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The Ethics of Whiteness: Race, Religion, and Social Transformation in South Africa

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Abstract

*The Ethics of Whiteness* is an ethnographic study of progressive white Christians living in Johannesburg who sought to engage with histories of racism, contemporary racial inequality, and calls for racial redress. After apartheid, many whites attempted to preserve their privileged way of life through strategies of withdrawal, isolation, and emigration. In this context, Christian churches became key sites for maintaining elite white cultural norms. The individuals and groups I studied chose an alternate path: one which sought to embrace, rather than resist, sociopolitical and racial change. My interlocutors intentionally lived and worked in poor, black spaces and were involved in experimental social and spiritual communities aimed at bridging race and class divides. Seeking to challenge dominant white norms, they strove to cultivate lives of simplicity, service, and “downward mobility.” Such actions, while not unproblematic, were legitimated through a plurality of secular and religious ideals that framed authentic South Africanness, authentic humanness, and authentic Christianity as bound up with lived sacrifice and struggle. At the heart of this study is what I call the ethics of whiteness—the beliefs, practices, and values that motivated those I studied to engage in efforts to think and act otherwise in relation to their conservative white peers. I develop the concept of the ethics of whiteness in dialogue with concerns and methodological approaches found in the anthropology of ethic, which focuses on the empirical and qualitative study of ethical life. While wary of traditional religious institutions, my interlocutors drew from a number of religious sources and histories to develop their socially engaged form of Christian spirituality, including 1) Black Theology and South Africa’s history of
multiracial religious activism against apartheid; 2) liberal Protestantism and its focus on social development and civic engagement; and 3) the Emerging Church Movement, an Anglo-American reform movement that begin in the late 1990s in opposition to conservative white evangelicalism. The confluence of these movements, I suggest, ultimately allowed my interlocutors to understand themselves simultaneously as political activists, development workers, and Christian revolutionaries engaged in the work of building a “new” non-racial, democratic South Africa where white and black alike could find a dwelling place.
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I also dedicate this dissertation to the countless people in South Africa who have lived, struggled, loved, and sometimes died for the sake of a better world beyond the power and violence of white supremacy. Two of these people, Robert and Shirley Charles—who I regard as my South African family—changed the course of my life when they hosted me in 2002. Their love and friendship over the years, as well as the ways they have nurtured their children serves as an inspiration to me. Robyn and Dayton Charles were born into a democratic South Africa with possibilities unimaginable to those who came before them. This dissertation was written with hope for their future and in memory of all those who still long for freedom.

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Introduction: How Do I Live in this Strange Place?

“How do I live in this strange place?” It was a six word question posed by a philosopher in an obscure academic journal, but it soon generated the kind of debate—online, in print media, and within academic circles—that most philosophers can only dream of, if this debate was not so painfully divisive. The intensity of interest had everything to do with who posed the question and why. The questioner was Samantha Vice, a white philosopher from Rhodes University in South Africa, and her question “How do I live in this strange place?” addressed one of the most contested issues in post-apartheid South Africa. The point of her article was to ask if, and how, white racialized subjects could live “well” in a society marked by a history of extreme racial inequality.\(^1\) By this, Vice meant something different than material comfort. To live well, for her, meant to live virtuously: to be seen and to know oneself as morally good.

Published in 2010 in the *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vice’s article was subsequently written about in 2011 in the newspaper *The Mail & Guardian* by black political commentator Eusebius McKaiser, who publically praised Vice for exhibiting a sincerity, courage, and honesty that is all “too rare in the South African academy.”\(^2\) McKaiser’s summary of Vice’s article, in turn, generated hundreds of comments and many follow up opinion pieces and letters to the editor, which together became known as

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1 Samantha Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2010): 323–342. As Vice writes, “I want to ask how white people can be and live well in such a land, with such a legacy. [...] What is the morally appropriate reaction to one’s situation of privilege? Is it possible to live well? (232).”

the “Whiteness Debate.” In the process of having her work publically discussed and dissected, Vice herself received death threats, a philosopher who defended her was physically assaulted, and Vice was accused of being self-hating, attention-seeking, stupid, and neurotic. Criticism was also extended to Eusebius McKaiser.

Why such vitriolic responses? Vice’s central concern was with how white South Africans, including herself, might morally rehabilitate themselves in light of the harmful social, political, and psychological effects of whiteness in South Africa. By whiteness, Vice means a social location of structural privilege that allows people marked as “white” to have their perspectives, values, and ways of being understood as normative and desirable. This social position further allows white people to accrue individual and collective political, economic, and cultural advantages vis-a-vis others, at both local and global levels. Maintaining these advantages requires the reproduction of a social system of power relations whereby material and symbolic contrasts between whites and others are constantly reinforced through the deployment and manipulation of racial categories. Non-white racialized individuals and groups are simultaneously limited in exercising political, social, economic, and cultural agency and subject to the devaluation of their perspectives, values, and ways of being by virtue of being raced.

Vice’s conclusions regarding how whites might best morally respond to a situation where they benefit from and are complicit in the perpetuation of racial injustice

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5 Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 324.
6 For an excellent analysis of the social, epistemological, moral, and political implications of this system, see Charles W Mills, The Racial Contract (New York: Cornell, 1997).
subsequently sparked much academic and public debate. Her first claim that whites were morally damaged by their whiteness, and morally damage others, led to a second claim that whites must take responsibility for addressing the negative impact of “habitual white privilege” by examining the effects of whiteness on the self. She argues that to be white in South Africa is to enjoy unfair advantages due to apartheid and colonialism and the persistence of white supremacy in the post-apartheid present. Given the damage this state of affairs causes, whites must go about making amends and repairing damage done.

The first step in the path to living well for Vice is, paradoxically, to accept discomfort, guilt, shame, and regret for one’s whiteness. Whites must acknowledge that their sense of self is “inherently tied to structures of domination and oppression,” and seek to move from the comfort and security that white privilege brings towards the lived discomfort produced by the knowledge that their advantaged position in society depends on the harm of others. In short, white South Africans must begin to “see themselves as a

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8 Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 325.

problem,” which requires constant self-vigilance and examination regarding one’s thoughts and behaviors.\(^\text{10}\)

The assertion that whites, regardless of their intent or actions, should acknowledge collective guilt and complicity in violent systems of racial domination, and see their daily actions and habits as problematic due to the ways these reinforce white dominance, did not go down well with many white South Africans who are defensive about being connected to the apartheid past and tend to think of themselves as “basically decent.”\(^\text{11}\) In the post-apartheid era, many whites have embraced a color-blind ideology, which asserts that 1) the end of apartheid made everyone equal and thus white comfort, wealth, and success cannot be considered unmerited or morally suspect and/or 2) the best way to move forward as a democratic nation and from the apartheid past is to stop thinking about, and drawing attention to, race.

Vice suggests that in light of recognizing one’s morally compromised position as a white person living in South Africa, white subjects should subsequently engage in work on the self in order to change the self.\(^\text{12}\) If one accepts the basic premise of Vice’s argument regarding whiteness, this conclusion should not be that controversial. However, what landed Vice in further hot water was her assertion that, due to the moral harm posed to self and others by whiteness, ethical work on the white self needs to be conducted largely in private. This means that whites should refrain from public or political action as a means of trying to morally rehabilitate themselves. The most morally responsible thing

\(^{10}\) Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 326, 328.
\(^{11}\) Vice, “Why My Opinions on Whiteness Touched a Nerve.”
\(^{12}\) Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 331.
that white people can do in light of their whiteness, according to Vice, is adopt a stance of public silence and political withdrawal.

In Vice’s view, the danger posed by white participation in the public sphere due to their whiteness is simply too great. Thus, in order to minimize harm to others and also make space in the public sphere for black subjects to continue to “remake the country in their own way,” white South Africans should practice humility and refrain from contributing diagnoses, opinions, and solutions regarding South Africa’s present and future. As she puts it, the best way to express a commitment to racial justice if one is white is “through a commitment to a private project of self-improvement, recognizing the moral damage done to the self by being in a position of oppressor.” White South Africans can practice “care” for the self and others and avoid reinforcing the “very habits

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13 As Vice puts it, “Whites have too long had influence and a public voice; now they should in humility step back from expressing their thoughts and managing others” by refraining from “airing one’s view on the political situation in the public realm” and refusing to offer “diagnoses and analyses” (335). Thus, the most ethical thing a morally compromised white person can do in South Africa is 1) recognize their morally problematic position 2) engage in direct work on the self by cultivating a stance of active silence/listening and humility and 3) work to reduce the harm posed by their presence in the public sphere (335). In her view, whites should instead focus their time and attention on cultivating the virtues of humility and adopt a stance of active listening (silence) to difficult truths spoken by black South African in the public sphere.

Vice offers many compelling and carefully argued philosophical reasons for her controversial conclusions, which draw heavily on Aristotelian notions of ethics and virtue. Vice believes that virtue is to be cultivated in private and also that a space needs to be preserved for an ethical domain and self that is not reducible to the political, an assumption I also adopt in this study but without drawing the same kind of hard line between ethics and the public sphere that Vice does. My approach to ethics understands ethics as fundamentally intersubjective. Therefore, the cultivation and pursuit of the good can never be a solely private affair. Because ethics are intersubjective, they always have social and political implications.

Inevitably, some of the nuance was lost in the resulting media and online firestorm, but Vice’s conclusion drew the ire of many armchair and professional critics who saw this response as 1) paradoxically the height of white privilege because of the way it reinforces white solipsism through a sharp distinction between the private and public/political and the ways its prescriptions actually serve to further insulate whites from the kind of engagement that could challenge their power/privilege and whitely ways of being 2) well-intentioned but misguided given the need for concrete measures of redress and development in South Africa, which demand white resources and participation and/or 3) much hand-wrting about nothing because whites, and the rest of South Africa, needed to “move on” and the best way to do this it to move away from, rather than encourage greater reflection on, race.

14 Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 334–35.
from which one is trying to become disentangled” most effectively by refraining from public discourse and political debate.\footnote{Ibid., 334. Though Vice does seem to leave space for some degree of white sociopolitical engagement in professional or semi-private spaces, such as the academy (hence, her article), she is rather unclear on what constitutes public discourse or the public sphere.}

**Whiteness and Ethics**

Vice ultimately argues that until significant self-transformation occurs among whites, individually and collectively, one cannot say yet that whites have earned their right to enter into public debates and shape policy about the future of South African life, nor can whites sink into the unreflexive comfort of South Africa as home.\footnote{Ibid., 337.} Though her argument proved controversial, I am convinced that Vice is not the only white (or black) South African seeking to answer the question “How do I live in this strange place?” Indeed, the reasons Vice’s article elicited so much public controversy was that it touched on some of the most urgent and unanswered questions in democratic South Africa, such as: How, and in what ways, should white subjects seek to make amends for their complicity with, and benefit from, systems of white supremacy? How should South Africans understand the nature of citizenship and their moral responsibilities as citizens? Are white subjects welcome in South Africa? Do they belong in/to the nation simply by virtue of living in South Africa—or does a valued place in South Africa, and on the African continent, require something more? If, as Vice puts it, whites need to “earn our place in a country and continent that is not simply ours,” how might such work be imagined, pursued, and legitimated?\footnote{Ibid., 332.}
Such questions are at the heart of this study. Based on ten months of fieldwork (2013–2014), *The Ethics of Whiteness: Race, Religion, and Social Transformation in South Africa* is an ethnographic study of how progressive white Christians living in Johannesburg sought to engage with histories of racism, contemporary racial inequality, and calls for racial redress in post-apartheid South Africa. My interlocutors were not professional philosophers. Rather, they composed a loose network of pastors, teachers, social workers, and entrepreneurs. However, each of them had chosen to embark on a quest for white self-transformation. This journey was motivated by a deepening awareness of white racial and economic privilege; a deepening awareness of the impact of the apartheid and colonial past on the post-apartheid present; and a deepening awareness of the suffering experienced by so many black South Africans as a result of racialized poverty and inequality. As a result, most had chosen to intentionally live and work in majority black spaces—a decision considered by many South Africans to be transgressive in light of extreme social and spatial segregation—and were actively invested in building experimental social and spiritual communities that sought to bridge race and class divides. They further sought to cultivate lives of simplicity, service, and “downward mobility,” which were intended to challenge conservative white middle class social norms.

My interlocutors were all involved with faith-based organizations engaged in community development work in poor, black communities in and near Johannesburg. However, the central claim of this study is that such organizations, while seeking to improve the lives of black subjects, were primarily organized around quests for white ethical transformation. Living and working in black spaces, I suggest, provided these
white progressive Christians a means of moving away from segregated spaces of comfort and privilege and allowed them to form intimate relationships with black peers/colleagues that might have not emerged otherwise. Such relationships were particularly important because they offered a dialogical and intersubjective means through which to reflect on and problematize their whiteness—a confluence of race, class, culture, and religion.

As is well known, in 1994 South Africa emerged from decades of apartheid: a brutal system of racial segregation designed to maintain the dominance of the minority white population vis-à-vis a black majority. While most South Africans welcomed (at least publically) the arrival of a democratic South Africa, a mood of anxiety, and even pessimism, percolated among the privileged white populace. No longer could the advantages attached to white skin—advantages forged through Dutch and British colonialism and legislated under apartheid—be taken for granted, leaving many white South Africans to perceive their future as precarious and unstable. In response, many whites chose to leave South Africa, emigrating to the United Kingdom, North America, New Zealand or Australia, or they actively withdrew to spaces of racial and cultural familiarity.\(^\text{18}\).

Those whites who remained in South Africa tended to try to maintain elite cultural norms and economic hegemony through spatial and social segregation. In South

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Africa, as is the case elsewhere, wealthy suburbs, churches, and to some extent universities have become key sites for the preservation and defense of privileged ways of life in the midst of wider public discontent and contestation. As Johnathan Jansen insightfully points out, churches have been particularly effective at maintaining cultural, racial, and economic divides due to the voluntary nature of religious organizations. In particular, Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Churches have emerged as a site where Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans can maintain and preserve their culture, language, and way of life, which has faced a variety of pressures in the post-apartheid era, and find a space of retreat from critical voices that might call attention to the need for racial redress or raise disquieting questions regarding the role of the DRC in legitimating apartheid.

While undoubtedly, the increased blurring of spatial, religious, and racial lines is a feature of both the late apartheid and early democratic years, the fact is that most whites in South Africa still associate primarily with other whites, despite living in a majority black context. When they do mix with blacks, it is usually within a suburban social environment, either through the common but highly unequal labor relationship of white employer and black domestic workers/gardener or in relation to the small but growing percentage of upwardly mobile blacks who have benefited from increased education and opportunities after apartheid. The growth of suburban charismatic-evangelical megachurches serves as one social space for upwardly mobile black South Africans and middle-class white South Africans to interact (including Afrikaners who wish to downplay their ethnic identities in a post-apartheid era). In many cases, these churches have sought to demonstrate openness to South Africa’s racial and cultural diversity and

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pay lip service to Africa’s special role in the world, but their leadership structure almost always remains predominantly white; their worship style, politics, and economics framed in terms intelligible to Westernized elites; and their services are typically conducted in English. White cultural norms, as well as white symbolic and material capital, continue to exercise disproportionate influence in these religious communities, despite increased diversity.

Persisting social and material segregation between white and black, rich and poor, was something my white interlocutors were deeply concerned with. Convinced that the future of South Africa would ultimately be shaped by black, not white, South Africans, they viewed segregation as a problem in that it isolated, or alienated, whites from knowledge of the lived realities and cultures of the majority of black South Africans. White isolation, in their view, was dangerous, not only because of the apathy and moral indifference it cultivated in response to black suffering, but also because it failed to prepare whites for the likely ongoing relativization of white power and privilege vis-à-vis black South Africans. 20

In addition, as progressive Christians, they were deeply influenced by a form of Social Christianity that equated authentic Christianity with a commitment to social inclusion and equality based on the theological idea that black and white are equally valuable in the sight of God. Thus, rather than defaulting to “whitely” patterns of emigration, isolation, and withdrawal, or simply being content with working on the self in private, my interlocutors chose an alternate path: one which sought to embrace shifts in power relations, and one which sought to conduct the work of white self-transformation

alongside, and in dialogue with, black South Africans and wider public debates regarding poverty and inequality.\textsuperscript{21}

Though the groups and individuals I studied rejected Vice’s conclusion that the work of white transformation necessitated political and public withdrawal, they did agree with her that listening to discomforting truths from black subjects about racial oppression and practicing the virtue of humility was a prerequisite for white self-transformation, even if they did not always live up to these ideals. Another sentiment they shared with her is the sense that “South Africa is a strange and morally tangled place to live in.”\textsuperscript{22}

The strangeness that Vice refers to, and the strangeness that my interlocutors often articulated, was a sense of living in South Africa, and on the African continent, and yet not experiencing a full or meaningful sense of belonging—a right to belong—due to the fact of one’s whiteness. Yet the quality of strangeness to South African life goes much deeper and is often shared by progressive whites and blacks alike. To be alive in South Africa today is to be alive in a time of transition—a time of both possibility and peril. Most of my interlocutors were under fifty, meaning that they either emerged into adulthood at the end of the apartheid or during the height of the anti-apartheid struggle. Along with many other younger South Africans, one can argue that they now find themselves part of what Adam Habib calls a “suspended revolution.”\textsuperscript{23} Though South Africa achieved formal democracy in 1994—and this has brought rapid social and political change—many of the racial and economic divides that characterized apartheid


\textsuperscript{22} Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 323.

still remain. This reality has produced rising discontent among many black South Africans, particularly young blacks, who feel themselves suspended between a white supremacist past and a hoped-for future marked by racial justice, equality, and inclusion.

This hoped-for future is commonly referred to as the new South Africa. In this new South Africa, race will cease to be a defining factor in South African life because the political, economic, and psycho-spiritual conditions that produced racial stratification will have been addressed and redressed. Particularly, wealth and opportunity will no longer be correlated with whiteness and the racial categories produced by whiteness.

With the long awaited arrival of democracy, many progressive South Africans expressed hope of creating an equitable and non-racial South Africa that was qualitatively different from the apartheid past. Many also assumed that these changes would occur naturally through the peaceful transfer of political power from white to black and through the leadership of the black majority African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela. They were wrong. The strangeness of South African life thus emerges from the fact that, on the one hand, one cannot deny that there has been, and continue to be, significant shifts in power relations, and on the other hand, the arrival of a new South Africa seems perpetually delayed, even if the optimism and hope produced by this vision has not yet fully dissipated.

A New South Africa and an Alternate Christianity

My interlocutors were deeply influenced by the optimistic vision of a new South Africa, especially the vision put forward by iconic leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, having experienced the euphoria of the early transition years. The dream
of a non-racial South Africa was something Nelson Mandela proclaimed in 1964 that he was prepared to die for,\(^{24}\) and it is a dream that many of my interlocutors were attached to—despite some worrying that the horizon of opportunity may be rapidly closing due to the re-entrenchment of white cultural and economic hegemony and the persistence of black suffering. In addition to wanting to help build the new South Africa, they were also deeply dissatisfied with the perceived homogeneity and insularity of white suburban life and religion: the ways the majority white suburban Protestant churches seemed ill-equipped to deal with pressing social, moral, and political concerns. This dissatisfaction, in turn, had sparked new questions regarding the social implications of their Christian faith. Or as one informant put it, what it means to follow Jesus in Johannesburg. Such questions shaped their perception of Jesus as a figure who challenged the dominant systems and elites of his day while caring for the most vulnerable and marginal in society, and called them to do likewise.

The Anthropology of Ethics and the Ethics of Whiteness

At the heart of this study is what I call the ethics of whiteness—the beliefs, practices, and values that motivated those I studied to engage in efforts to think and act differently than conservative white peers. I develop the notion of an ethics of whiteness in conversation with theoretical concerns and methodological approaches found in the anthropology of ethics: a growing field which seeks to explore the empirical and qualitative dimensions of ethical life. I am particularly influenced by the Foucauldian

approach to the anthropology of ethics developed by James Faubion, but I also draw on the work of other anthropologists of ethics and anthropologists of Christianity, including James Laidlaw, Jared Zigon, Cheryl Mattingly, James Bielo, and Omri Elisha, to discuss and analyze the various ethics that I encountered during my research.25

A Foucauldian approach to the anthropology of ethics understands the study of ethics to be the study of how individuals and communities seek to transform themselves over time. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s work, particularly *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*, in *The Anthropology of Ethics*, Faubion argues that ethics is primarily about becoming a “subject of a qualitatively distinguishable sort:” one who can claim to be worthy of the moral esteem of others.26 Rather than a set of prescriptions, ethics, for both Faubion and Foucault, describes a process of self-making. It is materialized in the process and practices by which individual and collective actors move towards a particular “subject position,” the pursuit and consummation of which Foucault describes using the Greek word *telos*.27 The realization of a particular telos, or mode of being, occurs through ethical work (*askēsis*), directed at whatever parts of the self, or extensions of the self, are deemed in need of attention and intervention.28

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28 *Askēsis* involves a variety of practices or techniques referred to by Foucault as technologies of the self. For further discussion, see Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 223–51.
Ethics, in this view, not only involves a relationship between the self and a given set of rules, norms, values, ideals, and traditions—a mode of subjectivation—but also a relationship with others. Because ethical frameworks, values, and ideals are always negotiated and defined intersubjectively within a particular social and historical field, Faubion in particular advocates paying special attention to the role of others—as both objects of ethical concern and as pedagogues—in the process of self-making. Additionally, because self-making is an intersubjective process, one must pay close attention to how ethical norms are subject to adaption, change, legitimation, and reification.

The ideals and practices of self and social transformation that I discuss throughout this study were very contingent on the beliefs and values of both black and white South Africans as well as larger social contexts, histories, and experiences. As such, I do not argue that there is one overarching ethics of whiteness. Rather, I hope to show that there are multiple ethics of whiteness at work in South Africa. In other words, there are multiple practices, values, and ideals that come to bear on the problem of whiteness, just as there are multiple ways that religion played a role in shaping the individual and collective ethics of those I studied.

While the groups and individuals I studied were often critical of religious institutions, and in some cases hesitated to identify as Christian, a central aim of this study is to show how my interlocutors drew from a number of sources in order to develop

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29 Foucault defines the mode of subjectivation this way: “the way in which an individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practices.” Foucault, The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2, 27. Elsewhere he states that the mode of subjectivation is “the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations.” See Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 264.
an eclectic form of Christian spirituality that spoke directly to their particular social, political, moral, and religious concerns. Among these sources was 1) a history of multiracial religious and political activism in South Africa, 2) liberal Protestantism and its emphasis on civic engagement and social development, and 3) the Emerging Church Movement, an Anglo-American movement that begin in the late 1990s in opposition to conservative white evangelicalism suburban middle-class life and quickly spread to South Africa. I discuss each of these sources in depth in the chapters to come. Ultimately, I argue that the confluence of these various movements allowed my interlocutors to understand themselves simultaneously as political activists, development workers, and Christian revolutionaries who were engaged in the work of building a new non-racial, democratic South Africa where white and black subjects alike could find a dwelling place.

Such analytic work remains important because, as anthropologist Omri Elisha argues in his study of socially engaged evangelicals in the United States, the pursuit of virtue by “people of faith” need not be seen as an expression of “radical individuality,” even if expressed in highly individualized and idiosyncratic ways. The ideals, practices, and values that inform the moral ambitions of people of faith are “inherently social in their inception” and “rooted in cultural practice.”  

30 Because white subjects in particular often think of themselves in highly individualized terms, it becomes all the more important to place the efforts of my white interlocutors within a wider social, political, and historical context and to emphasize the intersubjective nature of their ethics.

30 Elisha, Moral Ambition, 1.
The advantage of taking an anthropological approach to religiously-inspired ethics, versus a theological or philosophical approach, is that it is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It attends to the ways that ethics are imagined, embodied, pursued, and enacted, as opposed to focusing on ethics as a matter of cognitive belief. It also reveals the social, historical, and empirical dimensions of normative religious and theological claims. By adopting an anthropological approach, for example, my research demonstrates how social ideals drawn from Social Christianity of liberal Protestantism, Black Theology, and the Emerging Church Movement shaped the everyday actions of those I studied, even if my participants were not always explicit aware of these connections.

Religion, Humanism, and the Ethics of Whiteness

The deep implication of religion in South Africa’s history of colonialism and apartheid is well known.31 Perhaps less well known, but still widely studied, is the role of religion in shaping the anti-apartheid struggle and the modes of ethics and activism that accompanied this struggle, particularly black-led responses to racial injustice and conceptualization of a South Africa beyond apartheid.32 Yet, there has been surprisingly


little analytic attention given to the role of religion in shaping post-apartheid debates about race, whiteness, and the new South Africa or in the shaping of white ethical subjectivities. Moreover, while the relationship between religion and white supremacy has been vigorously debated within the study of Black Religion as well as Black Theology, explicit attention to the relationship between white racialization and religion has received limited attention within the broader field of Religious Studies, especially in contexts outside of the United States. This research gap has consequences. Not only does it allow the role of religious institutions, traditions, and practices in systems of white supremacy to remain opaque, it also leaves unanswered the empirical question of what resources religion might offer to white subjects seeking to transform themselves and their communities. This study responds to this gap by placing the efforts of the white racialized subject and its efforts to transform the self (and the role of religion and spirituality in these efforts) at its center. Building on historical and anthropological studies that reveal the entanglement of whiteness and religion in the conquest,


colonization, and marketization of southern Africa, I emphasize the role of religion in shaping white responses to post-apartheid racial inequality and privilege.  

Religion surfaces in many ways in this study. For my interlocutors, it was most often an explicit object of critique and resource for ethical transformation. Yet, there is a way in which many of the various modes of social engagement that I discuss throughout this study could be termed religious, whether explicitly identified as such or not. If one takes, as I do, the study of religion to be a study of how people make meaning in the world in relation to what they consider to be ultimately transcendent and/or good, then one could argue that the line between ethics and religion becomes quite blurry indeed. This was something that Foucault instinctively grasped: often using very similar language to describe spirituality and ethics.

In addition, Foucault helpfully provides a means of grasping the historical and conceptual linkages between ethics, religion, and the creation of what has come to be known as the modern West: an imagined community and well as a way of conceptualizing space and time that has deeply shaped South Africa’s past and present. Especially in his text The Courage of Truth, which I turn to in my final chapter, Foucault links ancient Greek and Roman ethical and philosophical systems to both the evolution of Christianity and revolutionary politics. In a similar way, I show the ways that Christian social and spiritual ideals have significantly shaped the more secularized discourse and values that surround the ideal of, and struggle for, a non-racial and democratic South

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35 For more on how this study fits into studies of whiteness in South Africa and in relation to Religious Studies, and an extensive literature review, see my appendix.
36 Michel Foucault, “What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?,” in Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism, by Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson (Chicago, Ill. [u.a.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 207.
Africa. I use Foucault’s term “spiritual politics” or the term “prophetic politics” to capture the ways in which ethics, politics, and social change often intersect in South Africa’s past and present. Influenced by activist traditions, my interlocutors believed strongly that one must prefigure, or serve as an exemplar, of the kind of change one desires to see in the world.

For conceptual clarity, nonetheless, I prefer in this study to use religion, spirituality, and ethics in distinct ways unless otherwise noted. Religion refers to institutionalized, or routinized, form of meaning-making, which are often but not necessarily tied to strong metaphysical and doctrinal systems. Spirituality refers to a more eclectic and individuated process of meaning-making. Again, the lines between these terms remains rather fluid as they often express two sides of the same coin that is religion. Finally, I use the term ethics to refer processes of individual and collective self-transformation. As I will demonstrate, such processes often involve both religion and spirituality.

The kind of religion that my informants practiced shares many features with Anthony Pinn’s descriptive definition of religion, and particularly his description of religious humanism in his 2015 book of essays Humanism. Though most of my interlocutors identified as Christian, at a practical level, the individuals and groups I studied arguably reflected many of the basic humanist principles that Pinn sets out in his text. Not only did they regard the struggle to transform the self and the struggle to fight injustice to be “the stuff of worthy existence,” but they were also motivated to undertake this struggle as a result of a quest for deeper life meaning and purpose.37 This quest for

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deeper meaning—or something more—was both personal and communal, and it involved a commitment to both individual and social transformation.

The vision of self-transformation and social change expressed by my interlocutors, while connected to a notion of Christian commitment, also emphasized, as Pinn does, human accountability and responsibility and expressed a “controlled optimism that recognizes both human potential and human destructive activities.” Where they differed in relation to Pinn’s definition of humanism was on confining “the workings of theistic sensibilities and inclinations” to private life. As with many forms of humanism that have emerged within the African context, they were not necessarily concerned to “detangle public life from theistic experience” in the ways that humanists living in the Global North often are, though they expressed various degrees of ambivalence or suspicion regarding overt expressions of Christianity in the public sphere.

Perhaps the best way to describe the religiosity of my interlocutors is in terms of what Pinn calls “shadow humanism:” a form of humanism that neither fully rejects Christian metaphysics nor embraces many of its traditional elements. Pinn discusses shadow humanism in relation to African American religious traditions that sought to develop theological positions “over and against” dominant presentations of the “Gospel message.” In a similar way, my interlocutors sought to develop their religious ideas and practices in opposition to white suburban and conservative Christianity—targeting in particular suburban Dutch Reformed churches and evangelical-charismatic megachurches.

38 Ibid., 3.
39 Ibid., 1.
40 Ibid., 15.
41 Ibid., 16.
What my interlocutors shared with many African American (and black African) shadow humanists, moreover, was an understanding of humanity as created in God’s image, thus holding profound moral worth and weight, and a prioritization of Jesus as the symbol par excellence of this merging of the human and the divine. They further understood the divine to be known and found in ordinary and everyday struggles for transformation and human progress. Expressing a this-worldly religious orientation, they understood, as Pinn says, “the significance of God’s movement in the world in terms of historically situated transformation—the increase of life options and greater possibilities for human existence.”42 In this way, ideas of salvation, liberation, and human progress for my interlocutors were often blurred. In turn, this inspired a form of Christian spirituality that posited a concern with collective, communal transformation over and against a form of religion that prioritizes individual advancement, wealth, and the salvation of souls.43

The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa

A large portion of this study is spent highlighting the conceptual and historical connections between the progressive white Christians I studied and broader Western religious, ethical and social movements, especially the relationship between my interlocutors and Emerging Church Movement, particularly its most socially and politically engaged stream known as new monasticism (chapter three and four), and the ancient Greco-Roman ethical tradition of Cynicism (chapter four). I also explore the

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42 Ibid., 17.
43 Ibid., 17–18.
relationships between their development model and changing discourses regarding humanitarian and non-profit work since the Cold War (chapter two and four).

In addition to exploring the historical and transnational social, religious, and philosophical movements that shaped the ethics of my interlocutors, this study also highlights the lived practice of religion within the postcolonial African context. In describing the Christian humanism of my interlocutors above, for example, I would be remiss if I did not emphasize that many of the dynamics I describe and analyse throughout this study are those that scholars who study religion in Africa have long noted: the blurring of the material and the spiritual and the refusal of a distinction between the secular and the religious, which often leads to an intermingling of the political with the religious, as well as the visible presence of religion in Africa’s public sphere. This is due, in part, to the associations made between modernity, progress, and Christianity, in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. For many Africans, this means that modernity, if understood as a project of social, political, and moral transformation, has rarely been conceived as outside of, or inimical to, religion or spiritual forms of power. As Smith puts it, religion, past and present, has been seen by many Africans as “having the power to radically change social life and history.”


postcolonial political movements have drawn on the power of religion to attempt to generate “new, inclusive social and political orders,” often trying to resurrect “indigenous” African religious concepts, practices, and traditions, but also often drawing on various Christian traditions, including Pentecostalism.47

The multiracial urban context of Johannesburg, where the rise of the black middle and upper classes has been most keenly felt by white populations, therefore provided an ideal and dynamic research location to think through shifts in white racial and religious subjectivity in light of a postcolonial African context. In many ways, Johannesburg is one of the key urban sites in South Africa that has experienced Africanization, prompted by the end of apartheid and the opening of South Africa to global markets. In chapter four, I spend significant time unpacking how efforts to transform whiteness intersect with Johannesburg’s Africanizing urban landscape, including questions of gentrification, white flight, slum tourism, and social responsibility.

In emphasizing the movement of religion across borders (national, racial, economic, and theological), and particularly the role of new media technologies and social networks in the emerging forms of religion I witnessed, this study joins a host of recent studies that have wrestled with the relationship between religion and globalization on the African continent and in the African diaspora.48 Following the end of the Cold War, dynamics of globalization have brought much change to the African continent and religion in Africa. One dimension of this change has been the increased role of

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NGOs/FBOs in social development on the African continent. Many scholars have drawn a link between the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s, which curtailed the power of the postcolonial state to advance social and economic development and slashed public services, with the increased NGO/FBOing of the African continent. In the postcolonial period, non-profit and faith-based organizations have once again become the primary provider of goods and services, taking on a role quite similar to that of mainline and evangelical Protestant missionaries during colonialism. The combined effect has been that religious organizations, in the form of development-oriented NGOs, new religious movements, and Pentecostalism, have taken on many state functions, including the distribution of social goods and services. The rise of mass communication technologies, combined with the weakening of national borders, has further created a situation of “deterritorialized religion,” in which religion, and the social and political movements it inspires, moves across and between countries and continents.

The Postcolonial Predicament

Increased economic hardship and external dependency combined with the simultaneous internal weakening and strengthening of the postcolonial African state has produced many social, political, and ethical complexities, many of which Elias Bongmba discusses insightfully in *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa*. Bongmba describes how, on the one hand, most postcolonial African states have found themselves unable, limited, or unwilling to provide goods and services that enhance individual and collective human flourishing (as well as environmental flourishing). On the other hand, postcolonial

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governments have focused their energies primarily on consolidating power and resources in the hands of an elite few, often at the expense of ordinary Africans who have found their quality of life to be steadily declining.\textsuperscript{51}

While Bongmba does not deny the negative effects of colonization or neo-colonial economies, he does insist that postcolonial elites be held responsible for the ways in which they have extended and deepened the modes of domination perfected by colonialism and apartheid. Postcolonial political praxis in Africa has created a social climate where, according to Bongmba, “agony thrives.”\textsuperscript{52} In this regard, South Africa, once considered to be “extraordinary,” seems to be so often a rather ordinary African postcolony.

The conditions of violence, domination, and death that Bongmba, along with postcolonial theorist and fellow Cameroonian Achille Mbembe, have described as characterizing life in the postcolony are increasingly evident in South Africa.\textsuperscript{53} While not the focus of this study, when conducting my fieldwork, two significant political events in South Africa occurred, which point towards a bleaker postcolonial future than my interlocutors might have hoped. The first was that Nelson Mandela—in many ways, the iconic embodiment of the hope of a new South Africa—died in December, 2013. The second was that the President Jacob Zuma, who was under investigation for the improper use of public funds to massively upgrade his private residence, was relected as the leader of the African National Congress and the president of South Africa in 2014. While no doubt due in part to the systems of patronage that Zuma has cultivated during his

\textsuperscript{51} Bongmba, \textit{The Dialects of Transformation in Africa}, 9.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 1.
presidency, Zuma’s re-election, however, also demonstrates that the majority of South Africans are not yet willing to turn their backs on the hope that the ANC will make good on their many promises to build a more just and equitable South Africa for all.

