chandra’s Death,” in *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 135–165. Also important in this regard is Shahid Amin’s *Event, Memory, Metaphor: Chuari Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ Jonathan Hyslop, “On Biography: A Response to Ciraj Rassool,” *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 2 (2010): 107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2010.490387>.

⁶⁶ Karin Barber also makes this point. See Karin Barber, *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.

⁶⁷ Bhekizizwe Petersen, “The Archives and the Political Imaginary,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business Media), 20–37.

Rassool's third criticism of documentary histories of political struggle and biography is that they produce lives and protagonists overly characterised by "stability, autonomy, self-determination and rational choice."⁶⁸ I wish to extend this criticism by noting again, as Njabulo Ndebele and Jacob Dlamini have done, that the moral imperative to condemn apartheid has sometimes meant that representations of those who lived it, whether in opposition to it or along its grain, are simplistically rendered.⁶⁹ The difficulty of waging a battle against racism, and patriarchy, has sometimes meant that anti-racist or feminist oppositional discourse is unable or unwilling to concede the moral and social complexity of those it represents and those among its ranks. For example, as Njabulo Ndebele points out of a certain moment in South African fiction the imperative to produce literature that was politically engaged, committed, or relevant, where these concerns were understood to be in an implacable opposition to concerns with moral and social complexity, interiority, and process, produced a literature concerned with "symbols of evil on the one hand, and symbols of victims of evil on the other hand."⁷⁰ Personal letters can of course be used to exacerbate such tendencies. However, they do offer material that can facilitate the production of more complex portraits of personal, political, and social life.

Many complexities, non-linearities, 'irrationalities', contradictions, and paradoxes surface in the Sobukwe-Pogrud letters. For example, alongside the two men's discussion of Pogrud's "skirt world"—a playful but overtly sexist reference to his sexual and romantic life by Sobukwe—⁷¹ there is also an inversion of the normative gender roles between men, with Pogrud often acting as Sobukwe's care-taker in a way that might, normatively, be more fitting to a wife or mother: worrying about whether Sobukwe has enough warm clothing and bedding, inquiring after the length of his inseam for some tailoring that needs doing, buying him shoes and clothes, taking care of his dietary and health needs etc. The letters are replete with moments that challenge normative masculinity, then and now. As to moral complexity, the letters include Pogrud's devotion to and defence of the newly established settler state of Israel alongside his critique and lived opposition—at a personal cost—to apartheid. These are just two examples of the many ways in which the letters allow me, in answer to the kinds of criticisms raised above, to draw a more complex and unresolved picture of my subjects; a picture that accepts the ambiguities of personality and of moral, social, and political life, and refuses the brittle security of certainty.

Rassool also notes that scholars working in the tradition of documentary political history and biography tend to leave matters of narrativisation and emplotment untheorised. One way to parse out

⁶⁸ Ciraj Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography," *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2010): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528581003676028>.

⁶⁹ See Njabulo Ndebele, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction," in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press), 15–19; Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009), 21; and also, more generally, Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2014).

⁷⁰ Ndebele, "Turkish Tales," 14–15.

⁷¹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrud, 14 February 1968, Ba8, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Research Papers Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

the problem that he identifies here is to say it is the problem of imposing an order on that which is not inherently orderly. The course of a resistance struggle or a life is not orderly from within that struggle or that life. Order, and meaning, is often imposed afterwards, looking back. There is definitive way out of the problem of imposing a certain degree of order on a life or a history that isn't entirely organic to that life or history to begin with. Some degree of structure, that is not inherent to the life itself, will be a feature of all accounts including those that disavow teleological narrativisation. As J.M. Coetzee puts it of the construction of autobiography "all the facts are too many facts. You choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving purpose."⁷² The authors of letters also choose their facts according to their purpose.

Next, I want to think a little bit about the characteristics of the letter as a form. What distinguishes it from other forms? What might it enable that other forms don't? What are its limitations? How might letters and their unique properties feature in the attempt to write more complex political history and biography (or in an adjacent project such as mine)? What are their limitations? Recall that Rassool's first criticism of dominant modes of political history and biography is that they conceive of political resistance purely through its manifestation in public and organised forms. The access that personal letters grant me to what is normatively coded as the private realm, allows me to think about how, or whether, political resistance takes place outside of public life too. Letters offer potential, though of course mitigated, access to this realm; they are not straightforwardly windows onto the personal or the private. But they can tell us how Pogrud and Sobukwe wished to appear to one another, and how they fashioned themselves for the other. In telling us this, the letters reveal the aspirations – normative, political, social – of the two men, even if they are not a guide to how they lived the rest of their lives outside of their letters to one another.

Although Pogrud and Sobukwe's letters were not strictly speaking private—censors routinely read the letters—they concerned the realm of what is generally normatively conceived of as private life. Pogrud and Sobukwe's themes include health and illness, family, religion, sexuality, romantic relationships, marriage, divorce, ideological convictions, food, gardening, music, forms of comfort, and feelings, among others. They also include quotidian concerns about, for example, buying or repairing clothing, organising birthdays, family visits to Robben Island, finances, the care and education of children, small comforts for the cottage in which Sobukwe was incarcerated such as items of furniture and appliances, a weekly package of fruit and biscuits, books, magazines, records, newspapers for pleasure as well as for Sobukwe's studies, and so on.

The letters are also rich in moments of self-fashioning. The private and the mundane to which these details in Pogrud and Sobukwe's letters speak are not the kinds of details or locations for the analysis of the political that figure prominently in the kind of political history and biography of which

⁷² David Atwell, "On the Question of Autobiography: Interview with J.M. Coetzee," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 3, no. 11 (1991): 117–118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.1991.9677878>.

Rasool is critical. However, as I will show, it is in these details of life, normatively considered to be private and ordinary or mundane, that a certain kind of resistance, a kind of contingent humanity, to the racial domination of Pogrund and Sobukwe's times is to be found. At the same time, in these very details, aspects of the overarching social and political order are re-inscribed. Letters of the kind Pogrund and Sobukwe exchanged—which dealt with the intimate and mundane details of their lives and in which they each fashioned an image of themselves for the other—allow me to move out of what is normatively regarded as the public domain into the private and the personal, a place where the political is less frequently sought, notwithstanding decades of feminist criticism to this end.⁷³ By facilitating entry into the realm normatively constructed as private, the letters offer the reader an opportunity to explore political resistance in general, and resistance to apartheid specifically, without privileging public organisations, public life, or the organised struggle against apartheid, as the only locus of politics or activities, practices, and instances of meaning-making that may be construed as political. Issues of gender, subjectivity, and identity, which Rassool identifies as often lacking in the conventional scholarship on South African political history and biography can therefore also be more easily explored.

What constitutes the private is, as I have acknowledged, a normative matter. Nothing is inherently either public or private, but convention makes it so. Contemporary conceptions of the private realm and its forms of interiority emerge out of developments that took place in Enlightenment Europe in the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century the conjugal family and companionate marriage emerged among the bourgeoisie and this was reflected in the architecture of the eighteenth-century bourgeois home. In contrast to those of the nobility and the poor who, for different reasons—the nobility for reasons of convention and the poor for want of room—lived their lives in front of an audience, the bourgeois family home had rooms for socialising that were separate to those rooms in which one withdrew—bedrooms and studies etc.⁷⁴ The effects of these kinds of developments were to code certain activities, practices, feelings, and so forth, which had not previously been so construed, as private—sexuality, family matters, emotions, etc. This kind of privacy was important to establishing a new “civilised identity” which was exported through colonisation to other parts of the world.⁷⁵ In South Africa, for example, in keeping with new ideas about privacy and civilisation, missionaries often replaced the indigenous beehive houses that people lived in with compartmentalised ones.⁷⁶ Writing, such as letters and journals, was critical to the new forms of the personal and the private then emerging.⁷⁷ Pogrund and Sobukwe formed in the context of this kind of modernity appear to have held fairly conventional attitudes about the distinction between the private

⁷³ See Julia Schuster, “Why the Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives on Everyday Feminism,” *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 6 (2017): 647–659, doi: 10.1080/14742837.2017.1285223.

⁷⁴ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 179.

⁷⁵ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 179.

⁷⁶ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 179.

⁷⁷ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 179.

and the public. What I wish to do here then is not a deconstruction of the binary between the public and the private but rather an inquiry into the realm of what is normatively construed as private, including by my subjects, with an eye on how forms of political resistance manifest themselves in that realm through friendship. Letters surface their own share of complexities, to which I now turn.

Ken Plummer writes about research that uses “documents of life” and identifies two problems with letters from the perspective of the social scientist. He writes that although “many insights can be gained from the study of letters...every letter speaks not just of the writer’s world, but also of the writer’s perception of the recipient. The kind of story told shifts with the person who will read it.”⁷⁸ Plummer regards letters as “not generally focused enough to be of analytical interest” as they “contain far too much material that strays from the researcher’s concern.”⁷⁹ Plummer refers to this unfocused quality—from the researcher’s perspective—as “the ‘dross rate’”.⁸⁰ So, firstly, letters, like ordinary life, are from the researcher’s perspective, often unfocused.

The very qualities Plummer finds challenging about letters are precisely those other scholars, such as Liz Stanley, argue commend them: letters are dialogical, perspectival, and have “strongly *emergent* properties.”⁸¹ These are qualities that also characterise friendship. This means, firstly, that letters involve communication *between* people and, in longer exchanges such as correspondences, turn taking and reciprocity.⁸² Secondly, “the structure and content of letters changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time,” hence their perspectival nature.⁸³ And thirdly, the content of letters is not determined by the interests of the researcher, as in the case of an interview where the researcher plans what to ask in order to elicit the information she thinks in advance to be relevant. With letters a researcher must, to a certain extent, subordinate her interests to what emerges organically out of the letters themselves. As Stanley points out these properties are not distinct to letters; they are “dimensions of all social interaction” on and off the page.⁸⁴ Life has strongly dialogical, perspectival, and emergent qualities. This likeness with life outside of the letter is precisely what makes letters so interesting. They are, one could say, life-like.

Letters have other qualities that make them interesting to addressing the problems that characterise conventional political and biographical history. In her work on life writing, Karin Barber comments on the possibilities for self-fashioning that various forms of personal writing such as letters and journals make possible.⁸⁵ In composing a letter the author can reflect upon and change what they have written. In this way the author of a letter may come to a new consciousness of self through

⁷⁸ Ken Plummer cited in Liz Stanley, “The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences,” *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004): 202.

⁷⁹ Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 202.

⁸⁰ Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 202.

⁸¹ Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 203.

⁸² Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 202.

⁸³ Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 202–203.

⁸⁴ Stanley, “The Epistolarium,” 203.

⁸⁵ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 179.

selecting, shaping, and giving an external form to their thoughts.⁸⁶ These qualities that involve thoughtfulness, selection, agency and so on make some of the moments in Sobukwe and Pogrand letters, when racism is resisted and a contingent humanity fleetingly realised, even more powerful. The letter “launches one’s own private thoughts across time and space in a concrete, externalized formed which both sender and recipient can scrutinize.”⁸⁷ As Barber points out, the letter genre also makes possible “the composition of intensely private expressions of emotion” as well as “new forms of self-examination [and] new styles of self-projection and self-dramatization.”⁸⁸ Having thought through the letter as a form, and the issues it raises for research and interpretation, I now provide a brief overview of the substance of the chapters that follow.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2: Friendship and Sociability Under Colonialism and Apartheid. In this chapter I explore existing literature on friendship and sociability under conditions of colonialism and apartheid, situating my own work within a recent body of literature on friendship. First, I look at how previous scholarship has figured the relationship—and its possibilities or lack thereof—between the coloniser and the colonised. Then, I explore critiques of the liberal offer of friendship and non-racial relationality in the context of South Africa’s history of liberal colonialism to differentiate what I wish to do with the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship from the less edifying and often racist aspects of the liberal tradition on friendship. Finally, I turn to the literature on friendship that informs how I work in this dissertation. That literature looks at forms of friendship and sociability under colonialism (and by extension apartheid and the postcolonial world) that resist the racist conceits of empire but do so outside of the telos of anti-colonial nationalism constituting a form of politics that has thusfar often been overlooked precisely for the reason of its location outside formal, organised, and public nationalist struggle.

Chapter 3: The Politics of a Friendship: Possibilities, Contradictions, and Limitations. In this chapter I establish the mutuality and relationality between Pogrand and Sobukwe and, at the same time, think about the contradictions of their friendship. To establish the tenderness of their tie to one another I quote from their letters to each other, written in the late nineteen-sixties, in which they express a kind of bond that is both mutual and reciprocal and refigures the raced homo-fraternity of the political as it is commonly conceived. The bond between Sobukwe and Pogrand was not without its contradictions, however. By exploring the choices that Pogrand made in his biography of Sobukwe, against those made by another of Sobukwe’s biographers, Thami Ka Plaatjie, I show that Pogrand appreciates and foregrounds the liberal aspects of Sobukwe’s formation and way of being in the world and that this may have had something to do with making the friendship possible in the first place.

⁸⁶ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 177.

⁸⁷ Barber, *Africa’s Hidden Histories*, 8.

⁸⁸ Barber, *Africa’s Hidden Histories*, 9.

Both the friendship and its friends remained rooted in the worlds and realities of colonialism and apartheid as well as the struggle against these. Thus, there are both moments in which the racism of those worlds and realities are resisted and others in which they are reinscribed. This chapter tries to hold onto both those realities simultaneously without collapsing into either one of them.

Chapter 4: Friendship and the Making of Non-Racial Africanity. In this chapter, I look at aspects of Sobukwe's worldview, how he conceived of a non-racial Africanity, and his general openness to the world and others. I argue that this kind of thinking on Sobukwe's part, which perhaps one might describe as an inclusive idea of being African, is both what made the Sobukwe-Pogrud friendship possible and was deepened through the advent of the friendship. Sobukwe's openness to an inclusive Africanity confirms what I am trying to get at in the dissertation by looking at the friendship in the first instance: that these identities were not, and are not, settled or closed-off, and thus these kinds of relationships were and are possible. I show how Sobukwe posits that openness through an open-ended account of pan-Africanism. Sobukwe's way of thinking about what it means to be African tells us that his friendship with Pogrud was not just a flash in the pan or the expression of an idiosyncrasy.

Chapter 5: Friendship as Politics. In this chapter, I argue that, in their letters to one another, Pogrud and Sobukwe realised, fleetingly and beyond the province of guarantees, an imperfect humanity founded in the more life-affirming possibilities of human being. Fleeting because, in the context of their times, they were liable to be returned, outside of those moments in which they achieved a relation to each other as people not as races, forcefully by the structures imposed by the apartheid regime to their positions as Master and illegal citizenship-less 'boy'. They did this, I suggested, through what *might* count as a counter-hegemonic mode of being and relating realised in the ordinary details of everyday life—the celebration of birthdays, the caring for children, everyday modes of respectful address and so on. I have chosen to describe these practices of refusal as non-racial.

Chapter 6: Friendship Between Men: Masculinity, Race, and the Letters of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrud. In this chapter, I tease out the forms of horizontal homosociality that existed between Pogrud and Sobukwe, without denying that there were more vertical forms at play between them too. I have attempted to attend again, as I did in chapter 3 and 5, to how their friendship both resisted forms of racism and inequality even as it was located in those and at points appears to reinscribe them. However, it would be all too easy to interpret the letters and the friendship either as a straightforward contestation of existing norms around race and gender or, in some moments, as reinscribing those aspects of the racial order that flow particularly out of liberalism and its notion of trusteeship. What I have tried to do in this chapter, in keeping with the ethos of the study, is to hold both the moments in which the letters and the friendship invert hegemonic norms or unsettle them and those moments in which they reinscribe, particularly, the racial order from a liberal perspective.

In its own way, each chapter explores the theme of the politics of friendship and friendship as politics. Across the dissertations chapters I attend both to the ways in which the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship challenged unjust and unequal worlds and the ways in which it could not but be located in such worlds and thus bears their mark even as it resists their strictures. An abiding concern throughout is to remain attentive, curious about, and engaged in the both-ness of the relationship: its tender refusal of racism and its location in a racist world that it – and its friends – could not entirely escape.

Chapter 2 – Friendship and Sociability Under Colonialism and Apartheid

As I pointed out in the introduction, the RMF moment, like many others, was one in which friendship and sociability across difference was both placed in question and, at the same time, engaged in. This chapter sets out to explore and clarify the relevance to the thesis of the small and developing literature on friendship under conditions of colonialism and apartheid. Until relatively recently, the literature on friendship and sociability under colonial rule has written about “colonial emotions...through the template of emotional communities or regimes...[plotting] the ways in which emotions [and forms of sociability such as friendship] operated as a ‘dimension of racialised power.’”⁸⁹ This project, like the critique of archive explored in the introduction, takes its bearings from the work of Michel Foucault. Although this critical account has been a worthy and fruitful project, it has also produced its share of lacunae. For instance, as Michael Roper observed of a similar phenomenon in historical studies of masculinity, this literature does not “...allow for the ways in which individuals interact with collective consciousness”⁹⁰, and the “deep, complex and varied emotional experiences that constitute the domain of subjectivity get flattened in an analyses of external codes and structures.”⁹¹ In this chapter I look first at the literature from which I hope to learn but from which I also wish to depart and then at the more recent literature on friendship, sociability, and “imperial intimacies”⁹² or the “private lives of empire”⁹³ that speak more directly to the kind of work I am trying to do in this dissertation. I begin especially with Fanon because a certain reading or interpretation of Fanon circulated both in the moment in which I was discovering and beginning to consider my archive and continues to inform how sociability and possibilities for a different kind of relationality are thought about in particularly polarised contexts in the post-colonial world.

Friendship and Sociability Under Colonialism: Two Approaches (Among Others)

Frantz Fanon opens his *Wretched of the Earth* with a Manichean description of the relationship between the coloniser (settler) and the colonised (native). It is of course important to contextualise Fanon’s observations. He was, as we know, writing in the context of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), during which time, having joined the Algerian Liberation Front (FLN) he participated in the struggle “by hiding weapons and other supplies at the Blida hospital where he

⁸⁹ Will Jackson, “The Private Lives of Empire: Emotion, Intimacy, and Colonial Rule.” *Itinerario* 42, no. 1 (2018): 2, doi:10.1017/S0165115318000049.

⁹⁰ Jackson, “Private Lives,” 2.

⁹¹ Michael Roper cited in Jackson, “Private Lives,” 2–3.

⁹² Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019).

⁹³ See Jackson, “The Private Lives,” 1–15.

worked.”⁹⁴ The French government, and French colonizers in the Organization de l’Armée Secrète, waged a war against Algerians “characterised by systemic arrests, tortures, and killings.”⁹⁵ Robert Young describes the term “violent” as “too clean and cerebral a word, too surrounded with the dignity of philosophical conceptualization, to describe the raging, sadistic and sickening butchery of what went on in Algeria.”⁹⁶ Although most colonial conquest has had its share of violence, not every colony (including the apartheid) was violent in the same way or violent in the same way at *all* times. South Africa and southern Africa did see genocides,⁹⁷ but the apartheid state was dependent on black labour and waged its violence against black people through the law and forms of government, alongside physical violence, aimed at dividing and containing them whilst also extracting their labour as cheaply as possible.⁹⁸ Thus, although there may be useful comparisons to be made between French Algeria and other colonies (or apartheid South Africa, a comparison Fanon does draw in *Wretched of the Earth*), there were also many important particularities and differences that may help to explain why forms of sociality such as the friendship between Pogrund (coloniser/settler) and Sobukwe (native) was possible in South Africa but might not have been possible (or might just have been even more vexed) had the protagonists been transposed into the reality of colonial Algeria. I am mindful of these differences between the Algerian and South African contexts; nevertheless, I am drawing on Fanon’s description of the worlds of the settler and the native in order to elucidate a form of thinking about relationality during and after colonialism, which informs me, but from which I also wish to depart by presenting what I think is both a more accurate and more complex picture.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes the world that the settler and the native exist in as inhabited by two different “species”⁹⁹ of men in a world “cut in two”¹⁰⁰ or “divided into compartments.”¹⁰¹ The compartmentalisation of this world is achieved through the colonial/settler application of “pure force”¹⁰² and establishes a settler zone and a native zone, each quite discrete. The two zones established through colonial violence are not complementary. Rather, the native zone is utterly superfluous from the settler’s perspective. Against the “strongly built” town of the settler, “its belly always full of good things,” its streets “brightly lit” and well paved, the feet of its inhabitants (the settlers) protected by “strong shoes” and never visible to native eyes for the beach where the

⁹⁴ Alberto Castelli, “Liberation Through Violence in Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*: Historical and Contemporary Criticisms,” *Peace & Change* 47(2022): 326, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12554>

⁹⁵ Castelli, “Liberation,” 326.

⁹⁶ Robert Young cited in Castelli, “Liberation,” 326.

⁹⁷ See Elizabeth R. Baer, *The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); see Mohamed Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2010).

⁹⁸ This is not to say that the geographical area we now call South Africa has not seen genocides but that the apartheid project depended too much on the cheap labour of black people to venture a genocide. See Mohamed Adhikari, “A Total Extinction Confidently Hoped For: The Destruction of Cape San Society Under Dutch Colonial Rule, 1700–1795,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 1–2 (2010): 19–44.

⁹⁹ Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 35.

¹⁰⁰ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 38.

¹⁰¹ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 38.

¹⁰² Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 38.

settler walks barefoot is out of bounds to him or her,¹⁰³ is the town of the native. Here the natives live “without spaciousness,” their huts “built one on top of the other.”¹⁰⁴ The circumstances of their lives—where they are born, how they live, how they die—are of no importance. “The native town,” Fanon writes, “is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light.”¹⁰⁵ From this zone the native covets the settler’s table, his bed, and his wife.¹⁰⁶

This manner of living—its two discrete zones, its two “species” of men—is inaugurated and maintained through the application of extreme violence and, Fanon writes, the native can only make himself (or herself) free by meeting this violence with an equal violence. (This is an observation that has often been misinterpreted as a prescription). “Decolonization,” Fanon writes, “is a program of complete disorder.”¹⁰⁷ It is the putting in into practice of the biblical dictum that “the last [natives] shall be first and the first [colonizers/settlers] last.”¹⁰⁸ He continues:

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists.¹⁰⁹

Out of the violence of decolonization, occasioned by the violence of colonization, will come, according to Fanon, a new man [*sic*] and a new society that starts *tabula rasa*.¹¹⁰ Vis-à-vis the theme of friendship in contexts of (violent) injustice and between protagonists positioned in diametric opposition to one another with which this dissertation is concerned, Fanon asserts that this process of decolonization and the birth of a new society and new human beings cannot be the outcome of “friendly understanding.”¹¹¹ The Manichean divide that is the premise for settler/native relations that Fanon sketches, while not without truth, would not help us to understand Sobukwe and Pogrund’s relationship. Indeed, if we assume that Fanon’s descriptions account for connections in the entire sphere of colonial life, it will lead us to believe that such a relationship is not possible. The possibility that friendship might work to undermine the colonial regime or repair the damage that colonization (and apartheid) have wrought or might function as an intermediary form of justice between friends is not evident in this influential text. Fanon’s sketch of the wounded indignant native also precludes accommodations for things Western—the cultural accoutrements of the colonizer. Fanon writes, “every time Western values are mentioned they produce in the native a sort of stiffening or muscular lock jaw [...] when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife—or at least makes sure it is within reach.”¹¹² In this instance Fanon was not writing about all colonialism’s

¹⁰³ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 39.

¹⁰⁴ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 39.

¹⁰⁵ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 39.

¹⁰⁶ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 39.

¹⁰⁷ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 39.

¹⁰⁸ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 37.

¹⁰⁹ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 37.

¹¹⁰ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 35–36.

¹¹¹ Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 36.

¹¹² Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” 43.

circumstances and subjects. It is also important to note that reading that I provide here of Fanon is more in line with the better known and more circulated image of his work in which the “disintoxicating” effects of violence are misconstrued and mistranslated as its “cleansing” effects.¹¹³ However, it should be recalled that Fanon’s own writing complicates this picture: in the final chapter of *Wretched of the Earth*, for example, Fanon writes explicitly against violence and hatred as agendas for liberation.¹¹⁴ I have chosen a reading based on the elements of Fanon that are most picked up and circulated because they represent the kind of polarisation that I am trying to write, read, think, and recommend against while maintaining a commitment to anti-racism in this dissertation. That Fanon is taken up in this way by many should not exhaust our appreciation of his much more complex position on violence.

The way Fanon constructs colonialism suggests a repressive conception of power. The other approach to forms of sociability under colonialism, which comes some decades after Fanon, following the insights and theoretical agenda of Michel Foucault, explores colonial power’s productive dimensions. By productive power Foucault and those who have learned from him mean the kind of power that, rather than exerting a downward pressure on subjectivities – driving them underground or into hiding – instead gives rise through discursive regimes and new forms of governmentality to new colonial subjectivities – making and marking and re-shaping people in the colonial world. There is a vast scholarship now on the productive powers of discursive regimes and colonial governmentality and scholars who have been important to the development of my own thinking – some of whom are enlisted in the dissertation – including Premesh Lalu, Suren Pillay, Carolyn Hamilton, and Mahmood Mamdani among many others. The questions of liberal paternalism that I engaged with in introduction also relates to the productive dimensions of colonial power in that the liberal project attempted, often successfully, to bring into being new subjectivities and new modes of being.

Here I am most interested in that aspect of the scholarship on governmentality that tracks the “the tense and tender ties” of empire through its intimate relationships.¹¹⁵ In *Genealogies of the Intimate: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Laura Ann Stoler attempts to make sense of “why connections between parenting and colonial power, between nursing mothers and cultural boundaries, between servants and sentiments, and between illicit sex, orphans, and race emerge as central concerns of the state at the heart of colonial politics.”¹¹⁶ Stoler points out that Georges Hardy’s 1929 homily that, “A man remains a man as long as he stays under the gaze of a woman of his own race,” in mandating a “set of behaviours, a template for living, a care of the self, an ideal of domesticity” starkly contrasted with the situation in many colonies not just in terms of what white men in the

¹¹³ Adam Shatz, “Vengeful Pathologies,” *London Review of Books* 45, no. 21 (November 2023), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v45/n21/adam-shatz/vengeful-pathologies>.

¹¹⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted By Empire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 24.

¹¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Genealogies of the Intimate: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010 [2002]), 8.

colonies were actually doing but also in terms of what they wanted and, significantly, what they could afford.¹¹⁷ Hardy was an architect of French colonial education, and it is in that context that he spoke. The disjuncture between Hardy's prescription and what people were doing serves, as Stoler points out, to illustrate that "white endogamy was neither an inevitable development nor even a norm."¹¹⁸

Though we are still in the terrain of colonial racism here, we are long from the image Fanon depicts of a complete and discrete separation between coloniser (settler) and colonised (native). Here colonial power works not (only) through direct oppression and gross physical violence, as in Fanon's account, but establishes itself in a Foucauldian manner through intimate relationships between coloniser and colonised to produce new manners, new ways of being, and new forms of subjectivity. It is productive in that it makes, marks, and reshapes subjectivities, even as it represses.

Stoler argues that Hardy's injunction was "a reactive gesture" against the actual situation in the colonies, which included "forced and financed arrangements of domestic and sexual service by housekeepers kept as live-in lovers and by live-in maids whose children were fathered by their European employers."¹¹⁹ The prescription for white women to tend to white men was a reaction to this situation perceived as a "social problem and political danger" by the French and Dutch empires of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ Thus, Stoler shows how social and sexual intimacy and the desire to police or educate it, was a central fact and activity of colonialism. Stoler shows how, through the intimate – through "knowledge about the domestic habits of colonizers and colonized" – racial distinctions central to the management of imperial hierarchies were produced.¹²¹

Stoler's work has been enormously productive for understanding the political nature of intimate social relations under colonialism in the production and management of raced, gendered, and classed hierarchies under colonialism. Like Fanon's work, it allows us to understand certain aspects of intimacy, emotion, and sociality (or lack thereof) under that regime but not others. Stoler's account is in the tradition that looks at the formation of emotional communities and regimes and is grounded in literature from public discourse. Although about the intimate, Stoler's considerations, and other scholars working in the same tradition, rest on an account of "public codes and expectations."¹²² Though the two are intimately connected, I would like to focus on the "interior, subjective worlds of individuals."¹²³ Although Stoler's work is about the intimate it does not consult documents from the "private realm" or think about the interior lives of its subjects. Friendship, for instance, is absent from Stoler's account. Below I explore the postcolonial literature on friendship and forms of sociality under colonialism that worked *potentially* to undermine it, survive it, make life worth living under it, or to

¹¹⁷ Stoler, *Genealogies*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Stoler, *Genealogies*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Stoler, *Genealogies*, 2.

¹²⁰ Stoler, *Genealogies*, 2.

¹²¹ Durba Ghosh, "The Terrorist and His Jailor: The Cundrum of Friendship and Intimacy," *Itinerario* 42, no. 1 (2018), 104–105, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115318000104>.

¹²² Jackson, "Private Lives," 4.

¹²³ Jackson, "Private Lives," 4.

repair, or fleetingly transcend, its harms by forming bonds outside or against possessive communities of belonging, as Gandhi puts it. But first, I pick up from where Fanon and Stoler have left us to consider the uses of friendship in the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa and the reasons for suspicion towards talk of friendship in such contexts. Yet through the intimacy of friendship, sometimes occasioned precisely by colonialism which brought people into contact as much as it separated them,^{124, 125} racism can potentially be subverted, refused, or, even if only fleetingly, transcended. Being friends across a structured form of oppressive difference might be a way to realise justice between friends even if only momentarily; at the same time, it can also reinscribe injustice or the ideas that justify forms of injustice in the context of a given friendship and the society in which it is located.

In “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics” the anthropologist Sidharthan Maunaguru describes friendships between different factions of the movement for Tamil rights in Sri Lanka—a movement characterised by significant political polarisation and violence. As Maunaguru points out it was not unusual within the movement for internecine struggles to end in activists killing one another, and some activists, rather than engage in such violence, left the movement altogether in response. However, some of them maintained their friendships and tried to avoid harming those they left behind even despite the chasm between them on the question of killing fellow activists.¹²⁶ “Friendships and politics” Maunaguru points out, “are not just formed within, but in the fraught space across the lines of seeming difference”.¹²⁷ Maunaguru writes that, “They [the Tamil activists that left the movement] constantly struggled to maintain their friendships while opposing the ideological views of their friends and fellow activists.”¹²⁸ As Maunaguru correctly points out, it is a liberal view of politics that separates the intimate from the political and treats “political activists...as individuals and their ideological commitments [as separate] from their social relationships”.¹²⁹ Being a friend to a person “with dissenting political-ideological views ...constitutes an ethical stand and a political claim,” Maunaguru notes.¹³⁰ I raise these examples to show that friendship can and does arise in any number of circumstances, many of them, as is the case above, deeply unjust and unequal and some, as in the case Maunaguru describes, in which the friends themselves are ideologically pitted against one another on life and death questions. For these reasons, friendship is apt to be an evocative and unsettling relation, putting together what, from the perspective of any longing for ideological or political purity, belongs apart.

¹²⁴ Jackson, “Private Lives,” 4, 9.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019).

¹²⁶ Sidharthan Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics,” *American Ethnologist* (2019), <http://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/the-intimacy-of-dissent/being-a-friend>.

¹²⁷ Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics.”

¹²⁸ Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics.”

¹²⁹ Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics.”

¹³⁰ Maunaguru, “Being a Friend: Ethical Living in Politics.”

Friendship in Lieu of Justice: The Critique of the (Liberal) Settler's Offer of Friendship

There is a long history, particularly in settler colonies, of invoking friendship to normalise political arrangements premised on inequality, domination, and oppression. In the introduction to their volume *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske trace just such a lineage of claims to friendship—or the desire for and the promotion of friendship across difference—in South African political discourse. Walsh and Soske, though not absolutely foreclosing the possibility of friendship, emphasise the undesirability and more manipulative function of a certain kind of claim to friendship as a discourse that shored up white minority rule and,¹³¹ among liberals, the discourse of trusteeship.¹³² As I described in the introduction, liberal trusteeship was the idea that the colonized would remain wards of their colonial rulers until such time as those same rulers deemed them ready to take positions of power themselves. Readiness was premised on the degree to which the colonised assimilated into the culture of the coloniser and was, in practice, permanently deferred.

Walsh and Soske cite Albert Luthuli as the anti-colonial nationalist exemplar of the critique of “liberal friendship,” who, speaking about liberal trusteeship and its doctrine of gradualism pithily said, “Oh, save us from our friends.”¹³³ They also gesture towards similar sentiments at the time, stating that “liberal tea parties [were] frequently mocked in the writings of black authors.”¹³⁴ By “liberal tea parties” they mean those events at which the presence of black people lent a certain legitimacy or credibility to the politics of the whites who organised them. In the 1940s, A.W. G. Champion, a trade unionist and member of the ANC, anticipated the criticisms of friendships of with white liberals by Africanists saying:

Most of you waste time by going to drink tea with Europeans and Indians at the International Club [...] where there are Jews and Jewesses with red cheeks. You do not care about your fellow Africans working with the road gangs. There you keep on cheating the whites that you are representing your own people while you hardly know any of your own people.¹³⁵

In a different vein but equally critical of claims to friendship, Sobukwe would say in the late 1950s of political solidarity with white liberals (which included communists in the Africanist parlance of the time):¹³⁶

¹³¹ Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 19.

¹³² Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 19.

¹³³ Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 21.

¹³⁴ Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 19.

¹³⁵ A.W.G Champion cited in Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 157.

¹³⁶ Gail Gerhart writes that “To the Africanists way of thinking, there was no essential difference between the radical whites of the COD and the old-fashioned white liberals who had always taken a benign interest in Congress...the white liberal and the white radical shared the same underlying attitude to toward African political initiatives: neither was willing to let Africans chart their own course...” See Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 154.

Our past experience has been that minority groups declare themselves sympathetic to our struggle...But when they come into our movement they do not accept the program we have formulated ourselves. They present us with programs that protect their sectional interests. If I am building a house, if there is a friend who wants to help me I expect him to bring building materials with him to come and help me. I do not like him coming with already drawn up plans which will affect my original plan.¹³⁷

This statement, which interestingly compares the white liberal activist to a friend, asking of him or her to act as the ideal friend might—honouring their friend’s wishes rather than overriding them or interfering with them—must be read against the backdrop of the Africanist attitude toward the rapprochement between the ANC, the Indian Congresses, and particularly the Congress of Democrats (which had a white membership constituted mainly of communists). Sobukwe’s statement may be read as a coded critique of this rapprochement and its perceived effects—leading the ANC away from the Programme of Action and from orthodox nationalism—rather than a statement against friendship across racial difference per se. Nevertheless, a particular kind of offer of friendship from white liberals, in which the white friend knows best, is rejected.

Continuing the volume’s exploration of the offer of friendship in lieu of justice, is T. J. Tallie’s “The Impossible Handshake: The Fault Lines of Friendship in Colonial Natal, 1850–1910,” which reflects on the politics of the desire of the nineteenth century Bishop Colenso of colonial Natal for friendship with “indigenous peoples.” Tallie begins by noting that:

Friendship and various forms of sociability across gendered or raced lines could work to either reinforce or unsettle settler power in the nineteenth century, and the legislative record is rife with concerns over ‘improper’ forms of socialization between Africans and members of settler society.¹³⁸

At the same time that colonial powers worried about friendship’s potential to disrupt the racial ‘purity’ that forms of segregation were intended to guarantee, Tallie points out that in the colonial period (before Union in 1910), settlers frequently invoked friendship to justify their rule in Natal.¹³⁹ In this context various groups invested or located in the project of settler colonialism in Natal cohered around invocations of friendship that legitimated colonial rule; and thus, “paradoxically served to strengthen colonial hierarchies of power.”¹⁴⁰

Here the empirical details of Tallie’s example become important. In 1854, Bishop John Colenso hoped to build “productive and close relationships” with “indigenous Africans.”¹⁴¹ At a meeting with a group of Africans he wished to shake the hand of one of the men he was to meet. But

¹³⁷ Sobukwe cited in Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 155.

¹³⁸ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake: The Fault Lines of Friendship in Colonial Natal, 1850–1910,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 101.

¹³⁹ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 101.

¹⁴⁰ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 104–105.

¹⁴¹ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 101.

before the meeting Colenso was warned that “too ready familiarity, and especially shaking hands with them upon slight acquaintance, was not only not understood by them, but did great mischief in making them pert and presuming.”¹⁴² So the bishop ignored the man whose hand he wished to shake instead.

Tallie analyses this desire for friendship with “indigenous Africans” by a colonial official through Derrida’s concept of the gift. The gift he writes, in explicating Derrida, creates a sense of obligation in the receiver to reciprocate. However, for the gift to function as such the obligation to reciprocate that it engenders must be ignored, indeed denied, by all concerned, otherwise it becomes a form of “calculation, exchange, and indebtedness.”¹⁴³ Tallie situates Colenso’s desire for friendship with “indigenous Africans” within this more calculated and economic process of circulation:

The friendship that Colenso desired certainly could operate in such a fashion; part of the calculus of such friendship would be to facilitate Africans reorientated as Christian laborers, acculturated to the religious and cultural milieu of colonial society.¹⁴⁴

Colenso, Tallie writes, would later agitate “for the rights of Zulu peoples against the settler government” supported “in part by the Aborigines’ Protection Society in Britain” and reported on in their periodical titled *The Aborigines’ Friends*.¹⁴⁵ As Tallie points out, this friendship was not innocent: for the Aborigines’ erstwhile friends reserved for themselves the right to “a paternalistic interest in indigenous peoples, but also [...] the right to perpetual protection.”¹⁴⁶ In the colonial and Union pasts, this paternalistic interest and right to protection was figured as trusteeship. Thus the friendship such settlers envisioned and offered was never far removed from “constant support for imperial authority in the region.”¹⁴⁷ Their gift of friendship Tallie points out, following Derrida, was colossal and could never be repaid:¹⁴⁸ “Instead, African peoples were to be ensnared in an affective relation of constant indebtedness to their enlightened British compatriots.”¹⁴⁹ This is a paradigm example of friendship in lieu of justice and is strongly associated with the liberal tradition.¹⁵⁰

The rhetoric of friendship in colonial Natal pulled in different directions. On the one hand, as I have illustrated above, it was used to advance settlers’ claims to a legitimate and autonomous position in the colony against their foreign counter parts in the colonial metropole.¹⁵¹ Settlers held that, rather than their far-flung metropolitan peers, they should rule in the colonies *because* they were friends with the natives. Their control over native populations was justified on the basis of a claim to friendship with them in the report of the 1881 Native Commission.¹⁵² From a liberal perspective, who

¹⁴²Bishop John Colenso cited in T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 100.

¹⁴³ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 106.

¹⁴⁴ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 106.

¹⁴⁵ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 107.

¹⁴⁶ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 107.

¹⁴⁷ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 107.

¹⁴⁸ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 107.

¹⁴⁹ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 107.

¹⁵⁰ See Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 3–30.

¹⁵¹ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 108.