Chapter Overview

Despite the hardships faced in South Africa, which are a product of both the structures of domination produced by apartheid and colonialism as well as decisions by a new generation of elites to maintain these structures of domination, I join Bongmba in insisting on a kind of Afro-realism when reading the postcolonial South African context. This realism is rooted in a dialects of pessimism and optimism that refuses to write off South Africa and the African continent and many struggles for social transformation and racial justice that have emerged, both past and present, while also refusing to ignore the ways in which elites, particularly white but also black, have contributed to human suffering in South Africa.

My argument proceeds as follows. In chapter one, I chart the discourses and symbols that allow the utopian idea of a new South Africa—understood as non-racial and democratic—to emerge as a compelling social and spiritual ideal during the apartheid and early post-apartheid period, and the implication of this ideal for considering the ethics of whiteness. Drawing on philosopher Charles Mills’s detailing of the racial contract and postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe’s analysis of post-apartheid South Africa, I consider the ways that figures like Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, along with many other religious activists, helped forge a vision of a new South Africa during the anti-

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apartheid struggle. While perhaps no longer as ubiquitous as it was during the transition years, I argue that the ideal of a new South Africa continues to infuse contemporary debates in South Africa regarding race, inequality, and the possibility/impossibility of white ethical subjectivity with a sense of moral urgency. My subsequent chapters show how, in one form or another, the ideal of a new South Africa was one that my white interlocutors implicitly drew on in to frame their own unique and religiously-inspired visions of self and social transformation.

In chapter two, I discuss the case of a Christian faith-based organization in South Africa that I call RISE. The organization was founded by a white Afrikaner couple in 2006 and was part of a larger umbrella organization based in the United Kingdom. At the time of my research it worked primarily in a black mixed-income suburb near Johannesburg, but was expanding to the inner city and other sites around the country. RISE was composed of a core group of committed black and white individuals who sought to develop and reproduce a form of social and spiritual community that bridged race and class divides. They further sought to cultivate and model the kind of individual and collective moral dispositions perceived as necessary for building a new South Africa. I argue that for the progressive white Christians affiliated with RISE and their wider network, RISE provided a space through which to elaborate and experiment with alternate white subjectivities. To make this case, I examine RISE from three perspectives. The first perspective deals with RISE as a faith-based development organization, including the history, values, and beliefs that animated RISE as an organization and their particular approach to development. The second perspective explores how the Emerging Church Movement, an Anglo-American reform movement focused on critiquing white
middle-class suburban life and conservative evangelicalism, influenced RISE members and their ethical values and practices. Finally, I consider how white RISE members were shaped by, and responsive to, post-apartheid questions regarding race, whiteness, and social change.

Chapter three focuses primarily on interviews conducted with two white RISE members, Nina and Pieter, in order to offer a more fine-grained analysis of the kinds of subjects attracted to the RISE way of life. Nina, a long-term member of RISE, lived outside of Johannesburg in the community where RISE began. Pieter, a more recent member, lived in the suburbs and worked with RISE in the inner city of Johannesburg. Both came from middle-class, Afrikaans, and Dutch Reformed backgrounds. Both expressed a desire to consciously reject conservative Afrikaans culture, and both sought to critically reflect on their identities as white Afrikaner Christians. I show how their involvement with RISE was part of a much larger process that revolved around questions of moral responsibility in the face of social injustice as well as their racial, cultural, religious, and economic identities: a process they described as waking up. Drawing on anthropologist Jarret Zigon’s Heideggarian inspired concept of an ethics of dwelling, I argue that, for Nina and Pieter, finding one’s place in a shifting and disorienting material, emotional, and racial landscape became an ethical task that required experimentation with values and practices that encouraged, rather than discouraged, social engagement. Not surprisingly, such experimentation also produced various tensions and complications, both for themselves and others.

Ultimately, I use the narratives of self offered by Nina and Pieter as lines of flight to explore how white self-transformation remains entangled with questions of futurity,
authenticity, and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. In response to felt white middle-class isolation and alienation, Nina and Pieter sought to deepen a sense of being at home within South Africa’s various cultural worlds. This quest spurred experimentation with, and adoption of, values and practices that encouraged, rather than discouraged, engagement with racial, cultural, and economic difference. Such efforts stand in contrast to the ways many white South Africans try to resolve a similar sense of loss and alienation through strategies of emigration, withdrawal, and isolation.

In my fourth and final chapter, I turn to a different group in inner city Johannesburg whose nuclease was formed by a white English-speaking couple, Nigel and Trish Branken. Similar to RISE, the Brankens had set up a non-profit organization called Neighbors to coordinate and facilitate community development work in the inner city neighborhood of Hillbrow, and they had also relocated to Hillbrow from the suburbs, along with their five children. This relocation had garnered much media attention due to the perception of Hillbrow as the most “dangerous” neighborhood in Johannesburg and a history of urban white flight from the city center. Social workers by training, both Nigel and Trish used their extensive contacts and networks among white, wealthy, and suburban South Africans to try to promote greater social engagement and facilitate the sharing of wealth, resources, and knowledge from rich to poor.

The Branken family’s vision of social transformation depended largely on a philosophy/theology of relationalism: they understood personal and interpersonal relationships as the key to lasting social change, and also sought to build a world where people were valued more than things. In this regard, they shared much in common with RISE. Yet, the Branken family stands out because in many ways their ethical praxis
provides an example of a radicalization of the kinds of subject positions and ideals discussed in chapters two and three. Unlike most RISE members, Nigel and Trish, and especially Nigel, were unapologetically political and public in their discourses, critiques, and modes of social engagement, as evidenced by their strategic and willing use of media and social media to draw attention to issues of moral concern in urban Johannesburg. I link this emphasis on publicness to what Michel Foucault calls “the courage of truth”—a critical, militant, and confrontational mode of being that connects ethical practices of self-examination with aspirations to change the world.55

Conclusion:

The ultimate aim of my research is to show how religious commitments are translated into ethical, social, and political practice and vice versa. In the midst of rapid social change, my interlocutors sought to visibly challenge values and norms central to white middle class life and religion, while also participating in debates and dialogue with black South Africans regarding the new South Africa. They did so because they perceived these norms as harmful to their own social and spiritual well-being, and also because they saw these norms as working against the achievement of racially transformed South Africa. In linking religion with the moral questions posed by white privilege and racial injustice, I do not contend that religion contributes to the best (or only) form an ethics of whiteness can take in South Africa. Rather, my intent is to describe, map, and understand the role of religion in the lives of those I studied, and I do so by placing the

ideals, values, and practices of my interlocutors alongside other social movements and moral projects that similarly seek to address questions of moral responsibility in the face of poverty and inequality. Through this approach, I seek to show that the actions of the progressive white Christians I studied, while not unproblematic, were legitimated through an assemblage of secular and religious ideals that framed authentic South African, human, and Christian identities as bound up with sacrifice and struggle. These actions were also intended to produce an alternate white subjectivity: one that understood the future of white flourishing within a democratic South Africa as dependent on demonstrated, voluntary commitment to the common (non-racial) good.
“Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all of humanity will be proud. Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity’s belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious future for all.”
——Nelson Mandela, 1994 Inauguration

“Experimentation may be necessary to save South Africa.”

Chapter One: Towards a New South Africa

Introduction

On February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela, soon to be South Africa’s first democratically elected president, set forth a bold vision of what it could mean to live in a nation that guaranteed “peace” and “freedom” for all. In his first speech after being released from twenty-seven years in prison, Mandela minced no words. “Today,” he said, “the majority of South Africans, black and white, recognize that apartheid has no future.” After paying tribute to those who had already sacrificed so much in the struggle against apartheid, including religious leaders, the working class, and members of various opposition movements, he then called on his supporters to continue their struggle to bring a “new” South Africa into being.\(^5\) For Mandela, the utopian ideal of establishing a new South Africa, a democratic and non-racial South Africa, would require nothing short of a mass social movement.

In extolling the vision of a non-racial South Africa, Mandela envisioned the creation of a political, economic, and social order where one’s “life options,” to use Pinn’s term, would no longer be correlated to one’s position in a racial hierarchy structured by whiteness.\(^6\) In 1990, Mandela was clear: the struggle for a new South Africa was far from over. First and foremost, the white nationalist government remained in power, and neither Mandela nor those who supported him would be satisfied until the apartheid regime had ceded total control of the state and black South Africans received


\(^6\) Pinn, Humanism, 14.
the franchise. Further, Mandela noted that the conditions that initially necessitated armed struggle in 1961—political repression, racialized poverty, millions homeless and unemployed, families destroyed—were far from sufficiently remedied. Such remedying, it seemed, would be the true test of a successful democratic transition and the arrival of a non-racial order.  

Perhaps because Mandela at this stage did not yet speak as the next president of South Africa, implicit in his brief remarks was an activist notion of democratic citizenship. While Mandela clearly understood the arrival of democracy to mean the extension of formal, or legal, citizenship to all who lived in South Africa, by extolling the virtues of sacrifice and struggle on behalf of a new South Africa, he also offered vision of citizenship that went far beyond simply attaining legal and political recognition by the state. A full and enduring sense of belonging in/to the nation, Mandela implied, would come only to those individuals (of all races) who were willing to sacrifice and struggle in order to bring this new, democratic nation into being—an ongoing moral project.

Mandela’s vision of a non-racial, democratic South Africa, inclusive of all who strove to bring it into being, was initially welcomed by many black South Africans active in the anti-apartheid struggle. Under the colonial and apartheid regimes, black South Africans had been denied citizenship, social belonging, and economic opportunity on the basis of their non-white status, and many were keen to distance their political project

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60 “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.” Notably, Mandela (later remembered as the world’s greatest peacemaker) refused to renounce armed struggle as a means of bringing a new political and social configuration into being.

61 Mandela, in the words of Arjun Appadurai, seemed to understand citizenship to be “an active and dynamic condition and not merely passive belonging to a territory, an ethnos, or a polity.” (121) An emphasis on active citizenship was, no doubt, shaped by centuries of attempts by black subjects living in South Africa to assert and claim full participation, belonging, and dignity in a county where those with power claimed their presence was conditional, temporary, and disposable. See Arjun Appadurai, The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition (London: Verso, 2013), 121.
from apartheid’s racial exclusion. In fact, a central part of anti-apartheid liberation discourse, especially in the 1980s, was the call to preemptively enact the shift from passive racialized subject to active non-racial citizen. As a result, many activists eagerly anticipated increased social and personal freedoms to define themselves upon the arrival of democracy. By publically promoting a kind of citizenship from below, before and after the formal end of apartheid, Mandela drew on these aspirations to frame citizenship in the new South Africa as both lived practice and emancipatory struggle.

To belong in/to the new South Africa required nothing short of the achievement of a new way of being.

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62 On the colonial distinction between citizen and subject, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Historian Ineke van Kessell describes how young black activists in the late 1980s saw their tasks as one of “making revolution.” She writes, “Making revolution’ implies a vision of a new social order. In the eyes of young activists, the old order was rapidly disintegrating. Moreover, the ANC and the UDF [United Democratic Front] had called upon the youth to hasten the hour of death by making the country ungovernable. In early 1986, UDF pamphlets with the slogan ‘from governability to ungovernability’ were circulating in Sekhuhuneland. Yet making revolution was a goal that clearly went beyond bringing an end to the already crumbling order. Amid conditions of disruption and destruction, building a new society in the present through community-based organizations and political structures became the ultimate mission of the youth. Not only did they perceive themselves as the vanguard of the liberation struggle, implementing the call to make South Africa ungovernable, they also saw themselves as purging society of forces of evil and actively constructing a new moral community.” Ineke van Kessel, “Beyond Our Wildest Dreams”: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 118.


64 For these reasons, I consider the creation of the new South Africa to be primarily an ethical project in the Foucauldian sense. As a voice of authority, Mandela gave permission to the public to transform themselves. Foucault understood ethics as “an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being” — a process of self-formation as a recognizable ethical subject within a specific socio-cultural and historical context. Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York; New York: New Press ; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1997), 282; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2*. 
More pragmatically, Mandela’s rhetoric of a new South Africa was intended to send a forceful signal to white South Africans that, within the new dispensation, a full sense of social and civic belonging could no longer be guaranteed on the basis of one’s whiteness and its attendant economic, cultural, and political privileges. Rather, the ability to claim a meaningful place in the nation would need to be actively earned on the basis of one’s commitment to the national “democratic revolution.” While white South Africans received legal citizenship though the negotiated constitutional settlement of 1994, what was at stake in the rhetoric of a new South Africa was the question of whether, and by what means, white South Africans could claim, and be recognized as part of, the moral and political community (the “nation” or “the people”) that had been forged through the struggle against apartheid. The promise of acceptance and inclusion in democratic South Africa, by virtue of one’s commitment to the process of social transformation, was intended to significantly sweeten the prospects of sociopolitical change for white South Africans. Most whites were fearful and apprehensive about shifts in power relations and deeply concerned about their future place in South Africa. The vision of white and black working together to build a new non-racial and democratic South Africa brilliantly invested the process of social and political transformation with historic and transcendent significance, and offered white South Africans a means of making a virtue out of necessity.

Unfortunately, by the time of my research in 2013–2014, most white South Africans had proven resistant to many of the sociopolitical changes envisioned by Mandela and the ANC. Most whites continue to regard the ANC government and its

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65 This phrase is subject to multiple and contesting interpretations, but it is generally understood to be the raison d’être of the African National Congress.
stated objective of national democratic revolution with fear and suspicion. Many also resist concrete policies of redress intended to improve the lives of black South Africans disadvantaged by apartheid, often decrying these policies as “reverse racism.” Simultaneously, many black South Africans have grown tired of waiting for the promised revolution to become reality. During the period that I conducted my fieldwork, I witnessed many examples of black South Africans once again taking to the streets to protest the social, political, and economic status quo.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from these dynamics that Mandela’s ideal of a new South Africa is devoid of contemporary moral, spiritual, and social significance. While perhaps no longer as ubiquitous as during the transition years, the dream of a new South Africa continues to haunt almost all contemporary debates in South Africa regarding race, inequality, and whiteness. As I will show in subsequent chapters, in one form or another, the ideal of a new South Africa was one that my progressive white interlocutors implicitly drew on in to frame their particular visions of self- and social transformation and to infuse these visions with a sense of moral urgency.

In this chapter, I seek to chart the discourses and symbols that allowed the ideal of a new South Africa—understood as non-racial and democratic—to emerge as a compelling social and spiritual ideal among activists during the apartheid and early post-apartheid period, before turning in subsequent chapters to how this ideal is related to the ethics of whiteness I encountered during my fieldwork. In part one, I explore how President Nelson Mandela linked the utopian ideal of a new South Africa to his sociopolitical vision of democratic change. In part two, I turn to former Archbishop of Cape Town Desmond Tutu and describe the ways he and other religious activists infused
the ideal of a new South Africa with theological and spiritual significance during the late apartheid and early transition years. Drawing particularly on postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe’s analysis of post-apartheid South Africa and Webb Keane’s discussion of a moral narrative of modernity, in my final section, I consider the ways that Mandela and Tutu, along with other black political and religious activists, helped forge a moral narrative of transformation in South Africa that opened up new ethical possibilities for black and white South Africans alike.

Spiritual Politics and the New South Africa

Much has been written about Mandela and Tutu’s role in the politics of nation-building. In this chapter, I take a different approach by considering the ways Mandela and Tutu linked their social visions of a new South African with an ethical vision of self-transformation, a pairing that continues to influence debates in South Africa regarding authenticity, citizenship, and belonging. I suggest that we can understand Mandela and Tutu to be part of a radical black political tradition that seeks to encourage a “politics of self-determination that is constitutive of alternative narratives and scripts of statehood” as well as alternate narratives of self. By weaving together Christian and modern ideas of agency and freedom with African communal/communitarian ideals, Mandela and Tutu helped generate a unique kind of spiritual politic that remains particularly appealing for

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66 Vineet Thakur, “Who Is a South African? Interrogating Africanness and Afro-Phobia,” *E-International Relations*, July 18, 2011, http://www.e-ir.info/2011/07/18/who-is-a-south-african-interrogating-africanness-and-afro-phobia/. Drawing on postcolonial African theorist Achille Membe’s work, Vineet Thakur to draw a distinction between nativism and Afro-radicalism, as two streams of black political thoughts. Nativism focuses on a romanticized African past and state of primary unity that has been lost through colonialism. It emphasizes and affirms African difference and presents it as the ontological opposite to a Western other that must be rehaboritized. Afro-radicalism, by contrast, views the past through a Marxist and nationalist lens. It critiques the role of colonialism and racism in depriving Africans of their agency through psychological and physical bondage, and it seeks to reclaim this agency by deconstructing ideas of absolute difference and promoting self-determination. See also Achille Mbembé, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 239–73.
progressive white subjects in light of anxieties and concerns about identity, agency and belonging in the democratic state.  

The term spiritual politics, or political spirituality, is a Foucauldian term that describes a situation where politics is not considered an obstacle to spirituality—understood as the cultivation of a certain mode of being—but, in Foucault’s words, “its receptacle, opportunity, and ferment.” In my usage, the concept of spiritual politics helps describe actions taken by a wide range of activists, religious and secular, who sought to align themselves with a shared vision of a non-racial, democratic new South Africa during the apartheid and transition years. I use the concept to emphasize that the creation of the new South Africa was understood as much more than simply the achievement of a new political configuration. Rather, the struggle for a new South Africa incorporated a deep yearning to discover something that lay beyond current material realities, and it represented an openness to a future beyond white supremacy. Similar to what Foucault observed in pre-revolution Iran, religious and secular traditions combined in South Africa to provided activists with resources to resist state power, rethink society anew, and, most importantly, pursue subjective transformation from passive racialized object to active non-racial citizen in anticipation of things to come.

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67 Foucault uses the term in his writings about the Iranian revolution. Spiritual politics is often translated political spirituality. Foucault, “What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?,” 209.
68 Ibid., 207.
69 I define this period as stretching from the 1940s, the era of the buildup for the apartheid state, to the end of the 1990s when Nelson Mandela concluded his presidency.
70 Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than at funerals of political activists, which often served as both religious rites and political rallies during the late apartheid years. Here, similar to what Foucault saw in Iran: religion became something “much more than a simple vocabulary through which aspirations, unable to find other words, must pass. It is today […] the form that the political struggle takes as soon as it mobilizes the common people. It transforms thousands of forms of discontent, hatred, misery, and desairs into a force. It transforms them into a force because it is a form of expression, a mode of social relations, a supple and widely accepted elemental organization, a way of being together, a way of speaking and listening, something that allows one to be listened by others, and to year for something with
To be clear, I am not suggesting that Mandela and Tutu are the sole creators of the utopian social ideal of a new South Africa or the various spiritual politics and ethics attached to this ideal. The many nuanced philosophical and theological threads that underpin this ideal are far beyond what can be discussed in a single chapter. However, I focus on Mandela and Tutu for two reasons. The first is historical. In many ways, Mandela and Tutu served as political and religious midwives to the birth of what was heralded by the world as a miracle: the arrival of a democratic South Africa. Due to an emphasis on peacemaking and democratic inclusion, Mandela and Tutu quickly became liberal icons in the West. Yet all too conveniently, they have been often treated in historical isolation from the radical black political and social movements that nurtured them, a tendency which deserves further scrutiny given the ways they publically tied their visions of social change in South Africa to wider African and black critiques of white supremacy.\footnote{Though unable to escape their iconic status, both insisted that their politics and ethics could not be separated from the local communities that nurtured them and to whom they felt a distinct responsibility.}

The second reason I focus on Mandela and Tutu concerns the problem of whiteness within post-apartheid South Africa. It is difficult to deny that Tutu and Mandela helped manage an incredible feat of transition. Both, in their own ways, played them at the same time as they yearn for it.” Foucault, “What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?,” 203. Desmond Tutu often served as the head of these funerals, connecting the deaths of those who had died in the struggle with the obligation of attendees to bring a fundamentally new society into being, which respected human rights and rejected the inhumane system of apartheid’s racial violence.\footnote{Nelson Mandela by no means endorsed peaceful protest without qualification, but generally the Western world has preferred to remember him as such: a “transformed” militant. Mark Gevisser has noted the ways in which Western leaders, for example President Bill Clinton, universalize Mandela, South Africa, and apartheid in order to bolster their own status and minimize the brutality of the apartheid system which bears uncomfortable parallels to their own contexts and policies. Mark Gevisser, “Strange Bedfellows: Mandela, De Klerk, and the New South Africa,” Foreign Affairs 79, no. 1 (2000): 173.}
a vital role in creating the social climate and providing the framing narrative that allowed for the relatively peaceful transfer of political power from a white minority to a black majority. This process required both of them to manage and respond to the fears and anxieties of white South Africans, especially those who forcefully and violently threatened to derail the democratic process, and it also required them to provide possible solutions to white South Africa regarding their future fate in the nation, always understood as both a political and a moral community.

As political and religious icons of the anti-apartheid struggle, Mandela and Tutu were uniquely positioned to use their public platforms to circulate and legitimate their particular visions of a new South Africa. Both worked tirelessly during the apartheid and transition years to mobilize South Africans of all races to accept their vision of economic, social, cultural, political, and spiritual transformation. By modeling behavior in line with their social, political, and theological visions, they intentionally sought to engage with white communities and to articulate to white South Africans the values associated with non-racial and democratic citizenship. In doing so, they willingly turned themselves into symbols of South Africa’s future: arguing through their discourses and actions that the path towards a new South Africa would emerge only through an openness to the other and an openness to history, and contrasting this with a dark vision of endless death, violence and mutual destruction.

_A Non-Racial Contract_

It is my contention that while Mandela and Tutu imagined the creation of a new South Africa to be a shared, or joint, project between black and white, they understood its creation to require different things from different people depending on how one had been classified during apartheid. White subjects, for example, were expected to cede political
power and work for social transformation in exchange for a deeper sense of belonging and acceptance in the emerging non-racial polity. Black subjects, on the other hand, were called to expand their conception of authentic South Africanness and/or humanness to include white subjects who had rejected apartheid in exchange for a defining moral and political role in the new non-racial order.  

While much could be said about these differences, my concern in this chapter is to show how Mandela and Tutu’s vision of a new South Africa offered white South Africans a chance to claim participation in the liberation movement and gave them permission to break with the apartheid and colonial past by joining the fight to overcome white supremacy. Put simply, Mandela and Tutu offered white South Africans a new racial contract—one much different in content than the one articulated by philosopher Charles Mills.

In his book *The Racial Contract*, Mills argues that modern Western societies are underwritten by a social contract that is racial in character. This contract, which needs the consent of and investment of social actors to function, creates a moral and political universe where full personhood and citizenship are ascribed to those classified as “white.” Those classified as nonwhite are ascribed a “different and inferior status,” even if formally granted the rights and responsibilities of citizens.  

Mill argues that the racial contract is synonymous with white supremacy or Whiteness (his capitalization). As Mills explains, pre-democratic South Africa provides an example of the racial contract in

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72 For black South Africans, who had long experienced the horrendous effects of white supremacy and colonialism, not to mention continued dispossession, this inclusive vision did not always match their interpretation of the liberationist impulse in African nationalism or Black Theology.


74 Ibid., 14.
its most overt form. Starting with the Union of South Africa in 1910, the “people” or the “nation” who invested the state with sovereign force were both “conceived and legislatively underwritten” as the white minority.\textsuperscript{75} When the National Party took over in 1948, South Africa subsequently bucked post-war trends in places like United States and Europe, which were moving towards more “de facto” version of the racial contract.\textsuperscript{76}

The anti-apartheid struggle posed a fundamental challenge to the racial contract, in South Africa, and also globally. Activists themselves were keenly aware of the global significance of their struggle, arguing that “the liberation of South Africa will serve to weaken the forces of international imperialism and racism.”\textsuperscript{77} In this view, the defeat and dismantling of apartheid’s racial contract would thus serve to encourage the defeat and dismantling of racism everywhere. What made the anti-apartheid struggle so significant, then, was that in anticipation of the future to come activists proclaimed themselves social, political, and moral coevals with white subjects. They did not wait for the formal end of apartheid to call into question the very terms of the racial contract set by the white supremacist state. Forged within the ferment of black politics and theology, concepts like non-racialism and \textit{ubuntu}, which both Mandela and Tutu often used, attempted to rewrite the terms of the racial contract before apartheid was even over. Black anti-apartheid activists in particular aspired to create the conditions that would give black South


\textsuperscript{76} Mills, \textit{The Racial Contract}, 73. Here, the boundaries of whiteness become more fuzzy to include nonwhite bodies that are willing to support the norms, values and ideals established by white supremacy, though apartheid South Africa also had elements of this version as well. What is key is that even in the more fluid versions of the racial contract, whites still resisted extending anything more than the formal recognition of nonwhites as persons and citizens (75). One could argue that South Africa is still struggling to move beyond a defacto racial contract in that whites tend to resist calls for greater redistribution and redress.

Africans an opportunity to define for themselves who or what constituted the moral and political community of the nation and also to determine their relationship to white South Africans. As a result, perhaps one of the most controversial and contested issues within the anti-apartheid struggle (and beyond) was in regards to the principle of non-racialism, because it seemed to imply a belief that white people may be able to repudiate the racial contract, if not globally than perhaps locally, by demonstrating one’s commitment to the oppressed majority. In what follows, I discuss the evolution of the principle of non-racialism within black political movements, and how this related to Mandela’s vision of a new South Africa.

Part 1: Nelson Mandela and the New South Africa

Few twentieth century figures were as influential as Nelson Mandela in creating a distinct political vision that combined social ethics and personal transformation. The ways in which Nelson Mandela seemed to merge the political and the ethical have led

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many to term him a political saint, a messiah or, in the words of South African political commentator Eusebius McKaiser, an “exemplar of excellence.” Such sentiments were on full display when Nelson Mandela died two months into my fieldwork in December 2013. While the designation of saint works to shield political figures like Mandela from criticism, the tendency to gravitate towards terms like

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79 Tom Lodge, “Nelson Mandela: Political Saint in a New Democracy,” in Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 1–18. In her innovative text, Saints and Postmodernism, Jewish philosopher Edith Wyschogrod considers briefly the narrative of Nelson Mandela as an example of a ‘political saint.’ Wyschogrod argues that saints are particular kinds of subjects: characterized by a heightened concern for the suffering of the other to the point of wounding or woundedness. In other words, saints are willing to risk their own corporeal existence and ‘expend’ themselves for the sake of the suffering other, often prompting extraordinary or excessive gestures of compassion (147). In addition, though they may focus on particular causes or individuals, saints are concerned with the ‘totality of human suffering,’ manifested in the particular (148). While non-political saints are marked by an excessive altruism, ‘political saints’ often tie their altruism in terms of a national or ethnic identity (153). This certainly was the case for Mandela in his early years as a political revolutionary; yet, as discussed, Mandela always connected the particular to the universal, inviting others to do the same, which is why Wyschogrod considers him an example of a political saint. In the transition years, Mandela modeled and performed reconciliatory actions with his oppressors, and he consistently affirmed the ‘humanity’ of these oppressors, while at the same time calling whites to live up to an authentic South Africanness that acknowledges the full humanity of blacks. In doing so, Mandela framed acceptance of political change as a moral good. In more technical terms, Mandela can be said as trying to convince white South Africans to “act in terms of communitas values” for the good of the nation. Communitas, as anthropologist Victor Turner defines it, is a social state marked by a sense of equality and reciprocity, a sense of transcendence of rank and hierarchy, a sense of being part of something greater than the self (177-187). See Edith Wyschogrod, Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2011).

80 Chidester quotes Rev. Jesse Jackson upon Mandela’s prison release. Jackson calls Mandela a “Christ-like figure” who had “suffered his way to power.” He went on to compare the release from prison to Christ’s resurrection and entrance into the public sphere as an apocalyptic “second coming.” Chidester, Shots in the Streets, 113.

81 Pubic Facebook post, December 5, 2014.


83 Many commentators have critiqued the application of the term saint to Mandela for political or theological reasons, despite the fact that the public continues to use these terms. Typically, the critique can be summed up in the words of Gary Younge: “[O]ne should not sanctify Mandela, for two reasons. First, to make him a saint is to extract him from the realm of politics and elevate him to the level of deity. And as long as he resides there, his legacy cannot be debated or discussed, because his record is then rooted not in his role as head of a movement, but in the beatified soul of a man and his conscience. Second, to make him a saint is to render all who come after a devil.” See Gary Younge, “Why Everyone Loves Mandela,” Nation 297, no. 1/2 (July 8, 2013): 11.
exemplar and saint to describe Nelson Mandela deserves further reflection. These terms are deployed because in the eyes of many, particularly white and Western observers, Mandela seems to confound Western or secular notions of politics. His politics often verge closer to how Michelle Foucault conceptualized spirituality and ethics: both understood at once as the attainment of a “certain mode of being” and as the process of self-transformation undertaken to attain that being.\(^{84}\)

Mandela’s political vision for a new South Africa was intimate and personal as well as African and universal in scope: it called South Africans to attain a certain mode of being and to embark on the processes of transformation needed to attain that mode of being. Though quickly routinized, and often understood as a plea for colorblind “reconciliation” at the time of its emergence, Mandela’s vision of a non-racial and democratic South Africa invited black and white South Africans to embrace a process of transformation irreducible to the granting of political rights and/or economic progress. Citing the need for an ongoing and broad-based “freedom movement” that would extend beyond the formal granting of universal/non-racial franchise, Mandela seemed to suggest that political “liberation”\(^{85}\) was only the start of a much larger process through which, as Foucault says, “liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must [then] be controlled by practices of freedom.”\(^{86}\)

For Mandela, the ideal of a new South Africa could only be reached when individuals used the freedom afforded by democracy to redress the inequalities and modes of domination produced by apartheid and colonialism and to promote the common

\(^{84}\) Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 294.

\(^{85}\) “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”

\(^{86}\) Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 283–284.
good. The concrete ways such freedom would be practiced was left open-ended, but in his public speeches, Mandela often took it upon himself to map the broad trajectory required to achieve a new South Africa, and publically sought to recruit others to this vision. In so doing, he detailed the kind of systemic conditions and categories that individuals and groups had to move away from and the kind they needed to move towards in order to concretize the quest for a new South Africa. Importantly, Mandela seemed to suggest different paths towards a non-racial future for white and black South Africans, legitimating the idea of what I call an ethics of whiteness.

Situating Mandela Historically

Before turning to how Mandela addressed the problem of whiteness, I want to situate Mandela historically in relation to black political thought. First and foremost, Mandela cannot be understood apart from his participation in and loyalty to the African National Congress. Founded in 1923, the African National Congress began as an effort by black elites to politically organize the “African” population living in the Union of South Africa. The goal was to challenge increasingly oppressive laws, including the notorious 1913 Native Land Act. The Native Land Act essentially demarcated over ninety percent of the territory that would form the apartheid state for private and public white ownership. The remainder of the territory was divided into “native” reserves that

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87 The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 through the joining of two British controlled territories (Cape Colony and Natal) with two independent Afrikaner republics (Transvaal and the Orange Free State), following the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The Union formed the basis of the South African state, which left the British Commonwealth in 1961 to become the Republic of South Africa. Historians often tie the dominance of British/English-speaking whites in the Union with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and efforts to “capture the state through ethnic mobilization” that culminated in the apartheid state. See Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, “The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism,” in The Politics of Race, Class, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, ed. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (London; New York: Longman, 1987), 2–3.
were deemed collective property of ethnic “tribes.”\textsuperscript{88} As Mahmood Mamdani points out, this was a classic colonial system of divide and rule, fostered by a rising demand for cheap labor.\textsuperscript{89} To live outside the reserves, as many Africans did, forced them to have their labor and movement highly regulated through a capricious pass system, which began in the nineteenth century.

The erosion of already limited black political and economic rights emerged at a time when British and Afrikaner settler populations were increasingly working together, despite their history of conflict, to form a cohesive white industrial power bloc. Thus, even as metropole British control was receding, powerful divisions between white and non-white populations were sharpening. When the Afrikaner National Party rose to political power in 1948, the apartheid system was born. Apartheid grafted a system of racial classifications onto existing colonial-based systems of segregation based on ethnic or tribal divides. The apartheid government instituted a strict hierarchy of segregation based on four racial categories (Back, Colored, Indian and White). These categories were sometimes called nations, indicating the apartheid government’s desire to create the illusion of imagined, tightly bounded—and most importantly separate—racial and ethnic communities.\textsuperscript{90} This illusion was sustained through indirect and direct forms of violence that pervaded every sphere of life. Under apartheid, where one lived, who one married,

\textsuperscript{88} Mamdani, \textit{Citizen and Subject}, 143–44. Gerhard Maré writes: The 1913 Land Act “gave legal force to more than two centuries of cumulative conquest, and legalized dispossession of land occupied and utilized by groups of people living in what became South Africa, in some cases with a presence dating back tens of thousands of years.” The Act also prohibited further acquisition of land by black people in provinces where this was still possible; and it has featured prominently in land restitution policies and actions in the country since the 1990s.” See “The Cradle to the Grave: Reflections on Race Thinking,” in \textit{The New South Africa at Twenty: Critical Perspectives}, ed. Peter C. J Vale and Estelle H Prinsloo (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 149

\textsuperscript{89} Mamdani, \textit{Citizen and Subject}. See Chapter 3 on Indirect Rule.

and one’s level of education and political representation were all determined by a complex, shifting legal rubric grounded in a political theology of white supremacy and racial difference.\footnote{Apartheid was inseparable from Afrikaner Christian nationalism, which saw nations and cultures as sovereign under God with unique callings and destinies. Therefore, protection and advancement of Afrikaner language, culture, religion, and economy was tied to Christian duty: service to the volk (people)/Afrikaner nation was understood as service to God. Marks and Trapido, “The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism,” 10–22. See also David Theo Goldberg, “A Political Theology of Race: Articulating Racial Southafricanization,” \textit{Cultural Studies} 23, no. 4 (July 2009): 513–37.}

At a local level, apartheid worked to prevent the majority of people living in South Africa from claiming ownership of and full belonging in South Africa. While considered residents, non-whites were brutally stripped of, and in some cases completely denied, nearly all the benefits of democratic citizenship, including freedom of movement and the franchise. Starting in the 1950s, apartheid legislation resulted in massive forced removals of non-white populations from racially-mixed urban areas to racially segregated “townships.” Those classified as Indian and Coloured had their political representation and voting rights reduced, and in 1970, the total and formal denial of blacks as South African citizens became complete. The “Bantu Homeland Citizenship Act” declared every black person a “citizen” of apartheid-instituted ethnic homelands and a permanent alien everywhere else, even if they had only ever lived in ‘white’ areas.\footnote{1970. Bantu Homelands Citizen Act No 26 - The O'Malley Archives,” accessed April 30, 2016, \url{https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01944.htm}. See also T. R. H Davenport and Christopher C Saunders, \textit{South Africa: A Modern History} (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 432.} In short, the apartheid system sought to take settler colonialism to its logical conclusion: to ensure that whiteness would become synonymous with total ownership of the land and its wealth.

It is within this ethnically and racially circumscribed system of white supremacy that Nelson Mandela developed as a political leader and thinker. Nelson Mandela played
a key role in the ANC during the apartheid years. He began his political career as part of a group of young leaders who formed the more radical ANC Youth League in the 1940s, which critiqued establishment leaders for their accommodationist tactics. Founded just prior to the instantiation of the apartheid state, the ANC Youth League is often credited with transforming the ANC from a small group of elites into a mass-movement for social change by pressing ANC leaders to adopt a more populist and militant tone that could speak to the plight of the African majority.

The Youth League’s main focus was on the widespread economic degradation and land expulsions impacting Africans. However, in the process, key philosophical questions surfaced. The key point of contention in the ANCYL was how to define the African “nation,” as well as the relationship between African nationalism, democracy, and political liberalism with its individualist emphasis on universal human rights.93 Influenced by the Pan-Africanism of the early twentieth century, and wary of white liberals and communists, youth leaders like Mandela argued that the ANC should form a unified and unapologetically black African majority political front that transcended particularistic ethnic or “tribal” identities. Thus, ANC youth leaders wanted to shift the locus of political agency from traditional communal structures to the rights-bearing African subject. It was African individuals seeking emancipation and equality who would

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give the ANC a popular mandate to push forward their political agenda of African liberation.

Despite initially restricting membership to Africans, over time a multiracial approach to social change developed within the ANC as emerging leaders like Mandela recognized the pragmatic benefit of forming alliances with other political organizations concerned with race and class inequalities. Throughout the ANC campaigns of the 1950s, a key part of the ANC platform became multiracialism: the acceptance that other races were in South Africa to stay and must be factored into its political agenda and values. In practice, this meant that the ANC was open to forming coalitions and alliances with other political organizations who opposed apartheid and were willing to coordinate their activities under African leadership, such as the white Congress of Democrats, the South African Indian Congress and the Colored People’s Congress. 94 Together, these organizations produced the prototypical document of the democratic South African Constitution—the 1955 Freedom Charter—which proclaimed: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.”95 The Charter went on to claim that every South African deserved full equality, regardless of color, race, sex, or belief, and that the wealth of South Africa would be shared equally among citizens.

A more open and inclusive stance of the ANC resulted in a split between moderates and more radical African nationalists who formed the Pan-African Congress (PAC). In contrast to the vision of the Freedom Charter, the PAC viewed South Africa, and by extension the state and economy, as “a country belonging to Africans by right of

94 For a discussion on white engagement with multi/non-racial politics of the 1940s and 1950s, see David Everatt, The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009).
first possession” and their majority population status. Though deeply committed to African liberation and self-determination, Mandela nevertheless joined with those in the ANC who accepted the reality that whites were here to stay in South Africa and saw the benefit of including white allies within a broad political front opposing apartheid and seeking democratic social change.

Making a distinction between white power and white people, Mandela summed up this view during his 1964 trial, “The ideological creed of the ANC is, and always has been, the creed of African Nationalism. It is not the concept of African Nationalism expressed in the cry ‘Drive the White Man into the sea.’ The African Nationalism for which the ANC stands is the concept of freedom and fulfillment for the African people in their own land.” While affirming his commitment to achieving freedom for African people living in South Africa, this view does not seek the curtailment of white freedom and fulfillment, provided that whites are willing to live in an African nation. Instead, what it seeks is the dismantling of South Africa as an exclusively white nation.

In 1969, the ANC put its conciliatory form of African Nationalism into practice by opening its ranks to all races (Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites) in efforts to presage the unified and non-racial future: a future where there would be “one nation” united against white supremacy, but in which Africans would play a leading role.

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97 “Nelson Mandela’s Statement from the Dock at the Rivonia Trial.”
98 Fiona Anciano, “Non-Racialism and the African National Congress: Views from the Branch,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 37. Though non-racialism was the ultimate end, in practice the ANC organized along a multiracial basis. Only after extensive debates did the ANC open membership to all races in 1969 and allow ‘non-African’s to sit on the Executive Committee in 1985. Multiracial alliances were crucial for both the 1951 Defiance Campaign, a mass campaign of civil disobedience targeting unjust laws, as well as in 1960 when the ANC formed its military wing *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, which endeavored to overthrow the apartheid government.
However, the ideological tensions between “Charterists” and more radical African Nationalisms persisted into the black politics of the 1970s. During this period, opposition political organizations like the ANC and the PAC were banned, and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) emerged. The BCM explicitly rejected political partnerships with white liberals, emphasizing the need for sociopolitical organizing around black identity, but at the same time, it expanded and redefined the category of black to include all those classified as non-white and sought to cast off “dependency and deference towards whites.”

In attempts to challenge apartheid logic, the BCM emphatically rejected apartheid’s racial categories of division, which were grounded in essentialist ideas about biological, ethnic, and cultural difference. Instead, the BCM affirmed a subjective identification with the more expansive and assertive category of black, often signified with a capital B, that spoke to both self-pride and a shared experience of oppression among South Africa’s oppressed racial groups—though what counted as authentic blackness was often a matter of debate within the BCM.

Non-racialism as it came to be articulated in the 1980s and 1990s took a different but related stance to the BCM. The United Democratic Front, in which prominent black religious leaders as Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak and Frank Chikane played a critical role, welcomed participation of whites who dis-identified with white power structures and were willing to embrace a mass democratic movement that was black led. Non-racialism, as articulated by UDF leaders, promised that whites too could be liberated from the violence of white supremacy in supporting the cause of black liberation and the

100 Daniel Magaziner documents these debates extensively in Magaziner, The Law and the Prophets, 2010.
quest for racial equality. The most salient symbolic line for the UDF was the one between an unjust minority (i.e. whites not part of the UDF) and illegitimate state, and the majority who opposed these (i.e. the “people”).

The UDF, sometimes seen as the internal wing of the ANC when it was banned, helped champion the cause of non-racialism and ensured its prominence during the transition years. The UDF strove to bring the new non-racial and democratic nation into being by providing as many people as possible a communal experience of historical agency and resistance. But even then, as I have sought to emphasize throughout this section, the philosophical underpinnings of non-racialism and the imagining of a new South Africa was always filtered through a decisively Africanist lens. This mode of framing non-racialism in terms the prioritized the contributions of African (and black) subjects were present in the earliest ANC Youth League documents and Freedom Charter that Mandela helped to shape.

The 1944 Youth League Manifesto, which Mandela helped write, was clear in stipulating that black Africans needed to reject white supremacy and claim full racial equality and self-determination: “Africans reject the theory that because he is nonwhite and because he is a conquered race, he must be exterminated. He demands the right to be a free citizen in the South African democracy; the right to an unhampered pursuit of his national destiny and the freedom to make his legitimate contribution to human advancement.” While emphasizing the special role that Africans had to play, the Youth

101 Implicitly, Ineke van Kessel points out, the UDF in promoting non-racialism placed themselves in opposition to more exclusive Africanist/PAC aligned political groups. Generally, these groups and their supporters were not included in the UDF’s notion of “the people” they represented. Kessel, Beyond Our Wildest Dreams, 4.
102 Marx, Lessons of Struggle, 15–16.
Manifesto worked to place Africans within a common and shared world, equals alongside Western Europeans and whites. In the process, young leaders like Mandela decisively rejected the ideology that “civilization”—and with it, ideas of historical, political, cultural agency—belonged solely to Western Europeans: “The African regards Civilization as the common heritage of all Mankind and claims as full a right to make his contribution to its advancement and to live free as any White South African: further, he claims the right to all sources and agencies to enjoy rights and fulfill duties which will place him on a footing of equality with every other South African racial group.” In the 1994 elections, the black-majority public overwhelmingly voted in favor of this vision of non-racial equality, giving a popular mandate to the ANC’s vision of racial revolution through democracy.

Mandela’s Sociopolitical Vision

Following his release from prison, Nelson Mandela embarked on an ambitious public campaign intended to persuade South Africans (and the world) of the need for the “end to a white monopoly on political power and the fundamental restructuring of our political and economic systems to ensure that the inequalities of apartheid are addressed and our society thoroughly democratized.” From 1990 to 1994, Mandela engaged in negotiations with the white apartheid government on behalf of the ANC, helping lay the groundwork for the first democratic elections.

The transition years were a particularly dangerous and fraught time. Many different groups with competing visions of the future vied for power. Conservative white

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104 “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”
Afrikaners, in particular, were fearful of the loss of power and what it would mean to allow other racial groups to have equal rights. A long-standing racist trope in white society was *Swart Gevaar* (Black Peril), which warned of chaos and white genocide should the African majority gain power. While ultra-conservative white nationalists threatened to violently subvert the political negotiations underway, various black groups vying for political hegemony also violently clashed, creating an explosive mix. In 1990, there was an average of 100 deaths a month due to political unrest, and this number continued to rise until 1993. Against this background, Mandela consistently maintained that the burden of responsibility for ending the cycle of violence rested squarely on the shoulders of the privileged white minority and the apartheid state. He warned again and again that the only path to avoiding racial civil war and mutual destruction was a radical restructuring of colonial and apartheid power relations in ways that benefited the African and black majority.

Yet at the turbulent dawn of democracy, white South Africans were not simply called to passively cede political power. Rather, Mandela called for something far more robust: the active building of a new South Africa. The building of a new South Africa represented simultaneously a political, social and ethical project aimed at overcoming white supremacy and establishing a non-racial democratic society. As political scientist Michael MacDonald writes, “Meant less as a description of South African reality than an ideal, non-racialism was a promise about the future and a measure of progress that remains to be made in the country.”

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meant the formal extension of political rights, responsibilities and privileges to every South African, regardless of race.\textsuperscript{107} As a social project, moreover, the ideal of a new South Africa sought to go beyond simply the formal legal or juridical extension of political rights. The creating the new South Africa involved the fundamental transformation of institutions and systems that had historically privileged a white minority at the expense of a black majority. But perhaps most importantly for this study, building the new South Africa represented an ethical project in that it promised individual and collective emancipation from state-imposed racial categories and hierarchies and in that it prioritized human agency in the quest for social change.

In his many speeches, Mandela outlined the key principles and values that informed his vision of the future: a future where the apartheid system, and the economic and social destruction it had caused, would come to a definitive end. This future would come as a result of a mass social movement committed to peace, democracy and freedom for all.\textsuperscript{108} Already in 1964, at the landmark Rivonia Trial, Mandela shaped the contours of this hoped for future: a future where the “African” people would be part of the government and have a stake in the laws by which they were governed; the removal of legislation designed to preserve white supremacy; and a sharing of material resources that prioritized the collective good over the individual. In short, he imagined a future where “Africans” would have a just share in the whole of South Africa, a future where they

\textsuperscript{107} As a political project, sociologist Heribert Adam discusses the new South Africa as a colorblind, liberal, modernist project to build a civic nation not based on ethnic/racial and religious nationalism: “the ideology of non-racialism rejects an ethnic nation in favor of a civic nation, based on equal individual rights, regardless of origin, and equal recognition of all cultural traditions in the public sphere. The civic nation is based on consent rather than descent.” Heribert Adam, “The Politics of Ethnic Identity: Comparing South Africa,” \textit{Ethnic and Racial Studies} 18, no. 3 (July 1, 1995): 459.

\textsuperscript{108} “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”
would have “security and a stake in society” and no longer be denied the benefits of full citizenship on the basis of race. As far as he was concerned, this was the “only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all.”

Far from proposing a moral equivalency between white and black South Africans under the guise of democratic universalism, Mandela proposed different roles for white and black South Africans in helping to achieve and lay claim to the new South Africa. This differentiation is important because it continues to shape contemporary debates about the status and role of white South Africans within the democratic nation. Though emphasizing values of mutual sacrifice and shared struggle in order to ensure lasting peace and justice, Mandela made clear that if white South Africans were to have a place in South Africa’s future, they would need to demonstrate proactive engagement and solidarity with those who had been oppressed. In particular, whites would need to place the collective well-being of the nation (or the people) over their individual self-interest by voluntarily sacrificing their economic, political, and cultural power and supporting state-sanctioned policies of redress.

Following his release from prison in 1990, Mandela continually invited and welcomed “freedom-loving” and “peace-loving” whites to break with the apartheid system and join the black majority in the “shaping of a new South Africa.” In doing so,

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109 “Nelson Mandela’s Statement from the Dock at the Rivonia Trial.”
113 “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”
he went out of his way to emphasize that their struggle was not against white people as individuals but against a system of white supremacy that maintained racial inequality and produced “systemic inhumane violence.”\textsuperscript{114} Any white person who opposed this system and the violence it produced would be welcomed and included within the democratic revolution. In this way, Mandela seemed to promise that South Africans of all races could find dignity and belonging through the very process of forging the new, democratic nation, provided they were committed to ending “white monopoly on political power” and to a “fundamental restructuring of our political and economic systems to ensure that the inequalities of apartheid are addressed and our society thoroughly democratized.”\textsuperscript{115} Despite benefitting from centuries of racial oppression, white South Africans were invited by Mandela to join this process, and they were promised that, by doing so, they too could find their “home” in the freedom movement.

Mandela’s message of inclusion was strategic and pragmatic. Mandela needed white power-brokers to feel secure enough to cede political power without violence. But the message also seemed to offer white South Africans an unprecedented opportunity to redefine their individual, social, and political identities. Mandela suggested that whites who were willing to oppose the material and symbolic basis of apartheid could find a “home” in the New South Africa through their participation in an ongoing “freedom movement” and through commitment to the principles of democracy, non-racialism, and


\textsuperscript{115} “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”
a united (rather than ethnically/racially segregated) South African nation-state.\textsuperscript{116} In other words, Mandela offered white subjects the chance for national and social inclusion within the new South Africa on the basis of their political solidarity and moral action. At the same time, Mandela never wavered from the principle that Africans and blacks should play a central role in defining the terms of the future to come. White South Africans were called to actively embrace processes of social transformation, but the future would not be their prerogative to unilaterally define. Rather, the suffering endured by black subjects entitled them to lead the “irreversible” march towards freedom and justice.\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{Afro-universalism}

The political, social, and ethical vision that Mandela represents has been termed Afro-universalism by Vineet Thakur. Afro-universalism “bases itself on the belief that an oppressive past gives the oppressed a rational outlook as well as a moral mandate to actively pursue liberation for all: the ultimate universalism. In other words, a history of racial oppression makes Africans natural adherents and proponents of an idea of a truly non-racial post-colonial society.”\textsuperscript{118} Such a view understood black South Africans as having a historic opportunity to lead the creation of a non-racial socality previously unseen in the history of Western modernity.

\textsuperscript{116} Mandela, “Nelson Mandela’s Address to Rally in Durban”; “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.” In a 1990 speech in Soweto, Mandela addressed white South Africans directly, saying: “A new South Africa has to eliminate the racial hatred and suspicion caused by apartheid and offer guarantees to all its citizens of peace, security and prosperity. We call on those, who out of ignorance, have collaborated with apartheid in the past, to join our liberation struggle. No man or woman who has abandoned apartheid will be excluded from our movement towards a non-racial united and democratic South Africa.” Mandela, “Nelson Mandela’s Address to Rally in Soweto, 13 February 1990.”

\textsuperscript{117} “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison”; Mandela, “Nelson Mandela’s Address to Rally in Soweto, 13 February 1990.”

\textsuperscript{118} Thakur, “Who Is a South African?”
Importantly, the possibility of creating a non-racial future qualitatively different from the racist past entails and emphasizes significant psychological and material sacrifice, which is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Mandela’s Afro-universalism. As Thakur explains: “In the aftermath of colonialism, when the erstwhile racially oppressed—the Africans—are a majority, it is not only the former colonizer, or the white ruler, who is made to lose his privileges bestowed to him under a regime committed to maintaining a false sense of colour superiority; in fact, a greater sacrifice has to be made by the ‘Africans.’ For a non-racial society, the Africans have to first renounce their claims of a new racial order.”\(^{119}\) There are many ways to interpret what such a renunciation entails, but Mandela seemed to suggest that this meant refusing to dispossess and disenfranchise whites in the same way that blacks were dispossessed and disenfranchised under colonialism and apartheid.

As an idealist with a bent towards liberalism, Mandela seemed to believe that the moral superiority and conciliatory example of Africans and blacks, acting from a position of consolidated majority strength, would be enough to facilitate voluntary shifts in power relations. The strategic and moral need for blacks to embrace a politics of reconciliation during the transition years was made clear by Mandela in his pronouncement to black supporters in Soweto in 1990 that “our statements alone will not be sufficient to allay the fears of white South Africans. We must clearly demonstrate our goodwill to our white compatriots and convince them by our conduct and arguments that a South Africa without apartheid will be a better home for all.”\(^{120}\) Elsewhere, Mandela called on supporters to face and reject the “evil” of the racist past, so that future generations would

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Mandela, “Nelson Mandela’s Address to Rally in Soweto, 13 February 1990.”
not be tempted to repeat its systemic abuses. He further added that “there is nothing to fear from democracy. The African National Congress seeks no retribution.”\(^{121}\) Statements like this illustrate why Mandela is often praised by whites for his embrace of inclusion and reconciliation and criticized by more radical Africanists who regard him as prioritizing white fears and anxieties over the need to redress black pain and suffering at both a symbolic and a material level.

Certainly, Mandela’s Afro-universalism muddied the familiar conceptual waters of colonizer versus colonized, white versus black, and African versus Western, and opened up new questions and possibilities for these categories in the future. In the 1960s, Mandela spoke of the “African nation” as a social entity beyond the formal mechanisms of the state, which demanded sacrifice by black “Africans” to defend and preserve it in the midst of white supremacy.\(^{122}\) However, by 1990, Mandela’s concept of the nation and nationalism had greatly expanded. Here, commitment to the “African nation” was increasingly marked by one’s willingness to embrace a vision of sociality that is democratic and non-racial in character. An emphasis on sacrifice and struggle remains, but all are called to counter the “violence” of white supremacy, colonialism, and apartheid. The use of more expansive language suggests the possibility of multiple racial groups being included under the banner of a liberated African nation and a liberated African identity.\(^{123}\)


\(^{122}\) “Nelson Mandela`s Statement from the Dock at the Rivonia Trial.”

\(^{123}\) Upon his release from prison, Mandela stated: “the destruction caused by apartheid in our sub-continent is in-calculable.” It is in this context, that he called for the “violence of apartheid” to end decisively through mass action, which “can only culminate in the establishment of democracy.” “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”.
Mandela’s evolving Afro-universalism also downplayed revolutionary violence as the preferred path to self-transformation and social transformation in favor of democratic process and voluntary social change. In 1964, Mandela entered his sentence of life in prison as a committed African nationalist who was willing to take up arms in order to bring a new democratic nation into being and to resist white domination. As Elleke Boehmer argues, during this period, Mandela’s life fit into a genealogy of romantic nationalism that has roots in the French Revolution and appears in many forms during anti-colonial struggles in Africa. In this narrative, the nation is imagined as an idealized self, the ultimate expression of the “spirit” of a people, which demands the ultimate sacrifice.\(^{124}\) Within a romantic vision of nationalism, expenditure of the self is glorified, and violence is seen as sacrificial and liberatory.

After his release from prison, however, Mandela increasingly linked revolutionary values of struggle and self-sacrifice with the peaceful transition of power and the establishment of a non-racial democracy that would put an end to the “violence of apartheid.”\(^{125}\) While Mandela never renounced violence as a tool for resisting state-sanctioned white supremacy, he did seem to believe that lasting peace and stability would only come when individuals across the racial, cultural, and ethnic spectrum voluntarily renounced autochthonous claims to power, and instead ground the rights and responsibilities of citizenship on the basis of shared values and a shared vision of the future. This required black and white alike to expand notions their notions of self and


\(^{125}\) “Nelson Mandela’s Address to a Rally in Cape Town on His Release from Prison.”
community beyond the strict racial exclusivity and ethnonationalism of the apartheid past.

In effect, Mandela’s Afro-universalism asked black and white South Africans alike to sacrifice the need for racial/cultural comfort in exchange for the chance to share together a “spiritual and physical oneness” with a ‘common homeland.’”

At his inauguration Mandela stated: “We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity— a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.” This proposed social contract, or covenant, looked towards a utopian future where every person would have freedom to “fulfill themselves,” unhindered by racial oppression. In making this case, Mandela reinforced non-racialism as central to the ideal of a new South Africa. Mandela also legitimated the idea of ascribing authentic (South-)Africanness to white subjects on the basis of political, social, and moral action.

Mandela’s Legacy

Mandela’s Afro-universal vision continues to provoke public debate regarding the conditions for social and national belonging within the post-apartheid period. While this vision has been far from uniformly accepted for a variety of reasons, it has produced a social space where terms such as African or citizen are open for debate and contestation. For many, what remains extraordinary about Mandela’s political leadership in the tumultuous and bloody transition years is that he managed to move South African national identity away from its previously exclusive connection to whiteness. This

126 “Statement of Nelson Mandela at His Inauguration as President.”
127 Ibid.
happened politically and legally in his insistence on the universal franchise (one person, one vote), and also at a social level in terms of what counts as a “good” or “authentic” citizen in South Africa, even though the philosophies he espoused had historical precedent in the Freedom Charter.

Mandela spoke often about an open-ended “freedom movement” that would strive to fundamentally reshape the kinds of power relations and subjectivities that had characterized South Africa’s modern history as well as the global system of white supremacy. He was not shy about detailing where he hoped this freedom movement would ultimately end. In his 1999 State of the Nation address, marking the conclusion of his presidency, he suggested that South Africans could serve the whole of humanity by contributing to the creation of a “new world order.” South Africa would serve as a global example of a society turning away from the violent “abyss” of racial inequality to forge a “common belonging” and “shared destiny” together.128 Of course, Mandela continued to note that this task imposed a special responsibility on privileged white South Africans. Whites were called to embrace social change, including economic redistribution, in order to free themselves from “the mire of hatred, despair and cynical longing for a past that shall never return.” Mandela concluded by saying, “the dismantling of apartheid is liberating us all, oppressor and oppressed alike, disadvantaged and privileged, to be the people we really are.” Here, Mandela clarified yet again that the dismantling of apartheid and the creation of a new South Africa was not a one-time event but an ongoing process where social transformation paved the way for new ethical subjectivities. Importantly, white South Africans would need to demonstrate their conversion to a political

imagination that prioritized the suffering and oppression of black South Africans in order to earn their true place in the nation.

Part 2: Desmond Tutu and the New South Africa

In my previous section, I suggested that Nelson Mandela articulated a form of spiritual politics during and after apartheid that presented the quest for a new South Africa as both a political and an ethical project aimed at allowing black and white South Africans to ultimately free themselves from the racialized systems that had defined them. In this section, I discuss how Desmond Tutu, one of the most prominent religious figures in South Africa, also contributed to the vision of a new South Africa. During the decades that Nelson Mandela was imprisoned (and the ANC was banned), Tutu emerged as one of the most visible black critics of apartheid. Moving into the public eye during the 1970s and 1980s, alongside the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement and Black Theology, Tutu helped advance the moral argument against apartheid and contributed to the vision of a future where black South Africans would no longer be denied full personhood and dignity within the moral and political community of South Africa. In the aftermath of apartheid, Tutu moved from being an icon of resistance to an icon of the transition, leading the nation in a process of trying to unearth and face the violence of the past through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was only through facing the horrors of apartheid, Tutu proposed, that white and black could be joined in communal bonds of reciprocity and equality.
Situating Tutu Historically

Trained as a theologian and ordained as an Anglican priest, Desmond Tutu began to publically articulate his political, social, and moral vision for future change within the most violent and repressive period of apartheid. Beginning the late 1970s, the white government engaged in a massive campaign of overt and covert “security” measures, including torture, assassinations, illegal detentions, and other gross human rights abuses. The militarization of South African society was justified through the same logic as apartheid: as something necessary to preserve white privilege and security in a sea of blackness. In 1956, President Verwoerd argued that apartheid was necessary to “prevent the swamping of the White community” by black political, social and economic power.\footnote{Quoted in Nancy L Clark and William H Worger, \textit{South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid} (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 59.}

As such, the “White” nation had a right to self-preservation and protection of its interests. Actions like forced removals of blacks from so-called white areas, were therefore morally justified.\footnote{It is estimated that from the mid-1950s to mid-1980s, 3.5 million Africans were removed from ‘white’ areas. See Nancy L Clark and William H Worger, \textit{South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid} (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 65.} Following the banning of the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress in and the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, South Africa increasingly morphed into a police state. In general, the white public, especially conservative Afrikaners, interpreted the rise of black power in South Africa, and African independence more broadly, as an existential threat to their privileged existence. In media and public discourses, Africa and Africans were associated with forces of darkness and death, and any compromise on the part of white leaders was seen as paving the way for white destruction and extermination.\footnote{Pierre Hugo, “Towards Darkness and Death: Racial Demonology in South Africa,” \textit{The Journal of Modern African Studies} 26, no. 4 (1988): 567–90.} Such fear translated into a massive build-up of security...
apparatuses, media censorship, and, by the end of the 1980s, the virtual occupation of townships by military forces.132

During this time, Desmond Tutu continually reminded the white public (and the world) that South Africa was dangerously poised between two alternatives. Echoing Nelson Mandela, Tutu told whites: “You have to decide which way you want to go. It is possible in our country to choose the path that leads to a new and more open society—a society that is more just, where people matter because they are created in the image of God. Equally, it is possible to choose the road that leads to our destruction, because it is the road of injustice and oppression.” The only option for avoiding a “bloodbath” was “real change.”133 Elsewhere, Tutu cited the blunt adage: adapt or die.134 The national crisis provoked by apartheid repression provided an “opportunity” for whites to take the side of justice, peace, and security, or else face the bloody alternative.135

What makes Tutu distinct from Mandela, however, is that while Mandela avoided public discussion of his own religious views, preferring instead to frame his politics in terms of a commitment to the African people and non-racial democracy, Tutu, along with other religious activists, explicitly linked his sociopolitical involvement to the moral demands of his Christian faith in order to challenge the apartheid regime on the very

132 Chidester claims that during State of Emergency in 1985, over 35,000 troops were deployed in 96 townships. Shots in the Streets, 101.
133 Desmond Tutu, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: A Collection of His Recent Statements in the Struggle for Justice in South Africa, ed. John Webster (London: Mowbray, 1982), 39. Rev. Alan Boesak said something very similar in 1980: “Basically, there are two alternatives facing our country. One is to continue with the present trend of modernizing and modifying white baaskap (overlordship) and eventually end up with a civil war; the other is to bring about radical and fundamental change which would inspire the search for a new society.” Allan Boesak, “The Black Church and the Struggle in South Africa,” The Ecumenical Review 32, no. 1 (1980): 20-21.
134 Tutu, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness, 56.
135 Ibid., 34.
theological and symbolic terrain it used to justify itself and its repression. This stance was particularly effective because the apartheid state rhetorically justified its policies and power on the basis of upholding “Christian values and civilized norms.” Rather vague in its attempts to craft a civil religion, the apartheid state nevertheless worked hard to reinforce a connection between the defense of Western “civilization,” Christianity, and the preservation of a (white) South Africa. Particularly during the Cold War, the apartheid regime cast itself as on the front lines of a global battle against radical black, Communist, and atheist threats.

Tutu and other black religious activists saw the struggle against apartheid as not solely political but also moral and theological. As thousands of people experienced arrest, detention, harassment, torture, and death, Tutu and other prominent black clergy such as Frank Chikane and Allan Boesak intentionally used the sacred symbolism attached to their religious offices to publically contest state power and lend a


138 Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, 289–90. As Ineke van Kessel concludes, the participation of churches and clerics in anti-apartheid resistance provided important publicity, access to global funding resources, and protection from repression. However, clerics and churches were also morally persuasive to those on the ground because they provided a counter-narrative to the religious discourse of the state. In particular, the United Democratic Front’s preference for boycotts and civil disobedience had “ample opportunity for expression of moral and spiritual appeals” because “these campaigns were aimed at identifying and isolating the forces of evil. By manifesting their purity, their nonassociation with evil, boycotters forged moral bonds. They took part in the battle between good and evil. Sharing a sense of belonging, not only to a political community but to a moral community as well, they knew both God and history were on their side” (290).

transcendent aura to the quest for black liberation. In challenging the apartheid system, they specifically called attention to the role of white Christians and Christian churches in supporting the white supremacist status quo. Religious institutions and beliefs were not separated from the state, but were considered the site of intense political struggle and symbolic contestation. Activists routinely protested against the devaluation of black life by staging dramatic and symbolic confrontations with the state, which was defined alternately as corrupt, evil, illegitimate, heretical, totalitarian, tyrannical, idolatrous, and oppressive.

Black religious activists were heavily influenced by Black Theology, a contextual theology that grew out of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa and Black Power movement in the United States. Black Theology resisted the identification of Christianity with whiteness and framed the struggle for black liberation in explicitly Christian terms. For those influenced by Black Theology, God stood unambiguously with black South Africans in their struggle for justice. This led most to affirm a “prophetic” politics that entailed: 1) taking a clear and total stand against apartheid 2) acknowledging the complicity of the church with conditions of suffering and oppression 3) using religious resources and sacred symbols to communicate that God is on the side of those struggling for justice, and 4) involvement in political campaigns aimed at bringing about structural change.141

140 For in-depth explorations of the role of religion in South African politics during the 1980s, see Borer, Challenging the State; Kessel, Beyond Our Wildest Dreams; Chidester, Shots in the Streets; Walsche, “Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice within Divided Churches.”

The insistence that God stands unambiguously with the majority of black South Africans facing the death-dealing violence of the apartheid state led to a spiritualization of political struggle. By framing their struggle in the “idiom of sacred time,” David Chidester notes, activists proclaimed the absolute sacredness of black life and called for obedience to a “higher law” beyond the state.142 For example, Rev. Allan Boesak went so far as to say that the refusal of black churches “to participate in the struggle constitutes an act of disobedience to God,” because this struggle was for the “liberation” of “God-given humanity.”143 In other words, one’s Christian faithfulness could only be measured by active participation in the struggle and one’s willingness to sacrifice for the struggle.

As religion scholar David Chidester has argued, the activists of the 1980s sought to challenge the apartheid state’s totalizing claim to god-like power: a power that allowed the state to render black bodies “subhuman” and thus killable because they were outside the moral and political community defined as a nation.144 To this end, Tutu was not afraid to use his symbolic power as a representative of the sacred to challenge the power of the state and draw attention to black suffering as human suffering. In declaring the apartheid government evil, Tutu endorsed extra-parliamentary means of enacting social change, including civil disobedience and economic sanctions.

Like Mandela, and so many other black activists at the time, Tutu made clear that he was “prepared to die for the cause of liberation.”145 For Tutu, this struggle for justice was part of witnessing for Jesus Christ and to the Christian faith, even “until death.”146

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143 Boesak, “The Black Church and the Struggle in South Africa,” 19.
144 For a longer discussion, see Chidester, *Shots in the Streets*, chap. 4.
145 Ibid., 112–13.
Never joining a political party, Tutu nevertheless played an important political role while serving as the Associate Director of the World Council of Churches (1972–1975), Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches (1978–1985), the first black Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg (1985), and the first black Archbishop of Cape Town (1986–1996).

In particular, his leadership in the South African Council of Churches (SACC) proved critical. At a time when black political organizations were officially banned, the SACC, an ecumenical para-church organization, served as a conduit for global anti-apartheid funding. The SACC sponsored a number of research and action campaigns around migrant labor politics, illegal dentations, and forced removals. They also played an on-the-ground role during the officially declared states of emergency in 1985 and 1986, offering shelter and legal assistance to victims and providing support to political detainees and their families. The SACC also supported the End Conscription Campaign, which protested the mandatory conscription of white men to serve in internal and external military/security operations. The threat that increasingly radicalized religious activists affiliated with the SACC posed to the apartheid regime became apparent in 1988 when President Botha ordered the SACC offices bombed.

nevertheless pointed out the hypocrisy of the Western Christians who praise martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a figure who resisted the Nazi regime, while prescribing pacifism to black activists. Tutu acknowledged that violence could be a necessary option if the apartheid regime maintained its authoritarian ways and closed off all routes for nonviolent action. By 1986, Tutu viewed economic sanctions, applied by the international community, as the only hope of a nonviolent alternative to violent revolution. See ibid., chap. 10; ibid., 101.

Many prominent religious leaders active in the SACC, including Tutu, were also active in the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Formed in 1984, the UDF was a broad political coalition aligned with the non-racial, egalitarian vision outlined in the Freedom Charter that sought to create a mass movement to end apartheid. Both the SACC and the Catholic South African Bishops’ Conference joined the UDF.\(^\text{148}\) As the tumultuous 1980s progressed, religious activists increasingly asked laity, clergy, and churches to initiate and support programs of civil disobedience on a mass scale as an expression of their Christian faith. In 1986, the SACC went so far as to designate a day to pray for the end of the tyrannical apartheid state.\(^\text{149}\) While maintaining an emphasis on preparing for a non-racial future and warning of the dangers of violence spiraling out of control, prominent black religious leaders like Tutu often took on the task, as Mandela had done in an earlier era, of explaining to the white public the reasons why violence was inevitable given apartheid oppression. They further proposed that, for both black and white, racial liberation and spiritual salvation went “hand in hand.” Christians were called to voluntarily take up “the cross to follow Jesus” by confronting the violent powers of the state in order to “open a way for a new society.”\(^\text{150}\)

\(^{148}\) Borer, *Challenging the State*, 55–56.

\(^{149}\) The SACC statement, timed in response to the 10\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Soweto uprising, said: “We have continually prayed for the authorities, that they may govern wisely and justly. Now, in solidarity with those who suffer most, in this hour of crises we pray that God in his grace may remove from His people the tyrannical structures of oppression and the present rulers in our country who persistently refuse to heed the cry for justice, as reflected in the Word of God as proclaimed through His Church within this land and beyond.” Quoted in De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 202. See also Borer, *Challenging the State*, 61.