¹⁵² T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 109.

better to run the affairs of Natal than one who shared amity with local populations? On the other hand, some settlers took friendship between settler and native as a threat to white supremacy. The settler politician Charles Barter held that settlers and natives —respectively the white and the coloured, as he puts it—could only live in close contact with one another if the hegemony and supremacy of the former was maintained; the “black, brown, or red” man should be entirely dependent on “the will of the stronger.”¹⁵³ There were others, like W.F. Butler who used the discourse of friendship to some extent against the usages described above to criticise the rapaciousness of settler colonialism saying:

How bitter must be the sense of disappointment with which he [the native] learns the real nature of the *role* he has accepted in the new creed and social state; how startling the discovery that this beautiful theory of the white man’s love and brotherhood and charity to all men, means in the hard logic of fact the refusal of a night’s shelter under the same roof to him [...] the actual existence of a barrier between him and the white race, more fatally opposed to fusion, more hostile to reciprocity of thought, mutual friendship, or commonest tie of fellowship, than that which lies between civilized man and the dumb dog that follows him.¹⁵⁴

Butler’s bracing criticism should not be mistaken for a call for friendship to overcome settler colonial rule; rather, he pled to reform its exclusionary practices.¹⁵⁵

Others deployed the rhetoric of friendship not between settler and native but between white settler and white settler against the perceived threat to their common hegemony posed by the natives and the subject races—in this case Indians—then migrating to colonial Natal. Here friendship acted to consolidate an affective bond between white settler and white settler.¹⁵⁶ Tallie cites Charles King as an example:

I want our own selves to occupy this Colony—Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen...give us our own friends, so that we can associate with them and make our lives comfortable and happy with them. But the very last people we should try to flood this Colony with are the Coolies.¹⁵⁷

Although Tallie opens his chapter by acknowledging the subversive potential of friendship his account only works well to explain mobilisations of friendship that sought to consolidate settler colonial hegemony —or reform it, as in the case of Butler— either by insinuating settlers into the emotional lives of the colonised and using this insinuation to suggest that they were best suited as masters of Natal or by deploying it to encourage an affective bond between white settlers against the perceived threat of the colony’s racialised others. These certainly are some of the usages to which the discourse and practice of friendship in the colonial period has been put. But what of examples that don’t fit the

¹⁵³ Barter cited in T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 110.

¹⁵⁴ Butler cited in T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 111.

¹⁵⁵ T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 111.

¹⁵⁶ The term “settler” is a contested one. I use it here to describe Tallie’s work in which it is used to denote Europeans involved in colonizing what was then Natal. Tallie does not use it in any other sense.

¹⁵⁷ King cited in T.J. Tallie, “The Impossible Handshake,” 112.

mould? In what follows I turn to another example of the discourse and practice of friendship that does not seek to shore up the power of Empire and its settlers but rather to rebel against it: an anticolonial (though not nationalist) discourse and practice of friendship. But first, I want to explore Franco Barchiesi's contribution to the volume that treats the topic of non-racialism, also an important theme in the dissertation.

In "The Problem with 'We': Affiliation, Political Economy, and the Counterhistory of Nonracialism," Barchiesi frame his intervention through the irresolvable antagonism between white and black proposed by theorists of Afro-pessimism such as Frank Wilderson. Briefly, in this theory an antagonism is "an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions."¹⁵⁸ In Afro-pessimist theory the white is constituted as human against the black, the latter stripped of any capacity for relationality or agency through racial slavery, which turned them into mere items of property.¹⁵⁹ Following Wilderson, Barchiesi argues that:

...the afterlife of racial slavery after 'emancipation' is secured by white claims to possess the ethical and productive norms needed to 'improve' 'Black' functionality in white civil society and political economy, which justifies the positing of 'Black' bodies as objects of white instruction, mediation, concern, or coercion.¹⁶⁰

Against this backdrop Barchiesi argues that friendship across difference is incompatible with slavery (the position of black people) because slavery totally objectifies and denies self-determination to the slave. The slave can have no friend because he (or she) is denied all relationality. White friendship, he says, presupposes "Black decomposition."¹⁶¹ African nationalism, he writes, "evolved...from the endorsement of affiliation steeped in visions of socioeconomic cross-racial interdependence to a critique of paternalistic white friendship."¹⁶²

The (liberal) non-racialism Barchiesi traces and critiques in the rest of the article is one that whether articulated by whites or black elites sought to establish friendship between whites and blacks (natives) "while remaining committed to the ideal of white-ruled South Africa,"¹⁶³ in which select blacks – educated, Christian, property-owning and male — could be incorporated without disturbing, unsettling, or in any way threatening white domination. Although Barchiesi allows for the complexity of non-racialism as politics,¹⁶⁴ he doesn't explore instances in which its vision was not to fold black people into whiteness. In chapter 4, based on Sobukwe's own speeches, I establish a lineage for an anti-racist non-racialism, rather than a colour-blind liberal non-racialism, which seeks to undo the

¹⁵⁸ Frank Wilderson cited in Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We': Political Economy, and the Counterhistory of Non-Racialism," in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 128.

¹⁵⁹ Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 128–129.

¹⁶⁰ Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 129.

¹⁶¹ Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 130.

¹⁶² Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 131.

¹⁶³ Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 136.

¹⁶⁴ Franco Barchiesi, "The Problem with 'We'," 133.

structures that make race all together – abolition, not colour-blindness! This anti-racist trajectory for non-racialism has real historical roots in South Africa beyond Sobukwe, as I explore in both chapter 4 and 5. An openness to the world and to others, and this the notion of friendship, is at the heart of Sobukwe’s anti-racist non-racialism.

Friendship as Politics: New Approaches to the Politics of Friendship

I want to turn now to another set of literatures that takes seriously the possibility that members of settler colonial and imperial societies could cast their lot in with the communities their governments and peers sought to dominate and that opens the way for thinking of friendship and non-racialism not as a strategy of containment but as a commitment to the radical undoing of race and racial domination in its colonial/imperial, apartheid, and postcolonial forms.

In *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, Leela Gandhi thinks through the empirics of friendship across difference in colonial India at the turn of the nineteenth century. Gandhi begins by pointing out that postcolonial scholarship has privileged, for understandable reasons, the anti-imperialism or oppositionality of the colonised themselves. Anti-imperialism, this scholarship assumes, is “an action performed solely by the putative non-West upon the putative West, through gestures of either oppositionality [...] or infiltration [...]”.¹⁶⁵ But there were those, as Gandhi points out, who “renounced the privileges of imperialism and elected affinity with victims of their own expansionist cultures.”¹⁶⁶ Gandhi asks, as I also do here of the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship and its correspondence:

How might we recognize as *political* the disaggregated forms of dissent *engaged for its own sake*, bearing no practical investment in the *telos* of the anticolonial nation-state and certainly gaining no material advantage from the diminution of imperial power.¹⁶⁷ (My emphasis).

To asks such a question is in some way to begin to address the criticisms of South African political biography and history that scholars such as Ciraaj Rassool have raised in recent years, and which I explored in the introduction. Rassool points out that what he calls “documentary” approaches to South African political history and biography have, partly as a function of the kinds of things that have been archived, remained organised around ‘Big Men’ and the public activities of the organisations that they led.¹⁶⁸ Thus, paying little attention to questions of subjectivity, private life, interiority, gender, and identity, “political lives have been seen, rather, as units of national history,”¹⁶⁹ ignoring the “disaggregated forms of dissent” to which Gandhi refers, and made to speak to that history in ways

¹⁶⁵ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ciraaj Rassool, “Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography,” *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2010): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528581003676028>.

¹⁶⁹ Rassool, “Rethinking Documentary History,” 29.

that efface its messiness—and the messiness of the lives of those caught up in it—producing very “unmessy narratives of resistance, with their subjects endowed with rationality, consistency and purpose, and the process of their lives constructed and constituting development and progression.”¹⁷⁰ To think about forms of resistance not yoked to formal anti-colonial nationalist struggle is to move in a direction that would begin to address these kinds of criticism. So too is the project of exploring subjectivity and interiority in the lives of those caught up in the liberation struggle whether nationalist and/or personal.

Part of Gandhi’s project, turning to Edward Said, is to unsettle the idea of “an ‘us’ and a ‘them’, each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident.”¹⁷¹ She writes:

If the imperial project, and its recourse to the exclusionary structures of instrumental binary reason, demanded from its votaries strict observance of the ideological thresholds separating insiders from outsiders, us from them, similars from foreigners, masters from slaves, the precise energies of the individuals and subcultures that I examine accrued in the main from innovative border crossing, visible in small, defiant flights from the fetters of belonging toward the unknown destinations of radical alterity.¹⁷²

Empirically, as Gandhi points out, colonial division had proved epistemically and existentially impossible.¹⁷³ The yearning of imperialism for “discrete binarization” and “secure psychic quarantine is always complicated by a perennial osmosis through which colonizer and colonized mutate unawares but inexorably into each other.” This is a very different account of colonialism than the one provided by Fanon in the passages I cited above, or in the more spectacular, polarizing moments of the RMF protests. That is not to say that there is no truth in how the latter two understand the relational problem of colonialism but rather that there are also other empirical and phenomenological realities. These other facets of the problem, no less real, are what engage me here. As Gandhi puts it, “it is precisely as a project of pure division that colonial fantasy carries elements of its own inevitable disappointment; precisely its craving for the hygiene of oppositionality that renders it susceptible contagion from a field where, à la Marx, ‘everything seems pregnant with its contrary.’”¹⁷⁴ This craving for pure division also haunts some forms of opposition to colonialism and apartheid obscuring the more complicated reality as I have discussed in the introduction and above. What might come into view, if the reality of “contagion”,¹⁷⁵ as Gandhi puts it, were admitted into a contemporary analysis of friendship across difference in the RMF and post-RMF moment?

¹⁷⁰ Rassool, “Rethinking Documentary History,” 29.

¹⁷¹ Edward Said cited in Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 3.

¹⁷² Edward Said cited in Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.

¹⁷³ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 3.

¹⁷⁴ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Exploring this reality is obviously not the innovation of either this dissertation or Gandhi’s work. Perhaps the most well-known example is Homi Bhabha. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Derrida too is useful to the exploration of the politics of friendship. In his *Politics of Friendship* he notes that:

The concept of politics rarely announces itself without some sort of adherence of the State to the family, without what we call a *schematic* of filiation; stock, genus or species, sex (*Geschlecht*), blood, birth, nature, nation—autochothonal or not, tellurian or not.¹⁷⁶

This he connects to the tendency to think of friendship since the time of the ancients as a relationship only between men and men of a certain social standing. But friendship, for Derrida, is an unscripted relation and herein lie its better political possibilities.¹⁷⁷ He writes:

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but belonging to the time of promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept. Is it possible to open up the ‘to come’ of a certain democracy which is no longer an insult to the friendship we have striven to think beyond the homo-fraternal and phallogentric schema?¹⁷⁸

Although Sobukwe and Pogrand’s friendship cannot be said, even in the way they conceived of it themselves, to break with homo-fraternity entirely (there are moments, of course, in which it does which I explore progressively in the following chapters), it does challenge the “schematic of filiation” at the heart of the political claims of the (apartheid) state. As Gandhi writes, “as apprehended by Derrida as a means whereby we might redesignate ‘the political’ as the place of an always deferred and therefore always open and hospitable community, ‘friendship’ categorically defines community as a countermand against social exclusion.

Others have walked the kind of path that Gandhi does too. Most notably Ashis Nandy and Susan Visvanathan. In *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Nandy explores various examples of figures who broke with colonialism in British India. Some of these figures, like C.F. Andrews, are the same as those Gandhi and Visvanathan pursue so it is on the treatment of Andrews that I will focus here.

Nandy’s premise—which I share and which I have stated above and explore further in subsequent chapters—is that colonialism (in the case of this dissertation also apartheid) harms the coloniser perhaps even more, Nandy thinks, than the colonised. Nandy starts by pointing out that while Indians were hundreds of millions in a large landmass, colonisers were few. This meant that the cultural impacts of colonialism on Indians could be *partly* confined to the urban centres and among Indian elites. For white Britons it was not so; they were saturated in the imperial culture. The same can be said for white settlers in the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa. Nandy writes,

¹⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 2005), viii.

¹⁷⁷ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 306.

“They [Britons] were overwhelmed by the experience of being colonial rulers. As a result, the long-term cultural damage colonialism did to the British society was greater.”¹⁷⁹ In what way does Nandy think they were damaged? Firstly, Nandy points out how the imperial culture made non-negotiable hierarchies of gender and age that were harmful and constricting not only to Indian society but to an increasingly homogenised British culture too. Nandy writes:

It [colonialism] began to bring to prominence those parts of British political culture which were least tender and humane. It de-emphasized speculation, intellection and *caritas* as feminine, and justified a limited cultural role for women—and femininity—by holding that the softer side of human nature was irrelevant to the public sphere. It openly sanctified—in the name of such values as competition, achievement, control and productivity—new forms of institutionalized violence and ruthless social Darwinism. The instrumental concept of the lower classes it promoted was perfectly in tune with the needs of industrial capitalism [...]
The tragedy of colonialism was also the tragedy of the younger sons, the women, and all ‘the etceteras and-so-forths’ of Britain.¹⁸⁰

There is more. As Césaire and Fanon recognised colonialism made its colonisers and settlers savage. Césaire writes that “In treating him [the colonised] like an animal...he [the coloniser] turns *himself* into an animal.”¹⁸¹ Fanon observes that the officers who tortured the freedom fighters of Algeria often went home to beat up their families.¹⁸² Thus, as Nandy argues the ancient wisdom of the New Testament and the Sauptik Parva of the Mahabharata applies: “Do not unto others what you would not that they do unto you, lest you do unto yourself what you do unto others.”¹⁸³ When thinking about the damage colonialism did to the coloniser, Nandy thinks in terms both of a loss of social relations and a psychic loss that he refers to as “ego constriction,”¹⁸⁴ and that I describe in subsequent chapters as a devastating cultural and social narrowing.

However, Nandy suggests, as Visvanathan and Gandhi will later, that there were people from within British society who broke with colonialism though not in a way that can be understood if one only privileges anti-colonial nationalism as exhaustively constitutive of such breakings. Alongside more obviously political figures like the novelist George Orwell, Nandy suggest that “non-political” figures such as W. H. Auden, Oscar Wilde, and Virginia Woolf contested the politics of their times without being involved in organised struggle through their manner of being in everyday life (I look at examples of this in the case of Pogrund and Sobukwe in the subsequent chapters).¹⁸⁵ But the “rhetoric of revolution,” Nandy points out, devalues reform and anything that is not a total rupture with the

¹⁷⁹ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 30–31.

¹⁸⁰ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 32.

¹⁸¹ Césaire cited in Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 30.

¹⁸² Fanon cited in Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 31.

¹⁸³ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 31.

¹⁸⁴ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 35.

¹⁸⁵ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 42–44.

past.¹⁸⁶ The point, which Leela Gandhi also makes, is that there are forms of refusal, resistance, and rebellion that cannot be easily understood within or incorporated into the telos of anti-colonial (or anti-apartheid) nationalism that have much more all-or-nothing stakes.

Visvanathan, Gandhi, and Nandy all pursue the figure of C.F. Andrews in their analyses (Gandhi acknowledges that Andrews is *somewhat* more incorporable into Indian anti-colonial nationalism than say Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt, Mira Alfassa, Sri Aurobindo, Manmohan Ghose, or Oscar Wilde, who are all less easily assimilated).¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Andrew's life and, as Gandhi puts it, "anti-manichean practice,"¹⁸⁸ is not the same as that nationalism and in fact, Gandhi argues, prevented it from "resolving itself into pure oppositionality," a fact which the Mahatma recognised "with his clear genius for the politics of transgression and small gestures."¹⁸⁹ What were these small gestures, comparable to those made by both Pogrund and Sobukwe to one another, that make up the discussion of subsequent chapters? Here I explore them through Gandhi, Visvanathan, and Nandy's analyses of the life of C.F. Andrews focusing on aspects that help me build my own argument about the Sobukwe-Pogrund friendship.

Charles Freer Andrews was an Anglican priest and missionary known for his support of the Indian struggle for independence. In 1914, "having resigned his post at St. Stephen's and donated his admittedly meagre possessions to the Indian National Congress," Gandhi tells us, he left for South Africa to support M.K. Gandhi "in his campaign on behalf of Indian indentured labourers."¹⁹⁰ On meeting M.K. Gandhi at the docks, the former dressed in the same garb as an indentured labourer might wear – a dhoti and kurta of course material – his head shaven, looking like, as Leela Gandhi puts it, a "coolie-ascetic," Andrews stooped to touch Gandhi's feet. Of this gesture, Leela Gandhi writes:

...one might claim it as an iconic anticolonial frieze: the London-trained Indian barrister defying imperial polarities of class and station in an elaborate costume drama; the Anglican priest reversing the fundamental civilizational hierarchy of Empire in a single, defiant gesture of self-abnegation.¹⁹¹

In chapter 3, 5, and 6, I explore a series of gestures, actions, and practices between Pogrund and Sobukwe, which are comparable to the anti-manichean practice of C.F. Andrews and M. K. Gandhi described here. Andrews had a flair for such gestures and would touch another pair of Indian feet in 1919, when he stooped to beg the forgiveness of a young Sikh who had been the victim of an imperial beating.¹⁹² As Gandhi writes: "Once again, the minor affective transactions of this closet drama import an incalculable excess into the impasse of the colonial encounter, collapsing *for a brief moment* the

¹⁸⁶ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 61.

¹⁸⁷ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 15.

¹⁸⁹ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 14.

¹⁹¹ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 14.

¹⁹² Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 14.

mutually quarantined categories of colonizer and colonized” (my emphasis).¹⁹³ Perhaps with less drama, one might read such a momentary collapse in certain moments and actions recounted in the letters that Pogrund and Sobukwe wrote to one another. For instance, the myriad ways in which Pogrund subordinated himself to Sobukwe carrying out the latter’s requests while he was in prison even to the extent of forging birthday cards for Sobukwe’s children on his behalf; organising small creature comforts for him in prison—fashionable clothing, nice furniture, a radio, a record player, records, more books than Sobukwe’s bookcases could hold, care packages for Christmas; or the moment in which Sobukwe compares Pogrund to a brother and Pogrund replies without shame that he had wept on reading Sobukwe’s words.

In Susan Visvanathan’s essay on C.F. Andrews—“C.F. Andrews and the Dialogue of Religion”—she tells an anecdote, corroborated by the record, in which Gandhi, at missionary conferences would tell the assembled there to live like the carpenter of Nazereth rather than *telling* Indians *about* Christianity. When a missionary asked how they were to identify themselves with the Indian masses, he replied: “Copy Charlie Andrews.”¹⁹⁴ Visvanathan writes that it was Andrews’ “pluralism of language and vision,” one that was nurtured and grew in the interstices of his friendship with figures like the Muslim Zaka Ullah¹⁹⁵ and the Hindu Munshi Ram,¹⁹⁶ that would later cause difficulties for him as an Anglican priest and cause him “to detach himself from the colonial shackles.”¹⁹⁷ Visvanathan points out the vital role that these friendships played in deepening and developing both Andrews’ Christianity and his politics (which cannot be easily separated). Through these relationship Andrews saw himself not as moving away from Christianity but becoming closer to Christ. He wrote to Munshi Ram in 1913 that “The wrappings of mere ecclesiasticism and conventional Christianity were falling off” and that he felt himself “becoming closer to Christ himself than ever.”¹⁹⁸

All of this is evidence of a truth that scholars of imperial intimacies insist upon: that colonial and imperial domination brought together as much as it separated the various groups it produced and dominated or elevated. Furthermore, those intimacies did not always work, as in the case of Stoler’s work explored above, to enforce the imperial or racist project. Sometimes, as Visvanathan and Gandhi make clear they challenged those projects in unexpected ways and outside of the more conventional route of formal, organised, anti-colonial nationalist struggle.

In her work on imperial intimacies, “The Terrorist and His Jailer: The Conundrum of Friendship and Intimacy,” Durba Ghosh argues for the “fundamental sociality of colonialism”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 14.

¹⁹⁴ Susan Visvanathan, *Friendship, Interiority, Mysticism: Essays in Dialogue* (Hydrabad: Orient Longman, 2007), 63.

¹⁹⁵ Zaka Ullah was an Urdu writer and translator who was born in 1832 and died in 1910.

¹⁹⁶ Munshi Ram was born in 1906 and died in 1998. He was an Indian spiritual teacher and a follower of the spiritual teacher Faqir Chand.

¹⁹⁷ Visvanathan, *Friendship*, 68.

¹⁹⁸ Visvanathan, *Friendship*, 69.

¹⁹⁹ Durba Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer: The Conundrum of Friendship and Intimacy,” *Itinerario* 42, no. 1 (2018): 102, doi:10.1017/S0165115318000104.

exploring a relationship between two men opposed to one another in often violent and life-or-death ways but which Ghosh nevertheless describes as “built on mutual recognition.”²⁰⁰ Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty was a Bengali revolutionary terrorist who spent several decades in prison and there fostered a relationship with the British policeman responsible for his imprisonment, Francis Lowman.²⁰¹ As Ghosh points out, a kind of intimacy with the enemy was the foundation for revolutionary terrorism:

Terrorist acts depend on intimacy. For the terrorist, knowing the enemy—the state and its officials—was critical to identifying what kind of act would most jar their security, so it was not so unusual or surprising that the revolutionary terrorists in Bengal took to attacking British officials in the spaces that the British felt most safe: the racecourse, the cricket or football pitch, or the club. In each of these cases, revolutionaries dressed up in European dress, showing their intimate knowledge of the more elite classes of India (some had even schooled in Britain), and in a subversive turn, mimicked those they hoped to unseat as rulers...the image of the Bhagat Singh dressed in a suit and black hat became an important and popular symbol of militant nationalism precisely because he was able to blend in with a European crowd and evade police detection.²⁰²

I have already suggested, in the introduction, the sharpest anger and resistance to colonial domination, including in the present to its long shadow, tend to emanate from among the ranks of those who have experienced the intimacies produced by the putting into practice of the liberal “civilising mission.” Not for nothing, both in the colonial, apartheid pasts, and in contemporary South Africa, the most angry and organised critics, of which, in the more recent past the RMF is exemplary, of colonial domination and its legacies, are those who have been assimilated into the culture of the oppressor through western-style education, culture, and religion. Indeed, the imperial turn from direct rule with its assimilationist aspirations to indirect rule, which produced a splintered consciousness among colonialism’s subjects, was precisely because some administrators recognised how dangerous this intimacy was for the stability of colonial rule. But, as I also pointed out in the introduction, forms of the “civilising mission” and its assimilationist aspirations, persisted even after indirect rule and separate development regimes (such as apartheid) became a norm across English speaking colonial world. Intimacy need not lead to friendliness between coloniser and colonised, nor preclude revolutionary political commitments or acts of political violence, indeed it can occasion these.

As Ghosh makes clear in her exploration of the Chakrabarty-Lowman relationship, friendliness could exist even between political enemies. What evidence do we have that Lowman and Chakrabarty—the agent of empire and its revolutionary enemy—were friends or shared, as Ghosh puts it, “mutual recognition”? The case of Lowman and Chakrabarty’s friendship and mutual

²⁰⁰ Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 102.

²⁰¹ Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 102.

²⁰² Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 107.

recognition rests on very similar evidence—though in this case far sparser—as the case for Pogrud and Sobukwe’s friendship. During Chakrabarty’s time in prison there is evidence that Lowman cared for him, and he for Lowman, in ways that went beyond what one would expect from the relationship between a prisoner and his jailer if one thinks of these relationships in more binary terms with only binary options so far as how they are realised in everyday life as possible outcomes. Although Ghosh makes it clear that there was a pragmatic stimulus for the intimacy between Chakrabarty and Lowman—she acknowledges and explores the pragmatic reasons for a terrorist prisoner to want to know his jailer and a jailer to want to know his terrorist prisoner—she also looks at the moments of tenderness, care, and mutual recognition between Chakrabarty and Lowman that are more difficult to explain if one assumes a purely pragmatic and rational calculus behind the relationship.

There are small acts between the jailer and the terrorist of Ghosh’s example that speak *both* to genuine mutuality *and* to self-interested calculation. For instance, when Lowman and Chakrabarty first met, the former saw that Chakrabarty was inadequately clothed and bought garments for him out of his (Lowman’s) own pocket. We have this account from Chakrabarty’s autobiography. Chakrabarty described Lowman as “overjoyed at my capture.”²⁰³ Chakrabarty writes that Lowman “roared in anger” when questioning him led nowhere.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, noticing that he had few clothes, Lowman attended to this need. Ghosh writes that “This vignette and several that follow gesture to Trailokya’s [Chakrabarty’s] impressions of Lowman’s emotional availability, suggesting an emotional surrender that enabled Lowman to recognise those jailed under his supervision.”²⁰⁵ Ghosh acknowledges that of course Lowman’s “acts of kindness might have emerged from a strategy to persuade Trailokya to be more forthcoming with information.”²⁰⁶ And yet, despite this possibility, of which Chakrabarty would have been aware, Ghosh describes a feeling of respect, informality, and even admiration in his account of Lowman and their relationship.

Of their next encounter in 1914, Chakrabarty wrote, “Mr. Lowman had the capacity to mix with all shades of people. Very frequently he used to come to have a chat with me. Of course he would always try to grasp any secret news from me that might have come out during conversation.”²⁰⁷ Here Chakrabarty acknowledges both the rational and self-interested calculus that almost certainly had something to do with Lowman’s behaviour and *at the same time* expresses a kind of admiration for Lowman’s capacity “to mix with all shades of people.” As Ghosh argues, this was not precisely a friendship and yet it was a social connection that evinced aspects of the fundamental sociability of human being, a sociability that persisted even under the conditions of colonial domination. Pogrud and Sobukwe’s relationship is of course a very different one to the one between Lowman and Chakrabarty, even though there are of course similarities. What is useful about the Lowman-

²⁰³ Chakrabarty cited in Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 111.

²⁰⁴ Chakrabarty cited in Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 111.

²⁰⁵ Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 111.

²⁰⁶ Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 111.

²⁰⁷ Chakrabarty cited in Ghosh, “The Terrorist and His Jailer,” 111–112.

Chakrabarty relationship in thinking about the Sobukwe-Pogrand relationship is that it evidences that forms of sociability that are based in mutual recognition (which could include friendship) can and do exist alongside more self-serving and rationalistically impelled sociability such as that which I explored in the section above on friendship and claims to friendship in colonial Natal. The question of friendship and sociability under conditions of injustice and between oppressors and oppressed is not an either/or question.

I want to close this chapter with an image of friendship from the philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In his chapter on friendship from a collection of essays titled *What is an Apparatus?* Agamben describes a painting by Giovanni Serodine of the apostles Peter and Paul meeting on the road to their martyrdom. The two apostles are depicted “so close to each other (their foreheads almost stuck together) that there is no way they can see one another.”²⁰⁸ On the road to martyrdom, Agamben observes, “they look at each other without recognising one another.”²⁰⁹ It is, he says, an almost excessive nearness.²¹⁰ Agamben argues that the word friend belongs to what linguists refer to as nonpredictive terms. Terms “from which it is not possible to establish a class that includes all the things to which the predicate in question is attributed.”²¹¹ To recognise someone as a friend means *not* being able to recognise her as *something*. To call someone a friend, Agamben argues, “is not the same as calling him ‘white’, ‘Italian’, or ‘hot’, since friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject.”²¹²

Through Aristotle, Agamben proposes that friendship is a con-division or joint sensation of being. On the basis of the famous passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that treat friendship, the theses of which include the ideas that a) we cannot live without friends; b) virtue friendship, in which the friend is loved for himself [*sic*] is the highest form of friendship, above friendships based on pleasure or utility; and c) that it is not possible to have many friends. In these passages Aristotle insists that there is a) a sensation of pure being; b) that this sensation is sweet; c) that there is an equivalence between being and living; and d), which this the most important observation for Agamben, that:

...within this sensation of existing there is another sensation, specifically a human one, that takes the form of a joint sensation, or a con-sent with the existence of the friend. *Friendship is the instance of this “con-sentiment” of the existence of the friend within the sentiment of existence itself.* But this means that friendship has an ontological and political status. The sensation of being is, in fact, always already divided and “con-divided” [*con-divisa*, shared], and friendship is the name of this “con-division.”²¹³ (Emphases in the original).

²⁰⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 30.

²⁰⁹ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 30-31.

²¹⁰ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 31.

²¹¹ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 29.

²¹² Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 29.

²¹³ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 34.

Agamben insists that this “con-division” of being is *not* the same as intersubjectivity. Rather, “I and the friend are two faces, or two poles, of this con-division or sharing.”²¹⁴ The friend therefore, is not another self, but rather:

...an otherness immanent to selfness, a becoming other of the self. The point at which I perceive my existence as sweet, my sensation goes through a con-senting which dislocates and deports my sensation towards the friend, towards the other self. Friendship is this desubjectification at the very heart of the most intimate sensation of the self.²¹⁵

I want to think about this argument in terms of the insights of Leela Gandhi about how the imperial fantasy of pure division carries within itself the seeds of its own disappointment. Because of its inherent sociability, which is to say the inherent sociality of all forms of human being, colonialism could not realise the project of pure division entirely successfully precisely (although it did a great deal of harm in the attempt); its sociality enabled contact and out of that contact emerged forms of relationality such as friendship in which, as Agamben describes it, one can no longer recognise the other as an other.

Conclusion

Histories of friendship, sociability, emotions, and intimacy, must contend with the fact that these things are embedded in, entangled with, and shaped by power. However, this does not mean that friendship always operates to enforce or replicate existing power relations in any sort of deterministic fashion. Friendship may both fleetingly transcend or subvert difference and *at the same time* be used to re-inscribe it. In this chapter I have explored both the literature that thinks about friendship, sociability, emotions, and intimacies as vectors of colonial power but I have also explored emerging literatures that suggest the ways in which friendship might rework difference, or work against colonial power as a form of a non-teleological way of being politically engaged. My intention here has not been to suggest that friendship is the solution to political problems but rather that friendship might be a form of struggling against political injustice or making lives worth living even under unjust conditions. In the next chapter, I begin to look directly at the friendship of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund where I take up some of the themes of this chapter.

²¹⁴ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 34.

²¹⁵ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 34–35.

Chapter 3 – The Politics of a Friendship: Possibilities, Contradictions, and Limitations

In the literature review, through the work of Durba Ghosh, Leela Gandhi, and Ashis Nandy, I pointed out that colonial conquest did not only divide, but also brought together. While much of that togetherness was violent, some forms of relationality that sought to challenge the violence of colonial conquest – physical, material, epistemic, political, and relational – did emerge (however fleetingly and imperfectly) even at the same time as that relationality and its actors remained rooted in and circumscribed by a social world shaped by colonial conquest. That these relationships remain haunted by the violence of conquest does not mean that they were fully or uncomplicatedly determined by that violence or merely gave expression to it. Instead, they existed *and* where characterised by forms of mutuality and, at the same time, were ridden with contradictions. Similarly, the friendship between Pogrud and Sobukwe existed and, as I will show in this chapter, was characterised both by possibilities *and* contradictions and limitations. This state of being ridden with contradictions is also true of the friendship's protagonists: Sobukwe and Pogrud, and of the PAC and LPSA, of which they were respective members.

Thus far, the fact of Sobukwe's friendship with Pogrud has not received any explicit attention in the small body of scholarly literature and public commentary on Sobukwe's life. Scholars and commentators interested in Sobukwe and the PAC have largely focused on his politics,^{216,217,218,219, 220} where politics is implicitly understood as public and formal/organised, or, more recently, on the psychological and political meaning for public memory of his erasure from the story of the South African liberation struggle.²²¹ In this chapter, I want to place the emphasis on Sobukwe's friendship with Pogrud, a member of the liberal opposition to apartheid. This is not because there are no other stories to be told of Sobukwe, but because this relationship allows me to reflect on the politics of friendship. Against the backdrop of the sometimes highly polarised moment of the RMF and its sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit takes on relationality and mutuality across difference, which I described in the introduction, it seems important to do so. In a polarised and violent world, in lieu of a utopia that is not imminent, it is necessary to represent and appreciate the forms of mutuality and relationality that people forge with one another. While it is important not to uncritically idealise

²¹⁶ See for instance, Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

²¹⁷ Ndumiso Dladla, "Contested Memory: Retrieving the Africanist (Liberatory) Conception of Non-Racialism," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 64, no. 153 (2017): 101–127, <https://doi.org/10.3167/th.2017.6415307>.

²¹⁸ Elias L. Ntloedibe, *Here is a Tree: Political Biography of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe* (Mogoditshane, Botswana: Century-Turn Publishers, 1995).

²¹⁹ Kwandiwe Kondlo, *In the Twilight of Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 2009).

²²⁰ S.E.M. Phoko, *The Land is Ours: The Political Legacy of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe* (Johannesburg: Tokoloho, 1994).

²²¹ See Derek Hook, "A Threatening Personification of Freedom or: Sobukwe and Repression," *Safundi* 17, no. 2 (2016): 189–212. DOI: 10.1080/17533171.2016.1171471.

these bonds, it is also important not to dismiss them altogether. After all, such mutual and relational bonds contribute to making lives, which might otherwise be inconceivably difficult, bearable, and perhaps even rich and pleasurable. Forms of relationality and mutuality can exist at the same time as they host multiple contradictions. As I pointed out in the introduction, this is true of many historical friendships that traverse forms of racial and political difference in conditions of violent injustice. I attempt to show that this is so while at the same time surfacing and thinking critically about the contradictions and limitations – the politics – of the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship.

As I have argued in the introduction there is a view, most recently explored in Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske's *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, that 'interracial' friendship functions as a kind of strategy of political containment and is therefore a source of legitimate suspicion to anyone sincerely concerned with justice and fairness. Although Soske and Walsh acknowledge a type of interracial friendship that they see as desirable –the insurgent, transgressive, or subversive (one might ask, why not also the pleasurable?)– the emphasis of their introduction to the volume is decidedly on the difficulties and undesirable nature of such friendship (they quote figures from the liberation movement such as Albert Luthuli in this regard).²²² One chapter in the volume, an interview of the Afro-Pessimist theorist Frank Wilderson by Shannon Walsh, focuses on the impossibility of such friendships even as Wilderson speaks about the depths of his relationships with his wife and a close friend, both of whom are white.²²³ There is an obvious paradox here.

Walsh and Soske point out the politically problematic nature of interracial friendship because of the imbalance of power between such friends and the historical desire of liberal settlers to contain political change through appeals to friendship. They are concerned about what such friendship might enable—might it prevent or frustrate political change? Might it naturalise existing relations of domination? Might it act to prevent the aims of social justice? Some of the contributions to the volume take up concerns thematically related to my own. Daniel Magaziner, for instance, explores the forms of friendship and freedom that arose in the context of the Ndoleni Art School in Natal between 1952 and 1981, despite the official aim of the school to interpellate its black students seamlessly into the mores and politics of Bantu education.²²⁴

I agree with Walsh and Soske, and their co-authors, about both the non-neutrality of friendship—that power circulates in and through friendships, just as it does through all kinds of social relations—and I share their disquiet about liberal and white settler appeals to friendship when such appeals attempt to constrain political change. However, there is less attention paid in the volume to

²²² Soske and Walsh, "Thinking," 20–21.

²²³ Shannon Walsh, "Afro-Pessimism and Friendship in South Africa: An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson III," in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, eds. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 70–99.

²²⁴ See Daniel Magaziner, "'A Song of Seeing': Arts and Friendship Under Apartheid," in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, edited by Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 192–215.

more complex experiences of friendship across difference (racial and political) from the perspective of those who have engaged in them. In addition, little attention is paid to the tension between the public pronouncements of figures like Luthuli (on friendship across difference) and what they did in their personal lives. It was not unheard of, however, for figures in the liberation movement to criticise such offers of friendship and solidarity from the podium while also engaging it in their personal lives (Sobukwe is an example, Biko is another).²²⁵ The way that friendship across difference and its risks is predominantly framed in *Ties that Bind* is also complicated by what I have found in the archive of Pogrund and Sobukwe's letters to one another. Deep, rich, and meaningful friendship and relationality is found in the archive of Pogrund and Sobukwe's correspondence. At the same time, Sobukwe is a fierce and public critic of liberals and their offers of friendship and solidarity in the political realm, and Pogrund holds incipient liberal racist attitudes and views which find expression particularly in his biography of Sobukwe.

In this chapter I attempt to do two things: I seek to establish the relationality and mutuality of the friendship between Pogrund and Sobukwe. Alongside this relationality and mutuality, I also explore the friendship's contradictions and limitations. Even as Pogrund fought against apartheid (often at personal cost),²²⁶ he still held views about blackness that were patronising and had internalised some of the racist conceits of the liberal worldview in which the West was the acme of civilisation whose unquestioned and de-contextualised ideals all were expected to embody. Pogrund was shaped and limited by the dispositions and aesthetics of his times and context: even as he strove to go past the racism of the apartheid state and the society it produced his efforts were at the same time circumscribed by the conceits of the liberal worldview. And Sobukwe, even as he was a stringent critic of settler liberalism and the liberal's offer of political solidarity and friendship, was also conscripted into the liberal cultural world through his mission education and Christian upbringing. I try in this chapter to neither dismiss or refuse to take the Pogrund-Sobukwe friendship seriously because of its contradictions, nor to dismiss or refuse to take equally seriously those same limitations.

To establish the deep and mutual nature of Sobukwe and Pogrund's bond, an undertaking which is addressed progressively across all the substantive chapters of the dissertation, I quote from and analyse some of the Sobukwe-Pogrund letters.²²⁷ To explore the liberal racism that nevertheless

²²⁵ Biko was fierce in his rejection of the white liberals offer of political solidarity, writing: [White] liberals, leftists...are the people who argue that they are not responsible for white racism...these are the people who say that they have black souls wrapped up in white skins... They want to remain in the good books with both the black and the white worlds... They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalizing all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skilfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges... [The white liberal] claims complete identification with the blacks...[H]e moves around...white circles...with a lighter load, feeling that he is not like the rest of the others. Yet at the back of his mind is a constant reminder that he is quite comfortable as things stand." See Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Bowerdean, 1978), 20-22. However, as evidenced by Mamphela Ramphele's recollections, which I explored in the introduction, as well as those of Glenn Moss, a member of the increasingly radical National Union of South African Students in the 70s, Biko also had warm and close relationships with some white people in the opposition to apartheid. See Glenn Moss, *The New Radicals: A Generational Memoir of the 1970s* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2014).

²²⁶ For an account of Pogrund's stints in jail as well as the state's surveillance of him see his autobiography *War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000).

²²⁷ The question of the impact of surveillance and Sobukwe's incarceration on the correspondence is addressed in chapter 5.

attended Pogrund's view of the world and of Sobukwe, I explore both his self-fashioning in his autobiography (*War of Words*) and his biographisation of Sobukwe in contrast to that of Thami ka Plaatjie's (another of Sobukwe's biographers). These two activities – exploring the mutuality between the two men and the contradictions of their persons and friendship – are pursued in an intertwined manner throughout the chapter rather than separately.

To date Sobukwe has only had three biographers in the English language (and none that I am aware of in any other language though there may be oral texts): Pogrund, Elias L. Ntloedibe, and Thami Ka Plaatjie. I have chosen Ka Plaatjie's biography because it acts as a useful contrast to Pogrund's in some critical respects. My intention here is not to try to catch Pogrund out. Like Pogrund, my own life and relationships are full of their own contradictions vis-à-vis race and racism. Like Pogrund, I have had to learn and grow. However, in order not to idealise the friendship it is important to represent its limitations realistically. That Pogrund harboured some ideas which were of a piece with the liberal racism typical of English South Africans at the time and even in the present, should not be a surprise. Nor does it devalue an appreciation of the friendship's better qualities. Indeed, given these complexities the relationship becomes more, not less, remarkable. I point out that Pogrund both cared for Sobukwe deeply, sometimes transcending racism and racial difference and, at the same time, carried within him, as expressed particularly in his biography of Sobukwe, the conceits of the liberal worldview.