\(^{150}\) Quoted in Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, 7.
Tutu’s Theopolitical Vision

For many anti-apartheid activists, the struggle for the new South Africa incorporated both religious and secular ideals to forge a particular kind of spiritual politics. Activists often understood themselves as “fighting a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness, cleansing society of evil in the search for a more harmonious moral order.” At stake in the 1980s, as well as earlier decades, were dramatic contests, not only between competing ideas of political change, but also between competing visions of the future and the question of who was worthy to belong within the “community” associated with the new order.\(^{152}\)

Ineke van Kessel observes that “the struggle in South Africa was not only about redefining the political and social order. It was also about competing concepts of the desired moral order.”\(^{153}\) Like other African anti-establishment movements, activists drew on “religious symbols, narratives and concepts to establish and extend their authority in the public sphere,”\(^{154}\) and to construct a “vision of redemption from racial oppression.”\(^{155}\) Desmond Tutu, while not unique in his orientation, played a significant role in branding the apartheid government as morally illegitimate and spiritually corrupt. Casting the political as a sphere of divinely inspired activity and moral struggle against injustice, his larger-than-life presence helped infuse the democratic movement with an apocalyptic and transcendent tone whereby clear lines between good and evil were drawn.\(^{156}\)

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\(^{151}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 6.


\(^{155}\) Chidester, *Shots in the Streets*, 12.

\(^{156}\) Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, 289.
By opposing an unjust and illegitimate state, Desmond Tutu understood his public role during apartheid as parallel to the Old Testament Jewish prophets who sought to expose and challenge the exploitation of the poor and weak by the powerful. Yet even in the darkest days, he continued to hold forth an alternate vision for the future. Tutu’s vision linked Christian ideas of ecclesial community with African communitarianism to present an ideal of the new South Africa as a spiritually joined family—the Rainbow Nation or Rainbow People of God—that transcended divisions of race, color, and creed without erasing difference. Tutu based his ultimate vision of justice for the oppressed on a belief in inalienable human dignity, which he rooted in the theological concept of humanity as created in the image of God. In so doing, he attached a sacred, axiomatic value to black life as human life, which paired well with Nelson Mandela’s and the ANC’s emphasis on the extension of universal democratic rights to black South Africans.

Ubuntu and Rehumanization

In the early 1990s, coinciding with Nelson Mandela’s ambitious campaign to democratize South Africa, Desmond Tutu embarked on his own campaign to reconcile and rehumanize South Africa. Here, his public role shifted from that of being a prophet, who opposed the violence of the illegitimate apartheid state, to being a spiritual healer who endeavored to bind the nation’s wounds. In addition to calling for the restoration of the God-given dignity of black South Africans, those who suffered disproportionately from state-sanctioned violence and political infighting, Tutu also underscored the need to

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157 Tutu spells out this familial vision of interdependence in *God Is Not a Christian* Chapter Two. He writes: “we are made for togetherness, for family. [...] We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation. [...] Our worth is intrinsic to who we are. We matter because we are made in the image of God. *Ubuntu* reminds us that we belong in one family — God’s family, human family.” Desmond Tutu, *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocations*, ed. John Allen (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 22.
heal and restore those who had been “dehumanized” through their support of apartheid’s racism. Along with Mandela, Tutu proposed that white and black South Africans could not overcome the wounds of the past, or be truly “free,” without coming into a new form of relationship with one another.\footnote{158 Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 8.}

Tutu’s theopolitical vision of the new South Africa understood the establishment of social harmony to involve the recovery of valued personhood. In part one, I discussed how in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a broadening of notions of South African national identity, or “the people,” to include all those who opposed apartheid and sought to use their democratic freedoms for the common good. This more inclusive vision of national identity, and the actual transition to democracy itself, was fostered and encouraged by Nelson Mandela and his Afro-universalism. At the same time, it was reinforced through religious discourses of redemption, conversion, and transformation. Desmond Tutu proclaimed, for example, that the act of voting for black South Africans was far more than a secular political event. Rather, “it was a veritable spiritual experience.” The act of voting “transfigured” blacks from racialized objects to subjects who were “free” and allowed South Africans of all races to discover each other “as fellow human beings.”\footnote{159 Ibid., 7.} Like Mandela, Tutu also emphasized that the work of individual and collective transformation would remain ongoing, because dark forces of anger, fear, and resentment persisted. For Tutu, the only way forward would be for “black and white bound together by circumstances and history” to “claw our way out of the morass that was apartheid racism” and learn to live together.\footnote{160 Ibid., 8.}
Heralded as an “exemplar of tolerance and inclusiveness,” Tutu has become inextricably associated with the politics of *ubuntu* in democratic South Africa.\(^{161}\) Especially during the transition years, the concept of *ubuntu* became a frequent part of South African national discourse as part of Mandela’s national appeal to the public to transcend apartheid divisions of race, class, and religion. Contrasting it with Western individualism, Tutu defines *ubuntu*—which has many African variations—most simply as “my humanity is inextricably bound up in yours,” and he relates *ubuntu* with the highest good of communal harmony that enhances all who belong to the community.\(^{162}\) For Tutu, the quality of ‘humanness’ associated with *ubuntu* is ascribed by one’s social community, and this quality can be jeopardized by actions that violate or disrupt the social fabric.

Drawing from Western, Protestant Christian, and African philosophical streams, Tutu foregrounds the intersubjective nature of ethics through invoking the principle of *ubuntu*: “a person is a person through others.” In his view, one becomes a recognizable human subject (‘a person’) through one’s relation to, and disposition towards, others.\(^{163}\) The discourse of *ubuntu* underscores the fact that one only becomes “more fully human” within a wider social ecology that involves others.\(^{164}\) In his many speeches and references

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\(^{162}\) Ibid., 22; Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 31–35.


\(^{164}\) Augustine Shutte, “Ubuntu as the African Ethical Vision,” in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, ed. Munyaradzi Felix Murove (Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2009), 92–94. Without oversimplifying, most African societies shun at an ideal level behavior that demonstrates a lack of caring for the common good or individualistic, giving up one’s interests for the survival and flourishing of the community. Membership and belonging within a particular community is intimately tied one’s demonstrated respect of interpersonal bonds and commitment to shared interests, goals, and values. Put simply, the community defines and confers the qualities that ‘count’ towards personhood and full membership in the moral and political community. The self is not an autonomous
to *ubuntu*, Tutu clearly understands *ubuntu* as key to building a form of community that transcends ethnic, race, class, and religious difference. He envisions all South Africans as working together to form a family, forging a new community, grounded in virtues of “generosity, hospitality, compassion, caring, and sharing.”

Practicing these virtues is what makes one “humane,” and also what, in Tutu’s view, sets humans apart from animals. Without the qualities associated with *ubuntu*, one becomes worthy of pity and contempt.

Despite grounding *ubuntu* in a theological anthropology that proclaims that “our worth is intrinsic to who we are; we matter because we are made in the image of God,” in Tutu’s framing of *ubuntu*, we also see the idea that persons are made human (or bestowed humanity) by virtue of how they treat others and because of the quality of their relationship with others. This emphasis on relationality opens the possibility that one’s “humanity” can be damaged or lost if one’s actions are deemed cruel or unjust by the broader community, a possibility that Tutu often warned white South Africans about.

This point is significant because, if the power to evaluate humanness is an intersubjective task, then this means that white South Africans, if they are to claim membership in a new South Africa, must factor in and value black perceptions and moral criteria, which are also variable and subject to change.

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being, rather, the self is formed through a network of social relations and forces. See also Munyaki and Motlhabi, “Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance.”


Ibid.

Ibid., 24. Earlier, Tutu puts it this way: “We need other human beings for us to learn how to be human, for none of us comes fully formed into this world.” Ibid., 21.

The intersubjective and dynamic nature of ubuntu is why Michael Onyebuchi Eze has called *ubuntu* a “political humanism.” He writes, “Its political significance is evident as it has opened possibilities of wider sociopolitical imaginations and intersubjectivities” than had previously existed in many parts of contemporary Africa and has offered a “criterion of interculturality.”169 Built into the concept of *ubuntu*, according to Eze, is a critique of individualism, a critique of apartheid separateness, and a critique of racial capitalism. Rather than claiming *ubuntu* as an essentially African alternative to Western thought (which figures like Tutu sometimes seem to do), Eze views *ubuntu* as a strategic use of “tradition” for the purposes of instilling a new culture and stimulating a sense of shared identity and history in response to rapid social change. As a response to an “institutionalization of difference that was both political and economic” during apartheid, Eze makes a compelling case for why we might view *ubuntu* as part of Mandela’s Afro-universal project, noting that *ubuntu* is often represented as “a pan-African ethical consciousness” where bonds are based, not in race or ethnicity, but on a sense of cultural affinity and elective kinship.170

Certainly, some white South Africans have found hope in the concept of *ubuntu*. Afrikaner writer Antjie Krog considers *ubuntu* a path to “a different way of becoming and being.” Contra Eze, however, Krog argues that *ubuntu* should be recognized as a

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170 As an intellectual historian, Eze accurately sums critiques of those would try to tie *ubuntu* to some universalistic (natural law) principle of humanity or frame it as something autochthonous to the black race or to African culture. In my reading, Eze positions himself as counter to essentialisms that would contrast *ubuntu* with Western tradition as an ‘indigenous’ and ‘authentic’ African philosophy, though he acknowledging the social and historical roots of *ubuntu* within African cultures. At the same time, he sees no reason that the lack or presence of historical authenticity invalidates or legitimates *ubuntu*’s “role or instrumentality in the making of the modern South African imaginary.” I share Eze’s view that *ubuntu*, at least how Tutu and Mandela use it, represents a postcolonial discourse and vision of history that draws from a multiplicity of cultural traditions. Ibid., 7.
uniquely “indigenous force” that offers a legitimate alternate to Western ethics, and it
should be disentangled from “other forces behind the ‘new’ South Africa, such as human
right, legitimizing liberation politics, [and] Christianity”171 Nevertheless, it remains
important to keep in mind that Tutu himself explicitly connected *ubuntu* with
Christianity. *Ubuntu*, for Tutu, becomes the 172African-Christian theological basis for
how he envisions the nature of reconciliation work in the new South Africa. Because
every human being also has fundamental dignity and a capacity for goodness by virtue of
their connection to a divine source of life, the possibility of gaining *ubuntu*/authentic
humanness through actions of redress, forgiveness, and social embrace remains open.

Further, Tutu’s vision, like Mandela’s, remains identifiably modern in that it
emphasizes “rupture from the past” toward “progress into a better future,” and calls
humans to “act upon their history” to bring about this desired future.173 Achieving the
new South Africa, then, means restoring “proper” agency to the oppressed through the
ethical work of liberating black individuals from the false ideology (or heretical theology)
of white supremacy. It also means establishing a proper relationship between the white
subject and agency through the ethical work of moving from an exaggerated position of
power to a position of accountability alongside black subjects within a shared, and also
expanded, moral and political community.174

173 Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of
174 Ibid., 49.
Reconciliation and the TRC

In 1994, the need for South Africans to develop a new sense of national community at the end of apartheid seemed acute to many observers. As I have noted, the threat of civil war loomed, and the country was on edge. A peaceful political transition depended on a delicately negotiated process of political compromise that would help pave the way to the building of a non-racial democracy. As part of the negotiated transfer of power, the 1993 Interim Constitution called for legal amnesty to be granted “in respect to acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of conflicts of the past.” The interim agreement further stated that peace, national unity, and individual well-being could not be secured without some kind of state-sanctioned mechanism for reconciliation, social reconstruction, and reparation. With Tutu as its chair, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formally convened by Parliament in 1995. In response to the 1993 interim agreement, it was charged with the task of recovering the testimonies of victims and perpetrators of gross human rights violations in order to create a national archive of abuses that occurred after 1960.

The TRC operated from the premise that forging a consensus about “the truth” of the past, while initially painful and disruptive, would be essential for promoting long-term social cohesion and ensuring that reproduction of the old order would not occur in the future. Because reconstructing what happened during apartheid involved consulting multiple parties, the TRC as a body needed the participation and trust of both agents and targets of political acts of violence and human rights abuses. Amnesty was granted to

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perpetrators who voluntarily came forward and gave full disclosure. To provide a stick to
the carrot of amnesty, quasi-legal power was granted to the TRC to give or withhold
amnesty to perpetrators if they were deemed to have not given full disclosure. Victims,
on the other hand, had the opportunity to share their testimonies, and for black victims,
this meant having their experiences recognized as valid by the state for the first time.
Finally, the TRC was charged with making recommendations to the government
regarding reparations for victims of political violence.\(^{176}\) Public TRC hearings began in
1996, and a preliminary 2,500-page report was delivered to Mandela in 1998, though
hearings were extended until 2001. The final report was completed in 2003.

Desmond Tutu’s appointment as chair of the TRC, along with white Methodist
minister Alex Boraine as vice-chair, ensured that the TRC, as a state sanctioned body,
was infused from the start with symbolic power that went far beyond its political and
juridical functions.\(^{177}\) Tutu in particular explicitly invested the TRC with eschatological

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\(^{176}\) A massive enterprise involving three committees, TRC public hearings were conducted in towns and
cities across South Africa and broadcasted throughout the country via media. The Amnesty Committee
heard testimony from those who had committed gross violations of human rights under apartheid, the
Human Rights Committee heard testimony from victims and survivors of human rights violations, and the
Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee dealt with policies and payments of victims of human rights
violations.

\(^{177}\) Even as the TRC was unfolding and after, observers noted, embraced, and also fiercely critiqued the
ritualized and religious aspects of the TRC. See Catherine M Cole, *Performing South Africa’s Truth
and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd (London:
Zed Books, 2000); Tanya Goodman, “Performing a ‘New’ Nation: The Role of the TRC in South Africa,” in
Giesen, and Jason L Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Tanya Goodman, *Staging
Solidarity: Truth and Reconciliation in a New South Africa* (Boulder, Colo.; London: Paradigm, 2011); Antjie
Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York:
Times Books, 1999); Piet Meiring, “The Baruti Versus the Lawyers: The Role of Religion in the TRC
Process,” in *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of
Moosa, “Truth and Reconciliation as Performance: Spectres of Eucharistic Redemption,” in *Looking Back,
Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, ed. Charles
Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd (London: Zed Books, 2000); R. Neville Richardson, “Reflections on
power and placed it within a larger sacred story infused with Protestant Christian ideas of redemption.\textsuperscript{178}

The TRC functioned in many ways as a ritualized representation of Tutu’s vision for the new South Africa. By creating a public stage where different actors, white and black, victim and perpetrator, could come together, and transmitting this stage around the country and the world through various forms of media, the TRC offered South Africans the possibility of experiencing “deep, horizontal, comradeship,” to use Benedict Anderson’s description of nationness.\textsuperscript{179} At a general level, the TRC became one of the primary social and symbolic means in which black subjects were interpellated as citizens by the democratic state. Proclaimed free under democratic law, and also in the eyes of God, Tutu hoped that blacks would move beyond a sense of victimhood and begin to see themselves as living alongside whites in a country that was no longer "theirs” but “ours.”\textsuperscript{180} In this way, Tutu created through the TRC a symbolic space for the performance of a new nation. This generated, but by no means guaranteed, the possibility of black and white acknowledging together the massive suffering produced by apartheid and beginning to forge a shared relationship to the past, present, and future.

In his foreword to the 1998 TRC report, Tutu reflects on some of the motivations and implications of the TRC. Focusing on the interconnection between the past and future, he argues forcefully that it is only by coming to terms with the past that a new

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\textsuperscript{179} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 7.

\textsuperscript{180} Tutu, \textit{No Future without Forgiveness}, 9.
future can be reached.\textsuperscript{181} Acknowledging that interpretations of the truth of the past will change over time, Tutu nevertheless claims that the TRC’s value lies in beginning the work of forging some kind of social consensus regarding the horrors of apartheid and the cycles of violence it produced.\textsuperscript{182} It is clear from Tutu’s remarks that the burden of memory, as well as the work of reconstruction and reparation, falls especially on the white public who had so often denied the full extent of apartheid’s violence and yet benefited mightily from its policies.

Part of the work of social healing/reconciliation, according to Tutu, must involve being “confronted” with the “ugly truths” of what happened during apartheid. He emphatically states, “The Commission has not been prepared to allow the present generation of South Africans to grow gently into the harsh realities of the past.”\textsuperscript{183} No matter how painful, “we need to know about the past in order to establish a culture of respect for human rights. It is only in accounting for the past that we can become accountable for the future.”\textsuperscript{184} Such realities must be confronted, and white ignorance and silence problematized, Tutu contends, so that the horrors of the past become an incentive to build an alternate future.

For Tutu, the journey away from a past marked by “conflict, injustice, oppression, and exploitation” towards a “new democratic dispensation characterized by a culture of respect of human rights” can only happen through the ethical work of coming face to face

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., paras. 5–6. He also emphasized that the roots of white supremacy went far deeper than the apartheid system and the time period that the TRC was tasked with addressing, as such the TRC is only the start, and a model for, a much larger process.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., para. 16.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., para. 28.
with recent history, of which the TRC is a symbol and model but not the conclusion.\textsuperscript{185} Acknowledging that perpetrators will not transform into respecters of human rights overnight, and victims of political violence cannot simply forgive and forget, Tutu nevertheless contends that the path toward a common sense of citizenship, belonging, and nationness involves conscious effort that will need to be supported by institutional mechanisms and policies aimed at redress.\textsuperscript{186}

While many commentators and critics focus on the forgiveness and reconciliation as key facets of the TRC, I want to emphasize the ways in which Tutu stressed the role of truth-telling as a necessary condition of reconciliation. The public Human Rights Committee TRC hearings, for example, were meant to validate the experiences of the mainly black citizens who had suffered under apartheid by placing their experiences into the historical archive, and working against what Didier Fassin calls cultural and political anesthesia.\textsuperscript{187} These hearings sought to center individual and collective experiences of gross human rights violations without subjecting victims to juridical forms of truth as they would be in a court of law. The TRC not only allowed the public to hear the “narrative truth” of victims’ experiences in its Human Rights hearings, it its separate Amnesty hearings it also provided victims the opportunity to publically confront

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., para. 49.  
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., para. 25.  
\textsuperscript{187} Didier Fassin, \textit{When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa}, trans. Gabrielle Varro and Amy Jacobs (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), xii. Drawing on the work of Allen Feldman, Fassin describes cultural and political anesthesia as the condition of feeling “no need to know any more than we already know” (xii). Against those who would claim that the South African case is singular, and thus does not merit study because it lacks global applicability, Fassin argues that his study of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, and its relationship to apartheid violence, is essential in order to resist problematic (and neo-colonial) assumptions of global elites that the social worlds emerging in South Africa are “incommensurable” with the West and the Global North. Fassin’s concern is with how the representation of (South)African others as incomprehensible renders us insensitive to their fate and suffering as well as subverts acknowledgment of shared destiny, a sentiment that Tutu would no doubt agree with.
perpetrators of violence. Both hearings, then, were intended to emphasize that truth-telling was understood by the Commission to be a prerequisite for learning to live well together.

Dealing with the past was considered essential ethical work that had to be undertaken for the sake of the future and for the sake of collective meaning-making or “social truth.” The wager of the TRC was that through uncovering facts about what happened, and placing these facts within a wider historical and social narrative, traumatized citizens would be able to gain some degree of healing and relief. In some cases, the hearings provided valuable information, such as where the bones of murdered activists were exhumed and subsequently able to be given proper burial. The TRC also publically exposed the extent of the apartheid government’s security operations for the first time, placing into the historical archive the brutality of the white supremacist regime and the anguish of its victims. Acknowledging that “all that a truth commission can achieve is to reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse,” the TRC nevertheless endeavored to make it impossible for the white public to claim that practices of torture by state security forces were not widespread and

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188 “TRC Report Volume 1.pdf,” 112–14, accessed July 12, 2016, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf. In its report, the TRC acknowledged the complexity of the concept ‘truth’ and described its relationships to four types of truth: factual/forensic, personal/narrative, social/dialogical, and healing/restorative. Factual truth was about verifying and corroborating the who, what, when, where and why of human rights abuses, but even this ‘objective’ form of truth admittedly required a degree of analysis and interpretation as they also were tasked with reporting on broader social patterns. Truth in the service of reconstruction, reparation, and on behalf of the future nation, was considered to be “healing truth” (114). TRC report defined social truth as “the truth that is established through interaction, discussion, and debate,” especially with key stake holders such as faith communities, NGOs, media, political parties, the South African Dense Force, etc. Social truth is regarded as intersubjective and formulated through recognition of complex motives and diverse perspectives (113 – 114). The notion of social truth also pens the process of the TRC to public scrutiny.

systematic, or that the state was not directly and indirectly involved in inciting “black on black” violence as part of its “total strategy.”\textsuperscript{190}

To those critics concerned that amnesty represented a politically expedient denial of justice in the interest of peace, Tutu pointed out that the public shaming and public acknowledgment of victim’s suffering could be a form of justice, because it would force white people to face the truth of the full horror of apartheid.\textsuperscript{191} “Now that [the South African Police’s] nefarious deeds are coming to light on their own admissions, the white community especially is appalled to discover that their ‘boys’ were not always the paragons of virtue they had presented themselves to be. The disillusionment is shattering. [...] The truth has always been there. It simply had been hidden from the public gaze.”\textsuperscript{192}

He further defends amnesty as the necessary price agreed upon by negotiators when compared with an “alternative too ghastly to contemplate,” before noting, with his characteristic acerbic incision, that the largest public outcry over the granting of amnesty has emerged only when the perpetrator was black and the victim white.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{190} “TRC Report Volume 1.pdf,” 111–12.
\textsuperscript{191} Tutu, “Chairperson’s Foreword,” para. 35. This way of thinking about justice has often been called restorative justice because it understands justice as an intersubjective process between conflicting, and often unequal, parties. Rather than making the punishment of the perpetrator the end of justice, the end goal of justice, in this view, is the repairing of social relations damaged through oppressive systems through things like redressive action, acknowledgement of collective suffering, and a public commitment to an alternate future different from the past. As noted in footnote 109, many commentators point out that this understanding of justice, especially the frequent emphasis on forgiveness, is recognizably Christian, and as such has made many in the West and elites human rights organizations uncomfortable. For Tutu, the end goal of the process of truth-telling, and even public shaming, is the healing or restoring of the social fabric. In praising restorative justice in his foreword, Tutu claims he is “concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships with healing, harmony and reconciliation. Such justice focuses on the experience of victims; hence the importance of reparation” (para. 36).
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., para. 51.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., para. 49.
Responding to a secondary criticism that the TRC made no legal distinction between black and white victims and perpetrators, and therefore seemed to suggest a moral equivalency between the violence of apartheid resisters and apartheid supporters, the TRC report and Tutu’s foreword attempt to dispel this notion. Tutu acknowledges that the TRC occupied tricky moral and political territory, especially by virtue that its very creation and amnesty provision was a product of a negotiated settlement. The TRC defined the violation of gross human rights in relation to international law and did not make any distinction between who committed violations in relation to whether they were for or against apartheid. Amnesty was open to all “perpetrators” of political violence. It further acknowledges that “all” suffered as a result of the policies of the apartheid state. However, Tutu makes clear that, in his view, it remains entirely appropriate to recognize that “the same kind of act attracts different moral judgments” and distinctions. For Tutu, this is the case because “we move in a moral universe where right and wrong and justice and injustice matter.”

Tutu continues, “We have sought to carry out our work to the best of our ability, without bias. I cannot, however, be asked to be neutral about apartheid. It is an intrinsically evil system. But I am even-handed in that I will let an apartheid supporter tell me what he or she sincerely believed moved him or her, and what his or her insights and perspectives were; and I take those seriously into account in making my finding.” In this regard, Tutu takes seriously the possibility that some supported apartheid because they “genuinely believed” that it “offered the best solution to the complexities of a multiracial land at very different levels of economic, social and educational development,” and was the “best policy in the circumstances to preserve their

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194 Ibid., paras. 53–54.
195 Ibid., para. 56.
identity, language and culture and those of other people as well.” In many cases, whites “believed God had given them a calling to help civilize benighted natives” and did not intentionally seek to inflict harm. “I do not for a single moment question the sincerity of those who believed they were defending their country and what they understood to be its Western Christian values against the atheistic Communist onslaught.” At the same time, Tutu insists that, regardless of sincerity, belief, or intent, white South Africans must be held to account, if not legally then morally, for their role in upholding the evil policy of apartheid and the suffering it caused.196

To draw attention to the horrors produced by racism or apartheid, Tutu says, is “not to gloat over or to humiliate the Afrikaners or the white community.” Rather, Tutu sees confronting these horrors as essential to white moral rehabilitation and broader social reconstruction. “It is to speak the truth in love.” Invoking the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, Tutu warns against leaders who would “deal falsely” by not recognizing the wounds of the people, preaching “peace” where there is no peace to be found.197 He argues that it would be naïve to imagine that the “ghastly revelations” of the TRC would not incite anger or make race relations more difficult in the short term. However, he ultimately affirms that the ongoing ethical work of whites actively confronting and reflecting on the apartheid past will be central to achieving a non-racial future. He legitimates this view by claiming that most black South Africans believe that

196 Ibid. At one point in the foreword, Tutu explicitly distinguishes between critiques of the TRC by those who care “about the future of our country” and were concerned that the amnesty process would sacrifice justice for victims on the altar of unity and reconciliation (para. 25) from those made by “obstructionists” who resist the work of the TRC because they see the TRC as a white witch-hunt, especially of Afrikaners (para. 61-62). I point out this distinction between it creates similar categories to what I discussed in Part 1, between those invested in the “future” of the New South Africa, according to Mandela, and those seeking to obstruct this future.
197 Ibid., para. 66.
white moral rehabilitation and reconciliation into the new South Africa is possible.\textsuperscript{198} If it were not so, South Africa would have never made it to democracy. Tutu concludes his foreword by reflecting on his sadness that white religious and political leaders remain resistant and hostile to the work of the TRC and have failed to encourage the broader white community to respond justly to the wounds of “the people,” who by contrast have shown extraordinary magnanimity.\textsuperscript{199}

Part 3: The Question of the Future

In the previous two sections, I have sought to elaborate on the political and spiritual dimensions of the ideal of a new South Africa. For both Tutu and Mandela, politics was not considered an obstacle to, but a conduit of, white and black self-transformation. Likewise, political transformation was seen as a key facet of creating the kinds of conditions conducive for developing the moral dispositions and social change necessary to create a new, non-racial, South Africa. In this final section, I want to explore more deeply the utopian promises contained in the ideal of a new South Africa along with the problems and contradictions it produces, particularly in relation to white subjects. Both are essential for understanding how social transformation is imagined and enacted in democratic South Africa.

As Charles Mills points out, due to the global persistence of the racial contract, any identification by white subjects with the oppressed can only ever be partial.\textsuperscript{200} At the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., para. 68.
\item\textsuperscript{199} “The greatest sadness that we have encountered in the Commission has been the reluctance of white leaders to urge their followers to respond to the remarkable generosity of spirit shown by the victims. This reluctance, indeed this hostility, to the Commission has been like spitting in the face of the victims.” Ibid., para. 67.
\item\textsuperscript{200} Mills, \textit{The Racial Contract}, 107.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
same time, perhaps more than any other modern nation, South Africa, by virtue of the fact that non-racialism is understood to be a founding democratic principle, arguably has the institutional mechanisms and symbolic resources at hand to allow, as Mills puts it, for “individuals to betray the white polity in the name of a broader definition of the polis” and human community. 201

During apartheid, most activists assumed that the black and African majority would have a large stake in shaping the future to come by virtue of their numbers and the fact that South Africa is on the African continent. However, and this is key, non-racial activists vigorously asserted that the new South Africa would not be a “racial state” in the way that Mills defines it. 202 He argues that the purpose of the racial state is to maintain and reproduce the “racial order,” to secure “the privileges and advantages of full white citizens” and to maintain “the subordination of nonwhites.” Within the racial state, whiteness defines the boundaries of moral and political community. White supremacy establishes the values, ideals, and norms that shape a vision of the good that citizens aspire towards in order to secure a just and flourishing polity. 203 Moreover, the possession of freedom and equality, though proclaimed as universal and framed in the language of moral egalitarianism, is limited by a “social ontology” that applies only to whites. 204 By contrast, the ideal of a new South Africa, understood as non-racial and democratic, seeks to deconstruct whiteness as the social condition for belonging in/to the nation.

201 Ibid., 108.
202 Ibid., 13.
203 Ibid., 15.
204 Ibid., 16.
The anti-apartheid period was marked by intense anticipation as well as numerous political, social, religious, and ethical experiments intended to help individuals and communities live non-racially in the present. This quest to establish alternate subjectivities and communities further helped create a post-apartheid social climate whereby white South Africans are continually open to scrutiny and judgment for siding with white supremacy in its global and local forms. In a reversal of the racial contract script, the non-racial vision of a new South Africa suggests, implicitly and explicitly, that those classified as white under apartheid will therefore have to earn their inclusion in the post-apartheid nation and prove their humanity through voluntary acceptance of an alternate (non-) racial contract and promotion of the common good. As ANC leader Pallo Jordan outlined clearly in 1988, “the nation, then, is not defined by skin color or racial designation; its parameters are set by individual acts of voluntary adherence, which adherence requires the submergence of other loyalties in this larger unit; they are defined by a commitment to the country, its people, and its future. Since committed racists could never accept such an arrangement, they too voluntarily exclude themselves from definition of the nation.” For Pallo, those unable or unwilling to accept the terms of the non-racial contract jeopardized their future belonging and stake in South African society.

As icons of the democratic transition, Mandela and Tutu helped definitively set the public expectation that the South Africa to come, by virtue of its location on the African continent, would be shaped and defined by black and African actors. Together,

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205 See Mill’s discussion of the significance of white members of the ANC or other whites who refuse the racial contract. Mill states that “the mere fact of their existence shows what was possible, throwing into contrast and rendering open to moral judgment the behavior of their fellow whites, who chose to accept Whiteness instead. The Racial Contract, 108–9.

they challenged the political imagination of most white South Africans who had long understood the nation (its wealth, resources, people and ideas) to be synonymous with whiteness and Western civilization. Yet their mutual desire to include white South Africans in the new South Africa also held forth the possibility of white transformation through the problematization and rejection of the norms, values, and ideals that had underwritten the racial contracts of colonialism and apartheid. For white South Africans, such rejection would require a shift in consciousness, the development of an alternate “moral and political perception of social reality,” and a divestment from the material and psychic benefits of whiteness.207

Embedded in the ideal of a new South Africa, then, is an emphasis on futurity. The concept of futurity, according to Jose Esteban Muñoz, represents an alternative to “political nihilism.” 208 Futurity indexes a form of life that leads to the opening, rather than closing, of horizons and subjective possibilities. Orientation towards the future, according to Muñoz, is what allows subjects, individually and collectively, to “dream and enact” other ways of being in the world.209 Within the liminal moments of struggle and

208 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 83. The term futurity has deeper historical roots, which offer a tantalizing dimension to my argument. In 1836, John L. Sullivan, the man who coined the phrase Manifest Destiny, wrote a journal article that described the United States as the “great nation of futurity.” Post-revolutionary United States represented “the formation and progress of an untried political system,” a system which Sullivan claims separates America from an oppressive, archaic past. For Sullivan, what set the United State’s national origins apart as a nation was that it was birthed/or founded on the ideals of human equality and democratic rights. Sullivan deems America as destined for “unparalled glory” in “defense of humanity” in the future (426–427). In many ways, Mandela and Tutu, with their vision of the new South Africa, can be understood (and are understood) as appropriating and supplanting the futurist ideals of modern Western democracies, including the United States, which had so often been undermined by trenchant racism, with Afro-universal ideals. But similar to the United States, South Africa has equally been faulted for its hypocritical exceptionalism and its failures to live up to its own founding ideals, particularly around race. John Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (November 1839): 426–30.
209 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1.
transition, South Africa indeed seemed pregnant with the potentiality of creating a better world, free from the scourges of racism and race-thinking.  

Confident that the future belonged to them because their struggle was just, if not in the short term then the long, Mandela and Tutu advocated an ethics of futurity that looked beyond the present to consider the kinds of conditions that would maximize the benefits of freedom for all, once there was a reduction of violent conflict and/or some degree of dismantlement of oppressive systems. The fact that Mandela’s and Tutu’s spiritual politics are often interpreted by others as a commitment to the “ultimate cessation of violence and the resolution of conflict” produced by apartheid should not make invisible the fact that such commitment was ultimately about holding open a future space for the creation of a new South Africa that fundamentally broke with the norms, values, and ideals of the apartheid past. For both, the apartheid system was

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210 Writing in 2015, Achille Mbembe claims “the idea of non-racialism is arguably one of South Africa’s most potent contributions to modern political thought and practice. At its most utopian, non-racialism gestures towards a future time when the structures of racism will be thoroughly dismantled. [...] Race as a category of political organization and an index of social organization will become irrelevant. The distribution of the means of life and survival will be made on a basis other than mere claims of descent. Every human being will be recognized as a human like any other human irrespective of the color of one’s skin.” Achille Mbembe, “The Dream of a World Free From the Burden of Race.pdf,” The Salon: Archives of the Non-Racial, Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, 8 (2015): 1–3.

211 R. Scott Appleby and Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 13. During the late apartheid and transition years, Desmond Tutu distinguished himself as a “militant” peacemaker: a category historian Scott Appelby uses for those who are willing to go to the extremes, even risking their lives, “in pursuit of justice and peace.” Unlike religious extremists, “who employ violence as a privileged means of purifying the community and waging war against threatening outsiders,” militant religious peacemakers, though often not unequivocally opposed to the use of force, strive to “sublimate violence, resisting efforts to legitimate it on religious grounds” (11). Further, militant peacemakers make “reconciliation or peaceful coexistence” with opponents their ultimate goal (13). While Appleby focuses on religious militant peacemakers, in line with my argument regarding spiritual politics in this chapter, I think the category can be applied to both religious and secular actors who risk their lives in pursuit of justice and peace, seek to sublimate violence, and also resist efforts to legitimate violence on religious grounds. Nelson Mandela’s Rivonia trial speech is an excellent example of an activist warning against the dehumanizing dangers of violence for oppressor and oppressed alike and then using this vision of escalation to argue for the need to adopt a principled and disciplined counter-resistance to apartheid in the interest of peace and reconciliation. In particular, connecting political resistance to the
unequivocally evil and needed to be vanquished. But this did not negate the possibility of ultimate transformation of, and reconciliation with, those who, consciously and unconsciously, supported the maintenance of white supremacy.