The set of excerpts I wish to quote from come from a series of letters written in 1967 towards the end of Sobukwe's time on Robben Island. He would be released into banishment in 1969. At this time, Pogrund and Sobukwe had been corresponding since 1961 on the back of a friendship that began in the late 1950s when Astrid, Pogrund's fiancée at the time, introduced the two men to one another. Astrid had been taking a course at Wits University (located in Johannesburg) in isiZulu of which Sobukwe was the lecturer. One day, Pogrund came to pick her up, walked into the classroom where she and Sobukwe were in conversation, and she introduced them. After this they began meeting regularly, at first at Sobukwe's office at Wits and later at Pogrund's home in the whites-only suburbs and Sobukwe's home in Mofolo, a neighbourhood in the township of Soweto. This was a significant risk as both were prohibited to socialise in each other's neighbourhoods or indeed with one another by the apartheid laws that enforced strict racial segregation.²²⁸

The way that Pogrund writes about these meetings in the early days, and particularly the contrast between his view of Sobukwe and Sobukwe's fellow Africanist, PK Leballo, is revealing. Leballo, the son of an Anglican minister and educated, like Sobukwe, in mission schools, was a fellow member of the PAC and its national secretary.²²⁹ Leballo's temperament, from Pogrund's perspective,

²²⁸ For the only existing account of how the friendship began see Pogrund's *Sobukwe and Apartheid* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

²²⁹ See "Patlako Leballo," South African History Online, accessed 14 July, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/potlako-leballo>.

was different to Sobukwe's; Leballo seems to have been fierier and less inclined to be diplomatic; less 'civil' to put it in liberal parlance.

Initially, though Pogrund describes liking Sobukwe and enjoying their conversations, Pogrund was sceptical about Sobukwe's thinking and his abilities as a tactician and describes himself as "unimpressed" by him.²³⁰ The main point of their disagreement, perhaps predictably, turned was on whether black nationalism and a non-racial society were compatible (Sobukwe was an advocate of both, as I show in chapter 4). Pogrund writes:

I asked him whether he wasn't being contradictory in speaking of a non-racial society while at the same time pushing the idea of black nationalism.²³¹

Pogrund describes Sobukwe's response in the following terms:

It was only a partial contradiction, said Sobukwe, as once the new South Africa was created there would be no more racialism. Meanwhile, however, black consciousness must be fostered, and much as he did not like the prospect, he had no alternative but to accept the inevitability of armed conflict between white and black. Whites would not freely and unwillingly [*sic*] relinquish their position [...] After the revolution, there would be no anti-white feeling. China was an example: as the Red Army conquered an area, the political educators moved in and established an ideological basis.²³²

Pogrund writes:

I questioned his reasoning, pointing out that people's emotions could not be turned on and off like a tap. To obtain total opposition from blacks it would be essential to get them to hate whites with every bit of their being: how could this be changed overnight after victory? *In addition, South Africa was a twentieth-century complex industrial state, and if large numbers of whites were ever indiscriminately killed, who would administer the country, industries, commerce and farms?* By the time the revolution came about, if ever that is, blacks would in all likelihood not yet have been allowed by whites to acquire skills on a mass scale.²³³ (My emphasis).

There is much to say about these passages. Firstly, of course, it must be noted that these are written from Pogrund's perspective, so they are best read and interpreted with that in mind. There is no known record of how Sobukwe, in his own words, felt about conversations such as these or how he would have represented his own responses. What is most striking, in terms of how it illustrates Pogrund's liberal political disposition, is the anxiety about who would run the country after the revolution since, Pogrund assumed, black people would not be capable of doing so. This harks back to the notion of trusteeship that I discussed in the introduction: the idea that black people were not

²³⁰ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 65.

²³¹ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 66.

²³² Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 66.

²³³ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 67.

capable of or entitled to run their own affairs without adequate tutelage from whites, and that whites were entitled to manage those affairs until such time as *they* determined that black people were ready to take over themselves. While it is not untrue that the apartheid state had set out deliberately to under-capacitate Africans, or, to capacitate them only for futures as “hewers of rock and drawers of water,” Pogrund’s anxiety about their competence to lead a state must also be read in light of the idea of trusteeship that, while he consciously rejected it, had played a role in his intellectual and political formation and was common to his times just as it is to ours.

Sobukwe was himself, as I show below, a very staunch and public critic of this view (trusteeship), rejecting it entirely and fiercely. And yet, Pogrund’s expression of such views in conversation with Sobukwe did not imperil the friendship, which only ended with Sobukwe’s death in 1978. There is also a contradiction evident in Pogrund’s own biography in this regard. Despite the implicitly patronising view expressed in the quote above, which is of a piece with liberal notions of trusteeship, Pogrund had fought in the LPSA *against* the qualified franchised (premised on the notion of trusteeship) that older more conservative white liberals wanted to retain. A brief detour through the early history of the LPSA is illustrative.

The LPSA was founded in 1953, preceded in September of 1952 by a meeting led by Margaret Ballinger, a liberal politician, and Member of Parliament for the Native Representatives Council. The 1952 meeting resulted in a press statement that called for “the revival of the liberal tradition which prevailed for so many years in the Cape Colony.”²³⁴ This tradition, although based more on political pragmatism than ideals—in the days of the Cape Colony, the British recognised that Coloured and African voters tended to favour them over the Dutch and the Afrikaner bond—²³⁵ allowed Africans the vote subject to the certain liberal and racist qualifying criteria. The signatories of the press statement insisted on the principle of “equal rights for *civilized* men and equal opportunities for all men and women to become civilized [my emphasis].”²³⁶ Although this liberal view allows a pathway for all to become civilised, it still retains the view that to be civilised is to meet the standards set by a particular construction of ‘western’ norms. The Other must approach what is western in other words. There is no thought of the west approaching what it defines as other or even interrogating the extent to which it is historically separate or radically different from that other rather than being a product of encounters between others.²³⁷

²³⁴ Press statement cited in Randolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953–1968* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997), 12.

²³⁵ See D.R. Edgecombe, “The Non-Racial Franchise in Cape Politics, 1853–1910,” *Kleio* 10, no.1–2 (1978): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00232087885310031>.

²³⁶ Press statement cited in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 12.

²³⁷ Many scholars have repudiated the idea that the west and western civilizational ideals were the product of a “virgin birth.” What is now thought of as inherently western was itself the product of historical cultural contact and exchange, some but not all of it violent, between ‘Europeans’, ‘Asians’, and ‘Africans.’ For a scholarly statements see Martin Bernal’s three volume *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987, 1991, 2006), which argues from historical and linguistic evidence that ancient Greek thought may have been rooted in Egyptian (and thus African) thought, and an earlier statement by the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop in *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* Trans. Mercer Cook (New York: L. Hill, 1974). Kwame Anthony Appiah has also

In addition to calling for a qualified franchise, signatories called on the leaders of “black communities” to “recognize that it will take time and patience substantially to improve the present position [and] to accept the principle [‘Equal Rights For All Civilized People’] as a long-term aim.”²³⁸ From within the LPSA, Hans Meidner²³⁹ objected to the use of the word “civilization” in connection with the franchise. He also criticised the constitution of the South African Liberal Association (the LPSA’s precursor) on the grounds that “the meeting that had framed it had been unrepresentative, especially insofar as non-Europeans were concerned.”²⁴⁰ Liberal Party members such as Peter Hjul, Patrick Duncan, Peter Gibson, Alan Paton, and Benjamin Pogrund also strongly opposed the qualified franchise and supported full adult suffrage *without* qualification.²⁴¹ Reflecting in later years, Pogrund describes his objections to the LPSA’s endorsement of the qualified franchise according to which black would-be voters had to meet certain educational or property requirements in order to qualify for the vote. He writes: “I rejected the qualified franchise as insultingly patronizing to blacks.”²⁴² What we see here is both the tensions within the liberal opposition to apartheid *and* the contradictions internal to Pogrund himself: that he could both see and not see the racism of the liberal position; that he could both oppose it and reinscribe it as a biographer. This is also a contradiction in the friendship between the two men because Sobukwe was on record (cited and discussed below) as a staunch critic of just these positions and at the same time he forged a friendship with a man who expressed them quite openly even as he (Pogrund) also fought against them.

Pogrund’s comparison of Sobukwe to PK Leballo and his characterisation of Poqo, a pan-Africanist armed resistance movement, is also telling. Writing of these early meetings with Sobukwe, Pogrund offers this anecdote about Leballo:

We [Pogrund and Sobukwe] liked each other, enjoyed our debates and so our contact continued. Either we met alone or together with others in the Africanist Movement: principally P.K. Leballo, Zephaniah (‘Zeph’) Mothopheng, who had been fired as a teacher by the government after the introduction of Bantu Education— a quiet thoughtful man, who would over any years undergo one jailing after another; and Peter Raboroko, a teacher who was given to high-flown philosophising and who was ranked, by Africanists, as their leading theoretician [...] Several meetings were held at Leballo’s home in Dube. I always had difficulty in understanding him: words came out of him as a *series of explosions of sound* and

written a very approachable version of the argument, see “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilization,” *The Guardian*, accessed July 8, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture>.

²³⁸ Press statement cited in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 12.

²³⁹ Meidner, a biologist, fled Germany in the 1930s due to his anti-Nazi activities. He had both been held captive by communist partisans in Athens where he was fighting for the Allies and then later held by the apartheid state as a communist sympathiser for three months without charge. From the perspective of the South African state, anyone who opposed it was a communist.

²⁴⁰ Meidner cited in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 17–18.

²⁴¹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 36.

²⁴² Pogrund, *War of Words*, 43. See also Radolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953–1968* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997), 36.

much of it was *rambling and disconnected*. An *anti-white racism* often seemed to be *lurking* just under the surface, on occasion breaking into actual words. But, almost as a contradiction, there was always a personal politeness towards me and *a readiness to listen to my views*.²⁴³ (My emphasis).

In this first description of Leballo, a theme, which is elaborated throughout Pogrund's Sobukwe biography, emerges. Pogrund describes Leballo in way that arguably dehumanises him: Leballo is like a bomb exploding and just as rational. When Leballo speaks it is like a "series of explosions." While I don't doubt that Pogrund is reporting his own experience of Leballo faithfully, at the level of interpretation and given the context – that this is a liberal, white man speaking of a black man in the wider context of apartheid – these framings call out for comment and reflection. What redeems Leballo, in Pogrund's eyes, is his readiness to listen to Pogrund's views. Pogrund elaborates this kind of description throughout the book, describing Leballo as a public speaker like this:

Mudzunya and Leballo had the same strange mesmerising characteristics: when either of them addressed a public meeting words poured out in *torrential waves*, rapidly building up to the point where there was *no discernible coherence only a scream* of disconnected words.

Each of them could get a crowd jumping *hysterically* within minutes (my emphasis).²⁴⁴ Leballo is less a man than a kind of natural phenomenon in Pogrund's hands. His speech is like "torrential waves" without any "discernible coherence", and he makes crowds "hysterical." In the context of a well-established and racist colonial tradition of describing black and colonised people as in closer proximity to natural phenomena and lacking the capacity for reason, to justify treating them differently from whites (within the ambit of the human) it takes on another hue.²⁴⁵ What it suggests is that had Sobukwe been a less assimilated character, Pogrund might not have been able to feel the way he did about him.

These kinds of descriptions are echoed and enforced in Pogrund's account of Poqo. Describing information that a journalistic source was giving him about a planned Poqo uprising in Basutoland in the early 1960s, Pogrund wrote:

[...] Poqo's aims were frankly *murderous* [...] during the weekend of 7 and 8 April, members were to rise up and set about *slaughtering* as many whites as possible; the killing was to start in the city streets [...] The hope, and the belief, was that other blacks would join in *en masse* once the killing started. (My emphasis).

No attempt is made to situate or contextualise Poqo or its alleged aims. It is simply described as a murderous killing machine, outside of comprehension. One does not need to be romantic about violence in liberation struggles to see that such descriptions are problematic. Again, they suggest that

²⁴³ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 67.

²⁴⁴ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 83.

²⁴⁵ See Anne McClintock. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, Routledge: 1995).

had Sobukwe been a less assimilated figure, the friendship between him and Pogrund might not have been possible. This is important to note so as not to unduly idealise the friendship. I now turn to forms of mutuality between Pogrund and Sobukwe before exploring Pogrund's biographisation of Sobukwe. On 1 March 1967, from Robben Island, Sobukwe wrote to Pogrund:

Mrs. Marquard wrote to me a few weeks ago and told me she had had a visit from you. She was obviously most favourably impressed (as I had expected) and spoke warmly not only of you as a person but also of our friendship.

Helen Suzman visited me in here too, as you know, and she greeted me with the words "I was with your friend, Benjie, yesterday." *I was forcibly struck by the inadequacy if not the incongruity of the term.* I have friends, of course, of whom I am very fond. And high on the list are Mrs. Marquard and Prof Wellington. But *I have long passed the stage of even thinking of you as a friend.* I don't want to be sentimental about that. So I suggest that you and I stick to a simple Bob and Benjie in our dealings with each other, in the same way as my biological brother, Charles and I stick to our nicknames.²⁴⁶ (My emphasis).

These are strong words, indeed. What is someone whom one considers more than a friend? Sobukwe answers this by comparing Pogrund to a brother. As the reader will recall, I explored, through Leela Gandhi's work in the literature review, the ways in which friendship can remake the political by breaking with the homo-fraternity inscribed in the state and the family as loci of (political) community. On one level, we might read Sobukwe as reinscribing this homo-fraternity by comparing Sobukwe to a brother. However, in the context of apartheid in which homo-fraternity and family – indeed, who could and could not be family – was deeply racist, I suggest this comparison also has subversive political possibilities. Fraternity here, as Sobukwe, implicitly imagines it, has nothing to do with race or 'blood'. Rather, it is a chosen relation based on mutuality and reciprocity.

On 16 March 1967, Pogrund replied:

My dear Bob,

I owe you a very humble apology for not having written before now. As you will probably have learned, I had hoped to be able to see you, and I was grievously disappointed when this fell through. I have written to the Minister of Justice to express my disappointment and also took the opportunity of raising the question of your release. But apart from all this, with life as chopped up as it has been recently, I have failed to write. Your letter of February 5 reached

²⁴⁶ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 1 March 1967, Ba5.17, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Research Papers Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Helen Suzman was a member of parliament for the Progressive Party, later renamed the Progressive Federal Party; Nel Marquard was Afrikaans and an active member of the LPSA, taught English literature at Stellenbosch University, and was the spouse of the eminent liberal political philosopher Leo Marquard (also Afrikaans); Professor J.H. Wellington "was the retired head of the Geography Department in the University of the Witwatersrand, who became friendly with Sobukwe during the time both were employed by the university." See Derek Hook, ed. *Lie On Your Wounds: The Prison Correspondence of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001), 19.

me on March 4. I did, in fact, write immediately, but my letter was so dismal in tone that I decided that it would be unfair to inflict it on you so I tore it up. So, as you see, you are subjected to a double censorship! Then your letter of March 1 arrived on March 13. It seems that Helen's [Suzman] submissions about the delay in your letters has borne fruit.

Both your letters moved me very deeply, particularly your second one. There is no shame – there cannot be any – in my telling you that *I cried* when I read it. *I feel so very close to you, Bob*. I recall constantly the last times we were able to see each other, of the many hours when we ranged in our chats over every conceivable subject as though we had never not been seeing each other. I have said before, and I say again, that it is little that I do for you and your family. You deserve a lot more, and so often I berate myself for not doing more for you, and so often too I pray to G-d [*sic*] that I had the power to act effectively on your behalf. *I feel a terrible pain within me about your situation*. What more can I say than to agree with you that it should continue to be “Bob” and “Benjie”.²⁴⁷ (My emphasis).

What makes Sobukwe “deserve a lot more” in Pogrund’s eyes? Is it because there is a bond born out of shared social formation (both received a liberal English education)? Is it because Sobukwe has rebelled against that formation? Or because another kind of tie has been developing in time between them? Or because Sobukwe is now a heroic and incarcerated rebel? Or perhaps all of these? As I will show in what follows there are two equally valid but contradictory ways of understanding this sentiment. On the one hand, a deep tie *has* been developing between them for some time by this point and Pogrund’s sentiments — “you deserve a lot more”—may plausibly be read as an expression of that tie. On the other hand, as I explore below, Sobukwe embodies a kind of assimilation to liberal ideals—he speaks English, he is educated in the Western style—that could equally be the reason why Pogrund thinks he “deserves a lot more.” It is of course possible, and quite likely, that this sentiment could have been born *both* out of the bond they shared *and* out of the ways in which Sobukwe’s socialisation confirmed aspects of Pogrund’s liberal world view.

On 12 April of 1967, responding to a letter in which Pogrund wrote of his intention to leave South Africa and settle elsewhere, Sobukwe responded:

First of all, with regard to your intention to leave the country: I wholeheartedly approve. The only stumbling-block I am prepared to consider are personal ties: but true greatness, Benjie, lies in being able to sever those ties in pursuit of the Holy Grail. [...]

The dismay with which my wife received your news is understandable. She had come to lean heavily on you, regarding you as a restless younger brother who, unless watched very carefully, could be guilty of extreme extravagance on behalf of Bob and all of his. She

²⁴⁷ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 16 March 1967, Ba5.20, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Research Papers Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

complained rather proudly of how you had been dissatisfied with the room they had been given at the hotel and had arranged for a larger and more comfortable one.

In other words she has never felt with you that she was receiving “assistance”. She has always known that the suggestion would come from you that the children needed this and that (even special tuition in English!) and Bob this and that. There’s a vast difference, Benjie, between: “Please tell me what you need” and “I think you should have this, don’t you?” And, gentleman that you were, you knew it instinctively.

This phrase — “even special tuition in English!” — speaks to issues around assimilation, its desires, the revolts against it, and perhaps even the search and desire to be more globally oriented shared by both Sobukwe and Pogrund. The excerpt also suggests that ties have been forming not just between Sobukwe and Pogrund but between Pogrund and Sobukwe’s family.

Sobukwe closes the letter thus:

You have decades of fruitful labour before you, Benjie, and you must make your contribution. The intellectual blossoms only in freedom...Whether you decide on the UK or the USA, academic life or the typewriter, I should like you to regard that as preparatory work for service to Africa. In fact, once you are settled down I might seriously consider sending the children to you.²⁴⁸

These excerpts establish the intimacy and relationality that existed between Sobukwe and Pogrund, though not, as I have pointed out in my commentary, in an uncomplicated way. Sobukwe implicitly compares Pogrund to a brother, suggesting a form of community (friendship) not predicated on racialised notions of nation or family and trusts him so deeply that he considers leaving his children in Pogrund’s care (significantly, no mention here is made of Veronica Sobukwe’s feelings about sending her children away, which suggests a proprietary air between the two men). In regarding his future life as a preparation for service to Africa, Sobukwe also indicates that Pogrund is a man he would trust and want to have involved in Africa’s future destiny. All this is happening between people who were, according to the rhetoric of the time, political rivals if not antagonists. Similarly, in the present, such intimacy between liberals and Pan-Africanists is unexpected because of the way that relationship is usually framed.²⁴⁹

Biographizing Sobukwe

In this section I explore aspects of Sobukwe’s biography but also the choices that two of his biographers, Thami Ka Plaatjie and Pogrund make in what they focus on, what inferences they make,

²⁴⁸ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 12 April 1967, Ba5.24, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

²⁴⁹ Walsh and Soske’s framing of the relationship between liberals and black anti-apartheid activists is a contemporary example that would lead one to expect that friendships did not flourish across this divide. See Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 3–30.

and how they chose to tell his story. Sobukwe was born in 1924 in Graaff-Reinet, a small town in the Karoo region of what is today the Eastern Cape province, in the township of Kwa Masizakhe, a working-class township on the outskirts of the settler town.²⁵⁰ His was a household of practicing Methodists. His parents, Mziyafani Hubert Sobukwe and Angelina Noneti were poor and worked at various menial jobs to keep the family provided for. Pogrund names Sobukwe's parents only by their Christian names whilst Ka Plaatjie attends also to their African names. Among their sources of income was a firewood business that sold to the residents of Masizakhe. Sobukwe and his siblings would get up early in the morning to sort the wood before going to school. After school they would chop it.²⁵¹ Like many other anti-colonial radicals of his times, Sobukwe received a Christian upbringing and a mission school education.

Like Pogrund, Sobukwe was an avid and early reader devouring the English books his parents collected—some thrown out by the local municipality and others discarded by the people who employed his mother as a domestic worker.²⁵² While Pogrund received a reimbursement from his father for any books he purchased from his pocket money,²⁵³ Sobukwe had to make do with the castoffs of more affluent white people who lived in town. In Sobukwe and Pogrund's early lives as readers the inequalities produced through administratively and socially enforced racial difference were already at work. However, even as their access to books was shaped by their location in the racialised social and economic order, they shared a love of reading that would attract them to one another as adults.

Pogrund greatly and appreciatively emphasises the liberal English aspects of Sobukwe's early social formation. By Standard 5, he writes, Sobukwe was reading the classics of the English canon such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*.²⁵⁴ His was also steeped in biblical scripture, and his father expected his children to recite the text of the Sunday sermon verbatim every week or face a hiding.²⁵⁵ Although Pogrund's Jewish upbringing seems to have been comparatively relaxed, exposure to biblical literature (in Pogrund's case the 'Old' Testament) was another point they held in common. I state these points in common because it is easy in the present to assume that a white liberal and a black pan-Africanist would have nothing in common. To point out how much they shared is to defamiliarize their relationship in the present, but also, through the contrast with Ka Plaatjie's biography, which emphasises different aspects of Sobukwe's formation, opens the possibility to explore the ways in which Pogrund locates Sobukwe in a world familiar to and appreciated by him (Pogrund) against the other possible worlds in which Sobukwe may be located.

²⁵⁰ Thami Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe: The Making of a Pan Africanist Leader*, Vol. 1 (Sandton: KMM Review Publishing, 2019), 2.

²⁵¹ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 23–24.

²⁵² Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 24.

²⁵³ Pogrund, *War of Words*, 33.

²⁵⁴ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 24.

²⁵⁵ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 7.

Pogrud's biography emphasises Sobukwe's exposure to and formation through the world of English-speaking liberals and missionaries. But there were other formative influences as Sobukwe's later biographer, Ka Plaatjie, points out. If we ignore these other influences Sobukwe's relationship to the world of English-speaking liberal culture seems like it was the only important influence, when in fact it was not. While Sobukwe was deeply influenced by English literature and Christian scripture, he was also influenced, as Thami Ka Plaatjie points out, by the oral literatures that surrounded him. In the evenings it was the habit for older women to tell *intsomi* (stories or folktales). This practice fell to the older women of the community and Sobukwe's mother was "reputed for her exceptional skills" in it.²⁵⁶ In his letters from Robben Island to Nel Marquard, another member of the liberal opposition to apartheid with whom Sobukwe was friendly and in correspondence with, he would write appreciatively of the languages of his infancy (which included Xhosa and the Afrikaans of both the town and the location).²⁵⁷

As a youth, he participated in the tradition of stick fighting. Ka Plaatjie writes that the fights were not acrimonious "and rivals would occasionally be seen shaving one another's wounded heads after a fight. They would develop a greater closeness to one another, having spilled each other's blood."²⁵⁸ Though the closeness of a bond forged in the mutual spilling of blood, is worth thinking about critically, this detail – that stick fighting was not acrimonious or a function of animosity – is important. Practices like stick fighting are often, as I explore in the final chapter on homosociality in the letters between Pogrud and Sobukwe, framed as violent expressions of masculinity and used to explain, in part, violence when it takes place among black men. This is a mistake, as I argue in the final chapter. In the PAC anti-pass campaign of 1960, Sobukwe would draw on the language of this practice when he told his followers: *Emva kwedabi, sizakuchebana amaduma sixel' amakhwenkwe emva komlo wetonga* (After the battle we will shave our head wounds like boys do after a stick fight).²⁵⁹

As much as Sobukwe's early formation was rich in Western and liberal literature and culture it was also rich in African literature and culture as Ka Plaatjie's biography makes clear. This is an important difference between Pogrud and Sobukwe. For where white people were generally culturally, linguistically, and thus intellectually, devastatingly narrowed by their position in a settler society, middle class black people were obliged but also able to absorb a much wider variety of linguistic and cultural influences. By adulthood, Sobukwe spoke isiXhosa, Afrikaans, isiZulu, and seSotho, whereas Pogrud was limited to English (and perhaps a smattering of Afrikaans). This linguistic and cultural narrowing was a direct result of the organisation of settler society that allowed

²⁵⁶ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 24, 26.

²⁵⁷ For a letters appreciating the dialect of Afrikaans spoken in Masizakhe during his childhood see correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Nell Marquard, 17 September 1964, Bd1.7, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

²⁵⁸ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 28.

²⁵⁹ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 28. The translation is Ka Plaatjie's.

whites to get by with little trouble economically and socially in just one or at most two (settler) languages and their own settler cultures whereas Africans often had to become competent linguistically and culturally in a wide variety and/or lived in contexts where this kind of opening up to the world and taking in of it was still possible. Not so in the settler city, town, or suburb. It may be that Sobukwe's adult openness to the world and to others was primed by the cultural and linguistic vibrancy of his childhood. This is not to imply that being colonised was a benefit but rather to point out how settler colonialism narrowed whites, or as Ashis Nandy puts it led to "ego constriction", how their position and attitudes of supremacy impoverished them, how they too were unwittingly harmed by their acts or implication in acts of violent domination.

As much as the ethos of the liberal world in which Sobukwe was educated and did much of his early childhood reading shaped him, so too did the world of African oral and written literatures, and it is important not to assume that the values and ethos that drew Sobukwe to Pogrund, were merely those of liberal colonial society or even that those values were entirely at odds with the ones found in indigenous languages and cultures. Ka Plaatjie points out that S.E.K. Mqhayi's novel *Ityala Lamawele* (Trial of the Twins), with which Sobukwe was familiar, like the instomi of his childhood, communicated the values and worldview of the language in which it was written (isiXhosa). These included the "the potency of the traditional Xhosa judiciary system of conflict resolution, where evidence is led and resolution reached without emotion and undue influence."²⁶⁰ Interestingly, this kind of unemotional and principled detachment is a key feature of Pogrund's own self-fashioning in his auto-biography *War of Words*. Part of Pogrund's self-fashioning in his memoir includes his emphasis on the aspects of his character and comportment that he regards as even-handed, unemotional, and principled. Pogrund describes protecting Sam Khan, a former communist parliamentarian before 1950 when the Suppression of Communism Act came into effect. Many years later Khan spoke on a public platform in London with Pogrund and made a sharp critique of Zionism. The audience shouted at Khan to "shut up." Pogrund describes Khan as "tactless" and his own reaction as "Voltairean." He writes:

I rose to say that as a schoolboy I had gone to the South African parliament to listen to Khan's impassioned denunciations of apartheid, how they stirred me, and how I could still remember the heavy shouts of "*Jood*" (Jew) and "Go to Israel" from the Nationalist benches. Sam Khan had paid his dues and deserved better than what the audience was giving him. It silenced them.

It is possible to read this anecdote through the prism of Pogrund's liberal life world with its vexed value of civility, but what if we considered it through the prism of the Xhosa judiciary system that Ka Plaatjie describes? The shared characteristics that contributed to their adult bond are likely to have emerged out of many of the influences of their lives including the Jewish, Christian, liberal, and

²⁶⁰ Ka Plaatjie, *Sobukwe*, 25.

African ethos. The differences between these ethos, though they exist, should not be assumed at the cost of allowing for possible similarities.

As is often the case with parents who prioritise the formal education of their children, Sobukwe's father, Mziyafani, was a man who never finished his. According to Pogrund's biography of Sobukwe, this was because after Mziyafani's mother died he was left in the charge of an older sister who feared that if he became educated he would abandon the family and so refused to allow him to complete his schooling.²⁶¹ Mziyafani's disappointment spurred him on, and according to one of his sons he made a vow to educate all of his children.²⁶² Sobukwe went to the Methodist mission school in the location in Graaff-Reinet where he lived as a boy. But the school went only as far as year six.²⁶³ After year six there was a two-year period in which Sobukwe's family could not afford to send him to school. His chance to continue his education came only in 1940 when he was already fifteen years old and was sent to Healdtown—a Methodist mission school two hundred kilometres from Graaff-Reinet. There, according to Pogrund, he was provided with "a Christian and liberal arts education founded on English grammar and literature."²⁶⁴

If Ka Plaatjie's project appears to be to locate Sobukwe in an African context – with all the complexities and contestations that that category conjures – then Pogrund's appears to be to locate him firmly in the world of English-speaking liberalism and its mores, also contested and complex. The point here is that there are traditions of thinking, doing, and being that do not get recognized as influences by biographers (in this case Pogrund) and indeed sometimes remain latent in the writings of the protagonists of these biographies themselves. By comparing Ka Plaatjie's choices to Pogrund's I provide a sense of what their priorities are and what influences Pogrund particularly is either blind to or erases. This comparison allows some insight into what influences Pogrund's biography chooses to recognize and emphasise.

What Pogrund remembers and memorializes about Sobukwe becomes something to note here. For instance, Pogrund cites Denis Siwisa, a close friend of Sobukwe's, recalling Sobukwe as a brilliant student and with a particular command of English.²⁶⁵ Pogrund writes, "He invariably carried a library book with him and went through two or three novels a week. His early Healdtown addictions were the *Scarlet Pimpernel* novels by Baroness Orczy and the *The Saint* stories by Leslie Charteris. He devoured all that he could find until his tastes widened."²⁶⁶ Sobukwe would recall, later, that he had been introduced to reading by his brother, and was fortunate at Healdtown to encounter teachers like a Mrs Scott who encouraged him in reading.²⁶⁷ Sobukwe's intelligence and command of

²⁶¹ Benjamin Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better? The Life of Robert Sobukwe* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1990), 7.

²⁶² Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 7.

²⁶³ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 8.

²⁶⁴ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 9.

²⁶⁵ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 12.

²⁶⁶ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 12.

²⁶⁷ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 12.

English—a hallowed language in such contexts; the command of which was thought to be a mark of one’s capacity to be civilised according to racist liberal mores—caught the eye of various teachers including the Principal and his wife, George and Helen Caley.²⁶⁸ The Caleys were missionaries who taught at Healdtown and made some financial contributions to Sobukwe’s education.²⁶⁹ The Reverend Stanely Pitts,²⁷⁰ governor of Healdtown four years after Sobukwe left, recalled him as “the brightest student that we had.”²⁷¹ As much as I have emphasised that Pogrund’s identity as a liberal cannot always predict his politics – i.e. his position on the qualified franchise – it is important to note how much the kind of focus on Sobukwe’s adequacy and even excellence in ‘white culture’ speaks to the extent to which Pogrund internalised liberal norms. It does remind us that liberalism (and indeed Pogrund in these instances) recognized the black person as fully human to the extent that they were properly assimilated. This interpretation is buttressed by the comparison between how Pogrund represents Sobukwe against how he represents the equally educated but less assimilated Leballo.

The admiration and affection these missionaries felt toward Sobukwe —already of a complicated sort, and hardly innocent of the racist civilisational conceits of Empire, given the material and political conditions in which it was manifest—would become further complicated with the passage of time and Sobukwe’s maturation into adulthood. The Sobukwe who began to emerge in his Fort Hare university years bewildered the Caleys, for instance.²⁷² A few incidents are worth recounting here. Firstly, in his speech at the Completers’ Social at Fort Hare in 1949, Sobukwe criticised the Eurocentricity of the college, saying that if the College was serious about its stated mission to be an African College or University, then the “Department of African Studies must be more highly and rapidly developed [and] Fort Hare must become the centre of African Studies to which students in African Studies should come from all over the continent.”²⁷³ This is a critique that anticipates by decades those of intellectuals like Archie Mafeje,²⁷⁴ Mahmood Mamdani,²⁷⁵ and Lungisile Ntsebeza,²⁷⁶ as well as those of Ngugi wa Thiong’o more broadly,²⁷⁷ of the Eurocentricity of South African institutions of higher learning. The critique then, as now, was not only of what was in

²⁶⁸ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 13.

²⁶⁹ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 13. I was unable to find any source of information on the Caleys other than that provided by Pogrund in his biography.

²⁷⁰ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 14. I was unable to find any source of information on Reverend Stanley Pitts other than that provided by Pogrund in his biography.

²⁷¹ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better?* 14.

²⁷² Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 40. This is how Pogrund describes the Caleys’ reaction to the more militant and radical Sobukwe that emerged in his university years.

²⁷³ Robert Sobukwe, “Speech at the University of Fort Hare as President of the Students’ Representative Council, 21 October 1949”, South African History Online, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/robert-sobukwe-speech-university-fort-hare-president-students-representative-council-21>.

²⁷⁴ See Fred Hendricks, “Editorial: A Brief Tribute to Archie Mafeje,” *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 11, no. 1 (2007): 1–3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24487581>.

²⁷⁵ See Mahmood Mamdani, “Is African Studies to be Turned into a New Home for Bantu Education at UCT?” *Social Dynamics* 24, no. 2 (1998): 63–75, DOI: 10.1080/02533959808458649.

²⁷⁶ See Lungisile Ntsebeza, “The Ebb and Flow of the Fortunes of African Studies at the University of Cape Town: An Overview,” *Social Dynamics* 46, no. 2 (2020): 356–372, DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2020.1815335.

²⁷⁷ See Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London and Portsmouth, N.H.: J. Currey and Heinemann, 1993).

the curriculum or how prioritised a Department of African Studies was, but also of the composition of the staff and the discourse of “trusteeship” that made of Africans eternal wards, all the while promising that they would eventually graduate to positions of autonomous leadership, a position reflected in Pogrund’s worries cited above about what would happen “after the revolution”. At the Completers’ Social, Sobukwe said:

Again I would like to know exactly what the College understands by ‘Trusteeship’. I understand by ‘Trusteeship’ the preparation of the African ward for eventual management and leadership of the College. But nothing in the policy of the College points in this direction. After the College has been in existence for thirty years the ratio of European to African staff is four to one. And we are told that in ten years’ time we might become an independent university. Are we to understand by that an African University [is] predominantly guided by European thought and strongly influenced by European staff?²⁷⁸

Sobukwe continued:

Sons and daughters of Africa, harbingers of the new world order. What can I say to you? As you see, for the first time since the practice was started, we do not have the nurses with us on this momentous night’s Completers’ Social.²⁷⁹ And the reason? The battle is on. To me the struggle at the hospital is more than a question of indiscipline in inverted commas. It is a struggle between Africa and Europe, between a twentieth-century desire for self-realisation and a feudal conception of authority. I know, of course, that because I express these sentiments I will be accused of indecency and will be branded an agitator. That was the reaction to my speech last year. People do not like to see the even tenor of their lives disturbed. They do not like to be made to feel guilty. They do not like to be told that what they have always believed was right is wrong. And above all they resent encroachment on what they regard as their special province. But I make no apologies. It is meet that we speak the truth before we die.

What is particularly interesting in this passage is that Sobukwe inverts the usual conception of modernity and tradition. It is Africans who are the bearers of the “desire for self-realisation” (implicitly a capacity for change) and Europeans who carry a “feudal conception of authority” (which is how colonial administrations figured African ‘traditional’ authority: an unchanging realm outside of time and history).

News of these statements, among others, reached the ears of the Caley and, according to Pogrund, left them “bewildered”, “disillusioned, rejected and hurt.”²⁸⁰ George Caley interpreted

²⁷⁸ Sobukwe, “Speech at the University of Fort Hare.”

²⁷⁹ This refers to a strike by the nurses, among them Sobukwe’s future wife Veronica, at the nearby Victoria Hospital about their working conditions. See Benjamin Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 32.

²⁸⁰ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 40.

Sobukwe's later confrontation with Reverend C. W. Grant, governor of Healdtown, as "anti-white".²⁸¹ In 1959, Grant made a speech in which he protested that "the brotherhood of man" was more important than the laws of the state and that this brotherhood could be "fostered between white and black by personal contact in homes and informal meetings *without changing the state's laws*" (my emphasis).²⁸² This is a typical formulation of the liberal position (on friendship) of which Soske and Walsh are rightly critical. Sobukwe publicly pointed out to Grant that "the moment I step out of your home, sir, after a show of the brotherhood of man, the police will pick me up for a pass offence."²⁸³ Grant protested that this would not be *his* fault; Sobukwe said that it *would*, and then proceeded to criticise Grant over the discrepancies between the stipends of white and black ministers in the Methodist church.^{284, 285} As Pogrund puts it, this confrontation must have been shocking to the reverend and the other white people in attendance.²⁸⁶ Pogrund writes: "Sobukwe punctured missionary paternalism by pointing up the discrimination suffered by blacks. But blacks were not supposed to address whites in this way; young black men were not supposed to challenge their white teachers like this."²⁸⁷ Although this recollection is written sometime after Sobukwe's death, so we don't know how Pogrund might have framed it at the time, we are again in the presence of a contradiction: in his biography of Sobukwe Pogrund both demonstrates a critical grasp of white paternalism and a critique of trusteeship and at the same time engages in both of these in how he does *some* of his interpretative and representational work as I have shown above.

This anecdote also serves to illustrate the point that Megan Cole Paustian has made: that until recently the critique of mission education as a tool of colonial oppression has occluded the major contradictions of such institutions.²⁸⁸ The combination of Christianity and Christian mission school education that I have described above produced many anti-colonial intellectuals. In South Africa this included figures such as Charlotte Maxeke and Nelson Mandela. Maxeke received a missionary education at Edwards Memorial School in the Eastern Cape in the early 1880s and later studied at the Wilberforce University in Cleveland, Ohio, which was controlled by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC). Maxeke would go on to assist in organising the anti-pass movement in Bloemfontein in 1913 and found the Bantu Women's League of the SANNC in 1918, among her other anti-colonial political activities.²⁸⁹ Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and Winnie Madikizela Mandela,

²⁸¹ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 40.

²⁸² Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 40–41.

²⁸³ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 41.

²⁸⁴ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 41.

²⁸⁵ This anecdote is recounted by Pogrund in his Sobukwe biography. He does not, however, tell us anything about where this occurred and how Sobukwe came to feel compelled to respond to Grant.

²⁸⁶ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 41.

²⁸⁷ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 41.

²⁸⁸ See Megan Cole Paustian, "'A Real Heaven on Their Own Earth': Religious Missions, African Writers, and the Anti-Colonial Imagination," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 2 (2014): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.2.1>.

²⁸⁹ See Zubeida Jaffer, *Beauty of the Heart: The Life and Times of Charlotte Manny Maxeke* (Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA, 2016); and Thozama April, "Theorising Women: The Intellectual Contributions of Charlotte Maxeke to the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2012).

iconic examples, both received missionary school educations that sought to make them in the white man's image; indeed, the name Nelson was bequeathed to Rolihlahla by a white missionary at the age of seven. Mandela was first educated at Healdtown and then attended the University at Fort Hare, like Sobukwe. Both went on through their involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle to significantly rebel against the tenets of that worldview while also remaining, particularly in Mandela's case, conscripted into some of its norms.²⁹⁰ As one of the founders and the first leader of uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the armed wing of the liberation struggle, Mandela was at one point the acme of anti-colonial rebellion. Madikizela-Mandela studied at Shawsbury, a Methodist mission school at Qumbu, from which she would later matriculate. She would go on to participate significantly in the South African liberation struggle and was the subject of banning orders and imprisonments by the apartheid state.²⁹¹ On the African continent, Kwame Nkrumah rebelled against his mission education to lead the anti-colonial revolt that led to Ghanaian independence.²⁹² There are a host of figures from the continent and across the colonized world who travelled a similar path from an education intended to assimilate them into empire and its values to rebellion against the same.²⁹³

Mission education, which the apartheid state sort to gut in 1953 with the Bantu Education Act—an act that closed almost all mission schools—²⁹⁴ had ambiguous consequences including in Sobukwe's own life. Indeed, closing these schools and implementing the impoverished curriculum entailed by Bantu Education was intended to address precisely the problems such education produced from the perspective of the apartheid state, which needed its black subjects to be skilled enough to represent a useful labour pool, but not so skilled, educated, or indeed politicised as not to be amenable to apartheid rule.²⁹⁵ Mission schools produced skilful (in terms of navigating the world of Empire) but also politicised and therefore ungovernable subjects (in terms of accepting Empire's hierarchies and forms of dispossession, or those of apartheid). As scholars of colonial-era mission education have pointed out,²⁹⁶ on the one hand, this form of education, deeply shaped by the assimilationist energies of the 'civilising mission', which aimed to draw colonised elites into the cultural and political worlds of the coloniser,²⁹⁷ furnished its students with the kinds of skills and knowledge, and direct and politicising personal experience of the coloniser/settler, that would provoke in them either an

²⁹⁰ Colin Bundy, *Nelson Mandela* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2015).

²⁹¹ See South African History Online, "Winnie Madikizela-Mandela," accessed 26 September, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/winnie-madikizela-mandela#endnote-6>.

²⁹² David Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Political Kingdom in the Third World* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1988).

²⁹³ A few examples include figures such as Robert Mugabe, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kenneth Kaunda.

²⁹⁴ Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 1.

²⁹⁵ Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own*, 1.

²⁹⁶ See Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own*; Megan Cole Paustian, "'A Real Heaven on Their Own Earth': Religious Missions, African Writers, and the Anti-Colonial Imagination," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 2 (2014): 1–25; Norman Etherington, "Introduction," in *Oxford History of the British Empire: Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington (Oxford University Press, 2005), 2; Alan Lester, "Humanitarians and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century," in *Oxford History of the British Empire: Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington (Oxford University Press, 2005), 64, 67.

²⁹⁷ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–2.

expectation for full inclusion among his ranks, or, in the case of the more radical, a desire for an end to the kinds of discrimination that produced coloniser and colonised. On the other hand, the circumstances of the world they entered were not those of equality and justice, and so graduates of mission schools found themselves trained to participate in a world that refused to include them as full persons and equals or to undo itself, as was the radical anticolonial aspiration.²⁹⁸ Thus colonised elites were apt to join rebellions and struggles against the coloniser out of their own “frustration with the contradictions between the promises of European modernity and their exclusion from the fruits of that very same modernity.”²⁹⁹

In some respects, this echoes the more recent moment of dissent — the Rhodes Must Fall protests — which I discussed the introduction—in which many of the leadership (particularly at UCT) were the product of elite liberal educations but found themselves no less excluded in various ways—for some materially, for others symbolically—from the university. Exposure to the world of liberal colonial ideals that mission schools represented and inculcated in their students also meant that their graduates were better placed than anyone else to articulate a critique of colonial modernity. As Ian McQueen puts it of the Black Consciousness leadership — a generation after Sobukwe—“forged in the crucible of [mission education] they were well-placed to judge the gulf between liberal ideals and actions.”³⁰⁰ I have sought here to provide a context for and description of Sobukwe’s relationship to liberalism and colonialism, which might help to better understand both his fierce critique of liberals but also his affinities with them. Intellectually and socially formed in the context of liberal Christianity, it is no surprise that Sobukwe both engaged in friendships with liberals and at the same time rebelled against them. In this way, I would describe him, as David Scott does of Toussaint L’Ouverture, a leader of the Haitian revolution between 1791 and 1804, as a “conscript of modernity.”³⁰¹ To be a conscript of modernity is to be in an “everlasting negotiation” with the “ambiguous inheritance of the Enlightenment.”³⁰² There is, as Scott points out, no overcoming this; rather, it must be faced.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show both the mutuality and relationality between Pogrud and Sobukwe and at the same time hold onto and think about the contradictions of their friendship. To establish the tenderness of their friendship I quoted from the letters, written in the late nineteen-sixties, in which they express a kind of bond that is both mutual and reciprocal and refigures the raced homo-fraternity and filiatedness of the political.

²⁹⁸ See Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own*.

²⁹⁹ Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012).

³⁰⁰ Ian McQueen, “Re-imagining South Africa: Black Consciousness, Radical Christianity and the New Left, 1967-1977” (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2011), 24.

³⁰¹ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 175.

³⁰² Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 175.

The bond between Sobukwe and Pogrand was not without its contradictions, however. By exploring the choices that Pogrand made in his biography of Sobukwe, against those made by another of Sobukwe's biographers, Thami Ka Plaatjie, I showed that Pogrand appreciates and foregrounds the liberal aspects of Sobukwe's formation and that this may have had something to do with making the friendship possible in the first place. I also contrasted Pogrand's representation of Sobukwe against the more antagonistic figure of Potlako Leballo to show the conceits of the liberal world view, which can appreciate the humanity of the black person to the extent that that person is assimilated, evident in how Pogrand chose to write about these two figures.

Despite those more transcendent moments of the friendship, evident in the two men's letters to one another, both the friendship and its friends remained rooted in the worlds and realities of colonialism and apartheid as well as the struggle against these. Thus, there are both moments in which the racism of those worlds and realities are transcended and others in which, primarily in the case of Pogrand's biography of Sobukwe, they are reinscribed. The goal of this chapter was to hold onto both of these realities without collapsing into either one of them. In the following chapter, I look at aspects of Sobukwe's worldview, how he conceived of a non-racial Africanity, and his openness to the world that can be understood both as a condition and a product of his friendship with and openness to Pogrand.

Chapter 4 – Friendship and the Making of Non-Racial Africanity

In this chapter, I explore Sobukwe's ideas about Africanity. I argue that Sobukwe's thinking, which perhaps one might call an openness or more inclusive idea of being African, is both what made the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship possible and was deepened through the advent of the friendship. Sobukwe's openness to an inclusive Africanity confirms what I am trying to get at in the dissertation by looking at the friendship in the first instance: that these identities were not, and are not, settled or closed-off, and thus these kinds of relationships were and are possible. Sobukwe's thinking on Africanity aligns with the ways in which I am presenting Sobukwe and Pogrand in this dissertation and tells us that Sobukwe was open to the form of relationality that I have described in chapter 3.

Here I show how Sobukwe posits that openness through an open-ended account of pan-Africanism. Thus, his dispositions towards Pogrand were not just a case of compartmentalisation vis-à-vis one single person but were part of a larger worldview, way of being in the world, way of thinking about the world, interpreting identities, and interpreting what it means to be an African. Sobukwe's way of thinking about what it means to be African tells us that this friendship was not just a flash in the pan or the expression of an idiosyncrasy. What has been emphasised in scholarly writing about Sobukwe and the PAC is the non-negotiability of the land question in terms of achieving a non-racial Africanity,³⁰³ and the threat that Sobukwe's memory poses to the post-94 rainbow nation consensus.³⁰⁴ The literature that addresses the history of the PAC has not, so far, set out to trouble the racial definition of Africanity.³⁰⁵ My reading adds new dimensions to the existing discussions of Sobukwe's significance by exploring the connection between his open-ended understanding of Africanity and his friendship with Pogrand.

The category of the African, as Sobukwe conceives it, and which I explore in further detail in this chapter, is one open to *all* who would belong fairly and equitably in Africa. In what follows, through an interpretation of Sobukwe's speeches, articles, and other documents such as the *Pan Africanist Manifesto*, I look at how Sobukwe thought the category of the African and the implications of that thinking for how we might apprehend whiteness and go about unmaking it. I ask what his thinking means both for his friendship with Pogrand and for us today. In doing so, I pay attention to the context of debate and struggle and its use of language—the political debates about the “national question” in the 1950s and 60s—in which Sobukwe intervened, and the historical horizon towards which he was orientated: what I call, following David Scott, his “problem-space”; meaning the space

³⁰³ Ndumiso Dladla, “Contested Memory: Retrieving the Africanist (Liberatory) Conception of Non-racialism,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 64, no. 4 (2017): 101-127, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44862883>;

³⁰⁴ Derek Hook, “A Threatening Personification of Freedom or: Sobukwe and Repression,” *Safundi* 17:2 (2016): 189-212, DOI: 10.1080/17533171.2016.1171471.

³⁰⁵ See Kwandiwe Kondlo, *In the Twilight of Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 2009); Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).

of political problems that seemed worth having answers to in his times.³⁰⁶ I establish Sobukwe's conception of the African in order to open a set of possibilities for the unmaking of rigid and fixed racial identity.

On a negative definition of Sobukwe's African he (or she) was not defined in the language of colonial modernity and apartheid rule; in Sobukwe's conception it was not 'race' or 'tribal' identity which made one an African in the future democratic community, even though who counted as Africans in the colonial, Union, and apartheid periods was deeply shaped by the 'productive' deployment of both categories. This, I will show, is what the future African was *not*: a racial, ethnic, or tribal being defined by her geographical origins. On a positive definition – what Sobukwe's African was *for* – I argue that, under the right conditions, the African of a democratic future constituted a category of belonging premised on the commitment of those who would call themselves African to a particular kind of political, social, economic, and cultural order; an order characterised by equality and the non-rigid centring of African cultural repertoires broadly defined.³⁰⁷ To be this kind of African, for Sobukwe, was to be committed to that order not just for South Africa but also for the rest of the continent too; to want good things not just for South Africans but for all Africans. It is in this sense that Sobukwe's African challenges the conceits of modern ethnic nationalism. If realised, Sobukwe's African would have, to borrow a turn of phrase from the political theorist Adom Getachew, remade the world.³⁰⁸

I want to briefly turn to what Sobukwe's thinking of the national question meant or would mean for whiteness and white people. This is significant for two reasons: Firstly, Pogrund was himself a white person who aspired to belong as an African. Secondly, Sobukwe's take on Africanity in his response to the national question can be read as pointing the way out of whiteness both for his friend and for all present and future 'Pogrunds'. In the language of the PAC's *Manifesto*, which Sobukwe most likely contributed to,³⁰⁹ the white person is an "alien robber".³¹⁰ As an alien robber there is no way out of being white. However, Sobukwe's speeches suggest that to be an alien robber is also a matter of the exercise of personal agency and that there are ways in which whites can exit the position of whiteness or alien robbers. The tenacity and ongoing salience of whiteness in the present is to some

³⁰⁶ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004): 3–4.

³⁰⁷ This humanistic approach to Pan-Africanism was not exclusive to Sobukwe. Sean Viljoen has explored it in the life, person, and work of Peter Abrahams. See Viljoen, "Peter Abrahams: Living and Writing Pan-African Humanism," in *Moving Spaces: Creolisation and Mobility in Africa, the Atlantic and Indian Ocean*, eds. Marina Berthet, Fernando Rosa, and Shaun Viljoen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 177–192.

³⁰⁸ See Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019).

³⁰⁹ The exact authorship of the *Manifesto* is unknown. However, many critical aspects of what is said in the *Manifesto* are also expressed in Sobukwe's address at the launch of the Pan Africanist Congress in 1959 or echoed in his letters to Pogrund. It is reasonable then to infer that he either had a hand in writing the *Manifesto* or accepted much of what it said. Whether he agreed to the language of "alien robbers" remains unclear. However, as I show below, in his own speeches he was deeply and plainly critical of settler colonialism and regarded colonial dispossession as illegitimate and the position for white people under apartheid as equally illegitimate.

³¹⁰ The PAC, "Pan-Africanist Manifesto," in *Speeches of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949–1959* (Lesotho, Maseru: PAC Information Bureau, 1978) 46.

extent moored in the at-the-time necessary compromises of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which facilitated the transition to democracy, and the effects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).³¹¹ CODESA enshrined the right to private property in the heart of the constitution in such a way that the rights of the racialized majority, dispossessed by the 1913 Land Act and then again by apartheid, were not recognised and could not be adequately addressed.³¹² In this way, it stunted the possibility of realising the kind of social justice that might undo the on-going social and economic reality of whiteness in contemporary South Africa. The TRC played its part by “describing apartheid not as a system in which a racialized power disenfranchised and dispossessed a racialized majority, but as a set of human rights violations carried out by a tiny minority of individual perpetrators,”³¹³ allowing many whites to imagine themselves as un-implicated and therefore free of any kind of collective responsibility for apartheid or its afterlives.³¹⁴

The protection of private property has meant that although citizenship has been formally and legally de-racialized, the project of social justice that this chapter suggests would undo whiteness and open the door for the Pogrunds of the present to become African has not yet been realised. If whiteness is the outcome of a position in a structure of power—both material and epistemic/symbolic— rather than the inevitable expression of a biological essence, as I believe it is and as my interlocutors in this chapter argue, then undoing whiteness would require not just the de-racialization of citizenship, already achieved, but a thorough transformation of the social realm (which includes the economic) in such a way as to undo the patterns of domination that keep whiteness salient, but skilful enough to avoid making whites into a new group of victims with a future claim upon the state thus cementing their white identity/location even if changing its stakes. To undo white identity in this way *does not* mean stripping whites of “the means of life”—rendering them homeless for example— but altering instead the relationship of the entire society to, among other things, private property so that no one can use property as a form of power over others and so that the historically dispossessed can receive restitution and justice. This way of thinking of what an African is helps to explain both Sobukwe’s personal friendship with Pogrand and beyond that his openness to all who would call themselves African. I read this openness in the context of historical examples of similar openness in some significant instances of black radical struggle against racist oppression.

My concerns in this chapter are thought out against the backdrop of two historical examples and their present uses: the Quilombo dos Palmares (1605–1694) and the 1805 constitution of post-independence Haiti. The methodological basis for the comparison between these examples and

³¹¹ I accept Mahmood Mamdani’s argument about CODESA: that it achieved, rather than a revolution, which was not possible given the balance of forces at the time, a negotiated settlement that affirmed the lives of all by allowing political enemies to become political adversaries. See Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2020), 178.

³¹² Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native*, 178.

³¹³ Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native*, 188.

³¹⁴ For a critique of the ways in which the TRC facilitated treating apartheid as uncomplicatedly “past”, see Heidi Grunebaum, “Spectres of the Untold: Memory and History in South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2006).

Sobukwe’s conceptualisation of Africanity, which I unpack below, is their common location in the black radical tradition. All three of these terms – “black”, “radical”, and “tradition” – are deeply contested. However, David Scott suggests thinking about the black radical tradition as a terrain of argument about what blackness and radicality are that holds an investment in these concepts in common but does not presuppose agreement.³¹⁵ I hope to show, by locating Sobukwe’s ideas in a more global history that they are of a piece with a tradition of black radical thought that is characterised by a certain openness on the question of the possibility of remaking identity in the struggle against racism that refuses to mirror racist oppression in the modes of undoing injustice that they suggest.

What I want to suggest in this chapter is that the black radical tradition offers us a precedent for thinking a future without racial difference, where to be liberated from whiteness has nothing to do with destroying or eradicating particular bodies or ending individual lives. I focus on grounding the possibility of such a future both in the history of radical anti-colonial struggle, in Sobukwe’s own thinking on the question of citizenship and belonging *after* apartheid, and in his friendship with Pogrund. Sobukwe’s ideas surface the inspiration for a programme of social justice that would seek to realise some of the un-realised and stunted promise of South Africa’s transition to democracy. I turn now to the first of my examples: Palmares.

The history of marronage is replete with examples of challenges to the social and political order of colonial modernity.³¹⁶ Throughout the Spanish Americas, Jamaica, the French Caribbean, Brazil, the Guianes, and the territory that constitutes the contemporary United States, there were maroon communities.³¹⁷ Theorist Siba Grovogui’s way of thinking about Palmares and Haiti speaks to what I find the most interesting and generative in Sobukwe’s conception of the African: namely that both think a way out of the relations of domination that characterise colonial modernity and its concepts of race and ethnicity in ways that refuse to mirror the violence or epistemological priors (themselves also violent) of that modernity; that both, to put it in Mahmood Mamdani’s memorable phrase, “give the living a second chance.”³¹⁸ This chapter is guided by a concern with how to give the living, a second, and better, chance: how to move, in other words, from a world seized by whiteness and its repressive modes of organizing identities to non-racial Africanity. This whiteness is linked to

³¹⁵ David Scott, “On the Very Idea of a Black Radical Tradition,” *Small Axe* 40 (2013):3, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-1665398>.

³¹⁶ See Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006).

³¹⁷ See Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press and Doubleday, 1973).

³¹⁸ Here Mamdani is speaking in the context of the CODESA negotiations in South Africa in the early 1990s which presaged the transition to democracy. Mamdani commended these negotiations for the way in which they prioritised what he calls “survivors’ justice”; the kind of justice necessary in communities where victims and perpetrators have to continue living together after a great injustice and in which vengeance or “victims justice”, where the perpetrators are lined up, tried, and possible subjected to capital punishment, is not available as an option. See Mamdani, “Beyond Nuremberg: Learning from the Post-Apartheid Transition in South Africa,” *Makerere Institute of Social Research Policy Brief*, no. 1 (2015): 1–14, <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/55811/IDL-55811.pdf>.

being propertied beneficiaries: in a world organized by non-racial Africanity that form of benefitting would have to cease.

Rethinking the Political and Social Orders of Colonial Modernity: Palmares and Haiti

The project—whether tragic or romantic—of rethinking the social, political and epistemological orders colonial modernity has bequeathed us is not new.³¹⁹ There are two other moments in the black radical tradition in which the orders we have inherited from colonial modernity were rethought in ways that undermined the possibility of whiteness or, at the very least, which lend themselves to such an interpretation: the Quilombo dos Palmares (1605-1694) and the 1805 constitution of the Haitian Revolution.

I came to the examples of the Quilombo dos Palmares and the 1805 constitution of post-independence Haiti by way of Grovogui's lecture titled "Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference," which he delivered at a colloquium held at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape in August of 2016.³²⁰ Grovogui's account is important to me because of how he works with these examples to think a way out of the quagmires of racism without descending into the essentialism that sometimes characterises counter responses to it. It is also important to me because it allows me to situate Sobukwe within a strand of the black radical tradition by showing how other intellectuals and historical figures and examples have dealt similarly with the question of how to establish just orders in the wake of racist colonial violence. The context of Grovogui's lecture is apposite here. He addressed the example of Palmares (and, later in his account, the 1805 constitution of Haiti) to a young student from the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA). PASMA was at the time a voluble presence in the student protests then taking place, called Rhodes Must Fall (explored in the introduction). Despite the initial promise of the South African student movement, by the time Grovogui delivered his lecture in September of 2016, aspects of it were characterised by the celebration of millenarian violence and destruction—a belief that through fire (destruction) something new and better would be born—³²¹ and, sometimes, the acceptance of the epistemological conceits of colonial modernity. In the more spectacular moments of the protest and the discourse that surrounded the movement some students argued, for instance, against the teaching of certain forms of knowledge, such as mathematics and analytical philosophy,³²²

³¹⁹ For romantic narratives - romantic insofar as the narrative is about overcoming - see, for instance, Fanon *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965). For a narrative which, as David Scott has shown, is written first as a romance and later as a tragedy see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963). The first edition, published in 1938, as Scott has argued, is written in the mode of romance and the revised edition, published in 1963, is framed by James as a tragedy.

³²⁰ Siba Grovogui, "Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference by Siba Grovogui (Cornell University, USA)," Centre for Humanities Research: Flagship on Critical Thought in Humanities Research, YouTube, 35:28, September 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBsUcI5QoOE>.

³²¹ See Richard Pithouse, "The Turn to Book Burning," *Africa Is a Country*, September, 2016, <https://africasacountry.com/2016/09/the-turn-to-burning-in-south-africa>.

³²² See "Science Must Fall?" YouTube, 4:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9SiRNibD14>.

in ways that accepted the colonial construction of those forms of knowledge as indigenous to Europe.³²³ It is of course important to acknowledge that these spectacular moments did not define all that was happening on the ground. Even as some student activists made these kind of arguments others were conducting extra sessions to help younger students with their science and maths assignments and disseminating ideas about a more humane non-violent science.

It was not for nothing that Grovogui titled his address “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference.” The previous day at the same event the young PASMA student to whom he now spoke had presented a racially essentialist view of Africanity—in which Africanity was a matter of colour and geography (firmly located south of the Sahara)—and a defence of political violence premised on the argument that nonviolence and traditions that place human wellbeing at their centre are necessarily colonial or serve settler colonial interests over those of the oppressed.³²⁴ It was to this student that Grovogui addressed himself on the subjects of blackness, “African humanism”, and just constitutional orders, through the examples of Palmares (1605-1694) and the 1805 constitution of post-independence Haiti.

The story of Palmares begins in 1605, in the New World, when a group of African slaves who had rebelled against the local plantation system created a state for themselves.³²⁵ This state—republican in character—was located in the captaincy of Pernambuco in the Northeast of Brazil and consisted of a number of villages and hideouts inland of the coast and running parallel to it for a hundred miles.³²⁶ The leader of this maroon state was known as Zumbi. In the historical literature he is referred to as Ganga-Zumbi (meaning consensus ruler), implying that the popular figure referred to as Zumbi today may have been a succession of rulers rather than an individual person.³²⁷

It is a testament to the strength and on-going relevance of the aspirations that the story of Palmares embodies that even in contemporary Brazil, Zumbi is treated as a “premier Afro-Brazilian hero” and “the exemplar of antiracist and anticolonial praxis.”³²⁸ I don’t wish, however, to romanticize Palmares so it is important to note too that scholars like Pedro Funari, though sympathetic to the rendering of Palmares and Zumbi as exemplars of antiracism and anticolonialism, point out that the solidarity Palmares represented does not “imply the absence of friction, divisions, or even inner

³²³ For two similar versions of the argument against treating Europe’s construction of the origins of knowledge uncritically, particularly in the domain of philosophy, see Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*, trans. Jonathan Adjemian (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2016):3–4; Prathama Banerjee, “Doing Theory in Indian Classrooms,” Azim Premji University Colloquium Series, YouTube, 1:13:33, September 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CfRhnJ04wc>.

³²⁴ I am speaking here based on my memory of events. There is no other written account of this event, to the best of my knowledge.

³²⁵ Robert Nelson Anderson, “The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 3 (October, 1996): 551, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/157694>; Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 133.

³²⁶ Pedro Paulo A. Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares, a Brazilian Runaway Polity,” *Historical Archeology* 37, no. 3 (2003): 83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25617082>.

³²⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 133.

³²⁸ Anderson, “The Quilombo of Palmares,” 546.

contradictions” in that society.³²⁹ The archive of Palmares’ material culture speaks to the presence of its own share of social and political hierarchies.³³⁰ These complexities notwithstanding, as Funari documents, scholars and activists have drawn on Palmares to do various kinds of intellectual and political work in the present.³³¹ That is to say, in the same way Sobukwe’s notion of the African helps to make a claim upon the present, it has been commonplace to do so with examples such as Palmares in contemporary Brazilian culture.³³² It is in the vein of such usages of Palmares, as an example of the black radical tradition, that one could situate intellectuals who have thought about it such as Grovogui and, before him, Cedric Robinson.³³³

In Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Palmares, alongside other examples such as Haiti, functions as part of a broader argument that treats the struggles of slaves as inflected with the logics, practices, and traditions they brought with them to the New World from Africa.³³⁴ While there is a dispute among scholars about the extent to which maroon settlements, such as Palmares, replicated African cultural norms, plural and always on the move as all cultural norms were and are, what matters is that there is a line of thinking, represented for example in Robinson’s and Grovogui’s work, in which democratic, socialist, and humanist practices are reasonably ascribed an origin that is *also* African. This opens the way to think about a different trajectory, and indeed a richer content, for normative ideals often ascribed to a Europe constructed by its uncritical admirers as “entirely self-possessed.”³³⁵

There is of course, a lineage of humanism that is correctly located in the specificity of the European Enlightenment. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this humanism sprung forth fully formed and nurtured only on the cultural sustenance of that part of the world. All knowledge, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne reminds us, is the product of encounters.³³⁶ It would also be a mistake to assume that all lineages that emphasise human wellbeing or seek to create conditions which best potentiate it are derivative of Enlightenment humanism and on that basis reject humanism *tout court*. What Grovogui set out to do, as I show below, is to allow certain concerns with the social, political, and economic wellbeing of the human a provenance beyond colonial Europe and therefore a

³²⁹ Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares,” 87.

³³⁰ Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares,” 87.

³³¹ Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares,” 87.

³³² Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares,” 87.

³³³ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 132–139.

³³⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 121–122.

³³⁵ This is close to how Prathama Banerjee puts it when speaking about the construction of philosophy as ‘European.’ See “Doing Theory in Indian Classrooms,” 2016.

³³⁶ See Bachir Diagne, *The Ink of the Scholars*. There is a literature too numerous to describe here that supports Diagne’s contention, particularly from the field of global history. One example is Martin Bernal’s *The Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. 1* (London: Vintage, 1991[1987]). Of particular interest is Bernal’s discussion of the transition from what he calls the “ancient model” of Greek history to the “Aryan model”. The former understood ancient Greece and her cultural achievements as “Levantine, on the periphery of the Egyptian and Semitic cultural area,” and the latter seeing her as “Aryan” and part of Europe (conceived of as discreet and sealed off from the rest of the world) (Bernal 1991: 1). Unsurprisingly, this whitening of ancient Greek history took place between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when, as Bernal (1991: 2) put it, it was “intolerable for Greece [...] to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites.”

respectability that they cannot have if they are treated as derivative of the philosophies used to make whiteness and blackness, the human and the non-human, the living and the socially dead, in the modern world. This, I think, is a significant move because, as Getachew points out, recent literature on moments such as Palmares and Haiti has cast them as the realisation of European ideals rather than moments of innovation in which, through practice, those who struggled against colonial modernity inaugurated new ideals.³³⁷

Palmares was, Grovogui maintained, “the first experiment in republicanism in the New World, it was not [north] America.”³³⁸ Thus Grovogui makes use of Palmares to assert that black people did not merely realise pre-existing universals of European provenance but were central to the making of the universals often cherished today and most often ascribed an exclusively European origin or described in ways that make it seem as though Europe has a good record in realising those ideals wherever one may say they come from. Getachew points out of readings of subaltern agency that see moments like Haiti (or Palmares) as realising existing European ideals that “this risks reducing subaltern political practices to derivative discourses.”³³⁹

Grovogui’s interest is particularly in the social and political order the Palmerinos gave themselves. After their rebellion the former slaves chose, instead of going back to Africa, to settle in the New World under the leadership of Zumbi. As Grovogui tells it the group’s final settlement in what was to become Palmares was delayed by a group of women who resisted joining the men initially protesting that “if they were going to create a republic it has to not replicate the violence of the order from which they came.”³⁴⁰ Thus, “the first injunction against torture in the modern world [...] did not come from the West, it came from Palmares.”³⁴¹ For who, Grovogui asks in an important methodological and rhetorical move, is the more obvious candidate first to speak the words, “You will not beat me, Sir! Is it the slave or the slave master? Of course, the slave!”³⁴²

The Palmares constitution institutionalised laws against torture and thus the trajectory of resistance to unnecessary political violence, Grovogui argued, belonged, in the modern world, to black people because the black body is, in the context of that world, the most subject to torture. It is important to recall at this juncture that Grovogui was particularly addressing himself to the young PASMA student who had made his critique of nonviolence on the basis that it was “un-African” the preceding day of the colloquium. In this light, it is legitimate to read Grovogui as arguing that an injunction against violence is not *necessarily* of liberal colonial origin. There is a tradition of what Grovogui refers to as African humanism that is, precisely *because* of the experience of the slave,

³³⁷ Adom Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution,” *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016): 822, 823, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26419440>.

³³⁸ Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 9.52

³³⁹ Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn,” 822.

³⁴⁰ Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 11.53. I could not find evidence in the English language literature on Palmares for Grovogui’s claim about the women and their demands. It may exist in other literatures.

³⁴¹ Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 11.53.

³⁴² Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 12.22.

against violence. In this way it is a realistic rather than moralistic injunction; realistic in the sense that it arises out of an assessment of the actually existing conditions of life and political struggle rather than fidelity to moral precepts cast as timeless and a-contextual.³⁴³ To say that it is against violence is not to say that it is insensible to the pragmatic realities, which may from time to time make violence a feasible and necessary option. Palmares, for instance, was not docile in the face of incursions from the Portuguese and the Dutch who, over the course of its short history, sought frequently to destroy it.³⁴⁴ And Haiti, of course, had to mount a violent struggle against the plantation system in the attempt to break out of the violence of that system.

After the injunction against violence, the Palmarinos also had to ask themselves the question about belonging. “Palmares”, Grovogui continued, “...was of course not empty. They found Native Americans there.”³⁴⁵ Palmares became home to a diverse polity, which included people variously described in the literature as Africans, Indians, Jews, Muslims, and others characterised as “witches, traders, Europeans, rich men, [and] poor men”.³⁴⁶ Grovogui continued:

So these people who created the republic, again in the New World, were the first people in the New World to give universal citizenship to everybody who existed there, including Native Americans [...] they did not make a distinction between race, ethnicity, etc., because that would be [...] exactly replicating what we now call the metaphysics of racial difference; that humans can be actually categorised as racially different. They refused it. So in the New World, our traditions, black people, were the first to say, we shall not replicate that which was done to us—I am speaking about an African humanism, which is our tradition [...] it is recognising that if you don’t have universal citizenship there is no way outside of despotism: the despotism of the plantation, the despotism of everything else.³⁴⁷

A critic familiar with the scholarly literature on Palmares might point out that there is a degree of romanticism present in Grovogui’s telling of the story of Palmares. I have tried above, through the use of footnotes, to cross-reference Grovogui’s account by linking it to other scholarly work on Palmares. The account runs parallel to the claims of that scholarship. However, I am more interested in what Grovogui is *doing* with the story of Palmares than how close his representation hews to a reality that no one, including scholars, can be certain of. It is generative to ask what kinds of futures various tellings and retellings of the past make available to those of us in the present precisely because no matter how thorough a history is, no matter how well-executed, it can never tell precisely what really

³⁴³ See Karuna Mantena, “Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Non-Violence,” *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455–70. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41495087>.

³⁴⁴ See R. K. Kent, “Palmares: An African State in Brazil,” *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965): 161–175, doi:10.1017/S0021853700005582.

³⁴⁵ Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 14:13.

³⁴⁶ See, for instance, Aline Vieira de Carvalho, “Archeological Perspectives of Palmares: A Maroon Settlement in 17th Century Brazil,” *African Diaspora Archeology Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (March 2007): 3, 8, <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1226&context=adan>; Funari, “Conflict and the Interpretation of Palmares,” 85.

³⁴⁷ Grovogui, “Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference,” 15:43.

happened and it is always shaped to one extent or another by the location and concerns of its author. Grovogui's telling moors the importance of universal citizenship not only in ethical terms but also in terms of an appraisal, grounded in history and experience, of what happens when such citizenship is denied.

I want to turn now, with Grovogui, to the example of Haiti and its 1805 constitution. The Haitian Revolution, which produced the Constitution of 1805, unfolded between 1791 and 1804. Grovogui's central argument about Haiti was that it undid the order which produced white people by banishing plantation owners, denying the right to whites to own property (by which they meant plantation owners and slave masters: in other words, what is important in identifying whites is not merely colour), and declaring people of European origin loyal to Haiti or living in similar circumstances as blacks to be black. Grovogui says:

Haiti happens twenty years after the French and the American Revolution. Of those revolutions, Haiti was the only one that gave universal citizenship to everybody including whites, except French, and by which they meant French plantation owners [...] Haiti's constitution declared that everybody was black. It was not to say that everybody they saw and met was black. It is that the project of Haiti was not against white people, who they considered black if their circumstances were the same, but it was against whiteness. Harm was not to be done to blacks or whites: it was to be done to white privilege.³⁴⁸

I will advocate, in what follows, a reading of Sobukwe that goes further than Grovogui does here. I argue that if we understand white people as the outcome of a particular order, as Sobukwe does, having no independent existence apart from that order, then, if you take away the social, political, and economic conditions that produces whites you also take away white people.

Grovogui's argument about the deconstruction of whiteness that Haiti exemplifies is based on article 12, 13, and 14 of the Haitian constitution of 1805, which state:

12. No white, whatever his nationality, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he in the future acquire any property therein.

13. The preceding article cannot in the smallest degree affect white women who have been naturalized Haitians by the government, nor does it extend to children already born, or to be born of these women. The Germans and Polanders naturalized by the government are also included in the provisions of the present article.

14. All preference based on color among the children of one and the same family, within which the head of state is the father, having necessarily to cease, the Haitians shall henceforth be known only under the generic appellation of blacks (CH, 32).³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Grovogui, "Against the Metaphysics of Racial Difference," 17:57.

³⁴⁹ Anne W. Gulick, "We Are Not the People: The 1805 Haitian Constitution's Challenge to Political Legibility in the Age of Revolution," *American Literature* 78, no.4 (December 2006): 807, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2006-052><https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2006-052>.

As Anne Gulick puts it “these articles establish Haitian political identity by turning the logic of nineteenth-century racial ideology on its head.”³⁵⁰ Getachew points out that the re-description of all Haitians as black “cannot be read as an exclusionary measure that reduced citizenship to nativist or racialist entitlement.”³⁵¹ What is significant about the 1805 constitution, Getachew continues, in a move that Grovogui’s interpretation echoes, is that “Blackness was reconceived as a political category that signalled ‘historical or potential resistance’ to slavery and colonial domination. It was the contribution of Germans and Poles to the revolutionary war that allowed them to become Haitian citizens and therefore black.”³⁵² Thus, the Haitian constitution both de-racialized citizenship and provided the provisions for the kind of social justice that would undo whiteness and therefore whites: no more owners of slaves or plantations.

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I sought to establish a precedent for the deconstruction of the conditions of possibility for whiteness from within the black radical tradition itself. To do this I followed Siba Grovogui, alongside the scholarly record, as he thought through the examples of Palmares and Haiti. What I was interested in, primarily, was the claim upon the present Grovogui made through his use of these examples to insist that the world is something that we make and therefore also something we can make differently.³⁵³ Grovogui reads social actors in both of these examples as attempting to restructure their political, social, and economic orders in ways that entailed that there would be no *position* from which to be white. Thus, and this was particularly obvious in the Haitian case, it was not that pale-skinned people or people of European origin were *necessarily* white. What the examples of Palmares and Haiti make clear is that race is *not* a colour or a geographical origin, but a matter of a particular relationship to property and privilege and all the violence that goes with these.

In closing this section of the chapter, I would like to recommend what I perceive to be at the heart of Grovogui’s reading: the impulse to craft a political order that does not inaugurate fresh violence or lay the grounds for future violence through political or social exclusion. In formally de-racializing citizenship, the South African constitution accomplishes a similar political order. But, as I have shown above, the concessions of CODESA, the enshrining of the right to private property in the constitution even though that property was accumulated through dispossession, and the reinterpretation of apartheid as a human rights violation perpetrated by individual actors frustrates the kind of social justice—allowed for by the Haitian constitution—that might unmake whiteness fully. Sobukwe too crafts a definition of the African as a form of universal citizenship that is open to all, and in its careful attention to the question of social justice offers a pathway out of whiteness for whites

³⁵⁰ Gulick, “We Are Not the People,” 807.

³⁵¹ Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn,” 835.

³⁵² Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn,” 835.

³⁵³ This phrasing comes from David Graeber on how imminently possible it is to remake economic systems because they are the product of human activity rather than the artefacts of nature. I think this simple and sensible claim is just as pertinent to race. David Graeber, “All Economies are Ultimately Human Economies,” *The Journal of World-Systems Research* 27, no. 1 (2021): 321, <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2021.1043>.

and others who would oppose unjust orders. It is here that I wish to begin to pursue Sobukwe's ideas directly.

Races, Nations, and the National Question

In this section of the chapter, I look at the possibilities in Sobukwe's thought for the unmaking of whiteness, as part of the general unmaking of the racial order through the way in which Sobukwe constructs the African and the order in which he (or she) would flourish after apartheid. What I want to do is to look at those moments in his thinking that offer us the best chance of reconceiving what whiteness is, and at the least beginning to think a way out of whiteness even if that thinking is partial and initiatory and comes without any guarantees.

Before I address the question of how Sobukwe figured the category of the African in a fundamentally non-racial way, I want to briefly consider some language that will be striking to contemporary readers of Sobukwe's speeches and articles: the language of the "national question" or "national problem" and "national groups". This is not language as widely in use today as it was when Sobukwe wrote the material to which I refer in what follows. Sobukwe's speeches and articles, but also the *Pan Africanist Manifesto* and excerpts from *The Africanist*—the mouthpiece of the PAC in the 50s and 60s—all frequently refer to "national groups" or "nations" when talking about the liberation struggle. There were various ways in which this language was used by proponents of the white racist state and by political formations in the liberation struggle such as the PAC and the Congress Alliance.

In apartheid-era South Africa, the language of national groups was in use in two distinct quarters: it was used by the representatives of the apartheid state, and by the representatives of the opposition formations in the liberation movement. Sometimes the way both agents of the state and representatives of opposition political formations in the liberation struggle thought about nations and national groups, with notable exceptions such as Sobukwe and the activists of the Non-European Unity Movement and the New Era Fellowship,³⁵⁴ was one in which nations and races overlapped or were muddled.

In 1958, when Hendrik Verwoerd came to power as Prime Minister, the policy of apartheid was transformed into the policy of "separate development."³⁵⁵ Under the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 various homelands, or Bantustans, were created in which Africans (conceived of in racial *and* tribal terms) were granted a modicum of political rights, including, significantly, the right to land-use (not ownership) within the homeland to which they were assigned (on grounds of an ascribed tribal affiliation).³⁵⁶ Africans so defined fractured into natives and ethnic

³⁵⁴ See Crain Soudien, *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s–1960s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

³⁵⁵ William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159.

³⁵⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 51.

strangers depending on whether they were in their 'own' tribal homeland or that of another group. This also meant that they were foreigners in South Africa-proper (the domain of civil rather than customary law) with no political rights there whatsoever.³⁵⁷

This solved what would otherwise have been a serious political problem from the perspective of the state: that it governed over a politically disenfranchised majority. By dividing Africans into smaller 'tribal' groups and parcelling them off into separate homelands, the state also dealt with, or at least attempted to deal with, the problem of a common political consciousness and solidarity developing among those it oppressed. It was a strategy of defining and administratively producing new and more malleable subjectivities in order better to rule.³⁵⁸ It also solved an economic problem: namely, the need of capital (overwhelmingly held and controlled by whites) for cheap and fungible labour.

The Bantustans were defended in the language of national sovereignty. In the years leading up to his ascent to the prime ministry, in several speeches, Verwoerd framed "separate development" and its Bantustans as the granting of sovereignty to Africans to develop along their own chosen lines as "national communities",³⁵⁹ the idea being that national groups were racially and ethnically homogenous and belonged to, as well as required and were entitled to, their own territory. The Bantustans were thus cast in the language of national sovereignty.³⁶⁰ This allowed Verwoerd and others to defend apartheid in terms more respectable than those of racial domination, even as they figured these national communities as racial and ethnic. For example, in 1958 Verwoerd said:

There is thus no policy of oppression here but one of creating a situation which has never existed for the Bantu; namely, that, taking into consideration their languages, traditions, history and different national communities, they may pass through a development of their own. That opportunity arises for them as soon as such a division is brought into being between them and the Europeans that they need not be the imitators and henchmen of the latter.³⁶¹

While Verwoerd differentiates the "Bantu" into several "national communities" he appears to think them collectively as the racial other of Europeans. Reframed as the granting to each national group or community of its own sovereignty, separate development appeared munificent. The 'Bantu', according to Verwoerd, would ultimately be the sovereign of his own domain, just as the white man was of his.³⁶² Verwoerd's use of the language of national groups suggests a recognition that there was

³⁵⁷ Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 55.