Enshrined in the 1955 Freedom Charter, and now the Constitution, the principle of non-racialism holds open the possibility of a diverse group of South Africans laying claim to a shared homeland, a shared sense of nationhood, and a shared destiny. To achieve the new South Africa, then, means so much more than simply the establishment of political democracy. Rather, the ideal of a new South Africa was, and to some degree still is still is, invested with transfigurative power. Its achievement represents the creation of a new sociopolitical ontology previously unseen in modern human history: a fundamental shifting of power relations away from white supremacy and towards, in the words of Steve Biko, a “true humanity” no longer defined by whiteness.212

Transformation

Given persistent racialized inequalities and social segregation, it is safe to say that South Africa is not yet non-racial, regardless of how one defines it. But as Muñoz

suggests in relation to queerness, I found during my fieldwork that the quest for an alternate future continues to stimulate the desire among black and white South Africans to engage in social, political, and ethical action that seeks to transcend the “quagmires of the present.”²¹³ South Africa, in the minds of many, has become a global symbol of both the possibility and limits of creating a truly non-racial society.²¹⁴ For those persuaded by Mandela and Tutu’s vision, the intense social suffering experienced by large sections of black South Africa coupled with elite white (and black) indifference to this suffering serves to threaten the viability of the new South Africa and arouses calls for both moral renewal as well as political revolution. In either case, it is the bold promise of transcendence, from the burdens of race, and from the colonial and apartheid past, I suggest, that infuses questions of social change in South Africa with a distinct sense of moral urgency.

The individual and systemic work of undoing or dismantling the racial contract is often indexed in contemporary South Africa by the term ‘transformation.’ Like non-racialism, the precise meaning and definition of transformation remains contested in South Africa. Used ubiquitously, it is often intended, as political scientist Thiven Reddy noted in 2008, to signify “a change from one qualitative state to another” that implies “improvement.” Transformation, Reddy argues, is the term most often used by South Africans to describe the “new social relations and practices” ushered in by the arrival of political democracy in 1994, but it also is used to index unrealized hopes and aspirations

²¹³ Muñoz, Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity, 1.
for changes yet to come. In this way, the term transformation, in South Africa, gestures towards a future still to be realized, while also acknowledging shifts made in the present.

But just what this future looks like and what these shifts are is a matter of great diversity and fierce debate. As Reddy writes, “If there is something of a consensus, it is in the reference to some broad notion of societal change away from apartheid (as in ‘a break with the past’).” But this broad consensus does not mean that there are not different and competing visions and ideas of transformation, ranging from liberal to modernist to Africanist to Marxist and everything in-between. Nevertheless, most of these visions converge around the need to address the lingering effects and after-lives of apartheid and colonialism within democratic South Africa, though they differ on the precise means and ends of transformation.

Like the paradigmatic terms of earlier periods, the term transformation is utilized in many conflicting and divergent ways. For example, it is not uncommon to hear conservative white South Africans who oppose “transformation” policies like affirmative action in the employment sector also use the language of transformation to criticize the African National Congress. Citing “reverse-racism,” they accuse the ANC of mirroring the apartheid state in their disregard of “minority” (white) ethnic and cultural concerns and thus failing to deliver on its non-racial promise.

Increasingly so, the discourses and ideals attached to transformation provide an ever-morphing tool of critique directed at anyone or anything that that can be rhetorically and conceptually linked to the ideologies and practices of apartheid and colonialism. For


Ibid., 210.

Reddy provides an overview of these streams.
these reasons, I concur with Reddy that the term transformation “arguably occupies centre-stage of the contemporary political terrain and, as to be expected, is the locus of intense contestation,” which is why I invoke the term in the title of this study.218

Transformation is indeed at the center of many complex questions regarding ethics, race, citizenship, and belonging within democratic South Africa. In the late 1980s, the questions on everyone’s minds were dramatically existential: who or what will/can survive the arrival of a new dispensation?219 The questions posed in post-apartheid South Africa are no less dramatic and, unfortunately, not that much different: who or what can belong in the future to come? Is the racial contract being deconstructed, or is it being reproduced in ever more nefarious and habituated forms that must be opposed with similar force if necessary? Finally, if, as many South Africans claim, full participation in South African society requires the production of new subjectivities that shed colonial and apartheid forms of life, to what extent might white South Africans feel a moral obligation to pursue transformation and work for social change, including the deconstruction of racial and economic privilege? If so, what does such ethical work look like and how is it pursued and legitimated? These questions, which I discussed in my introduction, are ones constantly asked and debated within the South African public sphere, especially when evidence of the “old” South Africa erupts into public consciousness.

I explore these questions and how they were taken up by white actors in the following chapters. For now, I emphasize that Mandela and Tutu hinged their transcendent vision of transformation on the assumption of interlocking presents, pasts, pasts,

219 An entire volume in 1987 was devoted to the topic of survival and visions of the future featuring interviews with 45 key leaders. Alan Fischer, Michel Albeldas, and Hermann Giliomee, A Question of Survival: Conversations with Key South Africans (Johannesburg: J. Publishers, 1987).
and futures shared between white and black South Africans and a belief in the power of enlightened self-interest with regard to the common good. The persistence of white economic and cultural hegemony and racialized inequality within the democratic era have raised fundamental questions about the ultimate persuasiveness and viability of their vision. Today, the glorious futures that figures like Mandela and Tutu imagined seem to be fragile and precarious, given the many ways that democratic South Africa seems to be much closer to the old than to the new. This is perhaps illustrated most aptly by the fact that the official goal of the African National Congress remains to create a “non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society,” through the “liberation of Africans in particular and black people in general from political and economic bondage.” The ANC’s continued emphasis on African and black liberation within a post-apartheid era reveals that building the new South Africa is considered an ongoing, experimental process whose viability hinges on dealing with the legacies of apartheid and colonialism. Despite having achieved non-racial/universal enfranchisement, the ANC continues to proclaim the necessity of social and economic transformation if South Africa is to avoid future violent conflicts, though it tends to downplay its own role in maintaining and reinforcing anti-black racism in the democratic era.

The Moral Narrative of Transformation

Many leftist critics of the current ANC government claim that it has failed the majority black South Africans in its adherence to neoliberal economic policies and indifference to black

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220 Mbembe, On the Postcolony, 16.
pain. Other critics claim that the ANC, in efforts to maintain its hold on power, has veered towards nativist populism rather than safeguarding its non-racial vision. In Achille Mbembe’s view, the current incarnation of ANC is on a path to alienate “progressive and antiracist whites” because it has failed to effectively “turn white guilt into moral debt.” In other words, the ANC has failed to harness the energies of progressive whites who seek to make amends for apartheid while also letting reactionary and conservative whites off the hook. Even if a minority among a minority, Mbembe views progressive whites who are committed to racial equality, including former anti-apartheid activists, as vital resources in helping to build a society marked by democratic freedoms. This population has a role to play, in his view, in helping define the “ethics of care and responsibility, duties and obligations that freedom demands.”

Mbembe, like other black intellectuals of the non-racial tradition, seems to want to offer white subjects a significant role in shaping South African society by tying the demands and responsibilities of citizenship to ethical action. Mbembe’s post-apartheid views typify what I call the moral narrative of transformation.

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222 The leading opposition party to the ANC the Economic Freedom Fighters is probably the most paradigmatic example.
223 Adam, “The Politics of Ethnic Identity.”
224 Mbembe, “The Dream of a World Free From the Burden of Race.pdf.” A leading public intellectual in South Africa, Mbembe has elsewhere argued that, after the early transition, the ANC has failed to tap into the “immense reservoir or goodwill and talent among white professionals,” and failed to draw in those “eager to fully exercise their citizenship and contribute to the building of a non-racial society.” Achille Mbembe, “Passages to Freedom: The Politics of Racial Reconciliation in South Africa,” Public Culture 20, no. 1 (2008): 9.
226 Ibid., 8.
227 In discussing the moral narrative of transformation, I am indebted to anthropologist Webb Keane’s theorization of the “moral narrative of modernity” in Keane, Christian Moderns, 2007. Keane argues that the moral narrative of modernity is a conception of modernity premised on the belief that history “is, or ought to be, a story of human liberation from a host of false beliefs and fetishisms that undermine freedom” (5). In this view, historical progress and the “emancipated subject” go hand in hand (5). Likewise, I am convinced that the rise of the non-racial and democratic vision of transformation in South Africa remains infused with similar logics regarding human freedom and progress: the production of a New South Africa is indeed imagined as an ongoing revolution that continually strives to liberate all South Africans from the material, social and psychological factors that undermine their freedom as non-racial
South Africa as about more than simply economic and political shifts; rather, transformation is, in the words of Mbembe, about “coming out of the dark age of white supremacy” and “creating the first credible nonracial society on the planet.” Though unpredictable and experimental, the hope that undergirds the moral narrative of transformation is the hope is that South Africa will lead the world in confronting “historically entrenched racialized hierarchies” that continue to “undermine the prospects of a truly nonracial future” both in South Africa and around the world. Importantly, Mbembe, playing the role of postcolonial prophet, reminds his readers that this “experiment’s chances of success” cannot be taken for granted or ruled out; rather, every South African has a political and ethical responsibility to remain vigilant and engage with the personal and systemic forces that threaten to undermine, or foreclose, the possibility of creating a nonracial and democratic nation.²²⁸ The moral narrative of transformation addresses itself to white and black South Africans alike, but one gets the sense that whites, perhaps due to their disproportionate power, are privileged in this narrative. While blacks are encourage to take ownership over their country and their future, whites are deemed essential to the collective work of ensuring that the utopia on the horizon expands the domain of freedom for all.

Yet, at an empirical level, and similar to the debates that occurred during the anti-apartheid struggle, the role of white South Africans in moral, social, and political projects of transformation remains ambiguous and vexing. The coming of democracy has only deepened the

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complex entanglement in South Africa of categories such as whiteness and blackness: both categories continue to modify, provoke and incite each other towards various possible future trajectories. What continues to remain unanswered and debated in democratic South Africa is not just the means and ends of social transformation, but also the norms for determining the kinds of subjects worthy to participate and to belong in the emerging order. These questions are constantly posed and debated by white and black South Africans alike, often in the public sphere. Part of the sensitivity around questions of transformation in relation to white subjects is the fact that production of white identity in South Africa has historically been grounded in the “lethal intersections of ‘race’ and ‘nation’ in the furthering of white supremacist ends.” Because transformation, at least in the eyes of many black South Africans, typically involves redressing these lethal intersections it inevitably requires challenging the material and symbolic bases of white identity, agency, and power.

Utopia and Dystopia

When considering Mandela and Tutu’s legacy retrospectively, the question of the future cannot be ignored. Both Mandela and Tutu were figures deeply shaped by their involvement in twentieth century anti-apartheid and black liberation movements. Their speeches, writings, and political praxis reflect a modernist belief in historical agency: that is, the capacity of humans to transcend “material and social entanglements in the name of

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229 As I will discuss in my next question, such questions inevitably move beyond the realm of politics into the domain of ethics. As anthropologists of ethics James Laidlaw and James Faubion have argued, rather than a universal and normative set of principles, ethics can be understood as a process of self-making. If ethics is a process of becoming a particular kind of subject, this means that the criteria for who or what counts as “ethical” is an intersubjective process that shifts across time and space. What counted as “ethical,” especially in relation to white subjects and the ideal of non-racialism, during the anti-apartheid years may be different from what emerges in a democratic era, which emphasizes the related but open-ended ideal of transformation. James D Faubion, An Anthropology of Ethics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Laidlaw, The Subject of Virtue.

greater freedom.” But as I have shown, the vision of a new South Africa was not particular to Mandela and Tutu. Indeed, countless (mostly black) activists contributed to the hope of “one nation” or “people” emerging through the ashes of apartheid. Without erasing difference, individuals and communities would be united by a voluntary commitment to non-racialism and democracy.

Scholarship on South Africa, during apartheid and post-apartheid eras, remains fixated on the future. Book after book has proposed to explore its contingencies and discern alternate and competing resolutions to the so-called ‘national question.’ This is the case because South Africa was and remains a future-oriented society that draws on utopian ideals forged in the present and the past. The past—whether the Black Consciousness Movement, the African National Congress, the South African Council of Churches, the United Democratic Front—provides a historical reminder of the possibility of South Africans of different racial and economic backgrounds collectively working

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231 Keane, Christian Moderns, 2007, 76. Without a doubt, this belief has been shaped by Protestant conceptions of redemption and conversion, which I will discuss further in Chapter 2.
232 See for example, Pallo Jordan’s 1988 reflections on the topic. Jordan points out that almost as soon as the foundations for the apartheid state we laid in the early 20th century, counter conceptions of the nation emerged that challenged imposed racial, ethnic, and cultural divisions, despite the apartheid regime’s insistence of these categories as divinely ordained or natural. While the Freedom Charter recognizes South Africa’s cultural diversity, according to Jordan it “does not imply that they are permanently frozen categories” or seek to “legislate the involuntary adherence of any individual or group to some externally defined ethnic or cultural group.” Jordan, “The South African Liberation Movement and the Making of a New Nation,” 118.

While the Afro-universalism associated with the ideal of the new South Africa can easily be linked to ideals and values associated with modernity, Protestant Christianity, and the Enlightenment, it is vital to remember that competing nativist and African nationalist visions of liberation also exercise significant influence on the shape and scope of non-racial notions of liberation and transformation. The ANC’s and UDF’s “non-racial” vision of social change emerged out of intense debate and competition with competing Africanist visions of liberation that proclaimed “Africa for Africans” and sought to privilege black subjectivity and draw attention to black suffering. In this way, supporters of the liberal/modernist vision of a democratic and non-racial new South Africa has always had to wrestle with and attempt to define the distinctive roles that racialized subjects might play in the civic and public project of dismantling of systems of racial exclusivity.
together to overcome forms of racial oppression and inequality. Yet where there is utopia there is also dystopia. Indeed, dystopian visions drawn from the past continue to circulate widely, whether in the guise of threats of racial civil war, a militarized police state, the *swart gevaar* of old, or the occult-like reach of white supremacy.\textsuperscript{234}

How are South Africans, then, to resolve the fact that the formerly colonized and former colonizers now lay claim to the same physical space and to the same imagined community known as South Africa? Terms like non-racialism, democracy, human rights, *ubuntu*, and transformation have been, and continue to be, used by South Africans to express and enact alternate ways of being in the world that resist or dismantle apartheid and colonial power configurations and point to different arrangements of power.\textsuperscript{235} Such terms contribute to the dynamism and experimental quality of South African public life and shore up a palpable faith in democratic possibility, but they can also be used opportunistically by conservatives to stave off calls for structural change.

The terms of the new South Africa have always been subject to debate and contestation. Yet perhaps more than ever, the horizon of the promised non-racial future increasingly seems closed to millions of black South Africans due to the persistence of crushing racialized inequalities. The horizon may also be closing for white South


\textsuperscript{235} Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1. Of course, who these discourses and terms ultimately benefit is a matter of fierce debate. As I observed in my fieldwork, elite white South Africans, sometimes retroactively, sometimes opportunistically, find Mandela and Tutu’s spiritual politics an appeal to consider their future alongside the future of those who were oppressed. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many whites have not heeded the ethical dimensions of Mandela and Tutu’s vision of a New South Africa. They can articulate the benefits of the non-racial contract, but they are less likely to articulate what is required of them in exchange.
Africans who increasingly rely on their economic privilege and cultural hegemony as a means of maintaining social status in global systems of white supremacy. To his Africanist critics, Nelson Mandela’s public invitation to white South Africans to join the political, economic, social, and ethical struggle to create a new South Africa remains problematic in that it expanded the terms of who could legitimately lay claim to the African nation and the moral and political community this nation represented at the very moment that black Africans could legitimately lay claim to state power. At the dawn of democracy, black South Africans were called under Mandela’s Afro-universalism to sacrifice a particularistic vision of nationalism and citizenship for the sake of a new, non-racial, democratic order. The fact that Mandela placed a unique moral burden on those historically identified as “black” or “African” at the precise point when they were gaining significant political, economic, and social power did not go unnoticed by those who see in Mandela’s Afro-universalism a form of selling-out to elite (white) interests.

Mandela believed that true justice and democracy could not be achieved without the redistribution of money and land from white to black, and he made it abundantly clear that white South Africans were expected to demonstrate their commitment to the new South Africa and their gratitude for black magnanimity by voluntarily making economic sacrifices for the sake of the common good. In emphasizing the voluntary nature of economic redistribution, Mandel also placated white fears regarding wealth and land seizures, which they associated with other postcolonial African regimes such as Zimbabwe. In this regard, he has often been interpreted by critics as creating room in post-apartheid South Africa for a vision of social/racial progress that does not require the relativization and redistribution of white power and wealth.
In the post-apartheid period, the African National Congress has continued to affirm the 1955 Freedom Charter’s vision of shared ownership of land, property and economic resources among all who live in South Africa, black and white. At the same time, the massive land and economic dispossessions so central to maintaining the systems of colonialism and apartheid and a black underclass have yet to be resolved, in part because the voluntary transfer of wealth from white to black has not occurred on a large scale. Without the transfer of wealth or the creation of additional state mechanisms to encourage redistribution, democratic platitudes that proclaim South Africa to be non-racial appear increasingly untenable.

Despite attempts made by figures like Mandela or Tutu to articulate distinctive ethics for white and black South Africans in response to the apartheid and colonial past, there remains little consensus of how to best address the pain of black South Africans, which was/is produced by a shared experience of racial suffering and oppression, as well as how to apportion responsibility to alleviate this pain. While white South Africans are widely interpreted by black South Africans as having sacrificed political power only to maintain their own cultural hegemony and economic power, many white South Africans insist opportunistically that such privileges are consistent with Mandela’s democratic vision. Reducing non-racialism to a project of colorblind reconciliation, Mandela’s ethical vision is recast in more palatable neoliberal terms.

Arguably, Mandela’s spiritual politics have failed to compel a voluntary and large-scale restructuring of South Africa’s economic and social landscape. Though discourses of struggle and sacrifice on behalf of the nation remain prominent, the terms of Mandela’s non-racial social covenant remain subject to debate and refusal by a variety
of actors. What is clear is that two decades after the end of apartheid, South Africa continues to be one of the most racialized and unequal societies in the world despite significant political, economic, and social changes. This reality casts doubt on the ANC’s ability to maintain the promise of a non-racial democratic future for all and has simultaneously allowed counter-visions of nativist revolution and continued white supremacy to persist. Nevertheless, the hope of a new South Africa continues to run deep. In the words of one white commentator responding to South Africa’s current political and economic turmoil: “We are still divided, still fighting the remnants of an ancient race war.” But he goes to remind his readers, channeling Mandela and Tutu, “what’s clear is that we need to turn away from our worst impulses and towards our best, or the current malaise will consume us.”

The threat of catastrophic destruction and the hope of another way, which Mandela and Tutu so effectively articulated, continues to fuel a desire for the new.

Conclusion:
I have argued that Mandela and Tutu, along with many other anti-apartheid activists, helped routinize alternate notions of self, nation, and citizenship based on reciprocity and a commitment to the common (non-racial) good. Together, they proposed that if one is to be worthy of belonging in/to the new South Africa, both in terms of enjoying the benefits of citizenship and in terms of being recognized as a fully human person, then one must prove this worthiness through moral action that rejects local

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and global forms of white supremacy. While both left space for their contemporaries, as well as future generations, to outline the virtues and practices associated with ubuntu and non-racialism, they did, in their own ways, hold themselves up as moral exemplars. If they were capable of transforming, of reaching out and embracing the other, and of acting in accordance with a vision of a future different from the past, then other South Africans were capable too.

While some might disagree that the relationship between whiteness, ethics and social transformation is the most central issue facing South Africa today, questions regarding the ethics of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa remain an important element of broader discussions regarding the individual and collective possibilities, or lack thereof, unleashed by the arrival of democracy and the limits of belonging and citizenship (for both black and white) in this democracy. Efforts to address what George Lipsitz calls “the possessive investment in whiteness,” the economic and political incentives that allow white people to maintain racialized hierarchies and keep whites supporting the racial contract, still leave many unresolved questions regarding the social role that white people might play within a transformed and transforming nation and society.²³⁸

In the post-apartheid era, the persistence of extreme racialized inequality has once again brought urgent questions of black suffering to the fore and challenged non-racialism as a viable social vision that can deliver meaningful experiences of equality and freedom to the majority of black South Africans. Unfortunately, this is the case because, as Mills explains, even when “no longer constitutionally and juridical enshrined,” white

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supremacy maintains itself through entrenching “social, political, cultural, and economic privilege based on the legacy of conquest.” The recent rise in activism in South Africa centered on the need for “decolonization” speaks to the pervasive sense among black South Africans, especially young black South Africans, of how much further South Africa needs to go in dismantling white supremacy and a legacy of racial conquest.

As Jacques Derrida reminds us, democracy is never a given and always contains within it the promise of revision and yearning for something more. As such, to practice democracy is to recognize that “there is no prior destination. We simply have to choose between a number of possible openings and possible closures, and that is a matter of strategy.” For Derrida, the question of democracy is always a question of leaving the horizon of the future open. The question today, however, is what political, economic, social, and ethical future is being fashioned in South Africa. During the transition years, Mandela’s sociopolitical and Tutu’s theopolitical visions carried considerable costs and risks that, perhaps while universal, were not equal in distribution. In particular, the oppressed were asked to recognize and legitimate the wounds and psychological anxieties of their oppressors—all in a grand experiment and desire for a new South Africa to emerge.

The non-racial future was promised to be a beacon of light to the world. South Africans together would demonstrate the possibility of creating a sociopolitical order no longer fundamentally structured by race. It is easy to understand why this vision was

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compelling and contested: then and especially now. This vision, which imbues individual action with transcendental significance, remains susceptible to critique precisely because the sacrifices made at the altar of democracy are tied to a future that is yet-to-come. Further, one cannot ignore the ambiguity inherent in Mandela and Tutu’s spiritual politics. White South Africans often see in non-racialism security for their future; it is unclear whether the majority of impoverished black South Africans feel (or felt) the same.

While not immune from criticism, Tutu and Mandela’s significance in relation to this study derives from the fact that they worked tirelessly to provide possible solutions to white South Africa regarding the problem of their future role in the nation and the problem of white self-making. By linking citizenship and social belonging to moral action, they sought to disrupt the historical and conceptual link between whiteness, agency, and nation. At the same time, they sought to redefine the very terms of participation in the political and moral community of nation. As symbols of a changing nation, Tutu and Mandela embodied the promise of freedom, the promise of transcendence, and the promise of peace at the end of a century defined by mass death and white supremacy. If apartheid ideologies tied citizenship and full personhood to the fact of whiteness, Tutu and Mandela linked national belonging and the achievement of

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241 In particular, Mandela’s full identification with “the nation,” both as a political revolutionary and later as the first democratically elected president, provided him with a unique platform. Mandela the transformed terrorist/Nobel Peace Prize winner became a potent symbol of a nation (and a world) aspiring to transform and transcend a violent and racist past. Mandela advocated an openness to the other, an openness to history, and an openness to the future, contrasting this with endless death, violence and mutual destruction. His appeal was directed particularly to white South Africans who were fearful and apprehensive about shifts to power relations. However, Mandela was clear. All South Africans were called to embark on ambitious projects of self-transformation and social transformation for the sake of the common good. Mandela’s social contract, or “covenant,” promised that if democratic values were practiced, then one’s place in the rainbow nation would be secured.
“humanity” to the quality of one’s relations with others. Both men helped to craft a vision of a truly postcolonial society founded on values of human dignity, equality, and social justice that continues to exercise significant weight on debates regarding transformation and the new South Africa.
Chapter 2: Seeking (White) Transformation: Development, Spirituality, and Ethics

Introduction

In July 2014, I found myself at a noticeably interracial gathering at a home in the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg. The main living area was abuzz with activity: papers were strewn on a large table and clusters of sticky notes were pasted on the walls. Easy jokes with naughty twists bounced back and forth within the group, punctuated by boisterous laughter. During break times and meals, earnest political discussion broke out about the current state of South African democracy and the recent national elections. For the most part, all of this banter and debate was conducted in English, but during side conversations, or gleeful jokes, Zulu and Afrikaans were thrown in with good measure. From afar, this group seemed to reflect the promise of democracy in South Africa: young and optimistic, socially and politically engaged, and racially, culturally, economically, and even nationally, diverse. Their free-flowing intimacy and deep affection would have seemed unimaginable just two decades earlier.

The group I saw was composed of individuals who were simultaneously idealistic and weary, much like the country itself. They had emerged from a hard year of development work on projects ranging from life-skills training, youth tutoring, and employment initiatives to a brand new social enterprise that involved making and marketing artisanal food products to Johannesburg’s upscale market. They also brought to the gathering various personal trials, some of which were linked to the stresses and strains produced by their social engagement and community development work.

The group would spend the next three brilliantly sunny winter days in deep discussion and reflection about the future in front of them and the underlying vision and
motivation for their work. In particular, they seemed preoccupied with a specific problem: how to transmit and replicate the kind of connection and community they had formed between them to the various peoples, projects, and activities they were involved with “on the ground.” That is, they wondered how they could find and cultivate individuals who shared their commitment to transformation based on values of inclusivity, equality, diversity, and service. Indeed, such individuals seemed rare but necessary in a country whose future seemed all too precarious given stark economic and racial divides. In voices thick with emotion, they expressed the difficulty in finding “diamonds” who might develop the moral dispositions deemed necessary for lasting social change.242

As the meeting progressed, the group listened intently to each other’s stark confessions of weariness and limitation. In response, they invited each other to invest in activities that matched their current interests and capacity. Conversations and organizational decisions that seemed fraught and murky were postponed until future clarity was reached, and they pledged to hold each other accountable in the year ahead.

Steeped in middle-class comforts, away from the difficult decisions and realities found in the communities where they lived and the spaces where they worked, the group reconnected profoundly around their vision of a “shared way of life” and around the idea of becoming, and being, particular kinds of subjects whose conduct might “bridge the

242 I was rather shocked to hear this term used. I don’t think the group was conscious of it at the time, but the term “diamonds” in reference to those they wanted to recruit brought to mind the somewhat racially pejorative term “black diamonds,” a term used to refer to the new upwardly-mobile black middle class. Perhaps a Freudian slip, I find it interesting due to the fact that it seemed that RISE sought to integrate/include and socialize black participations into middle class norms and habits through its development work. At the same time, the group insisted that though participants should learn to “play the game” by developing certain skillsets, they should also see beyond the “corporate veil” and remain critical of middle-class, suburban values.
gap” between white and black, wealthy and impoverished. Of course, they were not always serious or deflated. During breaks, levity reigned as friends hugged, exchanged political gossip, listened to local hip-hop music, and prepared food together. The group was even treated to an afternoon wine-tasting and pairing lesson by their Afrikaner host: a wine and food enthusiast who grew up in the vineyards of the Western Cape.

The gathering I am describing was the national planning meeting of a Christian faith-based organization in South Africa that I will call RISE. The organization was founded by a white Afrikaner couple in 2006 and was part of a larger umbrella organization based in the United Kingdom. At the time of my research it worked primarily in a black mixed-income suburb near Johannesburg, but was expanding to the inner city and other sites around the country. As an organization, RISE was composed of three different, but overlapping, circles. The first circle, described above, consisted of a small committed group of individuals who through their “service” and “way of life” sought to inspire and equip others to create change in their communities. This group understood themselves as working to foster a racially inclusive and egalitarian form of community (a “movement”) that could serve as a model for wider social change. At the time of my research, this group had eleven members: seven white and four black. Most were volunteers, meaning they relied on outside income or support to sustain their work.

The second circle of RISE was composed of individuals who were employed by the organization to carry out development activities in a kind of mentoring opportunity aimed at inviting and inspiring them to commit to the RISE way of life. In contrast to the majority white but increasingly diverse core, this group was primarily black. They earned a stipend for overseeing things such as after-school or skills training programs, typically
working for RISE from one to three years. Ideally, those employed by RISE were also residents of the communities in which they worked. Several members of this circle were also part of the first. The third circle of RISE consisted of those impacted by various development programs. These programs focused on helping participants find sustainable employment and exercise leadership in their local communities. This group was almost exclusively black.

In this chapter, my focus will be on the first circle of RISE—the group tasked with shaping the values, norms, and practices of RISE as a development organization—and the role of whiteness in shaping the group’s communal ethics. I will argue that core members of RISE sought to develop and reproduce a form of social and spiritual community that bridged race and class divides and facilitated the kind of individual and collective self-transformation perceived as necessary for building a new South Africa. Moreover, for the progressive white Christians affiliated with RISE and their wider network, RISE provided a space through which to elaborate and experiment with alternate white subjectivities.

To make this case, I examine RISE from three perspectives. The first perspective deals with RISE as a faith-based development organization. I discuss the history, values, and beliefs that animated RISE as an organization and their particular approach to development, which included the development of the RISE way of life. Moving to the spiritual, I then address how a contemporary reform movement known as the Emerging Church Movement influenced RISE members and their pursuit of the RISE way of life. Finally, I explore how RISE members were shaped by, and responsive to, post-apartheid questions regarding race and social change. This multidimensional approach illustrates
how RISE, as both organization and community, gave rise to a particular ethics of
whiteness: one framed around social and spiritual ideals of equality and inclusion and
informed by proximity to black subjects. These ethics were simultaneously shaped by
moral nation-building projects and Western, Protestant Christianities. In my final section,
I explore the critiques, tensions, and contradictions that emerge as a result of these ethics.

Insights from the Anthropology of Ethics

Before I proceed, a discussion of theory and method is in order. This chapter,
along with the two chapters that follow it, focus primarily on the ethics of progressive
white Christians and how these ethics were used to negotiate questions of white identity
and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. Core RISE members, along with members
of similarly oriented groups, composed a network of about fifteen to twenty people who
were actively engaged in community development work in black majority contexts in or
near Johannesburg.243 Though small, the influence of this network stretched wider
through their connections to local area churches, others NGOs, and social activist circles.
Membership in these groups skewed white, but given the highly segregated nature of
South African society, the fact that these groups had managed to recruit and integrate
black members from a variety of social classes was striking.244 The groups also
ensquared a range of cultural, ethnic, and national identifications, including Afrikaans
and English South Africans, white Americans, and black Zimbabweans.

243 The network I am describing was primarily composed of two FBOs. Initially, the groups I studied were
not well acquainted, but by the time I left, they were increasingly linked with one another. Due to the
intensive, unique, and relatively radical nature of their ethical orientations vis-à-vis dominant norms in
white society, most members sought like-minded collaborators and conversation partners wherever they
could find them. The inner circle of RISE consisted of 11 self-identified members, about half of the larger
network I engaged with, though given the fluid nature of these groups and the flexible periphery around
RISE’s core group that I already described, this network could be larger.
244 The network was roughly 60% white and 40% black.
RISE was involved with a variety of development initiatives aimed at improving the lives of those suffering the social and economic effects of apartheid and persisting racialized inequality (e.g. after school programs, educational support, skills development, job creation, social enterprise, political activism). However, I find its primary significance to be in the ethical domain. Not only did RISE and similar groups promote an ethics of racial reconciliation, equality, and inclusion intended to support their vision of a non-racial and democratic South Africa, they also provided a quasi-institutional framework where white progressive Christians could pursue individualized aims of self-transformation amidst a supportive community.

By discussing RISE as a site of ethical reflection and experimentation, and placing RISE within a wider social and religious ecology, this chapter endeavors to illuminate some of the moral logics and ethical resources that communities like RISE provided to white subjects, before turning in subsequent chapters to interviews with individuals involved with RISE and a discussion of similar projects. As I will show, RISE provided its members a multiplicity of opportunities through which to elaborate and experiment with ideas and practices not readily available in white, middle-class religious and suburban spaces. These opportunities were especially important given the complicated relationships that members of RISE had with mainstream white communities and churches.

245In my discussion of ethical experimentation, I am indebted to the framework of moral experimentation that anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly develops. Mattingly discusses in her ethnography of African American families caring for chronically ill children, the idea that “contingencies of the ordinary can present resources for moral creativity and experimentation.” I agree with this view, and I argue something similar in relation to RISE. Mattingly, Moral Laboratories, 26.
In chapter one, I concluded by discussing the ways in which the post-apartheid political landscape remains animated by public contestations of white power and privilege and calls for racial redress. The continued cultural and economic hegemony of white South Africans, combined with resistance to sociopolitical transformation at a variety of levels, has become a central focus of debate and scrutiny. While iconic black leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu have lent credence to the idea that white South Africans can earn moral legitimacy and a place in the nation through embracing progressive social change, there remains little clarity regarding the concrete options available to white subjects who seek to participate in a politics of redress or the kinds of practices that might sustain alternate forms of life. I seek to respond to this lacuna by exploring the kinds of questions and conditions that incited those I interacted with to pursue aims of self and social transformation and the tensions and contradictions produced by such aims.

I embark on this quest informed by theoretical concerns and methodological approaches found in the anthropology of ethics: a growing field which seeks to explore the empirical and qualitative dimensions of ethical life. Anthropologists like James Laidlaw and James Faubion have argued that freedom, responsibility, and decision making are important vectors of human experience, deserving of non-reductive study and analysis. In *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*, Laidlaw critiques the way morality and ethics have been previously studied in anthropology. He is particularly concerned with the tendency to treat the varied ways people reflect and act on what they consider to be right and good as either 1) subjective illusions that mask subordination to social structures and ideology, or 2) straightforward acts of resistance to
them. Such structures and ideologies are often conceived of as “the social,” “the global system,” “neo-liberalism,” “colonialist discourse,” and for the purposes of this study, we might also add white supremacy.\(^{246}\)

Laidlaw’s concern is that ethics, religious or otherwise, need not be treated as always-already in the service of logics of domination or tied to their resistance. To proceed on this assumption holds the danger that important questions about the nature and limits of human freedom, responsibility, and agency within specific social systems are sidestepped. Thus, he vigorously argues for a kind of social analysis whereby ideas of freedom and responsibility are not always-already assumed to be synonymous with logics of domination, and human behavior is not rendered fully determinate by the material. This is not to say that scholars should not attend to the ways perceptions, dispositions, practices and values considered as “moral” tend to often to support structures of domination. But Laidlaw consider the anthropology of ethics to be an enterprise that primarily seeks to “bring into focus and make amenable to empirical research dimensions of human conduct that have hitherto been largely invisible, sidestepped or denied in social analysis” by taking seriously the question of human freedom to live and act in a myriad of ways in response to both the conditions around them and the codes of conduct and ideals available to them.\(^{247}\)

James Faubion shares these concerns, and I am particularly indebted to the Foucauldian approach to ethics that he develops in *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Drawing
on Foucault’s work, particularly *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*, Faubion argues that ethics is primarily about becoming a “subject of a qualitatively distinguishable sort:” one who can claim to be capable of the moral esteem of others.\textsuperscript{248} Rather than a set of deontological or consequentialist prescriptions, ethics, for Foucault and those who have extended his framework, describes a process of self-making. It is materialized in the process and practices by which individual and collective actors move towards a particular “subject position,” the pursuit and consummation of which Foucault describes using the Greek word *telos*.\textsuperscript{249} The realization of a particular *telos*, or mode of being, occurs through ethical work (*askêsis*), directed at whatever parts of the self, or extensions of the self, are deemed in need of attention and intervention.\textsuperscript{250} Thus, a Foucauldian approach to the anthropology of ethics focuses on the relationship of the self to the self by observing the intentional and voluntary practices taken in order to become a particular kind of subject, an ethical subject. At the same time, ethical frameworks, values and ideals are always negotiated and defined intersubjectively within a particular social and historical field. For these reasons, those influenced by Foucault advocate paying special attention to the role of others—as both objects of ethical concern and as pedagogues—in the process of self-making.