³⁵⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 44.

³⁵⁹ Hendrik Verwoerd, "The South African Governments Policy of Apartheid, December 5, 1950," in *Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches 1948–1966*, ed. A. N. Pelzer (Johannesburg: APB Publishers, 1966[1950]), 25.

³⁶⁰ Hendrik Verwoerd, "The Policy of Apartheid, September 3, 1948," in *Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches 1948–1966*, ed. A. N. Pelzer (Johannesburg: APB Publishers, 1966 [1948]), 8.

³⁶¹ Hendrik Verwoerd, "The South African Governments Policy of Apartheid, December 5, 1950," 25.

³⁶² Hendrik Verwoerd, "The South African Governments Policy of Apartheid, December 5, 1950," 26–27.

something separate and additional to the national group over and above race. This as I have shown above was by design.

The other quarter that used the language of national groups was the liberation struggle. Here, the national question arose out of debates about “how to build one united, democratic nation” within the confines of a territory thought to host multiple nations.³⁶³ Both the state and the various formations in the liberation struggle, during the 40s and 50s, appear to have understood the character of South Africa to be multi-national and that multi-nationalism to be a problem in want of a solution. There were different theses about how many nations South Africa consisted of and what processes—social, economic, political—produced these, but opponents of apartheid seem to have mostly agreed that part of South Africa’s predicament in its struggle for a sovereign and democratic future was that it was multi-national. Where they differed was on the question of the precise constitution of this multi-nationalism: how many nations? What produced multi-nationalism in the South African case? And what ought to be done about it?

In the context of the liberation struggle, the national question was not only about the future—it was not only a question of what kind of state the defeat of apartheid would inaugurate or ought to inaugurate—it also touched on the liberation struggle’s present, for it was a question too of what the appropriate relationship ought to be between the various national groups (figured sometimes as races and sometimes as distinct from races, as I show below) in the struggle against apartheid.³⁶⁴ Thus, most formations in the opposition to apartheid, such as the ANC, member organisations of the Congress Alliance, and the United Democratic Front organised on a multi-racial basis with separate organisations for the different national groups, but these national groups coincided with the racial designations of the times.³⁶⁵

In the late 1940s internal discussion in the ANC about its relationship to the Indian Congress was expressed in the language of “national groups” with the executive “empowering a working committee to arrange a meeting ‘of the three national groups for exploration of the basis for co-operation.’”³⁶⁶ In the early 1950s, ANC statements “began emphasizing the need for a South African loyalty and shared set of democratic values that would eventually build a single nation.”³⁶⁷ But the timber from which this single nation was to be built was sometimes imagined as its distinct *racial* groups, described by Dr. J.L.Z Njongwe in a 1952 speech at the Cape ANC Conference as “apparently conflicting racial groups.”³⁶⁸ According to Jon Soske, by the mid-50s Albert Luthuli and other African

³⁶³ Edward Webster and John Mawbey, “Revisiting the National Question,” in *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa*, ed. Edward Webster and Karin Pampallis (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 1.

³⁶⁴ Soske, “The Impossible Concept,” 13, 14.

³⁶⁵ Raymond Suttner, “Understanding Non-Racialism as an Emancipatory Concept in South Africa,” *Theroia: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 59, no. 130 (2012): 25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42705231>.

³⁶⁶ Minutes of the African National Congress National Executive, Bloemfontein, 1-2 February 1947, cited in Jon Soske, “Wash Me Black Again: African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944–1960” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 85.

³⁶⁷ Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 248.

³⁶⁸ J.L.Z Njongwe cited in Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 248–249.

leaders had begun to use “the word ‘multi-racial’ to refer to an essential characteristic of the South African nation itself.”³⁶⁹ Soske points out that the language used by ANC and Congress partisans to describe the elements of the South African nation included terms such as “national groups”, “races”, and “four sections of the people of South Africa” in reference to the four recognised ‘race’ groups: Africans, Whites/Europeans, Coloured, and Indians.³⁷⁰ He describes the language as inconsistent.³⁷¹

On the Left, contributions to the Forum Club symposium, convened to discuss the national question in May 1954, give some indication of the tendency to connect national groups and nation to the concept of race and races in some quarters of the liberation struggle.³⁷² At the symposium Thomas Ngwenya described South Africa’s population as “composed of four racial groups: Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Europeans. Together these four racial groups constitute the South African nation.”³⁷³ In his contribution to the symposium, H. J. Simons also connected race to nation, saying:

The ‘national problem’ which we are here discussing is, firstly, what are the ‘nations’ or ‘national groups’ in South Africa and, secondly, and mainly, what is the correct attitude to them—correct, that is to say, for South Africans who wish to replace the existing system of exploitation by a free and harmonious *multi-racial* society.³⁷⁴ (My emphasis).

Equally, the Left imagined equality between races rather than the end of races per se. What is particular about Sobukwe’s usage of race and national groups, as I will show below, is that he did not frame them as either inherent or fixed and he suggested that both could be permanently undone or remade. The nation he imagined was a non-racial community of Africans, rather than a multiracial community of races or nations.

I want to suggest a reading here of Sobukwe in which to exclude whites is not, as is the common understanding, to exclude *a priori* the people whose bodies (etc.) have been interpreted as white. There is another reading possible in which, much like in the Haitian example I considered above, it is whiteness and whites as a position-of-domination cemented through property and privilege that is rejected, deconstructed, and excluded from the political, social, and economic order to come rather than people who ‘look’ white or have European ancestry.

Sobukwe and the Category of the African

Sobukwe’s 1959 inaugural address at the first Pan-Africanist Congress, his “PAC Case” article, and the *Manifesto*, all insist that the nation to come will not tolerate the existence of more than one

³⁶⁹ Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 249.

³⁷⁰ Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 249.

³⁷¹ Soske, “Wash Me Black Again,” 247.

³⁷² The Forum Club was a regrouping of members of the Fourth International Organization of South Africa, after the latter group disbanded in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. See Baruch Hirson, “A Question of Class: The Writings of Kenneth A. Jordaan,” *Searchlight South Africa* 1, no. 2 (1989): 22.

³⁷³ Thomas Ngwenya, “What are the National Groups in South Africa? Forum Club, Cape Town, May 1954,” in *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1943–1964*, ed. Allison Drew (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997), 279.

³⁷⁴ H.J. Simons, “Nationalism in South Africa, Forum Club, Cape Town, May 1954,” in *South Africa’s Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1943–1964*, ed. Allison Drew (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997), 275.

“national group” within its boundaries. Speaking at the PACs inaugural conference, Sobukwe stated the party’s political aspirations for the nation to come thus:

We aim, politically, at [a] government of the Africans by the Africans for Africans, with everybody who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority being regarded as an African.³⁷⁵

There is to date no formal scholarship on the production of the *Pan-Africanist Manifesto* and accounts differ as to who its authors were. As president of the Pan Africanist Congress, Sobukwe would almost certainly have been among them. It was written in the late 1950s at a significant time, and one of growing support, for Pan-Africanism as an ideology. In 1958, the All-African Peoples Conference met in Accra, the capital of Ghana, conceived by Ghana’s Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah. Gail Gerhart suggests that the PAC adopted “the doctrines of the All-African Peoples Conference in toto”³⁷⁶ announcing their commitment to a continental conception of Africanity and a commitment to freedom across the continent with the words: “The African people of South Africa recognize themselves as part of one African nation, stretching from Cape to Cairo, Madagascar to Morocco, and pledge themselves to strive ceaselessly to find organizational expression for this nation in a merger of free independent African states into a United States of Africa.”³⁷⁷ After the first All-Africa Peoples Conference, the term “Pan-African” was incorporated into the Africanists’ name for their new organisation; they had previously also considered calling itself the All African National Congress, the Africanist Congress, and the African Revolutionary Party. The *Manifesto* was delivered – probably as a speech and possibly also in printed form – on April 6 in 1959 at the Orlando Community Hall in the Johannesburg township of Soweto when the PAC launched. There are no details readily available as to who delivered it, or how it was received by the audience.

The *Manifesto* was blunt about the priority of an African identity and loyalty for citizens of the future nation:

The African people will not tolerate the existence of the other national groups within the confines of one nation. For the healthy growth and development of the African nation it is imperative that all individuals must owe their first, and only, loyalty to the African nation, and not to their ethnic or national groups. The African people regard the influence of material conditions in the development of a nation as being of greater significance than mere ethnic origin. Within the social environment of the African nation there will be room for all individuals who identify themselves materially, intellectually and spiritually with the African nation.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Robert Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959* (Maseru, Lesotho: PAC Information Bureau, 1978[1959]), 24.

³⁷⁶ Gerhart, *Black Power*, 207.

³⁷⁷ PAC *Manifesto* cited in Gerhart, *Black Power*, 207.

³⁷⁸ PAC, “Pan-Africanist Manifesto,” 48.

The Manifesto also asserted its opposition to the multiracialism of the Freedom Charter and its inclusion of whites in the nation to come, saying:

These ‘leaders’ [referring to the Congress Alliance] consider South Africa to belong to all who live in it, the alien dispossessor and the indigenous dispossessed, the alien robbers and their indigenous victims.³⁷⁹

Sobukwe and the *Manifesto* present a vision in which anyone who assents to a just order can belong as African *and* in which *no* whites (“alien robbers”) can ever belong. In closing his address to the inaugural conference Sobukwe invited all who would into the ambit of the African:

Here is a tree rooted in African soil, nourished with waters from the rivers of Africa. Come and sit under its shade and become, with us, leaves of the same branch and branches of the same tree.³⁸⁰

Who were the other national groups to whom both Sobukwe and the *Manifesto* refer? In the 1959 inaugural address, Sobukwe identified two as significant in the South African context: Europeans and Indians; Sobukwe considered ‘Coloureds’, a racial identity constructed and enforced by the apartheid state, as African.³⁸¹ Europeans he described as:

...a foreign minority group, which has exclusive control of political, economic, social and military power. It is the dominant group. It is the exploiting group, responsible for the pernicious doctrine of White Supremacy, which has resulted in the humiliation, and degradation of the indigenous African people. It is this group which has dispossessed the African people of their land and with arrogant conceit has set itself up as the “guardians”, the “trustees” of the Africans. It is this group which conceives of the African people as a child nation, composed of Boys and Girls, ranging in age from 120 years to one day. It is this group which, after 300 years, can still state with brazen effrontery that the Native, the Bantu, the Kaffir is still backward and savage etc. But they still want to remain “guardians”, “trustees”, and what have you, of the African.

In short, it is this group which has mismanaged affairs in South Africa just as their kith and kin are mismanaging affairs in Europe. It is from this group that the most rabid race baiters and agitators come. It is members of this group who, whenever they meet in their Parliament, say things, which agitate the hearts of millions of peace-loving Africans. This is the group, which turns out thousands of experts on that new South African Science of the Native mind.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ PAC, “Pan-Africanist Manifesto,” 46.

³⁸⁰ Robert Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959* (Maseru, Lesotho: PAC Information Bureau, 1978[1959]), 24.

³⁸¹ Gail Gerhart, “Gail Gerhart Interviews Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (1970),” *PINS*, no.50 (2016): 68, NOT VERBATIM, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-8708/2016/n50a4>.

³⁸² Robert Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” in *Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959* (Maseru, Lesotho: PAC Information Bureau, 1978[1959]), 22.

Passages such as these suggest, firstly, that Sobukwe, and at least some of his colleagues in the PAC,³⁸³ defined the African—envisaged as the prime category of political and social life after the defeat of apartheid—in such a way that it was neither determined by ‘ethnic’ origin—the *Manifesto* insists that “material conditions” are more significant in the production of national identity than “ethnic origins” as does Sobukwe’s inclusion of the Indian poor among the ranks of the African oppressed, or, at least proximate enough to them to identify with their struggle—or national group and/or race. As both Sobukwe and the *Manifesto* asserted, all could become part of the African nation if they threw their lot in with it.³⁸⁴ What is also significant vis-à-vis whiteness and the possibility of it having a permanent end is that none of the features Sobukwe uses to characterise whiteness are essential. What makes one white is a particular position or relationship to structures of political, economic, social, and even epistemological power (recall Sobukwe’s invocation of the “science of the Native mind”). All of these have the potential to be changed.

As Jon Soske argues, in the vocabulary of the Africanists, “national groups” named the racial differences apartheid produced without attributing them to biology or culture, but rather ascribing them to an oppressive form of “political economy founded on settler colonialism.”³⁸⁵ Thus, the identification, “national groups”, articulated a critique of apartheid that acknowledged the materiality of racial (and ethnic) difference without conceding the racist argument that such difference was lodged in biology or culture, or that race was fixed and determined by the body. Indeed, in Sobukwe’s 1959 inaugural address to the Convention of the Africanists, the *Manifesto*, and in several editorials written often pseudonymously by Pan-Africanists in *The Africanist*, the existence of race as a biological category is vigorously rejected. In a passage from the address, titled *the race question*, and echoed in both Sobukwe’s the *P.A.C Case* and the *Manifesto*, Sobukwe declares:

Africanists take the view that there is only one race to which all belong, and that is the human race [...] In Africa the myth of race has been propounded and propagated by the imperialists and colonists from Europe, in order to facilitate and justify their inhuman exploitation of the indigenous people of the land. It is from this myth of race with its attendant claims of superiority that the doctrine of white supremacy stems.³⁸⁶

I want to turn now to the question of who is or could be an African in Sobukwe’s thought. This question, as Siphamandla Zondi puts it, is the perennial one so far as Pan-Africanists are concerned.³⁸⁷ I begin by reconsidering what an African is *not* for Sobukwe. There is a clear distinction in Sobukwe’s writing between an already African majority, defined *not* primarily in terms of race but in terms of their oppression and claim to land, and therefore including so-called Coloureds and working class

³⁸³ See footnote 64 above.

³⁸⁴ I explore the significance of the term “national group” in what follows.

³⁸⁵ Soske, “The Impossible Concept,” 25.

³⁸⁶ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 21.

³⁸⁷ Siphamandla Zondi, “The Africanist Turn in South African National Question Discourses,” in *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa*, ed. Edward Webster and Karin Pampallis (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 103.

Indians, and a European and elite Indian minority, also *not* defined in terms of race (if race is understood as something other than the product of political and social arrangements), yet to shed their status as “foreign minority group[s]” and become African.

For Sobukwe, Europeans (whites) are defined as “[...] a foreign minority group which has exclusive control of political, economic, social, and military power. *It is the dominant group*. It is the *exploiting group* [...].”³⁸⁸ (My emphasis). Europeans, for Sobukwe, were characterised by their domination not only of various spheres of life—political, economic, and social, for instance— but also over Africans (who Sobukwe broadly defined as the oppressed and amongst whom he included Coloureds and Indians) and responsible for the “doctrine of white supremacy.”³⁸⁹ Note that this characterisation of Europeans/whites does not make recourse either to race or culture, or even to geographical origin, to define Europeans/whites. It suggests that if whites are foreign, it is because of *how* they occupy the space (and the land) and their production of and relationship to its Others, not where they come from or some essence internal to their bodies.

Indians too he described as a “foreign minority group.”³⁹⁰ However, this group was distinguished from Europeans, the illegitimacy of its position in the hierarchy of apartheid South Africa qualified by the fact that Indians “...came to this country not as imperialists or colonialists, but as indentured labourers. In the South African set up of today, this group is an oppressed minority.”³⁹¹ But one could, when thinking about the position of Indians, according to Sobukwe, distinguish politically between “the merchant class” and “the poor ‘stinking coolies’ of Natal.”³⁹² Sobukwe described the merchant class as “...tainted with the virus of cultural supremacy and national arrogance,” identifying “itself, by and large, with the oppressor,” and lamented the fact that it was “the group which provides the political leadership of the Indian people in South Africa [...].” He went on: “All that the politics of this class have meant up to now is preservation and defence of the sectional interests of the Indian merchant class.”³⁹³ It was the “down-trodden, poor ‘stinking coolies’ of Natal” who alone, according to Sobukwe, could “as a result of the pressure of material conditions [...] identify themselves with the indigenous African majority in the struggle to overthrow White supremacy...”³⁹⁴ The Indian poor, in other words, could claim a solidarity with African struggle against apartheid that Europeans/whites *and* the Indian elite could not. There is also a suggestion here that Indians of the merchant class are proximate to Europeans/whites because of their social and economic position rather than any cultural or biological factor. It is important to read this as an invitation to the Indian poor, *not* a prediction about whether they would take up the offer to identify

³⁸⁸ Robert Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

³⁸⁹ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

³⁹⁰ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

³⁹¹ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

³⁹² Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22–23.

³⁹³ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

³⁹⁴ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 23.

with Africans and African struggle. As past and recent history suggests several have, and many have not.³⁹⁵

The fact that Sobukwe thinks the African, ‘Coloured’, and poor Indian in the context of the liberation struggle as African indicates that he does *not* think the African as a biologically defined racial category. From the perspective of the state and the everyday common sense, these groups were distinct races whose difference was lodged in biological and cultural essences. Sobukwe refuses this when he thinks them all as African. The fact that he does not think the African in terms of tribe indicates that he does *not* think that category as an ethnic category either, whilst still acknowledging in his speeches the lived reality of tribalization. That is to say, the legal, social, and political distinctions the apartheid state drew between Africans, ‘Coloureds’, and Indians, justified in the language of biology and culture (the latter as a kind of proxy for biology), do *not* obtain in how Sobukwe thinks about what it means to be African. The evidence for this is firstly in his inclusion of ‘Coloureds’ among Africans and in his inclusion of poor Indians in African struggle against apartheid. Whites, whom Sobukwe refers to mostly as Europeans, cannot be included but this is not because Sobukwe understands them as a race in precisely the same way that apartheid did. Rather, they cannot be included because of their objective interest in apartheid and white supremacy. But because what differentiates them from Africans is a position in a constructed not an inherent or inevitable hierarchy and form of difference there is no reason, for Sobukwe, that they, and Indian elites whom he also excludes from among Africans in the context of the liberation struggle, cannot join the ranks of the African in a fair and equal society in which the conditions for racial domination have been undone. Thus, what separates the Indian elite from the Indian poor and the European from everyone else is a constructed position in a social, political, and economic hierarchy justified by the ideology of white supremacy.

Moreover, even for Europeans (whites), a pathway for this majoritised minority out of what would be, in the context of a revolution, the otherness of the “foreign minority group” and into Africanity is always there in Sobukwe’s thought. For example, in his address to the inaugural Convention for the Africanists in April of 1959, Sobukwe stated that “politically” the aim of the PAC was:

...a government of the Africans by the Africans for Africans, with *everybody* who owes his only loyalty to Africa and who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African

³⁹⁵ As I have written elsewhere, “The recent Phoenix riots of 2021 [in KwaZulu-Natal], in which Indians engaged in significant violence against black people, although also based on complex socio-economic factors, were nevertheless framed in a racist idiom, which suggests how difficult the unmaking of race is in reality.” See Emma Daitz, “Towards a Future Without White People: Robert Sobukwe and the Category of the African,” *South African Review of Sociology* 52, no. 2 (2022): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2022.2079152>. See also, John Eligon and Zanele Mji, “Indian vs. Black: Vigilante Killings Uproar a South African Town,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/04/world/africa/South-AfricaPhoenix-riots-deaths.html>.

majority being regarded as an African. We guarantee no minority rights, because we think in terms of individuals not groups.³⁹⁶ (My emphasis).

The insistence here on individual rather than group rights should be read in the context of a form of state predicated upon group rights for Africans and individual rights for everybody else. Sobukwe insistence should not be read as a form of straightforward liberal individualism.

This position—that *any* person who is loyal to Africa and accepts the democratic rule of the oppressed majority can number among Africans—is reiterated in the *Pan Africanist Manifesto*; in an article Sobukwe wrote in 1959 titled *The PAC Case*;³⁹⁷ and in a 1960 speech made in Langa, Cape Town, at Bhunga Square, where Sobukwe is reported as saying, “in the new Africa we are going to, there will be no Indians and Europeans, but we will all be Africans.”³⁹⁸ Sobukwe’s position on what it would mean to be African, after the defeat of apartheid, was, therefore, an established one by the early 1960s some years into his friendship with Pogrund.³⁹⁹ In his personal letters, written from his solitary confinement on Robben Island under the watchful eye of the prison authorities, Sobukwe had a practice of generously and pre-emptively interpolating Pogrund into the category of the African. For instance, in a letter to Pogrund thanking him for the gift of some books, Sobukwe casually refers to himself as “speaking as one African to another.”⁴⁰⁰ I explore the significance of this practice further in the following chapter.

The becoming African of others who had once been white, does not happens because the order that produces races and racial discrimination has been undone and remade. Critically, that order is not only political, but also social and economic. The features of the post-apartheid order, as Sobukwe imagines it, include: “a planned economy without recourse to totalitarianism;”⁴⁰¹ “equality of income”;⁴⁰² the end of white supremacy as a precondition for democracy;⁴⁰³ majority rule (again, recall that the majority—Africans—are defined in a way that allows minorities to become part of it);⁴⁰⁴ an end to the kind of groups rights that characterised apartheid rule—“all men will be citizens of a common state and will live and be governed as individuals *not as distinctive sectional groups*” (my

³⁹⁶ Robert Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 24.

³⁹⁷ Sobukwe, “The P.A.C. Case,” 25–29.

³⁹⁸ Saunders, “Pan-Africanism: The Cape Town Case,” 297.

³⁹⁹ Saunders, “Pan-Africanism: The Cape Town Case,” 297.

⁴⁰⁰ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 3 January 1966, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Research Papers Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I look at the various aspects of this practice in more depth in chapter three.

⁴⁰¹ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 18.

⁴⁰² Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 19.

⁴⁰³ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 20, 23.

⁴⁰⁴ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 19.

emphasis);⁴⁰⁵ a United States of Africa that defied the colonial map of the continent;⁴⁰⁶ and the inauguration of an “Africanist Socialist Democracy”.⁴⁰⁷

Conclusion

I opened this chapter by considering two things: firstly, the ways in which CODESA and the TRC facilitated the political revolution (CODESA) but frustrated the social revolution by the way they (TRC) conceived of the kind of problem apartheid was and the concessions they (CODESA) made in order to realise the *relatively* bloodless transition to (liberal) democracy. Secondly, I reflected on the predicament of whites who enjoy all sorts of power and privilege at what I suggested is a profound spiritual cost: in order to occupy the position of whites they must remain mired in the worst aspects of human sociality and forgo its better possibilities. I then argued that within the black radical tradition there have been moments/projects (Palmares and Haiti) in which a solution to domination was sought that did not walk to path of eradicating the dominator/oppressor but rather opened up the possibility for her to realise the better aspects of her being through entering into a relation of equality with others. Against this backdrop, I explored the openness in Soubukwe’s thought to a future which because *both* democratically and socially just whites might undo their whiteness and become part of a non-racial community of Africans. That Sobukwe’s vision has not been realised has more to do I think with the fact that CODESA and the TRC frustrated (under the constraints of the time on what was possible) a social revolution, rather than the quality or realism of that vision. In the following chapter I turn to minor forms of practice in Sobukwe and Pogrund’s letters to one another that suggest the realisation of a non-racial humanity.

⁴⁰⁵ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 23. Sobukwe has been mischaracterised, I think, as unable to think a collective subject on the basis of his position on groups rights. But that position must be understood in the context of how apartheid rule deployed group rights to define, divide, and conquer. His objection is specifically to that kind of group rights and the collective subjects it produced.

⁴⁰⁶ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 19.

⁴⁰⁷ Sobukwe “Inaugural Address,” 24.

Chapter 5 – Friendship as Politics

In the previous chapter, I argued that Sobukwe offers us a radically non-racialist vision of what a future African *might* be. That vision addressed the question of social justice and deconstructed the conditions of possibility for whiteness. Sobukwe goes further than the formal de-racialization of citizenship (which South Africa has achieved) by refusing both race and tribe as categories of belonging in a democratic future, to address the question of social justice both epistemically—Sobukwe acknowledges the epistemic dimensions of apartheid when he invokes the “science of the Native mind” in a critical light—⁴⁰⁸and structurally—the demand that the question of South Africans’ relationship to land and property be addressed,⁴⁰⁹ the vision of a non-totalitarian planned economy with the human-wellbeing at its centre including the call for equality of income and redistribution of wealth,⁴¹⁰ and the suggestion that a future African culture be rooted in endogenous manners whilst still remaining open to and facing outwards toward the rest of the world.⁴¹¹ By refusing to cast whiteness (the European “foreign national group”) as the outcome of biology, instead describing it as an entirely politically and socially made category or position within society, Sobukwe offers whites the chance to realise the better aspects of their humanity by living side-by-side with everyone else not as masters (whites) but as equals (fellow Africans). I made these arguments by drawing on Sobukwe’s speeches, articles, and interviews with the press.

In this chapter I return to Sobukwe’s letters to Pogrund, which make up most of his known body of writing.⁴¹² What sorts of insights might be drawn about practices to refuse race as a biological category and their significance, I ask, based on Sobukwe’s letters and particularly those he exchanged with his main correspondent and friend Benjamin Pogrund? I suggest that Pogrund and Sobukwe realised a kind of momentary and unstable non-racial humanity in their letters and their friendship with one another. It is momentary and unstable for many reasons not least because Pogrund later throws himself into the bosom of another settler project when he emigrates to Israel in the early 90s.

I have chosen to describe these practices of refusal, which, I argue, realise a fleeting humanity, as non-racial. Given that non-racialism is a contested and controversial idea, the chapter that follows opens by clarifying what kind of non-racialism I am trying to speak to here against other lineages that I wish to distance myself from as I discussed in the introduction. It then proceeds by exploring two sets of exchanges—those concerning the arrangements for Veronica Sobukwe’s fortieth birthday and those concerning Miliswa Sobukwe’s use of the siNtu language honorific “Ntate” to refer to Pogrund. These intimate exchanges represent just a few among many others in the Pogrund-

⁴⁰⁸ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 22.

⁴⁰⁹ PAC, “Pan Africanist Manifesto,” in *Speeches of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949–1959* (Maseru, Lesotho: PAC Information Bureau, 1978), 43.

⁴¹⁰ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 19.

⁴¹¹ Sobukwe, “Inaugural Address,” 24.

⁴¹² See the introduction for a discussion of the methodological issues pertinent to working with letters.

Sobukwe correspondence that show the kind of contingent humanity and refusal of racism that I am concerned with here.

The first exchange is intended to further establish the level of intimacy that existed between the two men and to which I gestured through a few excerpts from their letters to one another in chapter 3. The second is intended to mount the central argument of the chapter: that in the course of ordinary everyday life Sobukwe and Pogrand attempted to realise, however fleetingly, imperfectly, and without guarantees, a relation to one another as people *not* as ‘races.’ This relation was actively prohibited by the society in which they both were obliged to live. I argue that both in the context of apartheid, in which Sobukwe and Pogrand made such attempts, and in the context of the on-going (re)making of race in the present, such actions might be read as a form of politics with life-affirming possibilities.

Apartheid, Race, and Non-Racialism

To provide a historically specific background to my analysis of Sobukwe and Pogrand’s acts of refusal, I begin by describing, particularly, the racialized dimensions of apartheid. As Deborah Posel writes, practices of racialized governance predate the advent of the apartheid state in 1948 and extend back into the Union and colonial pasts. However:

What made the apartheid system of racial categorisation notoriously distinctive was its panoptic scope: Every single South African citizen was now compelled to register as a member of an officially designated race, on the understanding that this classification would then *inform every aspect of that person’s life*.⁴¹³ (My emphasis).

There is a complication here that Posel doesn’t attend to. And that complication is evident in the different tribes that “the Bantu” was broken into with each black African person carrying a tribal identity imprinted on their identity document and which, as much as race, shaped every aspect of their lives another time over.

What is immediately important to me here about Posel’s observation is its emphasis on the productive inscription of race into the fabric of everyday life. The epistemology of race that underwrote the Population Registration Act of 1950 cast race as a matter of “common sense”.⁴¹⁴ Those appointed to classify people as races worked with the existing social conventions so that every bit of social information such as “the environment and dress of the person concerned,” whether a person played soccer or rugby, lay on a high bed or a low bed, what sort of beer they drank, and so on, became relevant to determining how to classify them.⁴¹⁵ Thus, the minutia of the everyday was

⁴¹³ Deborah Posel, “Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa,” *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (September 2001): 89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/525576>.

⁴¹⁴ Posel, “Race as Common Sense,” 87. For other important examples of scholarship on the making of race during apartheid, both at the level of the state and in everyday life, see, for instance, Zimitri Erasmus, *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2002); and Keith Breckenridge, *The Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴¹⁵ Posel, “Race as Common Sense,” 106.

permeated by racial “common sense” and it is in this regard that I view some of Pogrund and Sobukwe’s actions as refusing—or aspiring to refuse—that common sense in how they related to one another and thus as constituting a kind of politics.

Though Sobukwe and Pogrund’s refusal of the making of race in the everyday through the application and instantiation of racialised distinctions and the celebration of those moments in their lives when such distinctions were refused is not worked out by either as praxis, it mirrors features of other non-racial political projects which did work out such details in some depth. One notable example is that of the New Era Fellowship of the Non-European Unity Movement in the Cape, which had an explicit program premised on the perfectability of human social relations and politics that sought to challenge the ruling class ideology of race by utterly rejecting it in *every* aspect of everyday life.⁴¹⁶

In the contemporary moment non-racialism raises some concerns.⁴¹⁷ As I discussed in the introduction and literature review through the work of Jon Soske, Shannon Walsh, T.J. Tallie, and Franco Barchiesi, there is a position that holds that non-racialism would frustrate or prevent the possibility of realising a more fulsome social justice for South Africans. This is perhaps because the lineage of non-racialism that is best known in South Africa today is the lineage associated with the liberal tradition that centre-right political formations such as the Democratic Alliance have adopted. This is a shallow and facile non-racialism that forbids talk of racist injustice and claims its adherents to be colour-blind. But, as Kelly Gillespie argues in her defence of another more radical lineage for non-racialism, there is a lineage of non-racialism in South Africa that is *not* conservative and merits serious consideration.⁴¹⁸ Gillespie is thinking about that lineage as it develops within the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), whereas I am looking at it in the context of Pan-Africanism and particularly of Sobukwe’s thinking. Like Gillespie, Ciraj Rassool also sees in certain lineages of non-racialism “far more radical possibilities for social transformation than have hitherto been appreciated.”⁴¹⁹ He continues, “Nonracialism is thus not a putative condition of racelessness. *It is a politics of knowledge not merely of challenging racism but of questioning race itself.* It is a long-term epistemological project of making a new society and new persons” (my emphasis).⁴²⁰ Rassool tracks the lineages of non-racialism he seeks to recommend through the activities of the NEUM and the PAC.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ See Crain Soudien, *Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s–1960s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

⁴¹⁷ In her critique of David Theo Goldberg’s *The Threat of Race*, in which she argues for radical lineages of non-racialism, Kelly Gillespie notes this kind of anxiety when she recognises Goldberg’s worry that non-racialism forbids talk of racism and thus frustrates the project of dismantling it. See Kelly Gillespie, “Reclaiming Nonracialism: Reading *The Threat of Race* from South Africa,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 1 (2010): 61, Doi 10.1080/00313220903507636. See also, https://www.saha.org.za/nonracialism/2015_preface.htm.

⁴¹⁸ Gillespie, “Reclaiming Nonracialism,” 63.

⁴¹⁹ Ciraj Rassool, “The Politics of Nonracialism in South Africa,” *Public Culture* 31, no. 2(2019): 343, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-7286861>.

⁴²⁰ Rassool, “The Politics of Nonracialism,” 345.

⁴²¹ Rassool, “The Politics of Nonracialism,” 345.

I want to differentiate in greater detail than I have so far done, the radical form of non-racialism that I attribute to Sobukwe (he publicly declares himself a non-racialist in 1958)⁴²² from some of the other forms of politics and ethics that travel under that name. Firstly, Sobukwe's non-racialism ought to be distinguished from the facile colour-blindness commonly associated with the doctrine today (even though, as is evident in the excerpts below there are moments in which Sobukwe does appear to think of non-racialism as colour-blindness). Ciraj Rassool characterises the facile form of non-racialism as "merely a politics of racial equality" that advocates at most for "equal treatment for people deemed of different 'races'".⁴²³ Usages of the term "nonracialism", which first occur in the English-language press in the late 1950s, "to refer to racially integrated spaces and institutions," are one example of facile non-racialism that remains common even today.⁴²⁴ Such usages, which index non-racialism as integration between so-called races in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, public institutions, and so forth, remain popular today among critics and proponents alike.⁴²⁵ Facile non-racialism leaves the concept of race itself—where race refers to natural rather than social and historical categories—secure. In this kind of non-racialism, race is assumed rather than historicised and the project becomes to bring about equality between 'races' as though the concept of race itself were not problematic. However, race has only one historical purpose: in the context of the making of the modern world it divides those who are to be valued as human from those who are to fall in the zone of abjection outside of the count of the human and naturalises this division by lodging it in a conception of biology (or culture) as fixed and determinative.⁴²⁶

Seeking the equality of categories that necessarily produce such hierarchies or insides and outsides—indeed whose sole purpose is to do so—seems a futile task. 'Races' cannot be made equal for that is not their purpose.⁴²⁷ Rather, radical non-racialism of the kind Rassool describes, seeks to illuminate the conditions that produce race so as to challenge both the category of race and its operationalization through the activity of racialization (accomplished most potently in the everyday) by calling

⁴²² Apart from the evidence for this given in the previous chapter, Sobukwe's also publicly declared himself a non-racialist in an interview with the *Golden City Post*. See Soske, *Impossible Concept*, 23.

⁴²³ Rassool, "The Politics of Nonracialism in South Africa," 344.

⁴²⁴ Soske, "The Impossible Concept," 19.

⁴²⁵ In his critique of non-racialism (described in his text often as "antiracism" or "antiracialism"), David Theo Goldberg sometimes equates nonracialism with this kind of 'racial' intergration. See, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 314–315. As Kelly Gillespie has pointed out, and as other scholars such as Zimitri Erasmus and Crain Soudien have done much to provide substance for, there are other traditions of non-racialism than the one from which Goldberg distances himself. See Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017); and Crain Soudien, *Cape Radicals*.

⁴²⁶ See Ramon Grosfoguel, "What is Racism?" *Journal of World-Systems Research* 22, no. 1 (2016): 9–15, <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2016.609>.

⁴²⁷ The practice of formations such as the Non-European Unity Movement and the Black Consciousness movement to name the division between oppressor and oppressed as Europeans, non-Europeans, or Whites and Blacks respectively should be distinguished from racialization. Here racial categories were being re-imagined to describe differences in power and political subjectivity rather than biological or cultural difference. When Biko extends the meaning of blackness for example to include everyone who has a political consciousness of his or her oppression under white supremacy, he uses the racial category 'black' in a way that fundamentally sets it apart from its racist usage. Biology, as the basis for blackness, is refused. See Crain Soudien, *Cape Radicals*, 171.

...attention to histories of how race and racial systems were made in legislative, social, and epistemic terms...[and making] it possible to understand how each category of race was created as part of this administration and governmentality...as well as how these continue to be reproduced and remade after apartheid...⁴²⁸

Through an interpretation of Sobukwe's thinking on race, national groups, and Africanity I tried, in the previous chapter, to show how he might be read as deconstructing conceptions of race which lodge such difference in biological or cultural terms, reading racial difference instead as political (and therefore amenable to change). What is useful about how Sobukwe thinks about the problem of race is that he refuses to surrender the category to the domain of what is essential and self-sustaining and understands it instead as arising out of the domain of human activity consisting of chosen, material, and changeable arrangements—this, together with the fact that he speaks from within the tradition of black radicalism, continues to make him relevant to the present conjuncture in which essentialist notions of race and political subjectivity are making a return.

There are other uses of non-racialism that are more malignant than the facile forms and which are for this reason apt to provoke suspicion and hostility when non-racialism is raised as a serious ethical or political project.⁴²⁹ For instance, one form of contemporary non-racialism is strongly associated with a certain kind of political discourse that seeks to secure privilege for whites by refusing to acknowledge the existence of racial domination. This kind of non-racialism also attempts to frustrate any talk of or action against racialised injustice under the pretext that to talk *in any way* about race or to name racism is also to engage in it.⁴³⁰ For this reason, I think, some scholars have either distanced themselves from non-racialism or altogether disavowed it.⁴³¹ Through its conservative

⁴²⁸ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 344–345.

⁴²⁹ South Africa's Democratic Alliance has adopted a policy on non-racialism that tracks with many of Sobukwe's insights – that race is a historical and social phenomenon used in the service of oppression, but that its social nature does not mean it does not exist (see <https://www.da.org.za/2020/09/opinion-why-the-da-chose-non-racialism-over-multiracialism>). However, the party remains committed to protecting private property rights, the very rights which, as I discussed in the previous chapter are part and parcel of constructing and maintaining whiteness (see <https://www.da.org.za/2022/09/da-takes-firm-action-against-the-expropriation-bill>). In the domain of public discourse the DA appears to be committed to protecting a “private economy” and in so doing also shores up the forms of privilege that produce and sustain whiteness. See Democratic Alliance (@Our_DA). 2023. “South Africans who value non-racialism, fair access to jobs & a thriving private economy, join DA Leader @jsteenhuizen on the streets of CT to demand the scrapping of the ANC's race quotas for jobs & water. This policy is designed to sow racial division for political gain.” Twitter, July 17, 2023, 11.45. https://twitter.com/Our_DA/status/1680876315447009281. There are myriad examples in the DA's public discourse of its commitment to private economy and property. It is beyond the scope to do a full review here.

⁴³⁰ See for example, Helen Zille's article in *PoliticsWeb*. Zille is an extremely senior member of the party as Federal Council Chairperson and former DA premier of the Western Cape and mayor of Cape Town. Her views cannot be dismissed as marginal to the party consensus. Zille defines non-racialism as “accept[ing] that people cannot be classified on the basis of their race, and must be judged on their qualities, attributes, qualifications and contributions to society.” She describes affirmative action as “racial lunacy.” This gives the impression that non-racialism to Zille does not include addressing the harms of racism in the structural and material realms. See Helen Zille, “DA has no time for racial lunacy,” *PoliticsWeb*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/da-has-no-time-for-racial-lunacy>.

⁴³¹ See, for example, Kelly Gillespie, “The Trouble with Non-Racialism,” Johannesburg Workshop in Critical Theory and the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory (UCHRI), YouTube, 54:48, December 16, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBAuZbqPg-4>. In 2010, Gillespie had written an article arguing for radical lineages of non-racialism. I point this out here to avoid confusion. See also, Phila Msimang, “Non-Racialism Isn't in the Future of South Africa: Towards a Pessimistic View of Race in South Africa,” *Transformations* 96 (2018): 48–70, doi:10.1353/trn.2018.0002. For a somewhat different argument against non-racialism on the grounds that the centering of race obscures the customary and traditional (ethnic) focus of apartheid as a form of colonial rule and thus frustrates our

mobilisations non-racialism has become associated, ironically, with racism and the struggle to secure the privileges its institutionalisation has conferred upon the whites it produces. But as I have showed above, there are other lineages of non-racialism.

If it were the case that the cynical use of non-racialism to protect racialised privilege (domination) that I have described above were its only purpose, meaning, and genealogy then such distancing or disavowal would indeed seem to be the only progressive option; but there are different trajectories, different lineages, and different usages of non-racialism, as I have shown above. The ethics and politics named by this term is not exhausted by those who use it in the manner I have described, and thereby a pathway back to the promise of more radical practices of non-racialism exists. For the radical non-racialist, of which both Rassool and I take Sobukwe to be an example,⁴³² the existence of racism is not in question and the position is not to refuse talk of (or action against) racialised domination and injustice.⁴³³

The goal of radical non-racialism is to enable us to live, as Rassool puts it, “not as races but as people.”⁴³⁴ It is to restore the possibility both for individual specificity and non-filiated forms of community that race destroys. I realise that the concept of the individual is a contested and controversial one often associated with liberal political discourses that frame social life and personality in ways that serve to perpetuate capitalism as the social and economic norm and normalise the history of colonial domination so central to the making of race in the modern world. However, when I refer here to non-racialism as restoring individual specificity (and non-filiated forms of community) I am not thinking of the atomistic being often implicitly figured as white and male that appears in liberal political theory and discourse.⁴³⁵ I am thinking about the violent ways in which race pins people down to specific characteristics, desires, abilities, and futures, and forms of community, deemed to flow from their membership in groups that were constructed through modern power on spurious grounds. Individuality here is the gloss for the normative position that who people are and who they can become or want to be should not be a function of forced belonging in fictional racial groups or categories, however socially, economically, and politically material these fictions may now be. I take it that there is a certain unfolding quality to social life and personality. Race refuses the unfolding that is fundamental to both. To live is to be permanently unfolding,⁴³⁶ permanently in the process of changing; to live well is to live under conditions where this is understood and respected, if not actively facilitated.

analyses of our current predicament, see Suren Pillay, “Why I am no longer a Non-Racialist: Identity and Difference”, in *The Colour of Our Future: Does Race Matter in Post-Apartheid South Africa?* ed. Xolela Mangcu (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015), 133-152.

⁴³² Rassool, “The Politics of Nonracialism in South Africa,” 363.

⁴³³ Soudien, *Cape Radicals*, 363.

⁴³⁴ Rassool, “The Politics of Nonracialism in South Africa,” 344.

⁴³⁵ See, for instance, Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no.3: 257-337.

⁴³⁶ I take this idea of human life from the general ethos of Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*, trans. Jonathan Adjemian (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2016).

The assumption of the goal to live as people rather than races is that no full and dignified life can unfold in the shadow of race, including, as I suggested in the previous chapter, following Aimé Césaire and others, for those who are ‘beneficiaries’ of the modern racial order. In Sobukwe and Pogrund’s letters to one another I see an attempt, however partially and imperfectly realised, to live a life as people not as races. Of course, they often fail, as I will make clear, in the very moment of their most sincere attempts. But that they fail does not render the attempt an unworthy ethic by which to live. Neither does the fact that Pogrund goes on to cast his lot in with another settler colony, Israel, just as South Africa is attempting in the early 1990s to stop being one. Something is gained, even in trying and failing. Exploring this attempt is the focus of this chapter.

Because the attempt to live not as races but as people refused (and indeed refuses) the hegemony or racial “common sense” apartheid sought to install and maintain I regard it as having a kind of political potential.⁴³⁷ This attempt to live as people not as races—finding its expression in the minutia of Pogrund and Sobukwe’s ordinary everyday lives—is quiet and unassuming, never announcing itself explicitly. It takes place in the realm that is normatively understood as private (whereas politics is usually understood as public) and it does not speak in an antagonistic register.⁴³⁸ For these reasons, I will argue, its political potential is more difficult to parse, but not therefore less an instance of such refusal on a small and personal scale.⁴³⁹⁴⁴⁰

When I suggest thinking about Pogrund and Sobukwe’s attempt to live as people not as races as politics, I have in mind the insights of anti-apartheid activist Richard Welch (I explore Chantal Mouffe’s ideas about the political further along). To younger people enquiring about his activism, Welch would say that all you needed to do to be an anti-apartheid activist in his day (the 1980s) was to behave normally in everyday life. By this he meant (and said so) that even a shopkeeper, if he didn’t participate in the making of race in everyday life by treating black customers with a different set of manners (rudeness for example, rather than solicitude) and keeping a separate entrance for them—actions which, among many others, marked, *made*, and kept them in a state of being discriminated against and thus negated black people in the context of his shop—found himself in a kind of political opposition (or in the language I want to use, refusal) to the regime.⁴⁴¹ In Welch’s anecdote, it is the non-racial that occupies the normative ground of the ‘normal’ and the racial (apartheid) that occupies the normative ground of the ‘abnormal’ or aberrant. Apartheid, Welch said,

⁴³⁷ I say more about this in the section of this chapter that deals directly with what constitutes the political.

⁴³⁸ There have of course been other examples of the attempt to realise the non-racial in every day life. In his book *The Cape Radicals*, Crain Soudien documents and thinks through one attempt – on a far larger scale and more consciously articulated than the attempt Pogrund and Sobukwe made – by members of the New Era Fellowship of the Non-European Unity Movement to live nonracially.

⁴³⁹ For an example of work on small scale resistance see, Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women,” *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (Feb., 1990): 41–55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/645251>.

⁴⁴⁰ When I describe this politics as unspectacular, not conducted in the register of antagonism, I am not mounting an attack against either spectacular or antagonistic modes of politics; they exist and they have their own purpose and validity. Rather, I simply want to focus my attention on other less recognised locations for and modes of the political.

⁴⁴¹ Welch echoes the practices of the New Era Fellowship members. See Soudien, *The Cape Radicals*.

made an activist of anyone willing to refuse to participate in the everyday making and remaking of race that is required in order to sustain the social reality of a racial order.⁴⁴²

These smaller and more mundane political actions that refused to make or remake race in the everyday—mostly, it seems, untheorised by everyone including those who engaged in them—are mainly unrecognised by mainstream political history and biography.⁴⁴³ Unsurprisingly, more obviously political practices and activities have thus far preoccupied people thinking about South African political history. The organising of unions, protests, marches, anti-apartheid organisations, the making of weapons for armed struggle, guerrilla training, defending political prisoners, engaging in acts of sabotage, writing polemics against the regime, and other forms of oppositional speech are all much more obvious candidates for analysis as political action or practice than the good-natured scheming of two men in an often liberal English idiom to do such mundane things as organise the birthday of the other's wife, procure forms of material and intellectual sustenance for the other, declare love and fealty to one another, and foster familial bonds. And yet in what follows, I am going to argue that this good-natured scheming, this attempt to be together in an ordinary and unaccented way in the course of everyday life, might also have political potential, just in a register (not antagonistic), location (everyday life), or with a secular vision of what freedom might mean, in which it is customary to think about politics.⁴⁴⁴

One of the chief arguments I make in what follows is that in the course of their exchanges about matters of everyday life, matters which Pogrand himself characterised as “banal” and which others such as former political prisoner, anti-apartheid activist, and radical non-racialist Neville Alexander, thinking about prison writing, exclude from consideration as politics altogether,⁴⁴⁵ is found a kind of lived refusal of the social order (and its politics) apartheid produced through the *attempt* at a non-racial mode of relating to one another. My argument here is not that Sobukwe and Pogrand thought of what they were doing as politics in the received sense of the term. Indeed, I think that the only way this attempt to live as people not as races could pass in their letters undetected by the prison censors as politics was precisely because neither they, nor the censors, thought of ordinary everyday life spoken in a mostly non-combative register as a locus from or style in which politics or a politicised refusal arose.

⁴⁴² Welch was a well-known figure in Johannesburg in Meadowlands (Soweto) and Yeoville involved in popular education during the 1980s. This anecdote was related to me by his son, NRH Pule Welch.

⁴⁴³ Rassool, “Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography,” *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2010): 28–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528581003676028>. I cite examples of the kind of work I have in mind below.

⁴⁴⁴ See Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance”; for non-secular struggles for freedom and self-realisation see, Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); for resistance at the quotidian and often concealed level, see James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁴⁴⁵ This is referenced below.

Prison Writing and Censorship

Before turning to the letters there is another piece of contextualisation that is necessary. The letters were written in a context of censorship and one end of the correspondence was composed from prison. So, I want to ask here: what informed apartheid era prison censorship and what can be surmised from what has been written about how the censors conceived of politics or actions that might be parsed as forms of refusal of the hegemonic social order? There is surprisingly little scholarly literature on the specific topic of apartheid prison censorship particularly regarding letters. Most of what is written concerns either the activities of the Publication Appeals Board (PAB), which was involved in the everyday censorship of the media, film, and literature that the general public consumed; philosophical reflections on the concept of censorship with South African examples as illustrations of arguments;⁴⁴⁶ and a very small scholarship on the censorship of prisoners' reading materials.⁴⁴⁷

In what follows I sketch a picture of how prison authorities may have conceived of politics by looking at Neville Alexander's reportage on prison conditions on Robben Island, Paul Gready's observations about prison writing in the context of the autobiographies of former apartheid political prisoners, and Archie Dick's work on the censorship of books available to prisoners and their reading practices, as well as critical reflections on censorship and oppositional writing more generally. I also consider reflections on the actual experience of prison censorship from Pogrud and Neville Alexander. In the following section, I explore, through the work of Chantal Mouffe, what we might surmise about how prison authorities thought of "politics" and "the political" based on their censorship choices. Although there are aspects of Mouffe's thinking from which I wish to take my distance – her absoluteness, and her imposition of the empirical history of Western Europe as a universal embodiment of the political – I think that Mouffe assists us in terms of grasping how apartheid and its functionaries may have thought about these questions. Mouffe's characterisation of the political as the friend/enemy distinction as constitutive of the political community strikes me as particularly apt when thinking about apartheid from the perspective of the state – those who were, in this case, doing the censoring.

Like all political prisoners of the times, Sobukwe's letters were censored. Pogrud reflects on the nature of that censorship in his biography of Sobukwe:

...the official hold-up of letters was maddening. It was made even worse by the arbitrariness of the censorship. I never once received a letter from him with any part blacked out; what the authorities did instead was to seize letters and not tell either of us they had done so. It might have been that a single sentence — or a single word? — offended some faceless security official. Whatever it might be the entire letter disappeared. Because of the delay in forwarding

⁴⁴⁶ See, for example, J.M.Coetzee's *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁴⁷ See, for example, Christopher Merrett, "A Tale of Two Paradoxes: Media Censorship in South Africa, Pre-liberation and Post-apartheid," *Critical Arts* 15, no. 1 and 2 (2001): 50–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560240185310071>; Archie Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* (Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

letters it could take several months before it dawned on me that I was not getting Sobukwe's reply on an issue I had raised because the letter hadn't gotten through to him, or a letter from him had been blocked. As the handling of Sobukwe's affairs widened and became more complex I built up files to keep track of what was what.⁴⁴⁸

The first thing to say about prison censorship, particularly as it related to the letters of political prisoners, is that, as Pogrund puts it above, it was in some measure quite arbitrary. Scholars, as well as former political prisoners, who have written or thought about censorship during apartheid describe it variously as obtuse,⁴⁴⁹ arbitrary,⁴⁵⁰ or, as Rosa Lyster puts it, "chaotic and messy and frequently incredibly stupid."⁴⁵¹ Lyster here is referring to the censorship of novels, films, and newspapers, and not to the censorship of prison letters per se, but her remarks correspond with what is said about the latter. Neville Alexander, both a scholar and once a political prisoner on Robben Island, describes the censorship there as "whimsical, arbitrary, [and] fortuitous."⁴⁵² Despite this, I will argue, in what follows, that although prison censorship does indeed seem to have been characterised, in general, by its arbitrary nature there are traces in certain decisions in the archive of Sobukwe and Pogrund's correspondence that *suggest* a conception of politics with which scholars and critics can work to think about how prison officials might have conceived of what constituted politics. Other clues come from the views of those, such as Pogrund and Alexander, who were writing letters to or from prison at the time as to what did and did *not* constitute politics or political subject matter in letters.

The first clue to the character of prison censorship is in the particulars of the men who were tasked with censoring material entering or exiting the prison. According to Neville Alexander's account, which is confirmed by the accounts of former warders and the slim scholarship on prison censorship in apartheid South Africa, the kind of person who became a warder or a censor on Robben Island was typically uneducated or had, at most, a matric certificate, and some lacked even this qualification.⁴⁵³ Obviously to be uneducated, in the formal sense, is not therefore to be unintelligent. However, what is clear from all accounts, including those of former warders, is that prison censors were required to adjudicate on subject matter in which they had no training or experience (even as readers) and that some of them at least felt the want of this in discharging their duties. Aubrey du Toit, a prison official who arrived on the Island in 1976 to run the prison studies department confirms Alexander's account:

⁴⁴⁸ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 194. Prisoners in the main jail received blacked out letters. See Govan Mbeki, "Prisoner 21/67," in *Voices From Robben Island*, ed. Jürgen Schadeberg (Randburg, South Africa: Raven Press, 1994), 37.

⁴⁴⁹ Archie Dick, "'Blood from Stones': Censorship and the Reading Practices of South African Political Prisoners, 1960-1990," *Library History* 24, no. 1 (2008): 12.

⁴⁵⁰ This is how former political prisoner Neville Alexander describe censorship at Robben Island. See Neville Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 60.

⁴⁵¹ Rosa Lyster, "Chaotic and Messy and Frequently Incredibly Stupid": An Interview on Apartheid Censorship with Rosa Lyster," interview by Nick Mulgrew, pensouthafrica.co.za, July 4, 2018, <https://pensouthafrica.co.za/chaotic-and-messy-and-frequently-incredibly-stupid-an-interview-on-apartheid-censorship-with-rosa-lyster/>.

⁴⁵² Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 60.

⁴⁵³ See Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 60; and Archie Dick, "Blood from Stones," 12.

My duties included censoring the study material and films as well as the outgoing assignments. I had no official training for this and sometimes I didn't know what I was looking for. For instance you as a warder knew nothing about political science and yet you had to censor political science assignments. I remember I had to censor Andrew Mlangeni's assignments. He was an honours student in political science. Looking back I think it was a joke for an Afrikaner with a Standard 10 to censor these difficult assignments.⁴⁵⁴

Du Toit's account suggests the reasons—a want of experience in the texts that were being censored—why decisions were so often arbitrary, as Pogrund and Alexander describe it. Similarly, Archie Dick, in his research on the censorship of books for prisoners, describes the position of the average prison censor in relationship to the material he had to consider thus:

Prison censors had little formal education and were told in crash courses by higher-ranking officers what books or titles to disallow. Some books like Tolstoy's *Resurrection* were refused because prison officials knew too little to tell whether it was suitable or not.⁴⁵⁵

Coupled with this want of education and training was the deep insecurity that the erudition of many political prisoners on Robben Island stirred in the warders. According to Alexander, many warders carried about in them a strong attachment to the *Herrenvolkism* of the regime. To have to interact with black prisoners who were their superiors in education and learning contradicted their sense of supremacy and agitated them severely.⁴⁵⁶ Alexander makes one very telling statement about prison censorship at Robben Island, the significance of which I will return to when I write on the relationship of the politics to the ordinary and the everyday. He writes:

Any reasonably serious letter in which things are discussed *above the everyday level*, or which does not deal simply with the health of family and friends, infallibly arouses the suspicion of the 'censors' and invariably gets mutilated, withheld, or suppressed" (my emphasis).⁴⁵⁷

Note that Alexander sees the personal and the everyday as distinct from politics; and indeed, the prison censors, according to his account, acted as though they shared this view. He continues:

"Anything approaching politics is taboo, and anything in which the censors are not interested is best left unsaid."⁴⁵⁸ Pogrund draws the same distinction between the politics and the personal and the everyday when reflecting on the strategies he took up to avoid the censorship of his letters to Sobukwe:

I was now more conscious than ever that some or other comments or bits of information could not only cause a letter to be withheld with no notice or explanation, but might actually help to

⁴⁵⁴ Aubrey du Toit, "The Jailer," in *Voices From Robben Island*, ed. Jürgen Schadeberg (Randburg, South Africa: Raven Press, 1994), 47.

⁴⁵⁵ Archie Dick, "Blood From Stones," 12.

⁴⁵⁶ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 110.

⁴⁵⁸ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 110.

prolong his imprisonment. I spent hours writing and re-writing letters, trying to convey as much as possible but frightened of saying the wrong thing, without a clear idea as to what the wrong thing might be. *Blandness and banality was the safe way out*, as was discussion about his needs and reports about my young daughter (my emphasis).⁴⁵⁹

Prisoners, their friends and family on the outside, and prison censors and authorities, all seemed to share a conception of politics that did not include the political *potential* of the ordinary and the everyday and yet that was the locus of some of the more powerful acts of refusal in which Pogrund and Sobukwe engaged.

Paul Gready's work on prison writing clarifies something about what distinguishes Sobukwe's letters—and potentially personal letters written and sent from the context of political imprisonment in general—from other forms of prison writing. Gready's work looks at autobiography written *after* imprisonment by former political prisoners and motivated by the desire to set the record straight.⁴⁶⁰ This kind of writing, Gready argues, must be understood in the context of how writing functioned generally in the relationship between the state and its political prisoners. To be a political prisoner, Gready argues, "is to be variously written, to be contested through writing."⁴⁶¹ Gready's argument is that from the moment of their arrest through the interrogation process, legislation, trial, and prison regulations, the prisoner is "rigorously and violently rewritten."⁴⁶² The written self, he continues, that this process produces is "unrecognisable and unwanted" by the political prisoner and a "testimony to powerlessness."⁴⁶³ Gready refers to this process as the state's "power of writing." The autobiography of political prisoners, often written explicitly in response to the unwanted self the state's power of writing produced, he sees as a rival "power of writing."⁴⁶⁴

But this rival power of writing is not without its own set of complications, as Gready points out, for in its attempt to "proclaim an oppositional 'power of writing'" the autobiography of ex political prisoners comes to install an uncritical notion of objective truth. This observation is not made as a hostile criticism of such writing by Gready; rather, Gready wants to push readers to think more carefully about what kind of truth prison autobiography produces and the relationship of the context—apartheid, imprisonment, and the experience of being written by the state and its functionaries—to the version of truth—truth as objective—that is produced as a response to the state and the exercise of its powers. In other words, it is not surprising that a state that claims a monopoly on the truth would elicit from those it tortured and imprisoned a rival claim to objective truth. In this way, prison autobiography should be read, like all writing, as an attempt to solve a particular kind of problem. However, Sobukwe's letters to Pogrund, and I would wager personal letters sent from prison in

⁴⁵⁹ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 207.

⁴⁶⁰ Paul Gready, "Autobiography and the 'Power of Writing': Political Prison Writing in the Apartheid Era," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 3 (September 1993): 489.

⁴⁶¹ Gready, "Autobiography," 493.

⁴⁶² Gready, "Autobiography," 492.

⁴⁶³ Gready, "Autobiography," 492.

⁴⁶⁴ Gready, "Autobiography," 492.

general, are not characterised by the kind of oppositional project Gready identifies in the autobiographies written after imprisonment because they have a different sort of purpose.⁴⁶⁵

The problems Pogrund and Sobukwe are trying to solve in their writing to one another are of a different sort and so the kind of writing they produce is different too from the oppositional form of prison writing Gready identifies. Perhaps precisely because of the constant censorship to which Sobukwe's letters were subjected *and* the fact that they were often addressed to loved ones and friends (Veronica Sobukwe, Pogrund, and Nel Marquard), which endowed them with a warm and solicitous tone, Sobukwe's prison correspondence rarely takes on an oppositional character or seeks to install a rival notion of objective truth.

A letter from Veronica Sobukwe to Pogrund written in 1966, in which the Special Branch warned Sobukwe not to express any "political opinion", tracks with Alexander's and Pogrund's account of politics as being, for prisoner and jailer alike, something above the level of the personal and the everyday. Veronica Sobukwe reports that the Special Branch objected strenuously to the line in one of Sobukwe's letters, "If I had failed the enemy would have rejoiced and my friends would have been grieved" on the foundation of their assessment that it expressed "political opinion."⁴⁶⁶ This quote comes from a letter addressed to Pogrund by Veronica Sobukwe in which she quotes the Special Branch. Unfortunately, there are no details about what failure Sobukwe was referring to. I will return to the relevance of this adjudication by the prison authorities towards the end of the chapter when I look at theorisations of politics and the political.

Letters in Context

The excerpts that follow are mostly from letters written in the mid-1960s and all of them during the period in which Sobukwe was confined to Robben Island (1963–1969). By this time Sobukwe had been in prison since 1961, held initially in successive locations including The Fort (the exact location of which is unclear but which was probably somewhere in what was then the Transvaal), Pretoria Central, Stoneyard (a jail in Boxburg, east of Johannesburg), Stofberg (a farm prison not far from Sharpeville), Witbank (east of Johannesburg), and finally Pretoria Local.⁴⁶⁷ In 1963, when his prison term was due to end, the government detained him under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, which had been amended under the General Law Amendment Bill then recently passed by parliament for this purpose.⁴⁶⁸ The law used to detain Sobukwe, after his sentence had come to an end in 1963, came to be known colloquially as "the Sobukwe Clause" because that state wrote it specifically with him in mind and because he was the only person against whom it was ever used.

⁴⁶⁵ See for instance, Ahmed Kathrada's letters written from Robben Island. Ahmed Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada's Prison Correspondence, 1964–1989*, ed. Robert Vassen (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶⁶ Correspondence from Veronica Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 1 February 1966, Ba4-6, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁶⁷ For a detailed account of this time see Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 163–187.

⁴⁶⁸ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 186.

When Sobukwe was to end his imprisonment, it was put into effect for a year from May of 1963 to 30 June 1964 but, as Pogrund writes, it “could then be extended for periods of twelve months by a resolution of Parliament.”⁴⁶⁹ This was precisely what happened. Every year, from 1963 to 1968, Sobukwe waited in vain to hear whether he would be released or not. Every year his imprisonment was extended. Only in 1969 was he finally released and banished to Kimberley, where he lived with his wife, Veronica, and their children, Miliswa, Dalindyabo, Dedanizizwe, and Dinilesizwe, qualified as a lawyer and practiced law.⁴⁷⁰ Early in 1977 Sobukwe was diagnosed with lung cancer. Pogrund used his contacts as a journalist to directly intervene approaching the minister of police, Jimmy Kruger, for permission for Sobukwe to go to Johannesburg to seek treatment. Kruger assented but specified very strict conditions: there was to be no publicity and Sobukwe was to visit no one other than his doctor. Sobukwe was also to stay at Pogrund’s home during which time Pogrund was to entertain no one other than members of his immediate family. Pogrund recounts that after Kruger’s refusal to allow Sobukwe to take a later flight out of Johannesburg so that he did not have to get up early in the morning, he (Pogrund) did not dare to ask for permission for x-rays to be taken, which would prove to be a fatal mistake.⁴⁷¹ Sobukwe’s x-rays were taken instead some time later in Kimberley. It was then that his cancer was discovered. Sobukwe was ultimately granted permission to seek treatment at Groote Schuur, again under stringent conditions. After a course of radiotherapy, during which he was harassed by the police, he returned to Kimberley.⁴⁷² On Monday 27 February, 1977, Sobukwe died.

During his imprisonment on Robben Island his wife Veronica continued to work as a midwife in Johannesburg. Her children were educated at boarding schools. Once a year (sometimes with her children) she made the journey to Cape Town to visit Sobukwe. She was not allowed to stay with him on the Island and was instead obliged to take lodgings in Langa (a local township) and later at the Tafelberg Hotel on the outskirts of the city centre. From there she and her children took the ferry to Robben Island to visit Sobukwe during the day. In her Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony she described the trauma of visiting their father for her children who were strip searched before they were allowed to board the ferry to the Island.⁴⁷³

As I noted in the introduction, although Pogrund and Sobukwe met and became friends a few years before Sobukwe was imprisoned, during the time of Sobukwe’s confinement on Robben Island, they developed a particularly close relationship reflected in their correspondence with one another. Pogrund might be described as Sobukwe’s man on the outside. He took care not only of practical matters for Sobukwe such as arranging his studies and study materials, arranging for the care of his

⁴⁶⁹ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 184.

⁴⁷⁰ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 368.

⁴⁷¹ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 355.

⁴⁷² Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 366.

⁴⁷³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Submissions: Questions and Answers,” May 12, 1997, <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/kwtown/sobukwe.htm>.

material needs as well as those of his family by mobilising and co-ordinating Sobukwe's supporters (particularly among liberal opponents of apartheid) outside of prison, but also played a more intimate role in Sobukwe's family. At Sobukwe's behest he forged birthday cards in Sobukwe's name for his twin boys, organised Veronica's birthday celebrations, and wrote frequently to Sobukwe's children in boarding school, attending also to their needs. The reader will recall the depth of their intimacy captured in an exchange between the two men in 1967, which I shared in chapter 3. In that exchange Sobukwe described the term friendship as an incongruous one to describe his relationship with Pogrund, comparing him to a brother, and Pogrund responded that he had been so moved by Sobukwe's letter that he had wept.⁴⁷⁴

Sobukwe's imprisonment on Robben Island was peculiar. He was, according to Pogrund, to be treated as a "prisoner-plus, a status unheard of in South African jails."⁴⁷⁵ Thus, despite being held in solitary confinement the conditions of his time on the Island were in some respects different from those of other political prisoners in the main jail. Firstly, unlike prisoners in the main jail Sobukwe was allowed more letters from the beginning of his imprisonment than was usually the case. In the mid-60s, according to former Robben Island prisoner Michael Dingake, "Officially, prisoners were entitled to one letter in six months [and] one visit in six months."⁴⁷⁶ In his *Robben Island Prison Dossier* Neville Alexander says that the position on letters improved in the mid-60s to one letter and one visit per month for the lowest grade of prisoner, the implication being that higher grades of prisoner could receive a higher number of visits and letters.⁴⁷⁷ From the beginning of Sobukwe's confinement on the Island, he was writing and receiving two letters per month (four in total) and throughout his confinement he appears to have been treated like the highest grade of prisoner in the main jail and sometimes better.⁴⁷⁸ This is not to say that cruelty, neglect, or subtle non-physical forms of violence did not mark his confinement. Veronica Sobukwe wrote to Pogrund on more than one occasion complaining of the poor and neglectful treatment Sobukwe received especially regarding his physical health.⁴⁷⁹ Solitary confinement also took its toll on his mental health and towards the end of his time on Robben Island Sobukwe believed that authorities were secretly using a machine on him to influence the functioning of his body.⁴⁸⁰

In the main jail, according to Alexander, letters from whites were not allowed; similarly, whites were not allowed to visit black prisoners.⁴⁸¹ This is another detail in which conditions for

⁴⁷⁴ See chapter 3 for the relevant letter excerpt.

⁴⁷⁵ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 190.

⁴⁷⁶ Michael Dingake cited in Paul Gready, "Autobiography," 517.

⁴⁷⁷ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 110.

⁴⁷⁸ Prisoners were graded from D (lowest) to A (highest). Generally they began at D-grade and moved to A over time. A higher grade came with more privileges and comforts. See Paul Gready, "Autobiography," 499.

⁴⁷⁹ Sobukwe rarely spoke or complained of his health's neglect by authorities, perhaps not wishing to gratify them, but his wife wrote to Pogrund complaining of it. For a letter detailing some of the ways in which his physical wellbeing was neglected see Veronica Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 1 February 1966, Ba4-6, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁸⁰ Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 301.

⁴⁸¹ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 111.

Sobukwe differed from those of other political prisoners on the Island. The authorities would certainly have regarded Pogrund as white, and yet he and others such as Nel Marquard were allowed to write frequently to Sobukwe, and Sobukwe in turn was allowed to reply to them. Pogrund was also allowed one visit of two days with Sobukwe.

Another small way in which Sobukwe's imprisonment was different from that of the political prisoners in the main jail was his diet. His food was of a higher quality than the food usually given to black prisoners.⁴⁸² One way in which officials made and remade race in everyday life for prisoners was through the racialization of everyday necessities like food and clothing. Alexander describes the food for political prisoners over in the main jail as "meagre"⁴⁸³ and often "so full of sand and miscellaneous dirt and insects that even the strong stomachs of the most hard-bitten would somersault."⁴⁸⁴ Racialisation was observed in the main jail in every conceivable way and so the food served differed from prisoner to prisoner depending on if he was classified as Coloured or African. The poorest quality food was served to African political prisoners.⁴⁸⁵ While fruit was an unheard of luxury for political prisoners in the main jail,⁴⁸⁶ Sobukwe was allowed to receive a regular package of fruit and biscuits from the department store Stuttafords, sponsored by liberal friends and supporters on the outside.⁴⁸⁷ There is a long exchange in the archive involving Sobukwe, Pogrund, and the Officer Commanding about the matter of Sobukwe's weekly consignment of fruit including a bizarre incident in which, after glass was found in Sobukwe's food, the Officer Commanding claimed in a letter to Pogrund to be examining each grape with a magnifying glass.⁴⁸⁸

Unlike other political prisoners, Sobukwe was also allowed warm clothing and slept on a proper bed; comforts which were unheard of for political prisoners in the main jail.⁴⁸⁹ A stream of items for Sobukwe's comfort reached him on the Island, including a record player to whose music Sobukwe took "a few turns on my creaky joints in the solitude of my room!"⁴⁹⁰ an armchair and radio that Sobukwe described as belonging "...in civilized surroundings in a polished lounge,"⁴⁹¹ two chairs for use outside, large and frequent consignments of books,⁴⁹² fashionable clothing,⁴⁹³ plants and

⁴⁸² Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 190.

⁴⁸³ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 44.

⁴⁸⁵ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 45.

⁴⁸⁶ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 46.

⁴⁸⁷ See, for instance, Benjamin Pogrund to Moira Henderson, 12 July 1966, Ba4.45, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁸⁸ For the magnifying glass and the fruit, see Pogrund, *How Can Man Die Better*, 202.

⁴⁸⁹ African political prisoners in the main jail slept on sisal and felt mats. See Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 48.

⁴⁹⁰ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Astrid Pogrund, 7 April 1964, Ba2.11, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁹¹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 18 July 1967, Ba5.52, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁹² Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Sobukwe, 31 August 1967, Ba5.57, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁹³ See correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Astrid Pogrund, 7 April 1964, Ba2.11, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

supplies for his garden,⁴⁹⁴ and care packages such as a consignment of traditional European Jewish food Pogrand sent in 1968.⁴⁹⁵

Why authorities might have treated Sobukwe moderately better than other political prisoners remains something of a mystery. However, in his observations about the attempt of prison authorities to give Nelson Mandela a more comfortable imprisonment and their motives, Neville Alexander provides a clue. Alexander notes that “attempts were made to get certain well-known prisoners such as Nelson Mandela to get the doctor’s permission to wear warmer clothing (and eat better food), since these prisoners often spoke to visitors from overseas and could point to their own conditions as examples of the irrational cruelty of the officials.”⁴⁹⁶ During his time on Robben Island Sobukwe was frequently visited by the press who usually reported how well he was. His wife, in a letter to Pogrand, notes that she was “...really sick and tired about these glorious reports we continue to read about his health’s condition on Robben Island.” She writes:

Newspapermen or Reporters meet my husband inside his room...I have never been inside the yard in which he is confined. I don’t even know what his living quarters look like.⁴⁹⁷

The moderately better treatment to which Sobukwe experienced may be explained by his high profile internationally. An anecdote Pogrand tells of the Officer Commanding also suggests that Sobukwe, while feared, was also admired by some of his jailers. The head warder, according to Pogrand, said that there were two great men in South Africa: one was Verwoerd and the other was Sobukwe.⁴⁹⁸ What correspondence the Officer Commanding saw between the two men is unclear for there are no other details but those in the anecdote.

To illustrate the intimacy between both Pogrand and Sobukwe and their respective families, I share from a correspondence that took place between them in 1966 about Veronica Sobukwe’s birthday. On 1 June 1966, Sobukwe wrote to Pogrand to request that he assist him with arranging the celebrations for Veronica’s birthday:

Finally, Benjie, on the 27th July is my wife’s fortieth birthday. I should like her to know that she is highly appreciated. Do you think you could organise a present from me and the kids? I am writing early so that you may consult me if you wish. *I leave the choice of a present to you.* I am writing to Miliswa, too, to apprise her of the great event.⁴⁹⁹ (My emphasis).

On June 29 in response to a telegram from Pogrand about the gifts he had purchased for Sobukwe’s wife, Sobukwe wrote again:

⁴⁹⁴ See correspondence from Sally Mittag to Benjamin Pogrand, 8 January 1965, Ba3.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁴⁹⁵ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 14 February 1968, Ba6.4, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Wits Historical Papers Research Archive.

⁴⁹⁶ Alexander, *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, 47.

⁴⁹⁷ Correspondence from Veronica Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 1 February 1966, Ba4-6, Robert Sobukwe Papers.

⁴⁹⁸ Pogrand, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 203.

⁴⁹⁹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 1 June 1966, Ba4.34, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

As I stated in my replying telegram your choice of gifts suited me just fine. I know it will suit my wife too [...]

I have written to Miliswa about this event and told her Ntate Benjie will be consulting her. She's the most sensitive of my children, I think, and will relish being drawn into the conspiracy. To heighten the drama, therefore, I suggest that when you visit Mofolo, you call her aside, away from her mother and tell her what presents we are planning to make.

I told her that the two of you would have to get a cake (but this is really for *them* to eat that a "Birthday" cake with candles etc.) and that each one of them will have to present their mother with a bunch of flowers on the 27th July. If you can arrange the details for those two items with Miliswa you'll have given her the responsibility she is in such a hurry to shoulder.⁵⁰⁰

Carrying out Sobukwe's instructions, Pogrand wrote to Miliswa Sobukwe on July 20, to let her know about the arrangements for her mother's birthday and sending her money to buy a gift.⁵⁰¹ To Sobukwe he wrote:

I have been delighted to share in the surprises for your wife's birthday, and happy also that my suggestions for gifts are acceptable to you. I saw your wife yesterday and can report that she is keeping very well indeed. All being well, I hope that she will be visiting you next month. We worked out the details of a visit and she is now going to find out when she can take leave from the clinic. She will travel to Cape Town for about two weeks just as soon as this can be arranged. So something good for you to look forward to.

I was upset yesterday, however, to discover that I had just missed the children, as they had returned to school the previous day. The new term apparently starts unexpectedly early. Your wife assured me that they are well, and are also doing well at school this year, Miliswa in particular (she has come second in class).

Naturally I did not let on to your wife as to what is in store for the 27th. But I shall be seeing her on that day and will have pleasure in handing her the various presents. My only regret is that you will not also be there.

I have also, today, written to Miliswa telling her how sorry I was that I did not see her. I have sent some money to the school for pocket money for the children, and have told Miliswa that,

⁵⁰⁰ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 29 June 1966, Ba4.41, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰¹ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrand to Miliswa Sobukwe, 20 July 1966, Ba4.50, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

should she wish to send her mother a telegram, or even a small gift, she should go ahead and make use of this money. I see also that it is Miliswa's birthday on July 30: I shall be sending her a small gift for this.⁵⁰²

Sobukwe wrote back on the 1 July:

I have just received a letter from Miliswa in which she informs me that their schools re-open on the 18th July. I realise that *our plans* for bouquets by the children will have to be dropped. I hope she received my letter before she left so that she should know, at least, that *we* had intended her to play an important part in the festivities.⁵⁰³ (my emphasis).

Sobukwe speaks of "our plans" and what "we had intended" suggesting a form of non-filiated community with Pogrud. On the 28 July, Pogrud wrote to Sobukwe to report back on Veronica's birthday.

My dear Bob,

I am hastening to write this short letter to you to let you know that all went well on your wife's birthday yesterday. I delivered to her, as a personal gift from you, sweetpeas, and from you and the children, a tea service as we arranged. This is a set of 'Royal Standard' English bone china, and I think your wife liked it a great deal. My own gift was a black leather handbag, while my girlfriend presented a box of toilet soaps. One thing on which you and I slipped up: you should have sent me a little note to include with the tea service. As we had not done this, I had to improvise, and the note I delivered from you and the children read: 'To a wife and mother. For your courage and devotion'.⁵⁰⁴

The final letter in the exchange, from Sobukwe to Pogrud, reads:

I just could not start thanking you, Benjie, for all you have done. My wife has told me of your unfailing solicitude and your palpable love and concern for me. She has told me of how you came in, on her birthday, happily staggering under a load of parcels. I do not wish to embarrass you. I know you enjoy doing all for me and mine, but I can assure you it is much more than I would have expected even from one who had shared the same womb with me. Thanks a lot. I'll get the opportunity to thank you most appropriately one day.

Incidentally, your message accompanying the gifts was, as to be expected, most appropriate. My wife was thrilled and arrived here still walking on air.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrud to Robert Sobukwe, 20 July 1966, Ba4.51, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰³ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrud, 21 July 1966, Ba4.52, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰⁴ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrud to Robert Sobukwe, 28 July 1966, Ba4.55, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰⁵ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrud, 14 September 1966, Ba4.60, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

“Ntate Pogrund”

Having established the intimacy Pogrund and Sobukwe shared, I want to go back to a moment in the correspondence that occurs earlier in the course of 1966, for it is this moment on which the main argument of the chapter is built. On the 1 February 1966, Veronica Sobukwe wrote to Pogrund about a visit her husband had received from the Special Branch:

Before I came he was warned by the Special Branch not to express *political opinion* in his letters. They quoted the following extract from a letter he had written to a friend, “If I had failed the enemy would have rejoiced and my friends would have been grieved.” (My emphasis).⁵⁰⁶

This excerpt is a quote from a letter addressed to Pogrund by Veronica Sobukwe and no details are available as to what Sobukwe meant when he said “if I had failed”. We also don’t know anything about the context of the letter from which this line was excerpted, just that it caught the attention of the Special Branch who censured Sobukwe for it. Just shy of two months after this warning from the Special Branch, on the 30 March 1966, Sobukwe wrote to Pogrund about his daughter, Miliswa Sobukwe. He started the letter thus:

My dear Benjie,

In your letter of the 5th February you state that you were happy to note that my use of the term “African”, in an earlier letter, had no racist connotation or simplification.⁵⁰⁷

Sobukwe was referring to a letter of 3 January 1966, in which he had written to Pogrund,

As usual, I have to say ‘Thank you’ for kindnesses done. My wife has told me a little of what you’ve done for them and will no doubt have plenty to add when we meet. I know you are happy to do so much for me and mine and do not wish to be thanked for it. But I am an African, Benjie, and one thing we can do is to say “Thank you”[...] So, speaking as one African to another, permit me to thank you [...].⁵⁰⁸

On 5 February, 1966, Pogrund replied:

Reading your first page, I clucked my tongue in displeasure when I came to your reference to yourself as an “African” – and the one thing Africans could do was to say thank you. But I chuckeld when I turned the page and read ... “speaking as one African to another”...and saw that you had neatly trapped me into a line of racial thinking. No thanks needed, as you know.

It is to this correspondence that Sobukwe’s opening comments in his letter of 30 March, 1966, are addressed. The 30 March letter continues:

⁵⁰⁶ Correspondence from Veronica Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 1 February 1966, Ba4.6, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰⁷ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 30 March 1966, Ba4.21, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁰⁸ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 3 January 1966, Ba4.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Imagine my joy then when I received a letter from my daughter informing me that on their way to Joh'burg from Cape Town they met someone she calls "Ausie Mary" ("ausie" being the Sotho equivalent of the Afrikaans "ou Sis" = elder Sister) who had for some time been employed by "Ntate Pogrund". Now "Ntate" – for the benefit of you Zulus – is the Sotho term for "father".