Because self-making is also always intersubjective, ethical norms are subject to adaption, change, and reification. Further, ethics involves a relationship between the self and a given set of rules, norms, values, ideals, and traditions—a mode of

\textsuperscript{248} Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics*, 2011, 115.
\textsuperscript{250} *Askêsis* involves a variety of practices or techniques referred to by Foucault as technologies of the self. For further discussion, see Foucault, “Technologies of the Self.”
subjectivation. Thus, while Faubion underscores how a Foucauldian approach to the anthropology of ethics is not to be conceived of as the study of prescribed rules or obligations —nor does it presume to be prescriptive—one must account for how ethical values, ideals, and practices are rendered compelling and reproducible within wider social fields.

When considering groups like RISE, the ideals of self and social transformation they pursued were very much contingent on the beliefs and values of both black and white members as well as larger social contexts, histories, and experiences. Though both black and white members viewed participation in RISE as an important vehicle through which to actively shift understandings of self and society, for white members the chance to live and work in black spaces and to form intimate relationships with black colleagues provided an important means through which to reflect on and problematize their

251 Foucault defines the mode of subjectivation this way: “the way in which an individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practices.” Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2*, 27. Elsewhere he states that the mode of subjectivation is “the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations.” See Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 264.

252 In his study of ancient Greek ethics, Foucault tends to emphasize the prescriptive dimensions of codes of conduct and their relationship to ethical action. Faubion, on the other hand, emphasizes that “there is more to the ethical conditioning of a subject than its relation to duty,” including the inspiring role played by exemplars and pedagogues. As he rightly points out: “One’s duties are one matter; one’s values and ideals to which one might aspire to are often quite another” (51-52). For these reasons, Faubion encourages attention to the various kinds of conditions that “encourage or compel an actor toward becoming and being an ethical subject of a qualitatively distinguishable sort,” which I seek to do in this study (115). Faubion further argues that ethics cannot be ascribed to the actions of an isolated individual or conceived of outside the social. For Faubion, the ethical domain always requires others. Theoretically, the line between personal charisma and ethics is marked by one’s accommodation of and recognition by others. As such, the ethical domain always requires a degree of routinization (80-89). In order to highlight the dynamic and complex relationship between the self and the various open-ended systems that allow for the “becoming” and “maintenance” of the ethical subject, Faubion uses the term the themitical. The themitical indexes the rules, norms, obligations, traditions, beliefs, codes of conduct etc. used to shape the self and also reproduce ethical ideals. See Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics*, 20–21, 114–115.
“whiteness”—a confluence of race, class, culture and religion—and to pursue alternate subject positions that were distinct from conservative white peers.

Part 1: Development and Transformation

In this section, I explore RISE’s origins as a faith-based organization, its development model within the context of democratic South Africa, and the ethical values and ideals that framed the organization’s conception of the good. My discussion of RISE as an FBO departs from approaches that discuss FBOs in terms of their difference from secular NGOs. While some scholars view faith-based development organizations like RISE as posing a stark alternative to secular development models, which are perceived as being overly rationalistic, technocratic, and top-down, RISE seemed to intentionally blur spiritual and secular forms of social engagement that have emerged in response to global inequality. Certainly, RISE did “draw on elaborate spiritual and moral values that represent an important and distinct adjunct to secular development discourse,” but for reasons that will become clear, RISE might be considered (and was so by members) to be as much a social movement as a FBO. Indeed, it shared many similarities with what is known as “new, new social movements:” youth-oriented movements grounded in multidimensional notions of identity that operate through a network model and seek to respond to economic inequalities produced by late modernity and globalization. Such movements have a strong but flexible core attached to a less involved and more diverse

253 I concur with Hefferan and Fogarty’s point that anthropological analysis of FBOs must move beyond traditional NGO frameworks in order to “unpack the varied and shifting meanings that actors assign to religiosity, volunteerism, ‘doing good,’ development, charity, and justice, and how these notions intersect with faith and propel intervention into ‘other’ communities.” Tara Hefferan and Tim Fogarty, “The Anthropology of Faith and Development: An Introduction,” NAPA Bulletin 33, no. 1 (July 2, 2010): 1.

periphery. This porous relationship between the core and periphery creates “nodes of interaction” across sites of difference, allowing resources and knowledge to circulate widely and be applied diffusely in a kind of “localized internationalism.”

Origin Stories
RISE was founded by two white Afrikaners, Nadine and André, who felt a deep moral responsibility to engage with the racial and economic divides of post-apartheid South Africa. At the time of my research, Nadine and André were in their mid-thirties. Like many Afrikaners of their generation, they were born into apartheid and socialized into a world that revolved around distinctions between white and non-white as well as Afrikaner and non-Afrikaner. This culture was steeped in social and historical narratives of intense struggle for collective survival amidst external threats as well as an unquestioned belief in white supremacy.

Narrating her own “liberal” Afrikaans upbringing during apartheid, sociologist Melissa Steyn lends insight into this world. She describes how race was a defining factor in every white South African’s life, and how “the divisions between the English and Afrikaans groups, born out of a long history of competition for control of the land between two colonizing groups” remained starkly evident. Steyn also notes how she was raised on “stories of the bloody decolonization process led by African Nationalist movements” and the belief that black rule in South Africa would bring inevitable disaster. Such fears were magnified by the common discourse among Afrikaners that,

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256 For an extensive history, see Hermann Giliomee, The Afrikaners: Biography of a People (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

257 Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be, x–xii.

258 Ibid., xii.
unlike the English, there was no “back home” in Europe for them to return to.259

Centuries of settlement and cultural development convinced Afrikaners that the territory of South Africa belonged to them as much as any other group. This nationalism was bolstered by attributions of God’s special blessing and protection of the Afrikaner people.260 Many feared a loss of home and identity should the ANC gain power.

By the time Nadine and André moved into adulthood, Nelson Mandela’s vision of a new South Africa—a Rainbow Nation at peace with itself—was at its optimistic and utopian high point. The past really did seem like “another country.”261 On the surface, young South Africans, white and black, seemed eager to forge a new South African identity that celebrated racial and cultural diversity as well as the place of every citizen in the nation. Nadine and André ended up in very different professions, one working in the extremely wealthy and white-dominated corporate investment sector, and the other working with poor, black communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS. As they compared their daily realities, they were troubled by the gaps in wealth, opportunity, and resources they saw around them, and they dreamed of helping play a greater role in helping turn Nelson Mandela’s vision of a new South Africa into reality.

During a period of living and working in the United Kingdom, Nadine and André came into contact with a group of Christians who actively linked their faith to social engagement, which greatly appealed to them. This group was tied to a Christian

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259 Ibid., xi. Such discourses should be considered alongside those of white Americans whose claim to land and nation is rarely questioned. Americans do not think of themselves as colonists, rather they think of themselves as having broken with colonial powers to establish their own “nation,” people, and culture. Afrikaners have similar feelings in relation to the British, which in turn has shaped their understanding of having the same claim to land and nation as other racial groups.


development organization, and eventually the couple embarked on setting up a South African chapter of the organization in 2006. From the beginning, two questions motivated the founders of RISE: 1) “how can we be transformed” and 2) how can we “bring sustainable transformation to our communities?” Reflecting on these two questions led them to develop the particular shape and scope of RISE’s organizational model and its development philosophy.

Democracy and Development

As a faith-based development organization, RISE emerged at a time in South Africa when economic and cultural development was understood to be a fundamental right of all citizens living in the newly liberated nation. Such development was seen as a key ingredient for advancing the ANC’s mission of building a non-racial democracy.262 Initially, religious bodies were seen as key conduits through which the government could channel resources for community development.263 Yet because of global pressures on the state to adopt neoliberal policies, as well as emerging critiques of ANC corruption and nepotism, by the 2000s, civil society actors, including faith-based organizations (FBOs), began to understand themselves as quasi-independent or alternate agents of development vis-à-vis the state. As a result, the ANC government has developed an ambivalent relationship with FBOs, seeing them at times as a partner/resource for advancing their sociopolitical transformation agenda and at other times as an obstacle or threat.264

264 For a critical discussion of the relationship between faith-based development approaches and the ANC government, see Tanja Winkler, “When God and Poverty Collide: Exploring the Myths of Faith-Sponsored Community Development,” Urban Studies 45, no. 10 (September 1, 2008): 2099–2116. Kumalo also explores the fractious and shifting relationship between ecumenical religious groups and the ANC government, especially around issues of development and democracy. See Raymond Simangaliso Kumalo,
RISE adopted a supportive yet critical role in relation to the state. It pledged to support the 2030 National Development Plan, put forth by the ANC.\(^{265}\) It also wanted to contribute to building, and avoiding, the kinds of local conditions described in the Dinokeng Scenarios. These planning scenarios spelled out three alternate futures for South Africa with the preferred one being the emergence of a strong civil society that could effectively engage with the state to build development capacities and hold the state accountable.\(^ {266}\) RISE endeavored to support the state and help build a strong civil society through offering internships, job training, and social enterprise activities focused on tackling youth unemployment and through leadership development initiatives.


\[\text{“THE DINOKENG SCENARIOS - SCENARIOS SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION,” accessed November 3, 2016, http://www.dinokengscenarios.co.za/scen_summary.php. On the project’s website they explain the rational for these planning scenarios, who was involved, and why they chose the name Dinokeng.}\]

\[\text{“In 1994, at the dawn of a democratic era in South Africa, our hopes were writ large in the narrative of liberty. There was a vision both of nationhood for all and of substantial improvement in the quality of life for the victims of apartheid. Even those who had been part of the previous oppressive minority were buoyed by a sense of new-found pride in a nation that could hold its head high in the global community. In the 15 years of our democracy, the realities of constructing a new nation have revealed themselves as an entirely grittier and more complex task than we had anticipated. Our legacy challenges us once more with the task of reconstruction. We have not yet vanquished our past; nor have we yet fully constructed our future. In response to these predicaments, a group of 35 South Africans from a wide spectrum of our society gathered together to probe our country’s present, and to consider possible futures. The purpose was to engage citizen-leaders from all corners of South Africa in a discussion about our future: To create a space and language for open, reflective and reasoned strategic conversation among South Africans, about possible futures for the country, and the opportunities, risks and choices these futures present. This purpose was built on the premise that a more engaged citizenry would contribute to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in South Africa. The Scenario Team comprises leaders from civil society and government, political parties, business, public administration, trade unions, religious groups, academia and the media. They were brought together by six convenors, all of whom are actively engaged in our national issues. They are Dr Mamphela Ramphele, who chairs the convenor group, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, Mr Bob Head, Ms Graça Machel, Dr Vincent Maphai and Mr Rick Menell. The Scenario Team met in the north-eastern corner of Gauteng known as Dinokeng. Dinokeng is in a catchment area between two rivers and its name derives from the Sepedi word meaning a place where rivers flow together. The location captured the spirit of the dialogues: a flowing together of ideas and perspectives in the forging of a common future. It also gave its name to the scenarios the Team produced: the Dinokeng Scenarios.”}\]
same time, by deploying a community-based model, RISE tried to take advantage of, and reinforce, grassroots communal structures in a desire to bring about social change from below.

*Poverty, Development, and Ethics*

One of RISE’s foundational beliefs was that poverty was primarily about exclusion: exclusion from resources, yes, but also exclusion from “community.” As such, personal and interpersonal relationships were considered key conduits whereby the poor, excluded, and marginalized could be included in local and global pools of skills and resources that have often been an exclusively white domain. RISE tried to create specific programs that could help marginalized individuals move out of racialized poverty and other forms of social exclusion, but they also emphasized the importance of white and black RISE members building intimate relationships with each other and those directly impacted by social inequality. In this way, RISE members endeavored to make personal the political. Yet the aims of the group were not framed as political, even if they arguably had political implications.

RISE members clearly believed that democratic ideals of racial reconciliation, black empowerment, and non-racialism were best worked out in context of personal and interpersonal relationships. Creating a culture where everybody mattered dovetailed with the national development emphasis on the need for everyone to make a contribution to building a new South Africa. Influenced by development discourses that link democracy with the cultivation of a strong civil society, RISE’s development philosophy was equally premised on the idea that social transformation is rooted in, and fueled by, voluntary individual and collective action. To this end, RISE leaders sought to nurture in

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267 Kumalo, “Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa.”
themselves and model to others an ethical subjectivity that embraced broader social ideals of reconciliation, equality, inclusion, pluralism, and mutual accountability.

Like many Protestant non-profit organizations, RISE understood development to be about much more than the meeting of physical needs or the improvement of one’s material circumstances. Rather, development indexes a holistic process, which is why RISE placed great emphasis on the building of social, physical, spiritual, and emotional skills and adopted an organizational model that linked the individual and communal. The form of community that core RISE members sought to model was one inspired by Jesus’s concern for the poor, excluded, ostracized, and marginalized. Communicating a message of spiritual inclusion and equality, coupled with social enactments of these values modeled by the core community and their shared way of life, seemed as important, if not more important, to RISE as achieving material uplift.

Both black and white RISE members ultimately understood their own ethics or quests for self-transformation as integral to long-term social change. The work of development was understood to be as much about their own self-transformation as it was about changing the material circumstances of others. Members felt that the only way to live out core RISE values was to “train” in “becoming honest with the real conditions of our lives.” Practices that promoted self-reflection and listening deeply to others were considered to be the “core disciplines” needed for anyone who wanted to follow or promote the RISE way of life. Only through self-reflection and dialogue with diverse others could behaviors that promoted equality and inclusion be reinforced within the

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various layers of the organizations. In contrast to traditional charity models that reject (or conceal) notions of reciprocity and exchange, RISE highlighted the relationship between their development activities and the ethics of leaders/core members, particular privileged white members.\textsuperscript{269} Even as core members sought to provide practical means of improving the lives of black South Africans, they also sought, through their commitment to the RISE way of life and its values of service and simplicity, to critique privileged communities and the logics of accumulation, upward mobility, individualism, and white preservationism.

\textit{Moral Exemplars}

RISE members believed that lasting change could only come when leaders and those they served took responsibility for their own transformation. However, individually and collectively, core RISE members were entrusted with shaping the overarching vision, norms, practices, and ideals that guided RISE as faith-based development organization—what they termed the RISE “ethos.” They tried to model and promote a specific set of values with the hope of inspiring others, both inside and outside the organization, to embrace these values. These collective values included respect for difference, intentional inclusion of those considered in some way excluded, openness to new approaches, and embrace of risk. To reinforce these values, they encouraged one another to not only live in the communities they worked in, which for white subjects almost always involved residential relocation, but to also live near or with one another and to meet regularly around shared practices such as group meals, guided reflection, and organizational assessments.

As already described, RISE’s organizational model consisted of concentric circles with the understanding that the all development activities would flow out of, and be informed by, the ethics of the most committed members of the group. At the same time, RISE’s development model was intended to reproduce itself in a kind of sustainable cycle that started with skills development among the outer circle and progressed inward through significant shifts in lifestyle and ethics, all within a mentoring and group accountability framework. Those who showed affinity for the RISE way of life or leadership potential might move from being a program participant into a kind of project management role as their skills developed and they were mentored by core members. Eventually, they might make the ultimate commitment (or conversion?) to the RISE way of life, helping nourish the organizational core community with new life and perspective.

This cycle was the ideal, but in practice, most of the core leaders/members of RISE, particularly white members, were recruited or “invited” into the inner circle of the organization through personal referrals and contacts without starting on the outer edges. In other words, they were drawn primarily to the RISE way of life and understood themselves as committing to this way of life, and the core community, from the beginning.

This observation leads me to conclude that while tasked with overseeing, directly or indirectly, specific social initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality, the primary role of core members was that of being moral exemplars. Similar to what Humphrey observes in her study of Mongolian moralities, core members strove to be individuals who did not simply affirm “existing cultural ways of life.” Rather, in relation to one another, and to a chosen set of traditions and ideals, they developed a flexible set
of values and practices that were intended to be adapted and emulated by a wider public. At a practical level, RISE, as an organization/community, then, depended heavily on the everyday conduct of core members and those they inspired. Core members needed to invest significant time and energy in developing and sustaining meaningful interpersonal relationships with each other and across a wide range of networks. Core members also needed to exhibit high capacity for self-reflexivity and responsibility. All of these factors explain why the group was often frustrated in their attempts to recruit others to their way of life for the long-term.

Part 2: Spirituality and Transformation

In addition to conducting development work, RISE members saw their organizational model as having the potential to reimagine the concept of church through the creation of an alternate religious space that challenged norms of racial homogeneity, cultural insularity, and religious dogmatism. RISE sought to form a spiritual community that, unlike most churches in South Africa, formed intimate social and spiritual bounds between individuals of different cultures and races.

Interestingly, the deep Christian orientation of RISE as an organization was not always apparent in day to day development activities or in the wide-ranging conversations I had with core members. It took me a long time to understand the deeper philosophical and theological underpinnings of RISE’s organizational culture and the various streams that influenced this culture. This was the case because, while most core members of RISE saw themselves as striving to follow the “revolutionary” model of

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Jesus, a figure they saw as crossing social and religious boundaries, most were uncomfortable with institutionalized forms of Christianity and emphasized that “God is bigger than Christianity.”

Over time, it became clear to me that RISE can also be viewed as part of the Emerging Church Movement (ECM), a larger renewal movement within Western, Protestant, Christianity that began at the end of the twentieth century. This movement combines a desire for intimate spiritual community with an emphasis on social and civic engagement.271 The ECM is a “discernable, transnational network” of Christians who, despite holding diverse beliefs and practices, share a desire to resist dominant religious, theological, and social narratives.272 This movement has sparked a number of religious and theological experiments intended to rethink the meaning of church in response to late modern (or post-modern) conditions. Initially growing out of reactions to conservative evangelicalism in the US and stagnant Protestant mainline denominations in the UK in the 1990s, ECM leaders view social changes associated with late modernity, such as fluidity and pluralism, as having the potential to give birth to religious renewal in the West.273 While I never heard any RISE members refer to themselves as “emerging,” I found that they shared much in common with those considered to be part of the ECM, such as a yearning to embody an alternate religious subjectivity that could serve as a form of religious and cultural critique of white, middle-class, suburban life.274 Most considered RISE their primary spiritual community (it was not tied to any particular denomination),

273 Usually understood by ECM commentators as Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.
feeling alienated from the churches they grew up in, even if they maintained formal and informal ties to these bodies.

The Emerging Church Movement in South Africa

Similar to the United States and the United Kingdom, interest in the ECM in South Africa can be linked to religious and social changes occurring in the late 1990s. When South Africa emerged from decades of apartheid, many South Africans welcomed the arrival of democracy. At the same time, a mood of anxiety, and even pessimism, percolated among the privileged white populace. No longer could the advantages attached to white skin—advantages forged through Dutch and British colonialism and legislated under apartheid—be taken for granted, leaving many white South Africans to perceive their future in the nation as precarious and unstable. In response, many whites chose to leave South Africa, emigrating to the United Kingdom, North America, New Zealand or Australia, or they withdrew into spaces of racial and cultural comfort, including wealthy suburbs and churches.275 This suburban withdrawal, according to Ballard, represents a kind of “semigration:” while not physically leaving South Africa, whites tried to spatially escape from the pressures produced by socio-political transformation, shifting their energies to preserving familiar racial and cultural norms through the use of financial and symbolic capital.276

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275 Statistics on white emigration are very difficult to find, but there is a difference of 600,288 whites between the 1991 and 1996 censuses, and almost every white South African has a family member or someone close to them who has emigrated. Hendriks and Erasmus argue that some of this population difference may be due to respondents choosing to not identify their race in the census. Hendriks and Erasmus, "Interpreting the New Religious Landscape in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 42.
Nevertheless, the rise of black political, religious, social, and economic power meant that whiteness was no longer, and could no longer, be what it used to be. As white theologians and church leaders from historic mainline denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, Congregationalist etc.) took stock of these dynamics, the situation seemed dire. Much like the nation itself, and the fate of whites in it, the long-term choice facing mainline denominations seemed stark: “adapt or die.”

On a political level, leaders were acutely aware of needing to come to terms with the apartheid past and engage with (or at least not appear to be obstructing) the national social-political transformation project. Many also realized that the path to denominational growth and survival necessarily involved the inclusion of black South Africans at every level. Leaders also worried about a decline in their traditional religious “market share” among white, middle-class constituencies. In addition to dynamics of white flight, this market share was being impacted by global trends such as the rise of megachurches, the rapid spread of charismatic and evangelical forms of Christianity, and an increase in those who claimed no religious identification.

A perceived crisis in mainline denominations was intensified by varying levels of guilt and denial about the role of mainline churches in supporting white supremacy. Prior to the arrival of democracy in 1994, “English” traditions—such as Anglican and Methodist—occupied powerful social positions. Under colonialism and apartheid, they were key missionizing agents: often partners with the state or alternatives to the state in overseeing projects of education and health care. Though these denominations were

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277 Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be.*
278 Ibid., 61.
critical of racial discrimination, officially anti-apartheid, and counted many black members, institutional power often remained firmly in the hands of white elites. As a result, these churches tended to reinforce, rather than subvert, the dominant racial hierarchy, and this culture persisted into the post-apartheid era.  

More notoriously, the Dutch Reformed Church, the historic denomination of white Afrikaners, had the unenviable reputation of providing theological justifications for apartheid and served as the de facto state church during apartheid. Perhaps more than any other church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the denomination preferred by most Afrikaners, was especially impacted by post-apartheid shifts in racial power. Those within the Dutch Reformed Church who sought to come to terms with their place in a changing South Africa and the apartheid past had to contend with strong reactionary, and sometimes hostile, counter-pressures among older generations who sought comfort and stability in religious tradition and dogma.

As Jonathan Jansen argues, Afrikaners, on the whole, experienced the transition to democracy as a kind of cultural defeat. Because the dominance of Afrikaans language

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281 For more on the concerns and challenges facing the Dutch Reformed Church in the late 1990s and early 2000s, see Friedrich W. De Wet, “Dealing with Corruption in South African Civil Society: Orientating Christian Communities for Their Role in a Post-Apartheid Context,” Verbum et Ecclesia 36, no. 1 (March 25, 2015): 5–7; T. Kuperus, “The Political Role and Democratic Contribution of Churches in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” Journal of Church and State 53, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 285–89. An entire journal issue of Scriptura was devoted in 2003 to exploring the fate of the DRC church. It addressed issues such as shifting spirituality and dissatisfaction among DRC youth populations; the need to deal with the DRC history of racial segregation and the apartheid past; and the need to “reclaim” the Reformed Tradition and adapt it in ways that would allow it to be relevant, credible, and applicable to the new social and political context, which would involve participating in ecumenical, African, and public discourses. See Wolfram Weisse, “Introduction,” Scriptura 83 (2003): 189–91.
and culture in the political domain effectively ended in 1994, schools, churches, and universities became the three spheres where Afrikaners sought to actively preserve their language, culture, and ways of life. Jansen notes that, “of the three, the churches are the most secure; they are the only spaces in which Afrikaners can be left alone to be white and Afrikaans without interference; they remain the only arena that is, in many cases, still all-white and all-Afrikaans in the new South Africa.” Jansen further argues that the insulated and homogenous nature of Afrikaner churches allows social memories of traumatic loss as well as denial of the horrors of apartheid to be reproduced without challenge, exacerbating a sense of white victimhood and resistance to socio-political change. He concludes that despite external pressures and voices of conscience within the DRC “it is entirely up to these churches, once indistinguishable from the state, to decide whether and when they will change at all.”282 The civic nature of churches as institutions means that the choice to adapt and become more racially and culturally inclusive depends on the voluntary action of members and leaders.

But all was not doom and gloom. In the early 2000s, a small network of young white pastors, theology students, and lay people began their own conversation: one much more optimistic about the future of “the church” in South Africa. This network was convinced that death or growing irrelevance need not be the fate of the church in South Africa. A new church was being born, or needed to emerge, out of the ashes of apartheid. Influenced by the ECM in the US and Europe, those attracted to this conversation were predominantly white, male, and educated.283 While hailing from a variety of traditions—

282 Jansen, Knowledge in the Blood, 35.
283 These qualities are also present in the global ECM. See for example, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K Bolger, Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 11. Gibbs and Bolger note, “Our research identified that many emerging churches are
Reformed, Orthodox, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Evangelical—they were united by a sense that the church in South Africa needed to change in order to remain spiritually fulfilling and socially relevant. Though wrestling with many of the same questions as mainline leaders, this group interpreted South Africa’s changing social and political environment as providing opportunities to develop more authentic expressions of Christian faith.

Interest in the ECM among South Africans began as early as 2003. By the mid-2000s, a virtual network of blogs and websites devoted to the emerging conversation in South Africa existed. Here, participants reflected on and transmitted the thought of key ECM leaders and discussed application in the South African context. Similar to what American ECM leader Brian McLaren narrates in *The Justice Project*, the initial emerging conversation in South Africa was focused primarily on doing “church” differently and creating “safe space” for critical questions not allowed in traditional or mainstream religious spaces. Participants expressed frustration with the commodified culture of megachurches, disillusionment with suburban life, and the rejection of conservative dogmatism. Together, they dreamed of an alternate church in South Africa, understood more as a web of individuals and communities than a set of institutions,

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led by white, anglo, middle-class males. Consequently, some may judge the movement to be deficient multiculturally. At this point in time, the detractors may be right. Part of the reason this particular culture predominates is that many of the pioneering emerging churches arose out of the evangelical charismatic subculture, which has these same characteristics.” Many other studies have noted these same demographic characteristics. See Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 2011; Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*; Josh Packard, *The Emerging Church: Religion at the Margins* (Boulder: First Forum, 2012). Packard has a very thoughtful discussion of diversity in the ECM on pages 11-12.

which would be inclusive of the questioning and responsive to the needs/perspectives of younger South Africans.

By 2006, several ecclesial experiments influenced by the ECM were active in the Johannesburg/Pretoria area where I conducted my research. Following church plant, house church, and intentional community models, the focus of these experiments was to bring together people committed to exploring what it meant to be “missional” in their local context. Being missional meant, in part, committing oneself to critical engagement with one’s culture and society, rather than withdrawing.285 These groups were especially interested in developing practices and forms of community that could address the impact of consumer capitalism on Christianity, which they saw as corrosive to their spiritual health and South African society at large. In their view, Christianity was not a religious product to be consumed by an individual for quick emotional release, but rather an invitation to a life of adventure, service, and personal growth with high demands.

Following Jesus meant active commitment to a specific locale as well as deep commitment to a specific community of people (rather than to an institution).

Being Missional in South Africa

As those active in the emerging conversation in South Africa began to reflect on their local context, they increasingly began to explore the relationship between Christianity, colonialism, and apartheid and to reflect on the racialized nature of their religious identities. Despite the fact that a self-identified emerging conversation evaporated by 2011, these concerns and issues continue to influence groups like RISE.

Many of the key figures affiliated with RISE were linked to the ECM: either through

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participation in South Africa’s emerging conversation (2003-2011) or through their participation in experimental emerging congregations prior to their work with RISE.

One idea promoted by emerging evangelicals in North America, which seemed to particularly resonate with RISE members, was a critique of evangelical missions and proselytizing methods. Emerging evangelicals in the United States were deeply uncomfortable with the conservative evangelical tendency to associate missionary activity with a focus on saving lost souls, often in distant places. Convinced of the need to transform and redeem a corrupted and commodified “modern” Western culture by cultivating an authentic Christian identity based on the life and teachings of Jesus, many in the ECM sought to turn their attention closer to home. In contrast to conservative evangelicalism, those inspired by the ECM focused not on the ultimate fate of individuals in the afterlife so much as on transmitting forms of life perceived to be generative in the here and now. The ECM’s challenge to traditional evangelical discourses were marked by the counter-discourse of being “missional.” Being missional was understood in two ways: 1) seriously and intentionally cultivating relationships with diverse others in order to share life with them, rather than seeing them as souls to be saved and 2) seriously and intentionally cultivating a relationship to a specific place. For many self-identified missional groups, this often meant focusing on a particular neighborhood and investing in a process of intensive engagement or enculturation there.

According to anthropologist James Bielo, “the cultural work surrounding being missional is a process of subject formation grounded in acts of learning”: leaning about others as well as learning about the intricacies of place so that others cease to be “cultural
strangers” and instead become trusted conversation partners.\textsuperscript{286} Within the South African context, being missional for white RISE members in particular meant recognizing and learning about non-white, non-suburban, local contexts and building trust and rapport by learning from and with racial and cultural others. All of this activity was done with an eye for cultivating a spirituality of transformation vis-à-vis dominant white religious norms and claiming one’s place in a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

The desire to form deep and meaningful interpersonal relationships across sites of difference was part of how RISE incorporated the ECM emphasis on being missional. To reach this end, RISE placed a premium on creating open, inclusive, and tolerant spaces that encouraged an experience of “community.” The experience of communal belonging across difference, in fact, was considered to the ultimate end of all RISE’s activities.

Understanding the creation of inclusive and diverse community as “God’s purposes for humanity,” RISE departed from more evangelical Protestant NGOs to emphasize that God does not discriminate, all are equal before God, and that experience/knowledge of God is not confined to the boundaries imposed by Christianity, especially conservative and white forms of Christianity.

In addition to celebrating racial and cultural diversity, RISE sought to welcome those of different faiths and those of no faith, the doubtful and the questioning. On the other hand, RISE members remained clear that the ethics of Jesus were their primary inspiration, understanding Jesus as a figure who sought to build God’s Kingdom on earth through intentional actions and practices that sought out and included those excluded/marginalized in some way. The mix of these various ideas could at times be

dizzying: on the one hand, the centrality of Jesus and Christian frameworks infused RISE’s development philosophy and organizational culture. On the other hand, there was no assumption that one needed to consider oneself a Christian (or a particular kind of Christian) to participate meaningfully in RISE, although at the core level, anyone who did not regard Jesus as a moral exemplar would have found difficulty finding acceptance.

The dominant assumption of RISE core members seemed to be that an ethics of inclusion, as well as personal experience of interracial collectivity, were vital to equipping themselves and others with the skills necessary to address and engage with histories and conditions of racialized inequality. In line with their communal ethics of inclusion, RISE members sought to create open and inviting environments at every site in which they worked: to create places where every person who came through their doors could feel comfortable, valued, and included, regardless of income, belief, or race. In the RISE Johannesburg community center where I spent the most time, this openness came in the form of a large, open space where black youth came to hang out, surf the web (itself a premium resource), and engage in discussion with mentors/leaders about everything from New Age spiritualties to Black Consciousness philosophies to hip hop music and contemporary politics. Few things were beyond the bounds of discussion, and the space felt safe and free in relation to the crowded, noisy, and sometimes dangerous, streets below. When white and black were present in the space, conversation often turned to cultural difference and critiques of white ignorance, apathy, and privilege. Whites felt free to express their frustration, and even anger, at white suburban insularity, and blacks felt free to express the harsh realities and racism they navigated daily. This environment
of free flowing exchange seemed to be deeply appreciated by those who regularly interacted with it.

Racial Mixing and Collective Salvation

RISE’s attraction to missional living and their desire to engage with racial divides in South Africa can be linked to a long history of debate and reflection on the scope, goal, and parameters of mission activity within both white English-speaking and white Afrikaans-speaking communities. As anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff and history of religion scholar David Chidester have argued, efforts to missionize the South African frontier were essential to how white South Africans (and white Europeans) historically formed ideas about self and other as well as their understandings of society and religion.287 White missionaries, particularly in Comaroff’s account, were often as much transformed by their local contexts as they transformed others. Mission activity to local “black” or “African” regions of the country operated as classic contact zones that illuminated all the possibilities and perils of racial and cultural mixing. In the highly segregated world of colonial and apartheid South Africa, missionary work often produced contradictory results in terms of race relations.288 For example, during apartheid, missionary activity became one avenue through which white and black subjects interacted and white subjects were exposed to black worlds. As problematic as these points of contact were, and as unequal as the power relations were, white missionaries or clergy assigned to black communities sometimes became politicized as a result of seeing first-hand the conditions of black life. For some Afrikaner clergy, this led to positioning

288 Elphick, The Equality of Believers.
themselves in solidarity with their black congregants against the apartheid system and/or leaving the DRC to join black reformed congregations.289

The discourses and hope of being missional similarly mediated contact between white RISE members and black South Africans in the democratic era. In this way, RISE’s notion of being missional remained highly consistent with classic mission frameworks in South Africa, yet it was also distinct in the explicit expectation that engagement across borders would result in the self-transformation of the missional subject. Being missional, then, allowed for highly individualized, experimental, and idiosyncratic responses that aligned well with a historical moment characterized by post-apartheid fluidity and reconstruction.

Influenced by the ECM, RISE rejected traditional evangelical conceptions of salvation as other-worldly and individualistic by emphasizing an expansive, collective, and this-worldly notion of salvation. Salvation was to be experienced in the here and now through one’s relational bonds. RISE’s development model rejected any dualism that would separate the work of self-transformation (ethics), interpersonal transformation (community), and wider social transformation. In essence, RISE’s missional-inspired ethos was one of working to redeem or transform the self and one’s community through the reforming of one’s social relations.

Ideas of collective salvation or redemption were already well established in Calvinist thought and in white and black Reformed theological critiques of apartheid, which understood apartheid as a collective heresy or sin. Ideas of collective salvation were also present in more secular political and national discourse of transformation,

which utilized concepts such as reconciliation, non-racialism, decolonization, and Africanization to describe the communal ends to which South Africans aspired. In this way, RISE’s spiritual ideals, influenced by South Africa’s emerging conversation and the wider Emerging Church Movement, shared an elective affinity with the social ideals of the democratic transformation project.290

Part 3: Race and Transformation

In the previous sections, I have described how RISE saw a need for members to make a personal commitment to the RISE way of life as a means of furthering development aims and creating an inclusive spiritual community. Not only did members view their participation in RISE as an avenue through which to work on the self (ethics), they were also invested in the project of non-racial, democratic social transformation. Transformation, a term widely used in South Africa, refers to an ongoing social process by which the effects and legacies of apartheid and colonialism, which continue to perpetuate inequality, are dismantled through targeted interventions that are both personal and institutional. In this section, I describe how RISE members, particularly white members, viewed themselves as actively working to personally and interpersonally respond to the painful effects of colonialism, apartheid, and racialized inequality.