I have been rather strict, Benjie, in bringing up my children. I have stressed that their responses must always be accompanied by a polite "father" or "mother". In other words I want "yes, father", "no, mother", "thank you, father" from them and not just "yes", "no" or "thank you" etc.

I need not tell you, of course, that I have been hard put to decide how I can train them to show this politeness to *all* people irrespective of colour, without making them colour-conscious. And lo and behold, my child, most naturally, without any self-consciousness writes of "Ntate Pogrund" as she has written of "Ntate Mothopeng" (Zeph) before.

She reads me like a book, of course, that little girl. And I am afraid she is going to make me dance to her tune.⁵⁰⁹ (All parentheses in the original).

To this Pogrund replied:

I was delighted by your story of Miliswa's letter to you...and very flattered also by it. There is nothing more honest than a child, and I am glad to know that I am accepted by her.⁵¹⁰

It is to the relevance of this exchange between Pogrund and Sobukwe that I now turn now. As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, I see in the exchanges of the letters an attempt by both men to "live as people not as races" in the everyday. In what follows, I make the argument for this alongside the argument about how we conceive of the relationship between the ordinary, the everyday, and the political.

In his letters to Pogrund Sobukwe describes his joy at finding that his daughter, Miliswa, refers, unbidden, to Pogrund as Ntate, a siNtu language honorific by which one can refer to fathers, uncles, or older men respectfully.⁵¹¹ It is a perfectly ordinary and everyday thing for speakers of many languages, to refer to older people by means of such honorifics. In the majoritised dialect of the African language Afrikaans one refers to older men and women as Tannie and Oom respectively. In Kaaps, a minoritized dialect of Afrikaans spoken in the Cape the English loan word Aunty is used for

⁵⁰⁹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, March 30th 1966, Ba4.21, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵¹⁰ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 25 April 1966, Ba4-28, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵¹¹ The letter in which this is described is quoted and treated at length below. Cognate terms exist for respectfully referring to older women and all younger people are expected to use these terms so it would be a mistake to treat them as installing or maintaining a sexist or gendered hierarchy.

older women and the Afrikaans word *Boeta* for older men. To refer to older people in this way is to respect them and suggest community with them and one another. There is nothing particularly remarkable about this practice— most South Africans engage in it in various forms, and it is only in the context of a majoritized middle class (often white) anglophony in which it is very little observed. It is a practice that enjoins others in one's social world in ways that convey respect and mutuality. However, in the context of apartheid in which language and culture were deeply racialised (and tribalised) it harbours a political *potential* for any person to refuse these racialisations and refer in a way that respects the personhood of someone made white by the workings of state power in a language made black by those same workings. It is this very ordinary moment that there is a refusal and thus also the suggestion of a politics.

Given that Sobukwe's letters were subject to a form of censorship that sought, among other things, to prevent anything political from passing through the mail, why was this incident not censored when Sobukwe wrote of it to Pogrund? Other letters, such as the one about the grief of friends and the rejoicing of enemies cited above were censored precisely on the grounds that they expressed political sentiment. I use the non-censorship of letters such as these, which I embedded above in the broader context of a stream of everyday intimacies that passed between Sobukwe and Pogrund and which were never noted on or restricted in any way by the prison censors, to reason backwards towards how prison censors *might* have thought about what constituted the political and to contrast this constitution of politics, from the inferred perspective of the prison officials and censors, against the politics of the everyday, the ordinary, and the interior, available in Sobukwe and Pogrund's letters. In the previous chapter, I argued for a non-racial Africanity of which I took Sobukwe's ideas to be exemplary. In this chapter, I want to suggest small ways, not less important for their modest scope, in which racism is refused and a non-racial humanity fleetingly and incompletely realised in everyday life.

In what way then might Sobukwe's letter about "Ntate Pogrund" be read as a refusal, an attempt to realise a contingent humanity, and thus as having a politics? I first want to recall, as I have attempted to show above, that Sobukwe lived and thought in a context in which racialization was "common sense". Suggesting a refusal of that "common sense" is what allows me to read his letter as counter-hegemonic and thus political in its own way. It is political in the sense that Leela Gandhi evokes in her work when she describes Britons who betrayed "the claims of possessive nationalism in favor of solidarity with foreigners, outsiders, and alleged inferiors" in this way "refusing possessive communities of belonging" along the lines of filiation that define who is inside and who outside (who is friend and who is enemy) as engaging in the "politics of friendship."⁵¹² By doing so, the common sense that brings certain political arrangements into place and keeps them so, is resisted. Recall the gist of his letter: his daughter is travelling by train to Johannesburg and meets an older woman

⁵¹² Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 2-10.

employed by Pogrund; the two figure out the connection through conversation. In reporting the incident to her father, she bestows two honorifics on the older adults she is talking about. The older woman is not Mary, she is Ausie Mary, and the older man is not Pogrund or Benjie, he is Ntate Pogrund. Incidentally, for Pogrund's daughter, Jenny, Sobukwe is not Bob but Uncle Bob.⁵¹³ Both of these – Meliswa and Jenny's honorifics – are practices of respect towards older people. What is interesting is that Sobukwe celebrates this in his letter because his daughter has not altered how she shows respect for older people according to how they would ordinarily be racialised, which suggests either that she does not racialise them or that if she does initially, she doesn't allow it to affect her subsequent behaviour towards them. She bestows respect in her own idiom without racialising the adults concerned. It is in this sense then that I read the letter as counter-hegemonic.

Politics and the Political

In what way might one read the letter about "Ntate Pogrund" as political? Here I will do two things: first, I will provide a theoretical account of what I understand by the terms "the political" and "politics", and then I will make an argument for recognising as politics certain kinds of counter-hegemonic practices that do not express themselves in a mode or in a context in which antagonism is explicit or immediately obvious but which nevertheless require us, in the final analysis, to make a decision between "conflicting alternatives".⁵¹⁴ "Politics" and "the political" do not have to be understood as separate.⁵¹⁵ I separate them here because I am trying to understand how letters that I will argue constituted a politics passed through official channels unimpeded and to do that I must think the political from the likely perspective of the apartheid state and its petty functionaries. I do this by turning to the work of Chantal Mouffe who treats "politics" and "the political" as discrete and, following Carl Schmitt, grounds "the political" in antagonism. At the same time, I want to argue that in Sobukwe and Pogrund's letters politics and the political were not discrete and "the political" was not grounded in antagonism, hence the censor's inability to recognise the letters contents as a form of politics.

There are many ways in which politics and the political are construed in social and political theory and indeed in everyday life. One thing I want to emphasise at the outset is that anything that is political can through the practice of politics (whether a politics that shores up an existing hegemony or a politics that seeks to dislodge one and replace it with another) be changed. To acknowledge that something is political then is to acknowledge that it is the product of human activities of one kind or another rather than figuring it as bequeathed by nature and therefore unalterable. Anything political,

⁵¹³ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 28 March 1966, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵¹⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

⁵¹⁵ See Prathama Banerjee, *Elementary Aspects of the Political: Histories from the Global South* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 6-7.

therefore, is something that can be changed, and changed again, through willed human action.⁵¹⁶ The hegemony of any given political order then is unstable and permanently up for grabs.

One useful way of thinking about the political, from the perspective of the apartheid state and its censors, is to argue, as Chantal Mouffe does in *On the Political*, that the political is that ever present and ineradicably antagonistic dimension that constitutes human societies.⁵¹⁷ As I read Mouffe (whose work draws on, but also moves beyond, Carl Schmitt, to propose a taming of antagonism through agonistic practices), the antagonistic dimension that defines the political is related firstly to the dynamics of the constitution of collective identities and secondly to the way in which prevailing social orders naturalise themselves and convert the power relations that structure them into ‘common sense’. This is precisely what the apartheid regime did by naturalising raced and ethnicised hierarchies of power as ‘common sense’ by embedding them in everyday social practice. I see the letter about “Ntate Pogrand” as political insofar as it is an instance in which the racialised common sense – the cultural hegemony of apartheid – is refused or resisted though not in the register of antagonism, which is perhaps why the censors do not recognise it as resistance. Even though Miliswa Sobukwe herself cannot be said to be refusing this hegemony consciously or purposefully—it is impossible to know, having no access to her thoughts—her father’s celebration of it constitutes a conscious refusal and thus a moment of counter-hegemony. The concepts of hegemony and counter hegemony are strongly associated with the work of the Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1936). Gramsci did his thinking in the context of the anti-capitalist and anti-fascist struggles of the early 20th century. In his *Prison Notebooks*, a series of essays that he wrote between 1926–1935 while imprisoned by the Italian fascist government, Gramsci developed the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony, which Mouffe draws on in her work.

For Gramsci (1971) hegemony consisted in people’s internalized belief that capitalism is the ideal way to organise social relations.⁵¹⁸ Material and cultural conditions such as the ability to feed one’s family, place a roof over one’s head, and the solace of cultural phenomena such as religion that promise happiness in the hereafter secure the consent of the governed making capitalism appear ‘normal’. Counter-hegemony consists in all those actions that challenge hegemony by calling into question the values, beliefs, norms, and structures that shore up capitalist hegemony thereby revealing it to be one choice among others rather than an inevitability.

In what follows, I address, first, the question of how collective identities are constituted from Mouffe’s perspective and why they are liable to call forth antagonism or become antagonistic, and thus move from being social distinctions to political distinctions, and then consider the role of hegemony in the political. According to Mouffe, collective identities are constituted through a

⁵¹⁶ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 68.

⁵¹⁷ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 9.

⁵¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

distinction between an us/them or a we/they. “The constitution of a specific ‘we’”, Mouffe explains, “depends on a type of ‘they’ from which it is differentiated.”⁵¹⁹ Thus, for Mouffe, collective identities can never be all-inclusive, can never embrace everyone, and must, perforce, produce a “constitutive outside.”⁵²⁰ What this means is that “the possibility of emergence of antagonism can never be eliminated” from us/them distinctions.⁵²¹ In other words, under the right conditions we/they or us/them, which may have operated as relatively benign social distinctions to start with, can transform into political distinctions, that is to say, distinctions not simply between ‘us’ and ‘them’ but between ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’. Here Mouffe (following Schmitt) is not using ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ in the colloquial sense of people we are fond of (friends) versus people whom we dislike or even despise (enemies), but in a more existential sense as the contrast between the ‘we’/friend whose preservation depends upon the annihilation of the ‘they’/enemy.⁵²² According to Mouffe, because social distinctions between us/them or we/they produce a “constitutive outside” they are always liable to be transformed into the antagonistic political distinctions between friend and enemy. I want in what follows to hold onto the value of Mouffe’s work for understanding politics and the political under apartheid *without* accepting the deterministic tone of her argument. It is important of course to remember that Mouffe is writing about the nature of the social from within her location in modern Europe. I do not wish to be as categorical about the ‘nature’ of social as she is but what does appear to be of value, even outside of her particular location, is the recognition of the instability, impermanence, and malleability of the social. That the social, whatever it may include and however it is constituted, is constantly under construction. The fact that all societies have a history – that they are amenable to change in other words – notwithstanding racist nineteenth century conceits about the ahistorical nature of ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’ societies as fixed, timeless, and a-historical seems to bear this out, though this is my point not Mouffe’s.⁵²³ So what I want to take from Mouffe is not the all-encompassing nature of her claims about the social but the useful and potentially liberatory insight into its instability and thus its potential malleability both in her context and in the context of this study.

In theorising what constitutes the political, the other concept Mouffe considers is that of hegemony, and it is this concept that is important to my analysis of Sobukwe’s letter about “Ntate Pogrund.” The distinction between us/them, which can, as Mouffe shows become a political distinction of the friend/enemy kind, never expresses essential identities or essential differences but is a practice through which to construct identities that can then claim to be predicated on essences. In

⁵¹⁹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 19.

⁵²⁰ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 18.

⁵²¹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 16.

⁵²² Mouffe makes this claim in the context of attempting to elaborate the democratic project on realistic grounds by admitting “an anthropology which acknowledges the ambivalent character of human sociability and the fact that reciprocity and hostility cannot be dissociated.”

⁵²³ For an example of such nineteenth century conceits see Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005).

other words, identities do not pre-exist “the process of identification.”⁵²⁴ For this reason, Mouffe argues, it is important to recognise that there is “a lack of final ground” and a “dimension of undecidability which pervades every social order.”⁵²⁵ In any social order then the role of hegemonic practices is to institute and naturalise the social relations of that order as ‘common sense’; counter-hegemonic-practices do the opposite but counter-hegemonic practices are still concerned with instituting and naturalising a set of social relations, albeit a new set and, one hopes, one of an egalitarian type.

According to Mouffe, politics, in distinction from the political, represents “the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.”⁵²⁶ As I read Mouffe, both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices constitute politics because both intervene in the structure of power relations—the hegemonic to shore up an existing order by naturalising it as ‘common sense’ and the counter-hegemonic to displace one order and naturalise the power relations of another.

It is in the context of hegemony and the production of a common sense that the ordinary and the everyday become powerful sites of refusal. My argument is that small-scale social actions and practices that refuse to participate in the making and remaking of the racial order, such as the refusal of Welch’s shopkeeper to make race through separate entrances and different manners, or Sobukwe’s celebration of his daughter when she treats Pogrand as a member of her community suggesting that her consciousness of who her community consisted of was not racialised, or the scrupulousness of the New Era Fellowship members in refusing to think or behave in racialised terms in the everyday, *potentially* work to institute a new counter-hegemonic ‘common-sense’. I am not suggesting here that individuals doing these things in a disorganised way – as in the case of the examples I have given above – will necessarily produce a new hegemonic order counter to the prevailing one. What I am suggesting is that such acts as I have described here *could* work towards instituting a counter-hegemony. Here is a *potential* site of the political in the everyday and the ordinary.

One additional reason, it seems to me, that politics, as a “set of practices and institutions through which an order is created” (or through which an attempt is made to reorganise a given order or bring a new order into being and secure its power relations as ‘common sense’), calls forth antagonism (though as Mouffe suggests there may be ways to tame this antagonism and render it agonistic instead) is because it involves organising or reorganising power towards a (new) normative or ethical horizon. By “ethical horizon” I mean the ethical direction towards which a particular instantiation of politics attempts to move; different politics move in different ethical directions.

I want to take up a different aspect of Mouffe’s work and elucidate what constitutes counter-hegemonic practices in such a way that practices expressed or represented in language or other forms

⁵²⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 18.

⁵²⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 17.

⁵²⁶ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 9.

of action that do not immediately identify or call forth antagonism can still be recognised as politics. When I refer to something as politics then, what I am trying to flag for the reader the arena of practices or, as the examples I have worked with above suggest *potential* practices (be they hegemonic or counter-hegemonic; my focus has been on the latter) that either maintain a given order or to intervene in, contest, or re-organise the power-relations of that order with a specific normative or ethical horizon in mind and to naturalise the relations that arise out of such a reorganisation. Recall that apartheid was a project that, among other things, aimed to establish racial difference as the common sense. When Sobukwe celebrates the fact that his daughter does not distinguish between older men in her community on racial grounds, that she does not engage in the everyday construction of race through differentiated social practices and manners, he is celebrating a kind of social common sense that is antithetical to the common sense (and social relations) apartheid sought to install, maintain, and naturalise. It is for this reason that I see his celebration of his daughter's use of the honorific "Ntate" as an instance of counter-hegemony.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in their letters to one another Pogrund and Sobukwe realised, momentarily and beyond the province of guarantees, a fleeting and imperfect humanity founded in the more life-affirming possibilities of human being. Fleeting because, in the context of their times, they were liable to be returned, outside of those moments in which they achieved a relation to each other as people not as races, forcefully by the structures imposed by the apartheid regime to their positions as Master and illegal citizenship-less 'boy'. They did this, I suggested, through what *might* count as a counter-hegemonic mode of being and relating realised in the ordinary details of everyday life—the celebration of birthdays, the caring for children, everyday modes of respectful address and so on, rather than in the more recognisable form of organised anti-colonial nationalist politics (though that too was a part of their lives) or in the register of antagonism.

Chapter 6 – Friendship Between Men: Masculinity, Race, and the Letters of Robert Sobukwe and Benjamin Pogrund

This chapter considers Pogrund and Sobukwe's bond of friendship in relationship to the gendered and raced norms of their times. It heeds the call by contemporary political historians and biographers, such as Ciraj Rassool, to attend to the manner in which mainstream political biography and history has reproduced "modernist" accounts of the life courses of its subjects by focusing on the public lives of "big men" and relying heavily on official and public documents in order to do so.⁵²⁷ Rassool argues of the shortcomings of mainstream political biography and history that contemporary South African political history and biography tends to focus on what happened in the public realm (normatively coded as masculine) to the exclusion of what went on in private life (normatively coded as the domain of the feminine).⁵²⁸ Here, by looking at their letters, I focus on Pogrund and Sobukwe's 'private' lives to argue that their bond challenges the hegemonic masculinity of their times. At the same time, the friendship and acts of care by Pogrund (and other liberals) towards Sobukwe take place within the dual contexts of the racism of the apartheid regime (which explains the very different experience Pogrund has of prison authorities in comparison to that of Sobukwe) and the liberal ideology of trusteeship which renders of liberals' caretaking of Sobukwe worth critical scrutiny.

Sobukwe and Pogrund's challenge to the gendered norms of care giving through their relationship appears to have been unintended. When I say the challenge to gender norms was unintended I mean that it flowed out of their dispositions, their affection for one another, and the process of their friendship, rather than being part of a conscious political rejection of those norms. Indeed, there are also points in the letters, which I explore below, in which the two men engage in talk that very much reproduces hegemonic forms of masculinity. But as I have argued in the introduction, the ordinary also has a politics even though it is not expressed in the more recognisable register of indictment. The ordinary in the letters includes quotidian matters like having a nice spread for Christmas with a tree, decorations, and carols, expressing love to for one another, Pogrund's fight with an obdurate Officer Commanding to let a care package through to Robben Island, the unexpected kindness of a prison official who offers to refrigerate some food delivered for Sobukwe so that it doesn't spoil, the pleasures of Sobukwe's gardening and the pains of not having access to adequate water for his plants, exchanging gifts and other creature comforts, fashioning and image of oneself for one's friend, and so on. I also want to argue that, although Pogrund and Sobukwe may not have themselves intended such a challenge, in the present one might emphasise the manner in which their

⁵²⁷ Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History," 29.

⁵²⁸ Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History", 40. See also, Ciraj Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," (PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2004).

friendship did challenge the norms of its times by focusing on moments of non-normative behaviour and affect in their letters to one another as a way of producing an account of two men in the liberation struggle in a way that challenges how masculinity is usually represented in political history and biography.

Of equal importance are the raced dimensions that Pogrund and other liberals' care of Sobukwe suggests. On the one hand, the chapter explores the non-normative homosociality of Pogrund and Sobukwe's bond, and on the other it brings into view the intertwined nature of Sobukwe's life with the local community of liberal anti-apartheid activists and the racialised complexities of these relationships of which I spoke in chapter 2. It is in this regard that race becomes particularly salient as many of Sobukwe's caretakers were white liberals and there is arguable a strong dimension of trusteeship in their care of him. There is a way in which, while in prison, Sobukwe becomes the ward of his liberal caretakers.

Theorising Homosociality and Non-Normative Masculinity

The primary way of theorising men's bonds with other men has been through the concept of homosociality. Homosociality has been critically disputed and through this process expanded over the last few decades. Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson describe three tendencies in the way the concept has been deployed in the literature that are useful here. In the first instance, homosociality has been taken to refer to "how men, through their friendships and intimate collaborations with other men, maintain and defend the gender order."⁵²⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's conceptualisation of homosociality, in her ground-breaking contribution to queer theory, *Between Men*, was more nuanced. In its early usages in history and the social sciences, Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, homosociality merely meant "bonds between persons of the same sex" with an obvious distinction suggested between homosocial and homosexual bonds.⁵³⁰ Homosocial bonds, in that literature, were *not* erotic. Indeed, homosociality was a way of talking about same-sex bonds that distinguished them from homosexual ones. Sedgwick pushed the concept further to suggest both the way such bonds maintained hegemonic masculinity *and* to place them on a continuum with the erotic, suggesting a continuity between the homosocial and the homosexual in male bonds.⁵³¹ This represented a queering of the concept as it established a through line from erotic forms of desire and bonding associated with homosexuality and forms of desire and bonding typically treated as discontinuous with same-sex desire.⁵³²

The tendency in the literature, however, has been to treat the homosocial as an aid to patriarchal domination. The concept of homosociality is deployed in ways that suggest that men's

⁵²⁹ Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson, "Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy," *Sage OPEN* (January-March 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013518057>.

⁵³⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

⁵³¹ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1.

⁵³² Hammarén and Johansson, "Homosociality," 2.

friendships with one another are unilaterally characterized by “a lack of intimacy” and are “based on and formed through competition.”⁵³³ But, through their review of some of the recent literature, Hammarén and Johansson are able to point out that homosociality *does not* uncomplicatedly maintain hegemonic masculinity, that it can potentially undermine or reshape the hegemonic.⁵³⁴ This leads to the third, and more recent development in theorising the concept of homosociality. Hammarén and Johansson’s work develops and emphasizes “the contradictory and ambivalent aspects of the concept”⁵³⁵ to account not only for how homosociality can act to entrench hegemonic masculinity but also how certain forms or aspects of it “might undermine or reconstruct this power structure.”⁵³⁶

The authors make a distinction between what they refer to as “horizontal homosociality”, which points to “more inclusive relations between, for example, men that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy, and a nonprofitable form of friendship”⁵³⁷ and vertical or hierarchical homosociality, which refers to the manner in which male bonding can, and often does, shore up the hegemony of patriarchy as the prime and naturalised mode of organising the social vis-à-vis gender.⁵³⁸ Thus both homosociality’s function in maintaining certain norms as hegemonic and its potential to reconstitute or shift the gender values that are hegemonised is attended to by the authors. As Hammarén and Johansson acknowledge there are no absolute boundaries between vertical and horizontal forms of homosociality,⁵³⁹ but I am going to suggest treating the homosociality between Pogrund and Sobukwe as *also* of the horizontal variety. I say *also* because the way in which both men gendered and indeed their attitudes to gender and sexuality were in many dimensions deeply heteronormative and patriarchal. A passage in Pogrund’s biography of Sobukwe, for instance, shows the extent to which he did *not* depart at all from the hegemonic norms of his context or subscribe to alternative values. Pogrund is at pains in his biography of Sobukwe to insist that none of the members of the PAC engaged in acts of homosexuality while in prison. He writes:

...what sustained the PAC men was their self-discipline. Neither here [Stofberg Prison] nor at any time later was there any trace of the homosexuality, liquor or *dagga* —the South African version of marijuana—common among other prisoners. Instead, beginning at The Fort [a prison] and carried through into each jail, they organised themselves into groups which assigned study subjects and organised daily debates.⁵⁴⁰

This passage is indicative both of the heteronormative attitudes Pogrund held and of his bourgeois notions of respectability. And yet, as I have indicated above, I mean to show that aspects of the

⁵³³ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 3.

⁵³⁴ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 2.

⁵³⁵ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 2.

⁵³⁶ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 2.

⁵³⁷ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 1.

⁵³⁸ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 1.

⁵³⁹ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 5.

⁵⁴⁰ Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 166.

homosocial bond between Pogrund and Sobukwe challenged what was hegemonized in their context vis-à-vis masculinity.

The point of the distinction between hierarchical or vertical homosociality and horizontal homosociality is to insist on what is empirically observable: that not all relations between men necessarily support dominant (hegemonic) patterns of masculinity. Additionally, and this is my point not Hammarén and Johansson's, not all challenges to hegemony result in a shift in its constitution. Hammarén and Johansson trouble the way that hegemony (and thus hegemonic masculinity) is usually understood in the theory, particularly male homosociality by turning to the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. As Michael Rustin puts it, "the concept of hegemony is detached from both class and historical rules" in Laclau and Mouffe's work.⁵⁴¹ As I have explored the concept of hegemony from the perspective of Chantal Mouffe in chapter 3, I will rehearse it here only briefly. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Laclau and Mouffe took aim at early orthodox Marxist understandings of how social unities were constituted, which relied on essentialist and economically deterministic renderings of the character and "democratic tasks" of the working class.⁵⁴² For Laclau and Mouffe the ground for reconstituting hegemony doesn't lie with any particular social class. In Laclau and Mouffe's account the "primacy of the economic" is denied and the "existence of the social as an axiom of political and social theory" is abjured.⁵⁴³

The meaning of the social, as per Laclau and Mouffe—what is fixed as legitimately representative of or included within the social—is permanently unstable. Hegemonic struggles are the attempt to create centres and fixities but these attempts can't totally or permanently succeed and so struggles to maintain hegemony are an ongoing feature of social and political life. As Hammarén and Johansson put it, "Hegemony is never fully accomplished but is in motion."⁵⁴⁴ What counts as the social—that is to say, following Mouffe, those practices and bonds that are taken for granted⁵⁴⁵—is open to contestation. Hence, Hammarén and Johansson argue, "Relating this post-Marxian concept of hegemony to hegemonic masculinity would allow us to analyze potential transitions and changes, for example, articulations of potentially radical strategies for changing the gender order."⁵⁴⁶ What Hammarén and Johansson are arguing here is that what counts as the social—that is to say what is hegemonized as properly within the social— is open to refashioning. A society could have a non-patriarchal set of norms vis-à-vis masculinity in other words even if, as Laclau and Mouffe's work suggests, it could not maintain the hegemony of that set of norms eternally because of the instability of the hegemonic social and the unlikelihood of reaching permanent closure.

⁵⁴¹ Michael Rustin, "Absolute Voluntarism: Critique of a Post-Marxist Concept of Hegemony," *New German Critique* 43 (Winter 1988): 151-152, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488402>.

⁵⁴² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Strategy* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), xiii.

⁵⁴³ Stanley Aronowitz, "Theory and Socialist Strategy," *Social Text* (Winter 1986-1987): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466283>.

⁵⁴⁴ Hammarén and Johansson, "Homosociality," 8.

⁵⁴⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 18.

⁵⁴⁶ Hammarén and Johansson, "Homosociality," 8.

Hammarén and Johansson point out that in the large body of literature on homosociality there is a “proposed lack of intimacy in men’s friendship relations”⁵⁴⁷ and a tendency to privilege the analysis of those forms of homosociality that are “based on and formed through competition and exclusion.”⁵⁴⁸ But there is literature that suggests that men’s bonds with other men are not always grounded in competition and exclusion, that sometimes men build bonds typified by “cohesion, togetherness, and intimacy, rather than interpersonal competition and the creation of male hierarchies.”⁵⁴⁹ Homosociality need not always be, or need not be in an uncomplicated way, merely an “extension of hegemonic masculinity.”⁵⁵⁰

My argument in this chapter is not that Pogrud and Sobukwe set out to contest the hegemonic masculinity of their times. Nor is it that their masculinities represented a break with the hegemonic *tout court*. Firstly, the “cohesion, togetherness, and intimacy” of their bond, as Hammarén and Johansson describe horizontal homosocial bonds, with one another was not a political project, which is not the same as saying that it didn’t have a politics. It would be wrong to cast either man in the role of contesting hegemonic masculinity by design and yet, by reading that bond against the context in which it arose, unfolded, and developed, a contestation of the hegemonic male bond, a bond both gendered and racialised, emerges. My suggestion, heeding the criticisms Ciraj Rassool and others have made of the kind of masculinity that characterises biographical accounts of South Africa’s liberation struggle, is that scholars return to that literature and those stories with an eye to how male bonds can call into question the norms of the prevailing gender order. I suggest that there is a need for revised histories of the liberation struggle that look at friendship and comradeship among men involved in that struggle not only in terms of vertical forms of homosociality but also in terms of horizontal forms.

Southern African Masculinities in Historical Context

What then was the context for Sobukwe and Pogrud’s masculinities and their homosocial bond? As Robert Morrell points out Southern African masculinities reflect the turbulent history of the region.⁵⁵¹ At the dawn of the twentieth century Southern Africa was engulfed in war between the Boer Republics and the British. Africans (in the racialised sense of that term) too “were engaged in wars of their own, seeking to reclaim lands lost during the wars of dispossession in the nineteenth century.”⁵⁵² North of the Limpopo at this time Rhodes’ rapacious appetite for land and people was also generating conflict. Alongside all of this a class of educated African elites, sometimes referred to in the literature

⁵⁴⁷ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 3.

⁵⁴⁸ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 3.

⁵⁴⁹ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 3.

⁵⁵¹ Robert Morrell, “Times of Change: Men and Masculinity in South Africa,” in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, ed. Robert Morrell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001), 12.

⁵⁵² Morrell, “Times of Change,” 12.

as “Black Victorians”,^{553, 554} were reshaping local gender norms, including those of masculinity, along metropolitan and Victorian lines.⁵⁵⁵

Thus, as one enters the twentieth century the masculinity one encounters in Southern Africa is one shaped by the effects of the cultural contact brought about by colonial expansion, racism, capitalism, and war. As this class of relatively prosperous Black Victorians “withered away” in the early decades of the twentieth century two “major experiences and traditions” began to shape masculinity among Africans in its stead.⁵⁵⁶ These were the mines as workplaces, on the one hand, and increasingly cramped and impoverished circumstances in the rural areas,⁵⁵⁷ on the other, where various state policies made life more and more difficult for Africans as part of the state’s design to produce cheap and fungible labour for white capital on farms, in mines, and in the cities. As was the case before the twentieth century and right up to the early 1990s when democratic change, for all its wants, produced a somewhat less masculine public sphere (I am thinking here for instance of the fact that after the 1999 elections the number of women in parliament increased by 30 percent), the public sphere was the realm of men.⁵⁵⁸

Morrell—and here I part company with him to a certain extent—also insists on a patriarchal gender system among Africans, insisting on the primacy of the chief and the respect of older men qua men in the rural areas^{559, 560} in ways that do not, to me, seem sufficiently sensitive to the extent to which this depiction of the customarily African, or the African as customary, was shaped by a form of colonial rule that purposely centred authority in the figure of male chiefs and canonised as customary those features of African culture which were most patriarchal and reactionary. As scholars have pointed out there were pre-colonial social structures which dispersed power across a network of groups and authority figures rather than centring it in the person of a male authority figure and colonialism had much to do with the deepening and hardening of those features that were patriarchal in local cultures.⁵⁶¹ My point here is not that gendered oppression was unknown on the continent prior to the arrival of the white man, but the fact remains that colonialism had a decisive effect on gendered power relations—for the worse—here and in other parts of the formerly colonised world. Morrell’s work, while not unaware of this fact, is at certain points insufficiently sensitive to it.

⁵⁵³ André Odendaal, *South Africa’s Black Victorians: Sport and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop, 1987).

⁵⁵⁴ Victoria J. Collis-Buthelezi, “Under the Aegis of Empire: Cape Town, Victorianism, and Early-Twentieth-Century Black Thought,” *Callaloo* 39, no.1(Winter 2016): 115-132, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2016.0011>.

⁵⁵⁵ Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁵⁶ Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁵⁷ Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁵⁸ Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁵⁹ Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁶⁰ See Robert Morrell, “Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 4 (December 1998): 605–630.

⁵⁶¹ For a discussion see Mahmood Mamdani, “Decentralized Despotism,” in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37–62.

As the twentieth century drew on—in the 20s and 30s—the prospects of a “racially integrated” society disappeared.⁵⁶² Conditions in the reserves, in which most Africans were sequestered, were harsh by design and men were driven in search of work to farms, mines, and cities. The working conditions of such men—especially on the mines—were cruel. African men were paid little and subjected to various kinds of violence on the job. The mines served as a crucible for the forging of South African masculinities particularly for black men—given the large numbers employed on the mines—but also for the numerically fewer white supervisors. Keith Breckenridge has argued that “given their longevity and scale”—between 1910 and 1940, for instance, the mines employed a quarter of a million men (very few women were employed in this period)—“it is arguable that the ideals and the practice of manhood that have dominated South Africa in this century—what [Raewyn] Connell calls hegemonic masculinity—emerged on the mines.”⁵⁶³ Thus the mines were an important site for the production both of various masculinities but also for patterns of relating between black and white men. Given that in this chapter I am going to suggest a non-normative pattern of relating between two men who I regard in their particular context as black and white, it is worth considering this site of production and the kinds of practices of masculinity and relations between white and black men that it produced.

As Breckenridge points out that it was on the mines at the turn of the nineteenth century that “two groups of men, each shaped by powerful institutions of male solidarity and socialisation, met each other underground in very large numbers...”⁵⁶⁴ They met, not as equals, but, as Breckenridge points out, as bearers of racial identities “defined through centuries of social practice” and “increasingly rigidly defined by law.”⁵⁶⁵ The pattern of relating they developed, as one would predict given the history and the context, was a “pre-eminently violent” one.⁵⁶⁶ In this context violence as a mode of relating was valorised by all.⁵⁶⁷ This was a context in which manliness was associated with physical strength.⁵⁶⁸

Breckenridge moves on to the claim that organised violence was central to the upbringing of both black and white men. Here I want to distance myself somewhat from Breckenridge because the evidence to which he turns in order to describe black and white men as subject to an upbringing characterised by “organised violence” is the practice of stick fighting (among black youths in the reserves) in age-cohorts in the rural areas. As the reader will recall from the chapter 3, where I explored this practice as part of my discussion of Sobukwe’s youth and early formation, this kind of fighting was highly regulated and governed by a set of norms that restricted such controlled-fighting

⁵⁶² Morrell, “Times of Change,” 13.

⁵⁶³ Keith Breckenridge, “The Allure of Violence: Men, Race and Masculinity on the South African Goldmines, 1910–1950,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 4 (December 1998): 669, DOI: 10.1080/03057079808708596.

⁵⁶⁴ Breckenridge, “Allure of Violence,” 670.

⁵⁶⁵ Breckenridge, “Allure of Violence,” 670.

⁵⁶⁶ Breckenridge, “Allure of Violence,” 670.

⁵⁶⁷ Breckenridge, “Allure of Violence,” 674.

⁵⁶⁸ Breckenridge, “Allure of Violence,” 674.

to young boys, but proscribed it as untoward among adult men. It was not, as I pointed out there, informed by the kind of hatred and a lack of fellow feeling that characterises violence. And, chapter 2 made clear, the boys who engaged in such fights saw and valued one another as friends, washing each other's wounds and commiserating with one another after the fight was over. Counterposed to this are the military and republican backgrounds of the Afrikaans-speaking white males who made up the majority of white men on the mines. Very little is said about the organised violence that Breckenridge argues characterised white upbringings and pathways to masculinity among white men. Again, I feel the need to distance myself somewhat from Breckenridge's account. Based on his own description of the highly regulated practice of stick fighting among boys, a practice which was not thought proper to the resolution of disputes among men who were enjoined culturally to use words to resolve their disputes and on knowledge of Calvinism and Calvinistic violence—of the kind that would have characterised the childhoods of the Afrikaans mine workers—the comparison does not work. The right of the father to beat his wife and children is an extremely different thing from the regulated practice of stick fighting, which as Breckenridge himself points out contained within it a proscription on violence among adult men. While I want to distance myself from this aspect of the argument, what is obvious and well sustained by evidence is that mines—which were a key site of contact between white and black men at the dawn of the twentieth century and onwards—were extremely violent places and that relations between men on the mines were characterised by racialised and gendered violence.

Struggle masculinities have typically been the subject of negative critique in the academic literature.⁵⁶⁹ Although there is a literature on gender and masculinity in the post-apartheid period,⁵⁷⁰ to the best of my knowledge, there is a dearth of material on the ways in which men cared for one another during the struggle that is to say there is a dearth of literature on men engaging in modes and forms of care for one another that might typically be gendered feminine, or on horizontal homosociality during the struggle and among its menfolk.

There is no question that both Sobukwe and Pogrund held views about gender that were, while sometimes more refined than the crudely sexist views of some of their peers, still sexist and normatively gendered in their own way. This is evident in letters such as that in which Sobukwe refers to Pogrund's "skirt-world" to describe the latter's romantic life.⁵⁷² It is also apparent in comments Sobukwe makes about the relevance of the establishment of the State of Israel to Jewish masculinity when the two are debating Israel. Sobukwe writes:

⁵⁶⁹ See for example, Natasha Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912–1950," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 653–671, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178733>; see also, Elaine Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle," *The European Journal of Development Research* 12, no. 2 (2000): 157–178, DOI: 10.1080/09578810008426770.

⁵⁷⁰ Malose Langa, *Becoming Men: Black Masculinities in a South African Township* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020).

⁵⁷¹ Kopano Ratele, *Why Men Hurt Women and Other Reflections on Love, Violence, and Masculinity* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2022).

⁵⁷² Benjamin Pogrund, *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, 289.

You make the point which has been made frequently of late that the Jews of Europe had no excuse for allowing themselves to be led meekly to the slaughter: and that the resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto indicated the birth of a new spirit—the determination to assert Jewish manliness.⁵⁷³

But, as I have shown in the previous chapter, what is equally striking about Pogrud and Sobukwe's letters to one another is the extent to which and the manner in which they cared for one another.⁵⁷⁴ Particularly striking is Pogrud's care of Sobukwe. It is unsurprising that the emphasis should fall on Pogrud as it is he, after all, who had a modicum of freedom and agency as a middle class white man in 1960s apartheid South Africa. I say a modicum because I think the extent to which one can be free under regimes of white supremacy is limited even for whites; this is not to deny the power and privilege white supremacy accords white people, particularly men, but rather to insist that it is a tainted and deformed kind of freedom. Nevertheless, Pogrud had a degree of freedom that allowed him to care for Sobukwe in material ways that Sobukwe could not reciprocate given his circumstances. This is not to say that love, kindness, care, and affection flowed in only one direction in the letters, but the bulk of the material performances of such affects lie with Pogrud for his agency was less constrained and his whiteness operated as a significant advantage in facilitating his care of Sobukwe as I will show below. In addition, there is a complexity to Pogrud's caring for Sobukwe that is precisely due to the white supremacist social and political context in which it took place as well as the liberal cultural norms and political aspirations which informed it.

Liberal Trusteeship and the Sobukwe–Pogrud Friendship

Sobukwe's network of supporters while he was in prison were largely drawn from the ranks of the liberal white community and from people involved in liberal anti-apartheid organisations like the Black Sash, the Defence and Aid Fund,⁵⁷⁵ and the LPSA. It is important however to note that these are the supporters to whom the only existing archive of Sobukwe's correspondence gives us access and evidence of. It is not possible to say much about Sobukwe's networks of supporters among black anti-apartheid activists and friends. Some are periodically mentioned, such as Zeph Mothopeng, Sobukwe's wife Veronica, and some of his friends and relatives, but their deeds and actions are for the most part either not reported or undocumented because any letters that they may have sent never entered this particular archive. This does not mean that they were not sources of support and future work should look to unearth their activities so as to give a more holistic picture of the community that developed around Sobukwe and of which he was a part while he was imprisoned on Robben Island.

⁵⁷³ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrud, 27 September 1967, Ba5-62, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁷⁴ It is beyond the scope of the present work to explore whether evidence of other instances of the same type and manner of caring practices exist in other struggle correspondences, memoirs, and autobiographies between men.

⁵⁷⁵ Canon John Collins created the International Defence and Aid Fund during the 1956 Rivonia Treason Trials. "Its mission was to work towards a peaceful solution to the problem of apartheid through raising and distributing funding to victims of apartheid laws, especially political prisoners and their families." See "International Defence and Aid Fund," South African History Online, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/international-defence-and-aid-fund-idaf>.

Here I focus on his liberal support network, partly because of the available evidence and partly because of the tension and complexity that the fact that one of the twentieth centuries most eloquent and ardent critics of white liberalism also forged bonds of friendship and social networks among the white liberal community introduces. If this had only been the case during the time that Sobukwe was imprisoned one might argue that it was a matter of circumstances—that Sobukwe having no other choice as an imprisoned man with a family to support on the outside forged allegiances with white liberals because it served him to do so—however, what I have tried to make clear in the preceding chapters is how deep and sincere these bonds (particularly the bond with Pogrund) were. But the sincerity of his liberal friends and admirers should not blind the analysis of their activities of relating to and caring for Sobukwe, which I explore below, to the politics of those activities and what it tells us about how white liberals related to black people. For this reason, I take up the notion of liberal trusteeship to critically theorise the involvement of white liberals in Sobukwe’s private life as friends, sources of support, and fellow travellers in the struggle against apartheid. This is a both/and approach that is not meant to minimise sincere friendship but to take cognisance of the fact that friendships also arise out of and are informed by their political and social context; that friendship is seldom innocent of power.⁵⁷⁶

The concept that I will mobilise to think through some of the “giving and gifting”⁵⁷⁷ that takes place in the passages that follow, alongside friendship, is liberal trusteeship. As I have discussed the concept at length in the introduction and chapter 1, I provide only a brief re-invocation of its particulars here. The notion of liberal trusteeship is of a piece with the earlier ethos of the imperial mission. In the eighteenth century, particularly in British colonies, the *raison d’être* of colonisation was the “civilising mission.” Imperial power was justified through the argument that it shone the light of civilisation in the darkness of ‘primitive’ societies. The mission was to make good British ladies and gentlemen out of colonial wards who would, at some unspecified and permanently delayed future date, be able to manage their own affairs. The impetus was on assimilating the colonised into the culture of the coloniser.

This liberal ethos would face a crisis in the nineteenth century when colonised subjects began to rebel across the British Empire against imperial rule and new justifications were sought. There was a move away from the liberal civilising mission to a more conservative project premised on the idea that the empire’s responsibility towards its subjects was not to integrate them into imperial society but to “protect and preserve” their cultural difference, a difference described and codified from an imperial perspective and with imperial political interests at heart. It’s not that trusteeship went away exactly, but it took on a different gloss. Furthermore, in South Africa, after Union, although liberal trusteeship at the level of state power began to take on a new and different character, premised as I

⁵⁷⁶ Walsh and Soske, “Thinking,” 4.

⁵⁷⁷ This is how my supervisor, Dr Chaturvedi, described the acts of care by Sobukwe’s liberal supporters in a review of this chapter. I have adopted it because it seemed apt to describe one important dimension of what may have been going on.

said in the introduction on the conservative project of protecting cultural difference, it never fully went away as an ethos among white liberals, though some, such as Patrick Duncan and indeed to a certain extent Pogrand himself, expressed criticism of it. Nevertheless, the ways in which white liberals cared for or formed friendships with their black peers still resonated with, and sometimes even expressed as we have seen in chapter 1, older ideas from the era of the civilising mission. Thus, even in the present of apartheid, which broke with the civilising mission and took up a conservative version of trusteeship, the past continued to echo through the relationships between whites and blacks, whether liberal or radical.

“Giving and Gifting”: The Politics of Love, Care, and Friendship in the Sobukwe-Pogrand Correspondence

In this section of the chapter, I describe moments from the Sobukwe-Pogrand correspondence that exemplify love, care, and friendship in all its raced and gendered complexity between the two men. This is followed by an analytical discussion of the significance of these acts that pays attention to the raced and gendered power relations within which they were situated and which they sometimes challenged and sometimes reproduced or reinforced.

Pogrand and Sobukwe’s exchanges were often either tender, caring, or emotional. Sobukwe opens two letters to Pogrand, one in 1961 and the other in 1966, saying:

Dear Benji,

I have about five letters to reply to and yours was the last to arrive but I have decided to indulge in a little favouritism and write your letter first.⁵⁷⁸

And in 1966:

I am writing really because I want my first letter in the New Year to be for you.⁵⁷⁹

The reader will recall Sobukwe’s letter to Pogrand concerning his feelings about their friendship (the full citation is in chapter 1) in which he says:

Helen Suzman visited me in here too, as you know, and she greeted me with the words “I was with your friend, Benjie, yesterday. I was forcibly struck by the inadequacy if not the incongruity of the term. I have friends, of course, of whom I am very fond. And high on the list are Mrs. Marquard and Prof Wellington. But I have long passed the stage of even thinking of you as a friend. I don’t want to be sentimental about that.”⁵⁸⁰

To which Pogrand replied:

⁵⁷⁸ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, October 1961, Ba1.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁷⁹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 3 January 1966, Ba4.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁰ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 1 March 1967, Ba5.17, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Both your letters moved me very deeply, particularly your second one. There is no shame – there cannot be any – in my telling you that I cried when I read it. I feel so very close to you, Bob. I recall constantly the last times we were able to see each other, of the many hours when we ranged in our chats over every conceivable subject as though we had never not been seeing each other. I have said before, and I say again, that it is little that I do for you and your family. You deserve a lot more, and so often I berate myself for not doing more for you, and so often too I pray to G-d [*sic*] that I had the power to act effectively on your behalf. I feel a terrible pain within me about your situation.”⁵⁸¹

One of the ways in which Pogrand cared for Sobukwe while he was in prison was by arranging additional food for him. Three examples from their correspondence stand out particularly: a weekly package of fruit and biscuits; two “Xmas” hampers sent for the Christmases of 1964 and 1965; and a package of traditional European Jewish food sent in 1968. Beyond establishing something of the nature of their bond with one another, by following the food packages as they travel through the post across a number of years, I am also able to acquaint the reader with a host of people and issues connected to Sobukwe while he was imprisoned and reflect critically on the care (and its politics) between this liberal support network and Sobukwe.

That their presence and activities are most marked in the archive speaks to the racialised dimension of this network’s care for Sobukwe for it was they, as affluent white people, who were most able to provide for him. Their whiteness arguably facilitated enormous liberties on Sobukwe’s behalf —discussed below —that would not have been possible given the times for black friends, loved ones, and political supporters. Moreover, a certain liberal ethos is evident both in how they cared for Sobukwe and what they conceived his needs to be. It is important to attend then both to what such acts say about the complex emotional bonds between Sobukwe and the world of white liberal opposition to apartheid and to what they say about racial privilege of this segment of people who cared for him and how ideas about racial difference and racialised responsibility (liberal trusteeship) operated in their relationship to him.

Fruit Packages: 1964-1965

During Sobukwe’s time on Robben Island, Pogrand organised many comforts for him among which was a weekly package of fruit and biscuits. Here, I follow the vagaries of the fruit package, which seems at one stage to have gotten duplicated so that Sobukwe was receiving two and not one, each from different sources. One came by way of Sobukwe’s supporters (including Eulalie Stott, Moira Henderson, and Ruth Robb from the Black Sash).⁵⁸² This they purchased and sent from the luxury

⁵⁸¹ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrand to Robert Sobukwe, 16 March 1967, Ba5.20, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸² See correspondence from Moira Henderson to Benjamin Pogrand, 5 October 1965, Ba3.36, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrand to Mrs. Robb, 30 November 1965, Ba3.49, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

goods store Stuttaford's. The other seems to have been purchased by the prison authorities (out of Sobukwe's own money) directly. At one stage there is much back and forth about the duplication of the fruit package, introducing readers to figures like Colonel C.A. Wessels, the Officer Commanding during the time that Sobukwe was held on Robben Island; Stott, the President of the Black Sash; and Sally Mittag, a friend of Pogrund's who worked for the Defence and Aid Fund. By following the fruit, it becomes clear that Sobukwe was supported by a network of liberal women activists from or connected to the Black Sash. It also becomes clear how efficiently and assiduously Pogrund cared for Sobukwe co-ordinating a wide network of friends and supporters, national and international, mainly from the liberal community, to tend to Sobukwe's needs.

On the 1 May 1964, Pogrund wrote to the Officer Commanding Colonel C.A. Wessels enclosing a cheque for the amount R13.00 to cover the cost of a weekly package of fruit and biscuits for Sobukwe.⁵⁸³ "At R3.00 a week, this sum of money is for a three-month period from Friday, May 8, to Friday July 31 1964," Pogrund wrote.⁵⁸⁴ He then thanked Colonel Wessels again for the "courteous co-operation which I was given" on his last visit to Robben Island. Pogrund was then completing research on the influence of Communism on "non-white [political] positions" and Sobukwe had agreed to be interviewed for the project.⁵⁸⁵ Sobukwe confirmed in a letter to Pogrund that he'd be "delighted to oblige."⁵⁸⁶ The prison officials, perhaps partly because of the project's anti-Communist slant and partly in deference to Pogrund's status as a middle-class white man and a semi-public figure agreed to let him spend three days on the Island interviewing Sobukwe. But their "courteous co-operation" towards Pogrund was at odds with how they treated Sobukwe and his family. Veronica Sobukwe who recalled in her Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony her children being strip searched on the docks at Robben Island on their way to visit their father.⁵⁸⁷ It is also at odds with how Sobukwe was treated by prison authorities. A theme of Veronica Sobukwe's letters to Pogrund is the prison authority's neglect of her husband's health. In 1996, Veronica Sobukwe wrote a letter to Pogrund detailing the prison authorities' cruel neglect of her husband's health and asking Pogrund to write about it in the press. There is a stark contrast between the experience Sobukwe had in prison at the hands of authorities and the "courteous co-operation" Pogrund always received. On February 1, 1966, Veronica wrote to Pogrund of Sobukwe's health and general treatment:

He has lost weight. I took most of his trousers to the tailors for alterations. He is complaining of painful joints, severe back-ache and fibrositis. For all these which had been diagnosed by

⁵⁸³ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Colonel C.A. Wessels, 1 May 1964, Ba2.12, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁴ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Colonel C.A. Wessels, 1 May 1964, Ba2.12, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁵ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 11 December 1963, Ba1.7, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁶ Telegram from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 6 January 1964, Ba2.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁷ See <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/kwtown/sobukwe.htm>, accessed June 1, 2020.

the Prison Doctor, he is receiving no treatment what so ever. He is in the first stages of Arthritis. His fingers are disfigured.

For two years he has suffered from Prostatitis. Except a 10 day massage of the gland in the 1st year and a bottle of tabs in the 2nd year he has received no treatment for this illness. He has also complained about his eyes and teeth.

Truly speaking, I did not like his health's condition this time.

I think that is the only way they can get rid of him, by neglecting his health. He told me that they were thinking of making arrangements to take him to hospital for his Prostate Gland complaint. But I think it has long been neglected.

Despite the fact that he has paid in advance for the newspapers, the Prison Authorities have withheld copies of the Sunday Times which carried news they did not approve of. Issues of the Rand Daily Mail sent by you were confiscated by Prison Authorities and it was only after months that he learnt about this.

Bob did not ask me to tell you all this. But please write an article about everything.

I am really sick and tired about these glorious reports we continue to read about his health's condition on Robben Island. Newspaper men or Reporters meet my husband in his room. But I have never been inside the yard in which he is confined. I don't even know what his living quarters look like.⁵⁸⁸

The letter speaks in painful detail to the differential treatment authorities gave to Sobukwe's white liberal supporters, such as Pogrund, as against how they treated Sobukwe and his family.

Institutionalised and socially practiced racial difference and the differential privilege it afforded whites is also clear from the gulf between Veronica Sobukwe's experience and that of Pogrund.

On 11 May 1964, Pogrund received a telegram from a Robben Island official instructing him to cancel the order of fruit as it was still being delivered.⁵⁸⁹ But the Stuttford's fruit keeps on arriving. On 12 May Pogrund sends a note to Wessel's apologising for the inconvenience of the on-going deliveries of the Stuttford's fruit and promising to take care of it.⁵⁹⁰ The unwanted fruit package continues to arrive till mid-June, so too the sanctioned fruit package which seem to be organised by acquaintances of Eulalie Stott. Stott had taken an interest in Sobukwe's wellbeing and organised various comforts for him on the Island. For instance, in 1963 Pogrund wrote to Veronica Sobukwe that Stott had "promised to go into the matter of a record player [for Sobukwe] without

⁵⁸⁸ Correspondence from Veronica Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 1February 1966, Ba4.6, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁸⁹ Telegram from Robben Island to Benjamin Pogrund, 11 May 1964, Ba2.15, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁰ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Colonel Wessels, 12 May 1964, Ba2.17, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

delay.”⁵⁹¹ In early 1966, Pogrund writes to Sobukwe to say “She [Stott] feels that the chair she gave you in 1964 is probably wearing out by now, so she proposes to have a new one delivered to you shortly.”⁵⁹² Pogrund also says that Stott is “making arrangements with the Cape Town Municipal Library Services for you to borrow books and records.”⁵⁹³ One way to understand this “giving and gifting” is as a kind of reversal of the social order. Sobukwe’s liberal supporters tend to his needs assiduously and almost reverently. However, as I have shown above vis-à-vis the gulf between Pogrund’s experience of the prison authorities versus Sobukwe and Veronica’s experience, the privilege associated with whiteness, then as now, is an important dynamic in what makes this caretaking possible. Moreover, in light of the ethos of the civilising mission and its notion of trusteeship discussed above and in the opening chapters of the dissertation, it takes on a different kind of hue. There is a way in which, through liberal “giving and gifting,” Sobukwe is turned into a kind of ward dependent on his liberal caretakers for their charity.

In June 1964, Pogrund wrote to Stott to tell her that Sobukwe had told him the fruit was being delivered and she should “thank those concerned.”⁵⁹⁴ To Sally Mittag, he wrote, the fruit is arriving but the tobacco is not and can she look into it?⁵⁹⁵ Maybe she can send Sobukwe a telegram when the tobacco arrives at the docks and expressing that she hopes it has reached him safely, that way he—and the authorities—will know it is on its way—and the authorities will know that he knows.⁵⁹⁶ This was a strategy Pogrund adopted to try and keep prison authorities honest. The same day he writes to his “dear Bob” to let him know that he and Astrid—his wife of the time—are getting a divorce. “I was reluctant to write to you as I would have to give you news which I know would upset you,” he writes.⁵⁹⁷ “The insoluble tragedy is our little daughter, to whom we are both passionately devoted. I am sorry to have to break this news to you, Bob, I know it will distress you.” And then, towards the end of the letter he asks, “Is the fruit of sufficient quality and quantity? Please reassure me on these points.”⁵⁹⁸ And what about the clothing? Is it alright? Does he need more? Mundane, but not therefore unimportant concerns (food, clothing), mingle with life’s big crises (divorce).

These snapshots from the archive speak to the huge inequalities in the two men’s life circumstances: the freedom, affluence, and privilege enjoyed by Pogrund and other liberal supporters

⁵⁹¹ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Veronica Sobukwe, 25 October 1963, Ba1.3, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹² Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 6 January 1966, Ba4.2, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹³ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 6 January 1966, Ba4.2, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁴ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Eulalie Stott, 11 June 1964, Ba2.22, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁵ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Sally Mittag, 11 June 1964, Ba2.23, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁶ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Sally Mittag, 11 June 1964, Ba2.23, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁷ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 11 June 1964, Ba2-24, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

on the one hand, and the caged and constrained nature of Sobukwe's life on Robben Island such that he was rendered absolutely dependent on his white friends. There are also echoes of the culture of liberal trusteeship in all of this "giving and gifting" from liberals to Sobukwe as in prison he becomes and is obliged to become something of a ward to these care givers in the sense that they managed his affairs for him while he cannot. As much as this dimension needs to be acknowledged, based on the letters I explored in the previous chapter, there does appear to be something more complicated at work here than merely an attitude of trusteeship on Pogrund's part because in the liberal mode of trusteeship the ward is seen as too immature, underdeveloped, or uncivilised to manage his or her own affairs. Nothing in the Pogrund-Sobukwe correspondence suggests that Pogrund saw Sobukwe in this way and yet, at the same time, as I have made clear in chapter 2, Pogrund carried liberal attitudes deeply within himself and in how he saw the world and what was of value in it.

Xmas Food Parcel 1964

On a very weathered invoice made out to Benjamin Pogrund from the department store Thrupps—like Stuttaford's, a purveyor of luxury foods—dated 12 December 1964,⁵⁹⁹ is written "Christmas pudding, peaches, pineapples, one packet each of three different kinds of biscuits: Marie, Tennis, Eat Some More; dates, glacée fruits, sliced biltong, orange juice." In the New Year, 1965, Pogrund writes to Sobukwe and mentions the parcel was a gift from him and a man called Fred van Wyk.⁶⁰⁰ The invoice indicates that the purchases are for Sobukwe—it gives his address as Robben Island C/O Officer Commanding Wessels. In my research I have come across Wessels in two places—in these letters and in Neville Alexander's *Robben Island Prison Dossier*, an account of life on Robben Island over in the main jail—intended to be of use to international aid organisations in the work of trying to keep the apartheid government honest. In Alexander's account Wessels, unsurprisingly, fares differently to how he does in Pogrund's in yet more evidence in how racial differences and related differences of status (Pogrund as a free person, and Alexander and Sobukwe as political prisoners) affected how prison officials related to both prisoners and people from the outside world. Alexander describes Wessels as "a drunk and a complete moron in spite of his university education."⁶⁰¹ He was also a vicious man, who sometimes brutally assaulted the men in his charge then ministered to them afterwards saying that he was acting "*in locus parentis*" and like their father he had to beat them if they were "naughty".⁶⁰² Pogrund never gives a description of Wessels as such but from his letters it is possible to infer that, to Pogrund, Wessels was more like a mostly good-natured if sometimes pig-headed rule abiding official. Again, the huge disparities in how free white men and incarcerated and black men

⁵⁹⁹ Invoice T01382-40 for B. Pogrund from Thrupps, 12 December 1964, Ba2.49, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰⁰ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 19 January 1965, Ba3.4, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰¹ Alexander, *Robben Island*, 26.

⁶⁰² Alexander, *Robben Island*, 26.

and women experienced prison and its officials is evident and speaks to the racial privilege Poggrund enjoyed.

On the 18 December 1964 Poggrund writes to Wessels advising him of the food parcel he is sending Sobukwe as an Xmas gift.⁶⁰³ He asks if Wessels will let him know it has arrived safely as it is large! Next, Poggrund writes to Peter Hjul, an activist in the Liberal Party:

My dear Peter,

I wonder whether there is any chance of brightening up Xmas for Bob Sobukwe.

From here, I have sent him a large food parcel consisting of Xmas pudding, fruit drinks, biscuits, tinned meat, etc. I also put in a couple of decorative candles and some tinsel. In addition, I have passed the word around asking people to send him Xmas cards.

I know the pressures on your time, but I wonder whether something could also be arranged from Cape Town? For example, could someone perhaps spend [looks like R2] and send him a small Xmas tree and a few decorations? And a few gifts, however small they may be, would be a great morale booster. Perhaps also he could be sent a record of Xmas carols.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Sally at D.&A.⁶⁰⁴ as I am sure she would be willing to assist.

If you find it is possible to do anything, will you please let me know?⁶⁰⁵

There is a care and attention to detail in how Poggrund looks after Sobukwe that suggests Hammarén and Johansson's notion of a horizontal homosocial bond in which the bond itself is "nonprofitable" and not reducible to the exercise of maintaining the existing hegemony vis-à-vis male dominance and power. Poggrund spent a tremendous amount of energy, personal time, and even money, attending to small things—like a Christmas tree and carols—that might make his friend's life softer and more enjoyable despite the fact that he was being held in solitary confinement. This is not the stuff of a bond whose purpose is to re-enforce the hegemony of patriarchy or heteronormativity.

Christmas of 65 comes and goes and the Xmas parcel never arrives. I learn from a letter written to a Mr. Thrupp that the parcel was turned back on arrival at the Island.⁶⁰⁶ Poggrund apologizes to Mr. Thrupp for the inconvenience and encloses R12.09 apparently owed to the department store.⁶⁰⁷ But Poggrund writes letter to Wessels towards the end of 1965 letter, this time complaining that that year's Xmas parcel, including decorations, had not been let through by the prison authorities even

⁶⁰³ Correspondence from Benjamin Poggrund to Officer Commanding, Robben Island Goal, 18 December 1964, Ba2.50, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰⁴ International Defense and Aid Fund.

⁶⁰⁵ Correspondence from Benjamin Poggrund to Peter Hjul, 28 December 1964, Ba2.51, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰⁶ Correspondence from Benjamin Poggrund to E.J. Thrupp, 24 January 1966, Ba4.5, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰⁷ Correspondence from Benjamin Poggrund to E.J. Thrupp, 24 January 1966, Ba4.5, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

though the Christmas 64 package had.⁶⁰⁸ In early January of 1966, Pogrund tells Sobukwe he has begged the Officer Commanding to let the package through as it was sent back. Wessels' terse response to Pogrund's entreaties was "Mr. Sobukwe may receive food parcels from relatives only under very exceptional circumstances."⁶⁰⁹ It was not unusual for Pogrund and Sobukwe to note items they have sent one another (in Pogrund's case both goods and letters and in Sobukwe's letters) as a way of trying to keep the authorities honest; the idea being that if an object or a letter was being held back mention of it might cause the prison authorities to release whatever it was to the man concerned. From time to time, as in a letter of 18 February 1965, Sobukwe will confirm receipt of various items: yes he is receiving the weekly fruit package; yes *The Observer* is arriving – it had previously, mysteriously, not been⁶¹⁰ – and so on.⁶¹¹ From this practice, together with Pogrund's listing of the things he sent Sobukwe, one comes to know of the great variety of items Sobukwe received including, for example: "a large dish made by a potter friend of mine, filled with succulent plants which I collected in Bushmanland [*sic*] for him."⁶¹²

“But the Fish! I finished it only out of loyalty to you.”

In February 1968, Pogrund successfully sent Sobukwe a hamper of traditional Eastern European Jewish food. In a letter to Sobukwe dated 7 February 1968, Pogrund notes that he:

[delivered] to the ferry boat that afternoon some of the food you had requested, and the warder there promised to put it into the fridge. I hope it reached you safely. As I recall, I sent you a polony, roll-mops, some cucumber (I think) and bread and chicken fat. I held back a cheese cake which I had bought as I couldn't be sure that it would get to you fresh.⁶¹³

Sobukwe mentions the food in his February 14 reply. He writes:

Thanks for the Cosher [*sic*] food. I'll comment on that in my next letter [...] But I may as well say now that as I had had instructions I ate the bread first and found it absolutely delicious. But the fish! I finished it only out of loyalty to you.⁶¹⁴

Sadly, that is the last of the "Cosher" food. Either a letter went astray or Sobukwe never returned to the topic.

⁶⁰⁸ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Officer Commanding, Robben Island Goal, 28 December 1965, Ba3.54, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶⁰⁹ Correspondence from Officer Commanding, Robben Island, to Benjamin Pogrund, 10 January 1966, Ba4.41, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹⁰ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to the Chief Magistrate, Cape Town, 4 May 1964. Sobukwe's subscription to "The Observer", a London weekly, is not reaching him. Pogrund is advised by prison authorities to write to the Chief Magistrate about it. He informs him it was taken out two months earlier and has still not started arriving and asks the Magistrate if he is retaining it.

⁶¹¹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 18 February 1965, Ba3.9, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹² Correspondence from Sally Mittag to Benjamin Pogrund, 8 January 1965, Ba3.1, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹³ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 7 February 1968, Ba6.2, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹⁴ Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 14 February 1968, Ba6.4, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Sobukwe's letters suggests that Pogrund had not only sent him a hamper of Jewish comfort food but also instructions about how to eat it. The bread—most likely the kitke eaten on Shabbat—is usually eaten first after the customary Friday night blessings. Against the kinds of South African masculinities sketched, including struggle masculinities, consider how unusual this exchange of food is. Not only is it unusual in the depth of tenderness and care it suggests—Pogrund, for instance, not only procuring Jewish food for Sobukwe and managing to get it to him, but also, possibly, sending him instructions on how to eat it, suggests a kind of bond between the two men characterised by “emotional closeness, intimacy, and a nonprofitable form of friendship.”⁶¹⁵ I will attend to the manner in which such acts of tenderness, intimacy, care, and friendship relate to hegemony in the concluding sections of the chapter. First, I want to attend to some other examples that establish Sobukwe and Pogrund's bond as characterised by dimensions of vertical homosociality. Such letters also give the reader a view to an unusual and more ambiguous picture of Sobukwe's life in prison and his relationship with liberal opponents of apartheid. They also speak of a social and affective world in which white and black remain unequal even in the struggle to obtain equality and in the closest of friendships. At the same time that their friendship undoes the map of equality-inequality yet it remains located in the worlds they inhabited and in the world in which we are reading about their friendship. That world is not an equal one.

Furniture, Clothes, Necessities, and Creature Comforts

A handwritten invoice addressed to Pogrund in 1964 tells that he purchased: “Items incl: cloth, sheets, pillow, hooks, buttons, underpants.”⁶¹⁶ Among the many items that Pogrund procured, organised, supplied, and so on, to Sobukwe, he often, alongside Veronica Sobukwe, organised clothing and related items.

The letters about clothing, strengthen the picture of a non-normative homosocial bond and an undoing of the inequality between white and black men – momentary, fleeting, and far from the structural constraints of the world they inhabited. They also give an insight into Sobukwe's mode of self-fashioning in the letters and the kind of ‘self’ he sought to present to his interlocutors (in this collection; I obviously don't know how he fashioned himself to others outside of Pogrund and his circle as, if those letters exist, they have not yet been archived).

In a letter of April 1964, to Pogrund's then wife, Astrid, Sobukwe writes:

Will you tell him [Pogrund] from me that I am absolutely delighted with his choice of EVERY single item? In future I'll send him my size only and he can experiment to his heart's content with colour-combinations and fashions. Even the shoes which I first viewed with alarm (I am rather conservative, I admit!) are extremely comfortable and the pyjamas are a

⁶¹⁵ Hammarén and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 1.

⁶¹⁶ Invoice No. 072455 from JW Jagger & Co., Cape Town, addressed to Benjamin Pogrund, 2 April 1964, Ba2.9, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

peach! The record player too, has arrived and I had a few turns on my creaky joints in the solitude of my room!”⁶¹⁷

Here one begins to get a sense of how Sobukwe styled himself in his letters Pogrand and others. He liked to play the contrarian, sometimes the conservative out of touch with the ‘modern’ world, and always the rebel. In 1966, commenting on some records Pogrand had sent him for Christmas, one by “Miriam” (probably Makeba) Sobukwe comments, “I realize that you young fellows are trying to ‘modernize’ me and I believe you are succeeding.”⁶¹⁸ A letter of 1965, in which he wrote to Pogrand describing his time at the University of Fort Hare and aspects of his political engagement there, captures this aspect of his insouciant personality and self-presentation (or perhaps simply his desire to appear so) well:

In 1947 then I entered Fort Hare. At the Fresher’s Social held in April, speaking on behalf of the freshers of Wesley House – my residence – I unleashed a venomous attack on the attitudes of Wesley – its aggravated spirit of “hostelism” and the un-intellectual nature of its discussions. Wesley House, of course, is arch-conservative and there were some outsiders present. The senior students were incensed and at a subsequent “House” meeting, they decided, almost unanimously that I be sent to coventry for a month. We freshers didn’t have the vote so my friends and fellow freshers could do nothing but merely sympathize. I was placed in a private bathroom, with the tub removed to make place for my bed. It was an isolation cell, all right. Within the precincts of Wesley House nobody was allowed to talk to me! It didn’t bother me this much [*sic*].

In June we were enfranchised and in the elections that were subsequently held to elect the house committee for the ensuing year, I stood as a candidate for the Chairmanship. I won! You can’t imagine the din and confusion. The elections were declared null and void and fresh elections were ordered. All Senior students were fetched and wherever they were and to cast their vote. I lost by about six votes. The next year I became a member of the House Committee with a room to myself!

In 1949 the new Fort Hare constitution came into being whereby the SRC and the president of the SRC were to be elected by popular vote. I was the first president of the SRC to be elected according to that constitution, Benjie, and the vote was as near unanimous as makes no difference. The moral? That I was born for better things, Benjie, than the Premiership of South Africa. Wesley House and South Africa are on a par.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Astrid Pogrand, 7 April 1964, Ba2.11, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹⁸ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 3 January 1966, Ba4.01, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶¹⁹ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 17 June 1965, Ba3.18, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

In 1967, writing of some clothing Pogrand has sent him, Sobukwe opens his letter thus: “My dear Benjie, It amuses me the regularity with which you disregard my instructions completely and buy clothes of your own choice which invariably appeal more to me than my own choice had done.”⁶²⁰ Pogrand’s care of Sobukwe is attentive even to the smallest details as is evident in a letter of May 1967, where he writes, “Incidentally, in a previous letter I think I asked how your clothes were washed - in the communal laundry, by yourself, or what. I need to know so that I can choose the best type of material for your clothing.”⁶²¹

In 1967 a radio and an armchair arrive. Sobukwe writes to Pogrand in May to let him know that the authorities will allow him to have a radio but only if it is medium wave and tuned so that it is limited to the programming of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.⁶²² By June 28 the armchair as well as a coat have arrived. Sobukwe thanks Pogrand saying: “Thank you for the overcoat: it is very fine indeed. When she was down here my sister-in-law had very uncomplimentary things to say about my old overcoat. It was unfashionably long she thought... The chair, too, has arrived and it is very comfortable. But I couldn’t take it to the tree outside. It belongs in a polished lounge.”⁶²³ The reference to the tree refers to a comment Pogrand had made in 1964 when he visited Sobukwe that the former did not get enough sun and that he should sit outside by the tree in his yard more frequently.⁶²⁴ On the 18 July Sobukwe receives the radio. He writes:

I have received the radio: a real beauty! It is cracked along one of the “legs”. I am told it arrived in that condition. But the performance has not been affected in any way. And what a glorious performance it gives!

I am glad you did not have the additional lead you had thought of arranging to enable me to play outside. This is a lovely set, Benjie, and I want it moved as little as possible. I am, therefore, keeping the battery-operated set for use outside. In fact, as a rule, I have the radio playing during the day only when I listen to sport commentaries. The chair and the radio belong in civilised surroundings - in a polished lounge, as I said in an earlier letter.⁶²⁵

Pogrand replies:

I am glad at long last the easy chair has reached you and that it have proved comfortable.

About your comment that the chair and the radio belong in civilised surroundings such as a

⁶²⁰ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 6 April 1967, Ba5.23 Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶²¹ Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrand to Robert Sobukwe, 15 May 1967, Ba5.40, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶²² Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 11 May 1967, Ba5.38, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶²³ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 28 June 1967, Ba5.51, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶²⁴ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 28 June 1967, Ba5.51, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

⁶²⁵ Correspondence from Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrand, 18 July 1967, Ba5.52, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

posh lounge: just a stray thought in my mind – *your* being there makes it a civilised surrounding.⁶²⁶

Although the idea of the ‘civilised’ is retained here by both Sobukwe and Pogrund, in marking Sobukwe as an emblem of it Pogrund appears to invert the usual hierarchy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to tease out the forms of horizontal homosociality that existed between Pogrund and Sobukwe, without denying that there were more vertical forms at play between them too. I have attempted too to attend to how their friendship both undid forms of racism even as the friendship was located in a racist world and at points appears to reinscribe that world and its orders. I have also attended to aspects of Sobukwe and Pogrund’s lives that fall outside of what would be interesting from a teleologically nationalist perspective – the private, the everyday, and ordinary.

It would be all too easy to interpret the letters and the friendship either as a straightforward contestation of existing norms around race and gender or, in some moments, as reinscribing those aspects of the racial order that flow particularly out of liberalism and its notion of trusteeship. What I have tried to do in this chapter, in keeping with the ethos of the study, is to hold both the moments in which the letters and the friendship invert hegemonic norms or unsettle them and those moments in which they reinscribe, particularly, the racial order from a liberal perspective.

Given the level of depth and care both in how Pogrund and Sobukwe communicated with one another and in the acts of care they undertook for one another, something more complex is at work here than simple liberal trusteeship on Pogrund’s part. Similarly, on Sobukwe’s part it would be hard to sustain the argument that he was taking a purely pragmatic approach to his relationship with Pogrund, using Pogrund as a means to attend to his needs and those of his family from his position of relative helplessness in prison. However, the sincerity of the love and affection evident in their correspondence with one another does not erase the realities of the world in which it unfolded (both of their world and the world in which we read it today).

In keeping with my observations about the complexities of political slogans and rallying-calls against the on-the-ground realities of the social relationships between white and black supporters of movements for racial justice and social change, I have tried in this chapter to stay true to both realities. This is not intended as a facile attempt to beautify the violence of the world in which Sobukwe and Pogrund (and we) are embedded and in which their friendship unfolded. Without question, the world in which they were friends was a racist one and their lives were deeply shaped and marked by its violence. Also without question, Pogrund carried about and was informed by liberal

626 Correspondence from Benjamin Pogrund to Robert Sobukwe, 31 August 1967, Ba5.57, Robert Sobukwe Papers, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

cultural values which, as I have tried to show in my discussion of trusteeship and Empire, were implicitly racist values irrespective of the intentions of those who held them. All of this is true. But in keeping the ethical position that it is a virtue to face the complexity and moral undecidability of many aspects of everyday life (then and now) without trying to reach closure, I have tried in this chapter to hold on to and face both aspects of the reality of the bond between Pogrand and Sobukwe.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This dissertation began to take shape in 2015 during a moment of reckoning at the University of Cape Town with the legacies of the University's colonial and apartheid pasts. This reckoning with colonial legacies – and the legacies of later forms of institutionalized white supremacy such as Jim Crow and

apartheid—was not confined to South Africa but took place simultaneously, with local inflections, across settler colonies and former colonial metropolises such as the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), respectively, expressed in movements such as Black Lives Matter and protests such as *Why Is My Curriculum White?*

At the height of the student protests in South Africa, friendship across difference was also problematized. At the Ruth First Memorial lecture in Johannesburg two prominent black intellectuals, both women, spoke of the complexities and indeed the harms of ‘interracial’ friendship. In the question-and-answer session an audience member took the mic to shout what had already become a slogan of the protests: “fuck white people”. The liberal claim to friendship between colonizer and colonized, settler and native, was fiercely criticized, as I explored in the introduction, first in public fora and protests and later in academic work. It was in this moment of heated critique that I learned of the archive of letters exchanged between Benjamin Pogrund and Robert Sobukwe.

Colonialism brought people into contact with one another, albeit violently, as much as it created divisions. Social class, an important variable in capitalist societies such as apartheid South Africa, also facilitated contact between elites across racial difference even as it created divisions between elites and the poor. For this reason, friendship across difference, either during apartheid or today, is not surprising. Such friendships can of course be used in the attempt to secure the racist status quo, as critics have correctly pointed out. But reading the letters Sobukwe and Pogrund wrote to one another, I began to question the more totalizing versions of that critique. Might friendship, I wondered, also be kind of politics but a politics outside of the more recognizable telos of anti-colonial nationalism or formal and public anti-racist protest? Might it be politics even though it does not speak in the register of antagonism with which the political is often associated? And can one appreciate the value, the beauty even, of such friendship while at the same time being realistic and clear-eyed about both friendship’s limitations and the limitations, even the grave shortcomings, of its friends? These are the kind of questions I set out to explore in this dissertation through a reading of the Sobukwe-Pogrund friendship and its letters.

I began, as is customary, by exploring the relevant literature on friendship and sociability under conditions of colonialism and apartheid, and situating my own work in relationship to it. The critical study of intimacies by scholars has, until very recently based itself in public archives and followed Foucault’s method of genealogy to produce accounts of affective regimes. This has been a very useful literature that has allowed us to see the extent to which the intimate domains of life under colonisation themselves were also often regulated by the logics of colonialism. But I wanted to understand what is normatively coded as private by studying letters that were not part of the correspondence of officials but that were written and exchanged between two friends. I was also less interested in writing the classic genealogical account of a system of rules vis-à-vis what can and cannot be said. I had to depart from this literature though I hope I have learned from it. In this second chapter (after the introduction) I also explored critiques of the liberal offer of friendship and non-

racial relationality in the context of South Africa's history of liberal colonialism to differentiate what I wished to do with the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship from the less edifying and often racist aspects of the liberal tradition on friendship. Finally, I situated my own work in the context of a small emerging literature on friendship and intimacy by scholars like Durba Ghosh and, most significantly, Leela Gandhi. Gandhi allowed me to conceive of a politics of friendship that is unlike, but needn't be in opposition to, the politics of anti-colonial nationalism.

Given the controversies surrounding claims to friendship between oppressor and oppressed, settler and native, coloniser and colonised, it was critically important to me to face the contradictions of the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship at the same time as I established its mutuality, relationality, and indeed tenderness. Thus, in the first chapter to deal with the actual letters (chapter 3) I quoted extensively from the letters, written in the late nineteen-sixties, in which they express a kind of bond that is both mutual and reciprocal and refigures the raced homo-fraternity of the political as it is commonly conceived, and, at the same time critically explored the choices that Pogrand made in his biography of Sobukwe, against those made by another of Sobukwe's biographers, Thami Ka Plaatjie. I set out to show that Pogrand appreciated and foregrounded the liberal aspects of Sobukwe's formation and that this may have had something to do with making the friendship possible in the first place. Despite those more transcendent moments of the friendship, evident in the two men's letters to one another, both the friendship and its friends remained rooted in the worlds and realities of colonialism and apartheid as well as the struggle against these. Thus, there are both moments in which the racism of those worlds and realities are transcended and others in which they are reinscribed. The goal of this chapter was to hold onto both realities without collapsing into either one of them.

In chapter 4, I set out to show that Sobukwe's way of thinking about what it means to be African tells us that his friendship with Pogrand was not just a flash in the pan or the expression of an idiosyncrasy. Using Sobukwe's speeches, I argued that the openness of his thinking, the possible inclusiveness with which he endowed Africanity, his radical non-racialism and African humanist outlook, confirmed the arguments that I was trying to make from the Sobukwe-Pogrand friendship in the first place: that these identities (settler and native, for instance) were not, and are not, settled or closed-off, and thus these kinds of relationships were and are possible.

In chapter 5 and 6, I tried to establish my claim that friendship can be a kind of politics by looking at the everyday and unaccented ways in which Sobukwe and Pogrand refused the racial order in which they were rooted. I argued that, in their letters to one another, Pogrand and Sobukwe realised, fleetingly and beyond the province of guarantees, a momentary and imperfect humanity founded in the more life-affirming possibilities of human being. Fleeting because, in the context of their times, they were liable to be returned, outside of those moments in which they achieved a relation to each other as people not as races, forcefully by the structures imposed by the apartheid regime to their positions as Master and illegal citizenship-less 'boy'. They did this, I suggested, through what *might* count as a counter-hegemonic mode of being and relating realised in the ordinary

details of everyday life—the celebration of birthdays, the caring for of children, everyday modes of respectful address and so on. I have chosen to describe these practices of refusal as non-racial.

In chapter 6, I teased out the forms of horizontal homosociality that existed between Pogrand and Sobukwe, without denying that there were more vertical forms at play between them too. I have attempted too to attend again, as I did in chapter 3 and 5, to how their friendship both resisted forms of racism and inequality even as it was located in those and at points appears to have reinscribed them.

I have attempted in this dissertation to suggest a way of inhabiting political resistance, through friendship, that unsettles the violent identity binaries of colonialism and apartheid *without* suggesting or pretending that these do not persist even as we resist them.

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