290 An emphasis on social relevance and worldly engagement could also been seen as a very modern, or late-modern, form of religion. Robert Bellah has taken up this line of inquiry, arguing that, in the midst of increased complexity, religion in the modern period has largely moved away from metaphysics to ethics, deriving its meaning and symbols from the complexity of lived experience. He speculates that “the heart of the modern quest for salvation,” is characterized by a “search for personal maturity and social relevance,” which sounds very close to what my interlocutors articulated. Robert N. Bellah, “Religious Evolution,” American Sociological Review 29, no. 3 (June 1964): 373.
White Moral Legitimacy

In 2001, Melissa Steyn observed that “South Africans, willingly or unwillingly, successfully or unsuccessfully, are engaged with one of the most profound collective psychological adjustments happening in the contemporary world.” In response to the social changes brought about by political realignment, South Africans of all races are engaged in a process of “selecting, editing, and borrowing from cultural resources available to them in light of new knowledge and possibilities, while yet retaining a sense of personal coherence.” For the white members of RISE, this process involves coming to terms with a country redefining itself as African and acknowledging their interdependence with other racial groups. It also involves acknowledging entanglement of their “people” with histories of racism and colonialism.

Voluntary participation in a group like RISE offered white subjects the possibility of finding ethical alternative to white social apathy and withdrawal in ways that decentered white power and authority. By committing to the RISE way of life, white members hoped to challenge—through their work with RISE—the general perception that white South Africans were unconcerned with the difficult material conditions faced by many black South Africans. By investing their time/skills/resources in a particular locale, leaders hoped to equip black participants with the skills needed to access and navigate elite white spaces (and public institutions) with confidence, which they saw as requiring moral and spiritual training and skills as much as practical ones. At the same time, through participation in RISE and its development activities, white members were reminded, through proximity to the struggles of ordinary black South Africans, of the

291 Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be, xxi–xxii.
need to challenge deeply held beliefs of white superiority and individualism. Living and working in majority black contexts was considered a critical technology in helping problematize dominant white values and norms.

In this regard, we might think of white RISE members as seeking to respond to Mandela’s call for white South Africans to gain moral legitimacy by working actively to build a new society marked by inclusion, equality, and diversity in order to justify their belonging in the democratic nation. For the Afrikaner founders of RISE, the organization was one concrete way for them to help create a new South Africa. They emphasized how their vision for social change was informed both by the new constitution, and its founding principles of non-racialism and inclusion, as well as religious rhetorics of building God’s Kingdom on earth. From this perspective, Luther’s famous “two kingdoms” fused in a common goal of remaking social relationships in a more just and inclusive way, particularly black/white relationships.

White RISE members also sought to create lives of distinction in relation to their suburban, white peers through participation in RISE. While the individual kinds of subjects they aspired to become was often open-ended and evolving, what united white RISE members was their critique of and concern with white cultural insularity and stark economic divides. Their critiques of white South African life were informed by an acceptance of the apartheid past and a recognition of its entanglement with the present in the form of continued racial segregation and inequality.

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While perhaps an argument can be made for respecting the difference between imposed racial segregation and chosen racial separation, in democratic South Africa, what remains apparent to even the most casual observer is that economic and cultural capital continues to reside in spaces that the majority of black South Africans have difficulty accessing and the majority of white South Africans regularly access. For these reasons, RISE’s ethics of inclusion, and focus on blurring the boundaries and borders of whiteness, held great symbolic power to RISE members in that it signaled a desire to create flows of wealth, resources, and opportunities between white and black; an embrace of a future marked by white relativization; and a commitment racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious pluralism.

Essentialist ideas of racial and cultural difference in South Africa continue to be reinforced through racialized spaces and class divides with significant material consequences. According to a 2013 Reconciliation Barometer report, white South Africans exhibited a continued “lack of awareness about the plight of black and coloured South Africans” and there continued to be “low levels of interracial reconciliation between poor black and middle/upper class white South Africans.”293 The report cited racial segregation, social and spatial, as an urgent threat to addressing structural inequality since the massive scale black poverty remained largely invisible to middle and upper class white South Africans. The report also found that white subjects tended to only compare their class position with other white South Africans, meaning that their perception of their economic and social status remained extremely distorted vis-à-vis the

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whole of South Africa. Practically speaking, the report found that “white South Africans are 20–30% less likely [than other racial groups] to agree with the need to continue to support victims of apartheid or that economic redress is required for reconciliation.” And yet the divisions between white and black South Africans remain extreme: 83% of black South Africans surveyed lived on a household income of $650 or less a month, and of this group, 35.4% lived on less than $350 per month. By contrast, only 5% of the white population live on $650 or less, with 0% of white South Africans living on less than $350 per month. What this means is that 95% of whites live in top income brackets—income brackets that only 17% of blacks share with them.

Survey data illuminates the economically privileged position of white South Africans. However, the vast majority of white subjects often perceive their social and economic status as insecure and under siege in light of affirmative action policies implemented by the African National Congress government that aim to reduce economic disparities between racial groups. Indeed, I often heard middle-aged white South Africans express the pessimistic view that their children’s employment and economic prospects were precarious, despite the fact that white unemployment in 2014 was 8% when compared with 43% black unemployment. It is this distorted narrative that white RISE members sought to challenge through their commitment to transformation in South Africa, engagement with black life, and the promotion of black empowerment via

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294 Ibid., 27.
295 Ibid., 7
296 Ibid., 15
development. Rather than deny their wealth vis-à-vis the majority of black South Africans, they owned the fact of having received privileges and wealth as a result of being white and sought to wrestle with the moral questions this raised in light of South Africa’s racist and oppressive history.

Rising Inequality and Future Flourishing
RISE members were deeply concerned about rising economic inequality. They were also concerned with the growing discontent and alienation they witnessed daily around them, especially among black youth, the so-called born-frees, who increasingly felt excluded from the dream and benefits of democratic South Africa. For white RISE members, this was a side of South Africa they feared their suburban peers and networks failed to see at their own peril. In this regard, they felt a sense of urgency to address what Achille Mbembe calls the “psychic bonds” of pain and suffering experienced among both the black impoverished masses and black middle class. For these reasons, RISE chose to focus their work most intensively on skills development among black youth, hoping to equip them with the kinds of soft and hard skills they would need to navigate the formal sector, and also hoping to stave off in some small way the looming confrontation between the haves and the have-nots.

RISE’s central goal was to “increase our communities’ capacity to overcome the challenges we face,” and these challenges were understood to include the “emotional and spiritual hurt” caused by colonialism, apartheid, and present economic inequality.

Understanding South Africa to be a “multiply-wounded society,” RISE leaders

298 Term used to indicate those born after the end of apartheid in 1994.
acknowledged that the legacy of white supremacy causes “very real physical pain in the present and puts our collective future at risk.” This refusal to separate the physical, emotional, and spiritual when analyzing the causes of material inequality demonstrates RISE’s holistic approach to development. An emphasis on “our communities” and “collective futures” also makes clear, albeit in a coded way, that RISE, as an organization, was oriented as much towards white communal transformation as it was black. Core RISE members believed that unless white communities could grasp and address the wounds and material scarcity experienced by the majority of black South Africans, their future in the democratic nation would remain precarious. Without such engagement, there would be continued eruptions of “anger, hurt, and chaos,” which would undermine national stability and long-term development goals. Notably, leaders rejected any development strategies or contextual analyses that ignored or covered up persisting racial divides “in favor of artificial unity.”

By including white and black members within the core group, and actively seeking to recruit more black members, RISE sought to demonstrate to their larger networks that it was possible for white and black South Africans to join together in a shared project of transformation and to form deep personal bonds without denying differential experiences and histories. Rejecting artificial unity—reconciliation imposed from above or accepted with resignation out of necessity—they sought to demonstrate that authentic unity possible between white and black via a commitment to a shared way of life.

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300 RISE internal documents.
RISE members sought to form and reproduce small groups of highly committed individuals who shared with one another a deep sense of intimacy. RISE members ultimately understood themselves as part of—and contributing to—the building of a locally-rooted spiritual community that bridged race and class divides. At the same time, white members often used the insights derived from their work in marginalized black communities to promote greater social awareness and engagement among privileged white communities, particular Afrikaans communities. For example, the first event I ever attended, called Taste of RISE, took place in a suburban Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church outside of Johannesburg. This event served to introduce its majority white attendees to the various programs that RISE was involved in and the social issues RISE members were engaged with. In showcasing the work and expertise of black members, staff, and program participants, the event also intended to disrupt the white space and traditional hierarchies, modeling an alternate way of organizing black-white relationships.

Part 4: An Ethics of Inclusion: Critiques and Contradictions

I often wondered whether the values RISE promoted, especially emphases on inclusion and relationality, helped reinforce or preserve the very divides it hoped to dismantle. Despite ideals of equality and a desire to create and sustain an egalitarian, non-racial community, RISE’s development framework could not avoid entanglement with existing relations of power. White leaders, by virtue of their privilege, were inevitably placed in an inevitably paternalistic role of offering material and immaterial goods to the “excluded.” For these reasons, it was not always clear to me whether the RISE way of life reinforced a politics of redress that sought decisive social change and
post-apartheid redistribution of wealth, or whether it encouraged a politics of paternalism that regarded whites as being central to a gradualist process of resource sharing and distribution of goods. Perhaps it was a mixture of both. In this final section, I will explore some of the tensions that emerged in relation to RISE’s inclusive vision.

White Liberal Protestantism

Despite being linked to a global umbrella organization and the Emerging Church Movement, RISE’s notion of faith based development and guiding values and ideals can actually be found within South Africa’s white liberal Protestant mission history. Historian Richard Elphick narrates the rise of “Social Christianity” in South Africa among Protestant missionaries in the early twentieth century, which like the “Social Gospel” in North America and the United Kingdom, sought to counter social ills, such as the impact of rural impoverishment, urbanization, and racial discrimination on black populations, through development projects, often as a means of shoring up their declining public influence. In this way, missionaries hoped to extend what Elphick calls the “benevolent empire” of Protestant Christianity through development projects: promoting the Christianization of South African culture through their social influence and at the same time secularizing their activities to ensure practical relevance.

Elphick’s historical account lends insight into some of the logics at work in RISE. He notes that the “Social Christians of the inter-war years, unlike the anti-apartheid Christians of the 1970s and 1980s, rarely claimed to be ‘prophetic.’ Their goal was to not to demolish a repressive structure, but to let God transfigure society through the slow generation of Christ’s Kingdom in its midst. An inescapable component of their

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plan was to convert whites and to persuade them to treat blacks as fellow citizens.” Missionaries, then, placed great focus on other whites to “be a witness by life and work” to Jesus Christ and to abandon their fears of a so-called “black menace.” 302

Elphick observes that the “hope that white South Africans would experience a ‘change of heart’ (a modified notion of conversion) continued to animate South African liberals long after the heyday of Social Christianity.” 303 In my view, RISE can be considered the latest incarnation of this long-standing liberal hope of achieving racial equality and inclusion via white ethical transformation. Within the organizational culture, RISE sought to foster a micro-climate where every life, regardless of one’s beliefs, income, or race, mattered. This culture was rooted in theological beliefs that understood all humans as being created in the image of God and endowed with fundamental dignity.

RISE placed great emphasis on their commitment to the spiritual equality of all human beings, and members sought to model a kind of kinship with one another that suggested they were a spiritual family despite differences in race, culture, or ethnicity. In The Equality of Believers, Elphick shows how the ideal of spiritual equality, and the related hope that spiritual equality can lead to social and political change, has played a decisive role throughout South Africa’s history. At the start of the Cape Colony, the term “Christian” was understood to be exclusively the domain of white subjects; it was as much a marker of race and European origins as it was religion. But when missionaries began to spread the message in the 1790s that Jesus died “for people of every nation and race, not for whites alone; and that, in consequence, all who accepted him were brothers

302 Ibid., 368.
303 Ibid.
and sisters” it proved to be quite controversial among white settlers.\textsuperscript{304} It was against this message of spiritual equality, and the fear that it would lead to racial mixing and eventually produce \textit{gelykstelling} (social leveling) between whites and blacks, Elphick argues, that the political theology of cultural and racial separatism known as apartheid emerged.\textsuperscript{305}

The message of spiritual equality and kinship promoted by missionaries, indeed, raised expectations of increased social and political equality among black missionized subjects. Black Christians inspired by the ideal of spiritual equality “tended vigorously to assert that equality in the eyes of God should evolve into social and political equality.”\textsuperscript{306} No doubt, this visible expectation stoked white fears. At the same time, Elphick describes how white liberal Protestant missionaries in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, despite their stated beliefs and ideals, often sought to “limit, deflect, or retard” the full social and political implications embedded within an idea of spiritual equality. Through a kind of paternalism, they sought to control the pace and process of integration and inclusion within their institutions, and they often rejected black attempts to link spiritual, social, and political equality in a more radical political way.\textsuperscript{307}

While the paternalism of white missionary elites served to reinforce a culture of white supremacy, Elphick concludes that missionary emphasis on health care, education, and social work, along with transnational connections, did provide blacks with access to

\textsuperscript{304} Elphick, \textit{The Equality of Believers}, 1–2. White settlers were particularly concerned that Christian conversion would, or could in the future, serve to grant slaves in the Cape Colony legal freedom and non-white subjects the franchise.
\textsuperscript{305} See also Gilomee’s discussion of apartheid as theology and secular doctrine in \textit{The Afrikaners}, chap. 13.
\textsuperscript{306} Elphick, \textit{The Equality of Believers}, 2.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 8.
resources and opportunities they might have not received otherwise under the colonial and apartheid regimes. Further, the universalist message of spiritual equality, transmitted by missionary institutions, helped shape, in part, the non-racial vision of social, political, and economic equality advanced by the African National Congress, which eventually led to significant social and political change.\textsuperscript{308}

Could it be that RISE’s emphasis on spiritual equality and social development does the same kind of work in the post-apartheid era? If so, what might the history of white liberal Protestantism have to say regarding the limitations of such a merger? RISE’s relational and faith-based model of development provides an interesting case study because its aspirations for spiritual equality and racial/cultural inclusion, combined with a critique of white insularity and apathy, ensured that white subjects—and the hope of white transformation—would remain a significant part of and influence on the group’s orientation and development model.

Elphick convincingly demonstrates that, throughout South Africa’s history, any intimation of social equality between racial groups, even if framed in spiritual or otherworldly terms or accompanied by white paternalism, has always been perceived as threatening to white power, prompting resistance and counter-ideologies (i.e. apartheid). This deep history allows us to see why the values of inclusion, integration, and equality that RISE promoted, as well as its embrace of the ideal of a new South Africa, including a commitment to reducing material inequality and cultural divides between white and black, worked as a counter to apartheid logics. It also helps illustrate why individual and collective experiences of spiritual kinship across race and class, facilitated through

participation in RISE and its development activities, might be deeply meaningful to both white and black RISE member and encourage increased engagement with wider processes of social transformation.

Yet Elphick’s history offers a few warnings with regards to the collective ideals that RISE sought to embody. In addition to reinforcing white paternalism, he underscores how the combining of discourses of spiritual equality and diversity can, as in the example of Dutch Reformed Afrikaner missionaries in the 1920s and 1930s, have the effect of allowing for interracial contact and exchange in select spheres while leaving white supremacy untouched in others.\(^3\)\(^0\) For both of these reasons, by the second half of the twentieth century, liberal proclamation of God’s love for all and the spiritual equality of all races gave way to more militant and race-based political discourses led by black South Africans who vigorously rejected the need for white guidance or tutelage—in matters both spiritual and social—a historic precedent that RISE members would be wise to consider.

The Ambiguity of Inclusion

One way that RISE sought to make sure that their activities were “community owned” and avoid the common criticism of paternalism leveled against Western NGOs, especially those that are white-led, was to promote black empowerment at the programmatic level and make sure that their primary staff was majority black. But given the fact that whites are not generally in categories considered to be poor, marginalized, and excluded, this meant that the only way for whites to participate in RISE was within the most committed, and most influential, circle of the organization. Whites had no other

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\(^3\)\(^0\) Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 5.
way of being included in the organization in any other way except through participation in the core group, and adoption of the RISE way of life, which remained attractive given the possibilities it offered for white subjects to develop alternate subjectivities. This state of affairs served to ensure disproportionate white influence on RISE as an organization and their ethos. Such dynamics mirrored deep power divides in South African society, despite the fact that white members can be read as working to challenge these divides on a personal and interpersonal level through their ethics and way of life.

In addition, given RISE’s blurring of the social and the spiritual, it was not always clear what members meant by inclusion and how this related to their development focus on black empowerment. Within RISE, the ideal of inclusion remained a floating signifier. Inclusion could mean many things—the inclusion of wealthier white members in majority black communities through development activities and their participation in an interracial spiritual community; the inclusion of black members and participants in larger white networks and pools of resources via development activities and/or participation in an interracial spiritual community; and finally, inclusion of both groups in global circuits of wealth and opportunity via RISE’s transnational connections. On the one hand, white subjects involved with RISE and similar projects can be read as seeking a way to be included in the moral project of non-racial, democratic transformation within a nation rapidly redefining itself as black and African. On the other hand, the value of inclusion promoted by RISE communicated to black participants the hope of integration/acceptance/access to elite white culture. After the Taste of RISE event, I had an insightful conversation with a black staff member, who expressed how strange it was for him to enter into elite, suburban, white spaces for a single evening, and yet he also
indicated that he used events like this to serve as “motivation” for himself and those he worked with regarding what they might one day achieve.

In short, the ethical vision of spiritual kinship and equality facilitated by participation in the RISE community and commitment to the RISE way of life stands in tension with the ideal of inclusion as it relates to RISE’s development work, which seemed to offer black participants the salvific promise of proximity to whiteness. With this statement, I do not wish to claim somehow that wealth is the exclusive property of whites or that such aspirations are not valid. I simply want to point out that, in the context of South Africa, cultures of affluence continue to be associated with whiteness. This means that any development activity aimed at material uplift, especially those that are white-led, will tend to reinforce, sometimes unintentionally, dynamics of white cultural assimilation and paternalism and serve to reify the connection between whiteness and wealth.

While it is perhaps easy to critique RISE (and any development organizations, for that matter) of paternalism, I want to emphasize that from the perspective of founding white members, it was not enough for white South Africans to simply seek to “build relationships” with black subjects. RISE members were acutely aware of the problems with evangelical missionary activity that focused on saving souls rather than meeting the material needs of the excluded and suffering, as well as the fact that painful histories of apartheid and colonialism needed to be redressed. In the wake of massive unemployment and lack of effect service delivery by the state, RISE further saw an urgent need for civil society to deliver social goods and services to impoverished black communities. Developing paid employment opportunities for black staff members and creating social
enterprise, even if mediated through white social and financial capital, was seen as critical to long-term capacity building as well as building trust and rapport in the communities RISE worked by demonstrating commitment to a transformed South Africa.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I have explored the organizational, religious, and social conditions that compelled RISE members to pursue aims of self and social transformation. Collectively, white and black members of RISE sought to ameliorate the negative effects of colonialism, apartheid, and post-apartheid economic inequality not through “artificial unity” but through the hard work of establishing relational bonds and a communal ethics that might sustain difficult conversations, create open flows of knowledge and resources, and allow for shifts power relations at both micro and macro levels. RISE members sought to reform social relations and their own subjectivities in ways that blurred the lines between the Kingdom of God and the new South Africa.

As a faith-based organization, Christian values and beliefs informed the ways RISE perceived and practiced development. Similar to Bornstein’s observations of Protestant NGOs in Zimbabwe, Christianity, for core RISE members, became a conceptual fuel for social change. Perhaps more than providing a distinctive “how,” it provided a “why.” Christian commitments, and a desire to follow the example of Jesus, inspired a particular form of life among RISE members that linked embodiment of virtues such as sacrifice, commitment, and inclusion to lasting material and spiritual improvements in the lives of others.

RISE’s development approach can be understood as appealing not so much to those alienated by so-called secular development activity, as much as reaching out to those estranged from conservative forms of Protestantism and missionizing models that emphasize charity and the saving of souls over social justice and the flourishing of human life in the here and now. Influenced by the Emerging Church Movement’s emphasis on holistic spirituality, RISE sought to challenge not only sacred-profane divides through their blurring of ethics and development but also race and class divides. They pushed themselves to think about church and community in more expansive ways that resisted ideas of absolute difference. An ethics of inclusion, and the hope of diffusing these ethics to wider white communities, was seen as vital for mollifying the threat of violence, bloodshed, and democratic crisis.

Certainly, RISE’s development model was evangelistic in that it aimed to invite and recruit others into the RISE way of life. This way of life, while promoting values and behaviors drawn from a variety of discourses, such as development discourses, humanitarian discourses, socio-political transformation discourses, was imagined as ultimately leading to a “Christ-centered” way of life. To be sure, this official language was often times at odds with the hesitancy of individual RISE members to identify as Christian or with institutionalized forms of Christianity, as well as their great concern with imposing religious dogma or prescriptions onto others. Nevertheless, RISE’s understanding of the new South Africa remained mediated by Christian social ideals of reconciliation, equality, and inclusion. Like other Protestant reform movements, RISE members saw “civil society as a space of missionary intervention” — civil society
encompassing both black and white communities—though they would have likely resisted being understood as missionaries given their sensitivity to the colonial past.\textsuperscript{311}

At the same time, RISE members understood their activities and assigned meaning to them, in ways that drew from a plurality of secular and spiritual social ideals. For these reasons, rather than arguing for RISE as representative of a distinctive faith-based development model, I have chosen to focus on how RISE understood religion as both as an object of critique and resource for its development philosophy and organizational model. I have also sought to draw attention to the distinct set of “values, motivations, and means of belonging (both within the organization and the community)” that RISE sought to provide to members and participants through its communal ethics.\textsuperscript{312}

Attending to the religious ideals, social conditions, and historic influences that shape the collective ethics of groups like RISE remains important because, as anthropologist Omri Elisha argues in his study of socially engaged evangelicals in the United States, the pursuit of virtue by “people of faith” need not be seen as an expression of “radical individuality,” even if expressed in highly individualized and idiosyncratic ways. The ideals, practices, and values that inform the moral ambitions of people of faith are “inherently social in their inception” and “rooted in cultural practice.” \textsuperscript{313} Because white subjects, in particular, often think of themselves in highly individualized terms, it becomes all the more important to place the efforts of white RISE members within a

\textsuperscript{311} Elisha, \textit{Moral Ambition}, 3.
\textsuperscript{312} Vicki-Ann Ware, Anthony Ware, and Matthew Clarke, “Domains of Faith Impact: How ‘Faith’ Is Perceived to Shape Faith-Based International Development Organisations,” \textit{Development in Practice} 26, no. 3 (April 2, 2016): 323.
\textsuperscript{313} Elisha, \textit{Moral Ambition}, 1.
wider social, political, and historical context and to emphasize the intersubjective nature of their ethics.

Scholars have often failed to consider the ways people’s ethics are shaped by social systems and material conditions, and they have often failed to attend to how ethics can also provoke/irritate social systems and material conditions and create alternate possibilities that sometimes, but not always, are far from straightforwardly translatable to political notions of “resistance” or result in large scale social or structural change. To return to the anthropology of ethics, James Laidlaw argues that we must be careful not to equate “agency” or freedom or ethics only with “actions conducive to certain outcomes: those that are structurally significant.” I agree. In many ways, it can be argued that my white interlocutors were far from structurally significant. Their numbers were few, and their individual actions, besides being plagued with tensions and contradictions, were often ephemeral. Yet in trying to distance themselves from and challenge the values of dominant white middle-class society and conservative white religion, RISE and similar groups provided an important space for self-reflection and critique. Their actions signaled a willingness to remain socially engaged rather than withdraw into spaces of white cultural and financial comfort.

Obviously, as long as whites remain dominant economically and culturally in South Africa, the reality is that RISE’s focus on providing employment opportunities and skills to marginalized black subjects in hopes of including them in existing pools of wealth and opportunity will necessarily entail elements of white cultural assimilation and paternalism, even if RISE’s communal ethics emphasized cultural exchange and racial

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314 Laidlaw, The Subject of Virtue, 5.
boundary crossing. Practically speaking, the moral mandate expressed by white members to participate in development work, along with the racial politics of South Africa, allowed whites involved with RISE to occupy the more powerful role of granting access/inclusion to symbolic and material resources. For a number of reasons, it would be difficult to flip the mirror and proclaim that white subjects are those primarily in need of inclusion, though white anxieties regarding their own sense of marginalization and concerns about their ultimate place in South Africa clearly shaped RISE’s strategies and approach.

Developing an inclusive, interracial social and spiritual community composed of those committed to the RISE way of life was perceived by RISE members to be an ultimate weapon in the struggle to forge a new South Africa: the ultimate rejection of and counter to the apartheid past. Studying grassroots Pentecostal FBOs and HIV/AIDS programs in South Africa, Marian Burchardt has argued that these organizations were attractive in that they connected volunteers, employees and members in a shared (and expanded) moral community. Not only did shared discourses and values help bridge cultural gaps, on a more practical level, a sense of belonging or membership in an FBO allowed local actors to access transnational networks and financial resources that would not be available otherwise. Of course, access to such networks were always mediated through deep, interpersonal relations and demonstrations of self-transformation.

Viewing the work of FBOs from a development perspective, Burchardt remains critical of how FBOs perpetuate hierarchical patron-client relationships between staff/leaders and participants due to the fact that their organizational models link,

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implicitly, material benefits and personal progress to the adoption of specific religious values and discourses. The danger, in her view, is the way those who engaged with the FBO are “obliged” to perform in ways that conforms to the norms, expectations, and values of those with power and resources. Yet, seen from an anthropology of ethics perspective, one might question whether FBOs like RISE might also be read as ethical sites where actors are invited and/or incited to particular subject position in light of perceived benefits to self and others. Inclusion of white and black within a single moral community, as well as hope of including the marginalized in multi-directional flows of knowledge and resources, felt deeply meaningful to core RISE participants. In adopting a communal ethics of racial and cultural inclusion, RISE promised white and black members the chance to forge new subjectivities.

Though I have focused on white members in this chapter, I do not want to discount the ways black members were also attracted to the ideal of inclusion and the values of fluidity and pluralism that RISE offered. At the same time, one has to recognize that the desire to create a racially inclusive moral community ensured that white subjects would remain necessary and central to RISE’s development strategy and ethos. Therefore, the case of RISE raises difficult and complicated questions regarding ethics, freedom, and responsibility within contexts marked by unequal relations of power. Clearly, much more critical reflection needed to happen within RISE about how race shaped the core community—something that black members were especially aware of. Yet in my view, RISE remained attractive to both black and white core members because

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316 Marian Burchardt, “Faith-Based Humanitarianism: Organizational Change and Everyday Meanings in South Africa,” *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 51; Burchardt, “‘We Are Saving the Township.’”
of powerful experiences of belonging and affinity that it provided for those invested in the larger ideal of a democratic and non-racial South Africa, as well as the opportunities it provided for both white and black members to engage in practices of self-reflection and critique within a shared space. Apart from universities, spaces where white and black subjects can openly discuss and explore dynamics of power and inequality as social equals are incredibly rare in South Africa. Most racial mixing happens in formal sectors, rarely extending to interpersonal relationships and informal spheres. RISE, as a FBO, provided a structure for white subjects to engage in critical self-reflection on their whiteness in ways that likely would not have been available in other social spaces. The most significant ethical work happened at the core level, alongside black peers, but the insights produced by ethical reflection and learning were expected to filter into the wider networks that black and white core members were a part of.

While members were aware of these tensions and contradictions produced by the racial power dynamics in RISE, their commitment to building an inclusive and diverse spiritual community via a faith-based development model means that specters of paternalism will likely continue to emerge. Indeed, RISE has worked hard over the last seven years to shed the label of being a “white” NGO by focusing on black leadership development at every level of the organization. The scene of diversity I described in my introduction is a direct result of the kind of mentoring, skills development and outreach that RISE prioritized in its development model as well as the desire among white members to engage in proactive self-critique. Yet because an ethics of inclusion remains at the heart of RISE’s development philosophy—and this ethic of inclusion was seen as central to bridging the gaps between white and black, wealthy and impoverished by
rejecting dynamics of segregation and exclusion—this ensured that white members/leaders would remain central to the organization and continue to play an integral role in shaping the organization’s vision and mission. This means that white longings for transformation, and anxieties regarding their own future security and belonging, will no doubt continue to influence how RISE’s way of life is imagined and pursued.
Chapter Three: Becoming Authentically South African: Experimentation, Belonging, and Dwelling

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus primarily on interviews conducted with two white RISE members, Nina and Pieter, in order to offer a more fine-grained analysis of the kinds of subjects attracted to the RISE way of life. Nina, a long-term member of RISE, lived outside of Johannesburg in the community where RISE began. Pieter, a more recent member, lived in the suburbs and worked with RISE in the inner city of Johannesburg. Both came from middle-class, Afrikaans, and Dutch Reformed backgrounds. Both expressed a desire to consciously reject conservative Afrikaans culture, and both sought to critically reflect on their identities as white, Afrikaner, Christians. Their involvement with RISE was part of a much larger process that revolved around questions of moral responsibility in the face of social injustice as well as in relation to their racial, cultural, religious, and economic identities: a process they described as waking up.

In what follows, I seek to provide a glimpse of the adventurous, and at times arduous, process of self-transformation that Nina and Pieter embarked on. This process happened over a number of years, leading to the adoption of specific practices, or technologies, aimed at moving away from a whites only, Western form of life. Nina and Pieter’s daily choices and values were deeply tied to problems of identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa as well as dynamics of privilege and inequality. In the first part of this chapter, I describe the formative experiences that prompted Nina and Pieter to begin to reflexively engage with their identities as white, Afrikaner, Christians. In part two, I discuss their continued efforts to problematize white socio-religious norms and the role of RISE in this process. Given the fact that both sought to deconstruct and/or play
with the boundaries and borders of whiteness, part three reflects critically on white engagements with blackness through a discussion of Toni Morrison’s literary criticism and white Afrikaner author Antjie Krog. In part four, I draw on Jarret Zigon’s concept of an ethics of dwelling to emphasize how, for both Nina and Pieter, finding one’s place in a shifting and disorienting material, emotional, relational, and racial landscape became an ethical task that required experimentation with values and practices that encouraged, rather than discouraged, social engagement. Not surprisingly, such experimentation also produced various tensions and complications, both for themselves and others.

Ultimately, I use the narratives of self offered by Nina and Pieter as lines of flight to explore how white self-transformation remains entangled with questions of futurity, authenticity, and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. In response to perceived white middle-class isolation and alienation, Nina and Pieter sought to deepen their sense of being at home within South Africa’s various worlds. This quest spurred experimentation with, and adoption of, values and practices that facilitated engagement with racial, cultural, and economic difference. Such efforts stand in contrast to the ways many white South Africans try to resolve similar senses of loss and alienation through strategies of emigration, withdrawal, and shoring up of white cultural and economic dominance.

**Being Missional and Emerging Christianity**

In seeking to problematize inherited socio-religious norms, Nina and Pieter shared many similarities with Emerging Christians in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the last chapter, I discussed the concept of being missional. When discussing Nina and Pieter, as well as other RISE members, I do not wish to linger on the term so much as the desires the term indexes: desires to root oneself in a specific locale and learn from those
who live there; desires to separate oneself from white, middle-class, suburban life; and desires to develop an alternate religious subjectivity distinguishable from evangelical, charismatic, and mainline Protestant Christianities.

The term missional, as James Bielo argues, has its roots in the “idea of being a missionary to one’s own society.” Missional subjects seek to “settle into a locale and learn about the intricacies of a place and a people,” mimicking within their own society the enculturation process of a foreign missionary or anthropologist. While the shift in focus from the global to the local is noteworthy, Bielo draws attention to the fact that Emerging Christians remain overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and educated, and the ways that they understand the work of being missional usually involves intentionally cultivating relationships with people and places perceived to be racially, culturally, economically, and religiously other. In this regard, the kinds of power relations and imaginaries associated with traditional mission work persist in a localized context.

317 Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 2011, 11. Bielo calls his subjects “Emerging Evangelicals,” because he studied those who came from evangelical backgrounds, or still considered themselves as evangelical, and yet were attracted to the Emerging Church Movement. Particularly in the United States, the origins of the Emerging Church Movement have their roots in evangelical disenchantment. More recent scholarship, such as Marti and Ganiel, emphasize that Emerging Christians have largely moved beyond, or outside of, evangelicalism and encompasses people from a wide range of mainline Protestant backgrounds as well those from Catholic and no/other religious backgrounds. When discussing Bielo’s work, I use the term Emerging Evangelicals. When discussing the broader ecumenical group, which I would include Nina and Pieter in, I use Emerging Christians. See Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*.


319 See for example, Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*. They note, “Our research identified that many emerging churches are led by white, anglo, middle-class males. Consequently, some may judge the movement to be deficient multiculturally. At this point in time, the detractors may be right. Part of the reason this particular culture predominates is that many of the pioneering emerging churches arose out of the evangelical charismatic subculture, which has these same characteristics” (11). See also Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 2011; Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*; Packard, *The Emerging Church*. Packard has a very thoughtful discussion of diversity (or lack therefore) in the ECM on pages 11-12.
Surprisingly, Bielo does not spend much time critically unpacking the implications of this observation. In this chapter, I do not shy away from the race and class dynamics within Emerging Christianity. However, I do seek to draw attention to another dimension of being missional, which is implicit in Bielo’s analysis and other analyses of the Emerging Church Movement. That is, through intentional and strategic engagement with non-Christian, racial, cultural, and/or economic others, white, middle-class Emerging Christians simultaneously make strange that which is culturally familiar to them and taken for granted. In so doing, they create space for critical reflection and intervention at individual and collective levels. As a result of this process, some Emerging Christians (though certainly not all) begin to explicitly wrestle with questions of white privilege and histories of racism and colonialism. Nina and Pieter are two examples of this.

Bielo claims that part of what drives Emerging Evangelicals in North America to focus on engagement with diverse others is a critique of conservative proselytizing methods, which are seen as impersonal, programmatic, inattentive to changing social
conditions, and ignorant of the embodied realities of those targeted. For these reasons, Bielo concludes that the quest to be missional can be read as an update to the “well-rehearsed evangelical end of reaching ‘the lost.’” Efforts to reduce gaps in proximity and knowledge are ultimately tied the end goal of more effectively advancing a Christian(ish) message of hope and inclusion.

But when discussing Emerging Christianity, especially transnationally, one should not frame the theme of evangelism or its intended targets too narrowly. Certainly,


323 The kinds of projects that might be regarded as missional must be closely examined and differentiated by scholars because Emerging Christians, as well as evangelical and mainline bodies, have adopted the language of being missional: most increasingly emphasize the need to learn about one’s society and those in it, and encourage congregants to view society as dynamic and changing, requiring active engagement and dialogue. For these reasons, I find the anthropology of ethics helpful in that it encourages attention to differences in the ends, the logics, and the kinds of actions and values associated with various religious orientations. While many Emerging Christians might use the term missional, or express ideas linked to being missional, not all Emerging Christians understand the ends, logics, and motivations of being missional in the same way.

For example, as Bielo notes, but does not seem to find of theoretical significance, different informants understood being missional very differently. One informant who moved to an economically depressed area ringed by wealthy, white suburbs to plant a church, Kevin, wanted to bring hope to the poor and marginalized by showing them how Christ was “more than” than their fears. The other informant, Bart who also intentionally moved into a racially diverse urban context, understood himself as “post-Christian” — a stance that Bielo defines as affirming “love and grace as the definitive attributes of God, and questions doctrinally centered soteriologies.” (268). Bart’s focus was on building meaningful relationships and fostering physical and social spaces that could provide a measure of comfort, security, and relief to “terminally broken” people (272). He was not interested in classic Christian evangelism or proselytizing; rather, he saw himself as striving to be conscious of, and engaged with, the dynamics of privilege and economic despair impacting his local community.

Bart and Kevin, while perhaps broadly missional in orientation, and sharing an evangelical background and some shared critiques of evangelicalism, strike me as having different ethics due to the different ends, or telos, to which they directed their actions. At the same time, both voluntarily moved into settings “unlike those in which they grew up in and where secular logics of upward mobility aspire” and both saw grassroots approaches to social change as ideal (272). Shat joined them was the conviction that being missional involved cultivating a “distinct sense of place,” which in turn involved cultivating “consciousness of race, class, economy, history, and a host of other social dynamics” (269). See Bielo, “Purity, Danger, and Redemption.”

RISE members like Nina and Pieter shared similarities with Bielo’s informants Kevin and Bart, but they were far closer to Bart than Kevin. Even though Pieter was a Dutch Reformed Church pastor, both he and Nina placed a high value on meaningful, dialogical, relationships with others and were not visibly concerned with converting others or demanding adherence to a doctrinally defined religiosity or strict sets of belief. For these reasons, I do not consider them Evangelical, but I do consider them to be Emerging Christians.
engagement with non-suburban and non-white spaces represents an enactment of Emerging Christians’ desires to share and reproduce a specific way of life and set of values in these contexts. However, as I discovered through my conversations and interactions with Nina, Pieter, and other white RISE members, their intended objects of transformation were just as often themselves and their communities of origin. Efforts to engage with racial, cultural, and economic others were intimately bound up with their desires to cultivate a sense of authentic belonging—a dwelling place—outside of segregated white, middle-class, and/or Afrikaans spaces and communities.

Throughout this chapter, I pay special attention to the particular kinds of practices, or technologies of the self, that Nina and Pieter experimented with and the complex web of relations that informed their sense of self. As we will see, the ways in which Nina and Pieter engaged with, and were positioned within RISE, differed. Further, like most Emerging Christians, their spiritual values and practices remained quite individuated. At the same time, one can discern a number of similarities in terms of the

I find Marti and Ganiel discussion of the concept of missional in relation to mainline-background Emerging Christians a helpful counter-perspective. Due to his focus on evangelicalism, they claim that Bielo’s data set skews his “analysis of emerging approaches to mission” (138) The key for Marti and Ganiel, in terms of Emerging Christian concepts of mission and being missional, is the desire to be engaged with their surrounding locales, their desire to transcend social and religious divides (including those of race) through the creation of shared space, shared practices, and a focus on a shared future; their emphasis on fluid and open theologies that emphasize orthopraxy (right living) over orthodoxy (right belief); and their tendency to interpret "being missional" in terms of serving the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of surrounding locales without trying to proselytize or convert others. According to Marti and Ganiel, Emerging Christians seek to cultivate the “ability to accept people as they are—without trying to change or convert them”(140) and highly value “encounters with those who they perceived as radically different in beliefs and practices” (141) as a means of demonstrating their own values of acceptance and inclusion. In this sense, engagement and dialogue with others is an opportunity to “witness,” but the act of witnessing is about communicating as stance of openness, tolerance, inclusion, interest, and investment to others. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*. In this regard, their study supports Bielo’s claim that the “idealized missionizing Self” is first and foremost “a learner” whose core values include intersubjective reflection and dialogue (136). The key emphasis, however, for Marti and Ganiel is that Emerging Christians place value on dialogue and engagement with difference so that they can reflect on and shape their own ideas about self, God, and spirituality. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 2011.

Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*. 324
kind of subject positions Nina and Pieter sought to move away from and move towards, which was influenced by their shared backgrounds. For both, intentional practices of emplacement in black majority contexts, intentional relationships with black subjects, as well as their relationships to white communities played a crucial role in shaping their ethics.

Part 1: Searching for More

In this section, I describe the formative experiences that influenced Nina’s and Pieter’s quests for self-transformation and eventually led to their involvement with RISE. In both cases, a short-term mission trip to Mozambique ignited a search for a more relationally oriented, or authentic, form of spirituality while also encouraging a growing awareness of South Africa’s history and their own racial identities.  

Nina

Nina, an exceptionally thoughtful, blond-haired, thirty-three year old Afrikaner, was one of the most committed members of RISE. Close friends with RISE founder, Nadine, she became involved with RISE in 2009. A teacher by training, Nina initially focused on youth education programs but later moved away from direct program involvement. At the time of our interview, she focused on providing spiritual care and leadership support to RISE staff and core members. She was also involved with sharing the RISE way of life with wider networks and communities, including Afrikaans church

325 For a discussion of the relationship between authenticity and relationality among Emerging Christians, see James S. Bielo, “Belief, Deconversion, and Authenticity among U.S. Emerging Evangelicals,” Ethos 40, no. 3 (September 2012): 258–76. Bielo writes that emerging evangelicals “understand authentic Christianity as a faith defined by relationships” and rooted in local form forms of community” (260). This also seemed to be the case for Nina and Pieter.
communities, as well as helping RISE global incorporate some of the practices and values that had emerged in RISE South Africa.

Waking Up

Nina’s choice to join RISE had dramatically impacted her sense of self. However, this choice was proceeded by a number of prior events that prompted her to question the social, racial, and religious identities she had inherited. Nina grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church and indicated that she had been “serving God from a young age,” but during her university years, she began to develop a more socially-engaged and racially-conscious religiosity.

During her first year of university, Nina participated in a short-term mission trip to Mozambique. This trip “woke” her up to the fact that “I am in the African continent” and created a growing awareness that she had “no diverse friends,” having attended prior to university all-Afrikaans schools. Nina’s mission trip marked the first time she consciously reflected on her relationship to the African continent and on the cultural insularity of her upbringing. Prior to the trip, she had understood cultural diversity primarily in relation to whiteness. As a child she had “English” neighbors, and, in her circles, this fact alone was considered “strange” and “progressive,” which gives some indication of the segregated world she grew up in as well as the deep divisions that persist between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking white communities in South Africa.

Following the trip to Mozambique, Nina made her “first black friend ever” at university. She attended the University of Johannesburg, a historically white university, which like all major universities in South Africa began desegregating in the late 1990s. Nina’s friendship served to illustrate the vast differences in white and black experiences and upbringings. Also during university, Nina’s father became ill and died. At the time,
she was studying to be an accountant on a bursary and increasingly unhappy with this career choice: “I just knew I wanted my life to be about more.” Using the money that her father left her, Nina paid back the bursary and decided to get a teaching qualification instead. This vocational shift ultimately led to her initial work with RISE as a youth educator.

Religious Experimentation and Re-Learning History

Influenced by the Emerging Church Movement, in 2003 Nina and two white Afrikaner friends decided to form a small “house church.” The group initially met in a rented suburban hall, but the term house church was used by Nina to distinguish the group from more institutionalized (and impersonal) religious bodies. The congregation held as its ideal a form a religious community patterned on New Testament Christian life where believers met in households and cared for each other’s needs. As Bielo explains, this focus on cultivating small, intimate, experiences of community are a key component of Emerging Christian critiques of large, corporately-minded, megachurches. It also reflects how Emerging Christians link spiritual authenticity with relationality and community.

During their first three months of meeting, the group reflected on two simple questions: “What does it mean to follow Jesus in Johannesburg” and “What is church?”

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326 The New Testament early Christian community represented in the Book of Acts is typically the main inspiration for Emerging Christian congregational models, which include house churches, church plants, experimental gatherings, and intentional communities. In the United States, the Emerging focus on house churches has roots in earlier evangelical movements such as the Jesus People movement in the 1960s, which, according to historian Matthew Sutton, “blended the counterculture’s critique of mainstream American society with a call for a return to radical, New Testament-type Christianity” by creating alternate communities. See Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 342.

For the next two years, they intensively read the four biblical Gospels and reflected on the life and teachings of Jesus.\textsuperscript{328} They also meditated intensively on their geographic locale and the specific ethical challenges posed by this locale. In 2005, the group took things a step further and developed a set of experimental practices and principles, which they hoped would further support the creation of authentic spiritual community.\textsuperscript{329} These included daily exercises of reflection and prayer, eating and sharing meals together, and a lifestyle of service and simplicity.

Nina reported that during this time she developed increasing awareness of “Jesus’ heart for the least of these,” and also described a concurrent process of “relearning our history.” In this way, reflecting on Jesus’s concern for the poor and the marginalized led

\textsuperscript{328} Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
\textsuperscript{329} The development of these practices reflects the influence of a stream of Emerging Christianity known as New Monasticism, which I discuss further in chapter four. Growing in popularity during the 2000s, new monasticism describes Emerging Christians who are experimenting with alternate and intentional forms of community and subject formation that take as their inspiration monastic and other communitarian movements. New monastics cite as inspiration not only the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century and Benedictine and Franciscan monastics movements, but also sixteenth century “radical reformers” the Anabaptists and twentieth century movements like liberation theology and the Catholic Workers Movement. Rutba House, ed., \textit{School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), ix. For these reasons, Wes Markofski argues that their origins, motivations, and exemplars are distinct from the Emerging Church Movement. See Wes Markofski, \textit{New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

However, because new monastic leaders had significant overlap with and exposure to the Emerging Church Movement, most commentators, such as Marti and Daniel and Bielo, treat new monastics as part of the loose and diverse network that comprises Emerging Christianity.

It is interesting, in light of the role that the anthropology of ethics plays in this study, that a key new monastic proponent, Johnathan Wilson-Hartgrove sees the new monastic movement as directly responding to Alasdair Maclntyre’s conclusion in \textit{After Virtue}. See Johnathan Wilson, “Introduction,” in School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism, ed. Rutba House (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 2. In the final pages of \textit{After Virtue}, Maclntyre argues that in the midst of the Dark Ages, “men and women of good will turned aside from the task of showing up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium” in order to construct new forms of community that can sustain moral life around a common set of practices and virtues. Maclntyre appears to suggest that similar movements are needed in a new “dark age” where both Marxism and liberal individualism have proved bankrupt. Alasdair C. Maclntyre, \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 256–63. Maclntyre’s engagement with Aristotelean virtue ethics has been a conversation partner for anthropologists of ethics like Laidlaw and Faubion, though they critique Maclntyre on a number of counts.
to a growing political consciousness of social injustice, which eventually challenged her to face the apartheid past “because, I mean, I was just oblivious to what really happened.” Nina remembered that in 1994, as a teenager, she was more absorbed with boys than what was happening politically, though she remembered that her parents were tense. Relearning “our history”—meaning the history of apartheid—continued the “awakening” process that started with her trip to Mozambique and her first black friendship.\footnote{The choice to use the phrase “our history” as a euphemism for apartheid is interesting. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard white subjects often use the phrases “our history” and “the past” as code for apartheid.}

\textit{Race, Class, and the Emerging Church Movement}

The church that Nina served in as a leader deserves further explanation because it throws into sharp relief some of the dilemmas and challenges faced by young Afrikaner Christians seeking to re-define their religious and cultural identities in light of a transformed and transforming context. As the congregation sought to become more inclusive, as race and class became explicit objects of reflection, and as they developed spiritual practices aimed at interrogating what it means to be white and wealthy in South Africa, membership increasingly declined. From 2003-2011, the church went from about eighty people to a small handful.

This process happened in stages. In 2006, the group decided to adopt English as their primary language of worship. Given the role of language in maintaining group boundaries in South Africa, and the historical tensions between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, this change was a powerful symbolic gesture. Framed around ECM values of inclusion and diversity, it sought to challenge the ways Afrikaans is used in post-apartheid South Africa to maintain culturally homogenous and racially segregated spaces that reinforce anti-black racism, Afro-pessimism, and white
supremacy. Leaders were concerned that using Afrikaans would communicate a message of racial and cultural exclusion to others. As a result of this change, attendance dropped by half.  

The remaining group began to reflect much more deeply on the need for racial reconciliation and healing in post-apartheid South Africa, prompting them to form a relationship with a black church community located in an impoverished informal settlement. Unfortunately, while this relationship initially prioritized dialogue and learning in line with an emphasis on being missional (there was a moratorium on giving money for six months), it soon fell into a typical “charity model,” which reinforced a dynamic of superior whites giving to inferior blacks. Nevertheless, during this time, church members actively explored white fears about entering black spaces and fears of being taken advantage of by those who were less wealthy.

In 2009, the congregation went through another series of shifts, due to the painful recognition that, despite values of inclusion and diversity, they continued to be a white Afrikaans church. Recognizing that this was perhaps tied to their location in the suburbs, they stopped renting their space and began meeting in members’ homes. They also decided to no longer employ a formal pastor in order to encourage members collectively to devote their time and financial resources to service and social justice. Simultaneously, the group began to hold weekly dialogues in a nearby informal settlement about race and reconciliation with black residents who were willing to talk back.

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331 Many members felt very strongly about being able to worship in their preferred language of Afrikaans and found cultural and spiritual meaning in using the language.

332 Much of this history was recounted to me in an interview with the group’s pastor. He also served as a board member of RISE.
These interracial meetings focused on learning about/remembering the apartheid past and connecting the post-apartheid present to a larger socio-political history of oppression. For white participants, these conversations were deeply uncomfortable, raising issues of white complicity, guilt, privilege, and the need for material redress. Perhaps predictably, as white supremacy and apartheid became explicit objects of reflection and intervention, and more radical practices like residential relocation were discussed, resistance among white members increased and numbers dwindled again. White participants found it difficult to see and hear whiteness refracted through a black frame. Yearning to express themselves as individuals, they struggling with being tied to a collective (and ongoing) history of racial discrimination and oppression, regardless of individual accomplishments or struggles.

This example offers a cautionary tale regarding how far Emerging Christians and progressive white Afrikaners are willing to go when it comes to interrogating and actively disrupting/deconstructing their own racial identities. As key aspects of Afrikaner identity (language, culture, religion, and wealth) were questioned, leaders experienced resistance, backlash, and dis-investment at each turn. By the time apartheid became an explicit and sustained topic of conversation in a way that allowed white participants to be actively confronted by black subjects, the church had largely dissolved. At the time of my research, the group consisted of a handful of people—understood as friends rather than congregants—who met informally on a semi-regular basis and saw themselves as

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committed to sharing life together but no longer saw themselves as participating in anything like a church.

The fate of the church that Nina helped found and lead illustrates that while efforts to develop alternate white subjectivities are important, they should not be overstated. Even the most dedicated white participants of the congregation struggled with how to move beyond symbolic gestures of rebellion towards embodiment of new (and sustainable) ways of being. Few chose to do what Nina eventually did, which was to move into a majority black context. Congregants were all for experimenting with ecclesial forms and seeking a more authentic spirituality as long as it stayed within familiar Afrikaner, white, and Western frameworks, but they resisted more sustained efforts to promote cultural and racial inclusion through acts that decentered white identity and authority. By far, the most difficult questions faced by the congregation concerned the relationship between their Christian faith, their white Afrikaner identities, and their wealth. Even so, participation in the congregation was deeply formative for Nina because it encouraged exploration of and experimentation with various spiritual practices aimed at interrogating previously held ideas of “church” and “community.” Nina experienced the group as authentic and warmly recalled the process of developing a “specific way of life” together. While ultimately, she chose to leave the church to focus on her work and involvement with RISE, she was instrumental in transmitting much of their theology and practices to RISE.334

334 When the congregation formally dissolved in 2011, Nina and the founding pastor discovered in RISE an alternate community through which to transfer the practices and vision of their congregation and a platform to experiment/elaborate further. While the pastor did not officially join RISE as a staff member, he and Nina were both active in contributing to the spiritual frameworks, values, and practices that shaped the RISE community as well as trying to transmit these to white, Afrikaans mainstream communities and the global RISE network.
Pieter

Pieter, a charismatic thirty-three year old pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church, worked with RISE part time in the inner city of Johannesburg. Because of his work as a pastor, he lived in the suburbs near his church. A friend of Nina’s, Pieter’s work with RISE was motivated by a deep frustration with the insularity and homogeneity of his white Afrikaans church, an awareness of the deep social and economic divides between urban and suburban Johannesburg, and a desire to be a different kind of Afrikaner: one who acknowledged the benefits derived from apartheid and embraced processes of social change.

Unlike Nina, who grew up outside of Johannesburg, Pieter grew up in the Western Cape—a place he described as very “multicultural.” Indeed, the Western Cape region of South Africa tends to pride itself on being much more liberal, cosmopolitan and multicultural than its neighbors to the North. Because of the large “Coloured” community (a community whose historical roots trace back to the mixing of Malay slaves, indigenous inhabitants and white settlers), the racial landscape of the Western Cape remains distinct from the northern Gauteng province where Johannesburg is located, which is majority black African. Many who identify as Coloured speak Afrikaans, for example, and share many cultural practices with Afrikaners. From Pieter’s perspective, exposure as a child and young adult to interactions between white and Coloured communities gave him a different lens through which to understand the complexities of race and racial identity in South Africa.
Deeper Connections

Like Nina, Pieter’s narrative of transformation began with a 1997 “outreach” trip to Mozambique in high school where he made his first “black friend.” For the first time, Pieter felt his imagination stretched beyond that which was offered to him by white South Africa. Pieter reflected: “I remember coming back from that outreach and I had the sense that I will never be the same again. […] There’s a world playing out, and I am invited into that world.” Interestingly, Pieter’s sense of an expanded, and expanding, world, occurred at a time when South Africa was also emerging from the isolation of apartheid and re-imagining itself as part of the African continent.

Pieter was intoxicated by the profound and deep connections he experienced with others, despite racial and cultural difference, during his mission trip. In retrospect, Pieter interpreted his time in Mozambique through the categories provided by ritual theorist and anthropologist Victor Turner, who he read while getting an MA in Missiology (Mission Studies). Pieter reflected that what made his trip to Mozambique significant was the fact that it was a “liminality space, and communitas formed out of that.” While recognizing that the affective bonds he forged with his “first black friend” were in some ways artificially constructed, he valued how, in the context of a ritualized experience, these bonds provided a sense of depth and equality.

Not only did he and his friend stay in contact for a long time, writing letters to one another, Pieter claimed that his decision to study theology and become a pastor was born out of a desire to enter “more liminal spaces” similar to the kind he experienced in Mozambique. Pieter longed for the kinds of experiences where “ordinary water becomes

335 Pieter noted in his conversation with me that this was not someone who was “Afrikaans Coloured, but African black,” which reveals the distinctions often made between “Coloured” and black identities in South Africa.
holy water” and “where I can have deeper connections with people that in my ordinary
life I will not have had those connections, because we don’t suffer together, we don’t eat
together, we don’t pray together, we are just sharing space, sharing the sitting.” With this
statement, Pieter articulates a common Emerging Christian hope that if superficial and/or
oppressive cultural trappings can be somehow peeled away, one might discover an
authentic self, authentic spirituality, and authentic community.336

Pieter’s growing awareness of race began during his university years at
Stellenbosch when he was challenged to “deconstruct” the myth of white innocence in
the face of counter-histories and knowledge. Like many Afrikaners, Pieter grew up in an
insulated social world and attended a historically Afrikaans university. What made his
university experience unique, however, was that like Nina he attended at a time when
universities were under intense pressure to desegregate. Though Stellenbosch in the late
1990s was (and still is) perceived to be bastion of Afrikaans culture, Pieter began his
theological studies at a time when the faculty of theology at the University of the Western
Cape (a formerly “Coloured” university) merged with Stellenbosch’s theology
department. As a result, Pieter recalled:

From the first year, probably most of my teachers were black people, Afrikaans
and English black, and the apartheid narrative was very fresh at that time. Not
very, but it was six years into post-apartheid. So, obviously it was just past the
Truth and Reconciliation journey. So there wasn’t a day in our theology
department where we were not talking about apartheid, about race, about wealth,
about being white, about being black, forgiveness and reconciliation, that was the
narrative the whole time, and the black and the white teachers were very much
into that language. So from your first year, listening to the stories of people your
age and a bit older sharing their experience of apartheid, almost waking you up to
‘So, where were you at that time?’ And I had to say, ‘Well, I was climbing a tree’
or ‘I was fishing.’ ‘I was on my bike.’ I mean that’s where I was, I was helping
my dad on voting day, you know, with fliers. So I think that is where Stellenbosch

Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 79–90.
really helped me. To be invited into a very adult conversation with black people around our history.

Through dialogue with black classmates and teachers, Pieter began a process of unlearning the historical and social narratives he had internalized growing up, a process he also described in terms of waking up.

*Challenging the Ignorance Contract*

As we sat in his spacious, yet modest, living room Pieter reflected on the significance of growing up in the final decade of apartheid, which many observers consider to be the most violent and repressive period of apartheid. This period was a time of great fear in many white Afrikaner communities, as they were forced to come to terms with the need to move towards accommodation and liberalization in the face of worldwide condemnation. During this time, the National Party imposed several States of Emergency, black resistance was at its most militant, and South Africa became a virtual police state.

Pieter remembered that, during this time, his parents were very “political outside the house” and “very much involved” in every election, voting for the National Party. He further explained that his parents, like most Afrikaners at the time, were committed to the National Party because the alternative, the Democratic Party, was understood as the “English liberal” party. As a child, Pieter saw his parents as “open-minded” and “liberal” because they did not support the Conservative Party, who wanted even more extreme measures to be taken to ensure continued Afrikaner dominance.

Regarding his parent’s support of the National Party, he commented: “I think they were just towing the party line that it is better for everyone if we do it like this.” Despite their support for apartheid, Pieter remembered that his parents always treated the black
South Africans who worked for them with respect. Making an interesting distinction between public and private, he emphasized that his parents were never political “in the home” and “we never grew up hearing them saying bad things, disrespectful things about any other person of color, never really.” After 1994, when South Africa became much more “multicultural,” his parents even began to invite Coloured people over for meals.

At Stellenbosch, Pieter encountered for the first time counter-knowledges that helped expose him to the “myth” of his upbringing in the 1980s: an upbringing that felt very “protected” and “free.” Over time, Pieter began to revise his memories of childhood and change his view on the significance of Afrikaner support of apartheid. Pieter’s conversations with his black peers and teachers “invited” him to “deconstruct” the narratives of his upbringing in a way that allowed him to critique the actions of his parents and grandparents and think critically about the ideology of white Christian Nationalism. Pieter credits his time at Stellenbosch as helping him embrace apartheid as “evil to its core.” Pieter was particularly struck by the fact that during his “safe” childhood “the country was actually burning,” which continued to remind him of “how disconnected Afrikaans, ordinary Afrikaans people lived, from the real realities of our country.” Developing a sense of moral responsibility in relation to apartheid history, especially once living in Johannesburg, allowed Pieter to differentiate himself from white peers who continue to insist that apartheid is “in the past, let’s move on” or “it wasn’t all that bad…look at the infrastructure that our parents put in place.” These discourses, which minimize generalized white support for apartheid and the ongoing benefits derived, are common refrains among white South Africans in response to calls for further
By contrast, Pieter recounted: “the time I studied in Stellenbosch has really shaped my imagination around some form of responsibility to keep the narrative of apartheid in your mind” when engaging in public and private conversations about race and justice. With this statement, Pieter expresses his ongoing desire to break with what Steyn terms “epistemologies of ignorance,” even if this desire could not always be fully enacted.338

Part 2: Experiments in Transformation

In the previous section, I focused on the ways Nina and Pieter described their individuated processes of waking up to a more expanded and diverse world. Increased contact and dialogue with racial and cultural others played a significant role in helping them begin to challenge epistemologies that worked to obscure from them, as children and adolescents, the horrors of apartheid as well as the stakes of the anti-apartheid struggle and democratic transition.

The choice to represent this process in conversion and deconversion terms is not insignificant. A semiotics of conversion and deconversion offers a means of plotting, and performing, a path away from one subject position towards another and is quite common among Emerging Christians for this reason.339 I am particularly intrigued by the role played by a short-term mission trip to Mozambique in their narratives. I have long suspected that cross-cultural encounters and journeys across national borders mark a

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338 Steyn, “The Ignorance Contract.”

turning point (whether sudden or gradual) in white narratives of transformation.\footnote{For example, prominent Afrikaans writer Antjie Krog narrates in her book \textit{Begging to be Black} two journeys, to Lesotho and Berlin, which help her see race and work through her own positionality as a white Afrikaner in democratic South Africa. I discuss her text in part three of this chapter.} As the Afrikaans pastor of Nina’s former church shared with me, it took travelling to the United States for him to begin viewing race and class in South Africa with de-familiarized eyes. He called his time living in the United States his “conversion to South Africa.” Importantly, this conversion to \textit{South Africa} and the decision to stay engaged with social transformation stands in sharp contrast to the high rates of emigration among white South Africans \textit{away from South Africa}. Griffiths and Prozesky estimate that about 20-25\% of South African born whites have emigrated since the 1991.\footnote{Griffiths and Prozesky, “The Politics of Dwelling,” 28.}

In this section, I explore Nina’s and Pieter’s efforts to confront what Steyn terms the “normalized racial order” that continues to shape differential life opportunities and experiences between black and white subjects in post-apartheid South Africa.\footnote{Steyn, “The Ignorance Contract,” 11.} In their interviews, Nina and Pieter narrated a journey towards what they perceived to be a more authentic and liberated self. Consistent with other Emerging Christian deconversion narratives, the journey they described is one of moving from security to insecurity, comfort to risk, and from the known to the unknown.\footnote{Harrold, “Deconversion in the Emerging Church,” 81.} At the same time, both Nina and Pieter paid, as Rabinow writes in relation to Foucault, a great deal of attention to “the methods, techniques, and exercises directed at forming the self within a nexus of relationship.”\footnote{Paul Rabinow, “Introduction,” in \textit{Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth}, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), xxvii.} Intentional engagement with black majority contexts and intentional relationships with black subjects, facilitated by their work with RISE, played a crucial
role in shaping an experimental ethics at the time of my research. Again, in this regard, they are not unlike other Emerging Christians who stand out to because of the intense “lived relationships” they cultivate with physical spaces and those who inhabit those spaces. Yet despite ongoing efforts to problematize middle-class whiteness and conservative Afrikaner culture, both Nina and Pieter struggled with their own attachment to powerful norms and habits tied to their whiteness.

Nina

When Nina joined RISE, she was teaching at a small private Christian school in a nearby suburb. After reconnecting with her high school best friend Nadine, Nina discovered that Nadine and Andre were looking for someone to start youth work in a black mixed-income community near Johannesburg where they had recently moved to establish RISE. Nina was immediately drawn to the possibility and begin working with RISE in 2009. After joining RISE, Nina took the additional step of also relocating to the community where RISE worked.

Built after 1994 by the African National Congress government, this suburb (or more accurately exurb) housed over 100,000 people in government subsidized and market housing. Despite its shiny new appearance, the area struggled with high unemployment and a variety of social issues common to informal settlements and townships. I conducted our interview in Nina’s home, which was significantly smaller than the spacious dwellings of most white South Africans. Nina’s home was approximately 700 square feet with two bedrooms, a bathroom, and open living area. Relatively new, its open-concept design had a minimalist charm. The house sat adjacent

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345 Bielo, “Purity, Danger, and Redemption,” 267. Bielo cites the work of Steven Feld and Keith Basso on dwelling and space.
to identical homes on a smoothly paved asphalt street. Of the 100,000 residents, Nina estimated there were only ten white residents, most of whom were connected directly or indirectly to RISE.

   Nina and the other RISE members who lived in the community were extremely proud to live in a place that reflected South Africa’s diversity. Their locale contained migrants from many different regions of South Africa as well as other African countries. White RISE members, in particular, could not help but reflect on the relative ease and safety they experienced within a space that most white South Africans assume is dangerous and are taught to fear. Though crime was not entirely absent from the community, the visible lack of high walls, alarm systems, and electric fences stood in sharp contrast to heavily fortified homes found in majority white suburbs. Members derived great pleasure from witnessing everyday scenes such as neighborhood children playing together in the streets or doors and windows left open for neighbors to interact. They judged such scenes positively in relation to rarified suburban environments.

   Experiencing a more open and interconnected social environment resonated deeply with their own longings for authentic, inclusive community. In contrast to the pessimism that many white South Africans express about black spaces and the ANC government, Nina and other white members emphasized how significant it was to work in a context that exemplified efforts by the government to improve the lives of black citizens after apartheid. Partially subsidized single-family homes like Nina’s offered many middle class black South Africans the chance to own property for the first time.
The area also included free government (RDP) housing for poor residents who had formerly been housed in informal settlements.346

At the same time, RISE members recognized that their municipality was not immune from the myriad of social challenges facing countless black communities across South Africa. Upgraded housing could not make up for high unemployment among residents and enduring systems of poverty, which is why RISE worked in the community to begin with. Perhaps most indicative of the contradictions found in this thriving exurb—the image the government hoped to project—was a beautiful community center whose fields and buildings existed behind locked gates and fences, largely empty of activity except for local government sponsored events. While, on the surface, life appeared to have improved for those resettled from crowded informal settlements and those seeking upward mobility, it was impossible to drive into the area without confronting the harsh conditions of informal settlement life still present at its edges as well as the spatial contrast relative to adjacent wealthy white areas.

Relocation, Experimentation and Accommodation

Nina’s initial choice to relocate away from the suburbs was based on the recognition that to stay in the white suburbs while working for RISE would only serve to magnify the multiple barriers between herself and the people she worked with. These barriers were something she intuitively knew she wanted to reduce. However, over time her choice to live in a majority black community shifted from being simply a practical desire to serve RISE participants better to something much more explicitly bound up with

346 Millions of black South Africans still live in informal settlements. RDP housing is intended to address the legacy of dispossession and poverty produced by apartheid, but many remain trapped in what have been called “hell-like” conditions. See Bulelani Ngovi, “South Africa: Pastor Leads March Through ‘Hell,’” GroundUp (Cape Town), April 21, 2014, http://allafrica.com/stories/201404210024.html.
her own self-transformation. In Nina’s own words: “I think in the beginning, I didn’t want to be so outside, I wanted to understand, I wanted to experiment and see what happens if I do it, but I think now it is really about keeping perspective, like I feel I stay in the real South Africa. So it helps me, really, ultimately.” Ironically, she grew up fifteen minutes away in a wealthy Afrikaner suburb, and yet, in her view, this upbringing denied her an authentic experience of South Africa.

For Nina, staying conscious of the “real” South Africa involved rejecting segregated spaces and understanding how the majority of South Africans lived. It also involved with experimenting with rejection of white, middle-class norms and expectations, which prompted some interesting confrontations with her white family and unexpected insights about entanglements between race and class in South Africa. For example, Nina decided that she would forgo “medical aid” or private health insurance if “most of South Africa doesn’t have it.” Further, she would use the same public health systems that the majority of South Africans use. Public hospitals are notorious in South Africa as the places that patients go to die, so understandably Nina’s family was not happy about these decisions. It became a subject of constant heated discussion at family gatherings, but Nina’s attitude was “if I die, I die, that’s what it means to be South

347 Over time, medical aid become a bigger issue for Nina’s family than where she lived, especially once they realized that no incidents had taken place since Nina moved. She was perfectly safe.

Nina and other white RISE members embraced the value of downward mobility, sometimes called the downward way or journey. This value of downward mobility, which is often articulated in Catholic social teaching and Anabaptist traditions, became popular among New Monastics. The value of downward mobility derives its appeal from being tied to the life and teachings of Jesus, who is understood to have lived a life of simplicity, service, and sharing with others. Its theological logic resides in understanding Jesus as a figure who was “privileged” because of his divinity but intentionally chose to give up the luxuries of divine status in order to live in solidarity with the “least” of humanity.

The conscious choice of Nina and others to reject a logic of accumulation and upward mobility highlights the fact that, unlike the poor they engage with through development work, a life of simplicity is something voluntarily adopted for ethical reasons, rather than something externally imposed or determined.
African” (my emphasis). The ideal of becoming authentically “South African”—understood this time as awareness of and identification with black precarity—was what Nina strove for, even if it meant taking on increased bodily risk.

Eventually, Nina “compromised” on the issue of medical aid, but her shift came as a result of another practice she adopted: that of sharing her budget and consulting on financial decisions with someone who “makes more” than her and someone who “makes less” than her. She discussed her situation with a close black colleague/friend in RISE from a poor background whose mother lived in an informal settlement. This colleague expressed the view that, if he had the financial opportunity, the first thing he would do was purchase medical aid so as to buy peace of mind for his impoverished mother whom he did not want to financially burden further in the event of an illness. Nina was struck by his response, and she realized that, despite her choice, her own family would likely bankrupt themselves before they allowed her to receive treatment from a public hospital. Because Nina did not wish to financially burden her family in the event of an emergency, she eventually “compromised” and bought medical aid, though she remained uneasy about the decision. The perspective offered by her black colleague helped her, however, ultimately make the choice and also legitimated it.

At the time of our interview, Nina found that most of her ongoing struggles with race and class involved inherited logics about consumption and upward mobility. As a result of relocating to a black community and close relationships formed there, everyday decisions about what to consume, where to shop, and how to spend leisure time and have a “holiday” had increasingly become morally fraught. “It gets really difficult because I still have access to this wealthy world,” Nina reflected, “and people would make those
opportunities available to me, but not necessarily my other [black] friends.” Realizing that many things she took for granted growing up as a white, middle-class, Afrikaner are in fact a “luxury” for many black South Africans meant that Nina could no longer view the tastes, norms, and habits of many white South Africans with indifference. “

The hardest is seeing what people spend their money on. That for me is still the hardest. Good people, just [pause…serious tone] absolutely spending money on, splurging on themselves, while in my reality, I know I have to now let this person go because we can’t afford them anymore, or that money that you spent just like that could sponsor this person that I know has gifts to study. So, it is not a philosophical thing anymore for me; it is that money has a name for me, you know? And the fact that people just don’t care, that is hard for me.

She responded to her frustration by trying to figure out strategic and creative ways to use her access to wealth, resources, and opportunities in order to be “Robin Hood.” For example, she sought to share the benefits of opportunities to travel or expand her horizons through work with RISE Global with fellow black RISE members by often insisting that a black colleague travel instead of her or alongside her. Of course, while Nina invoked Robin Hood because he represents a subversive figure who stole from the rich and gave to the poor in creative ways, Robin Hood also represents a folk hero who shares resources with populations who then become/remain dependent on these actions in the midst of ongoing oppression.

*Following Jesus in the Real South Africa*

Because RISE functioned as both a development organization and spiritual community, it allowed Nina to feel as if she was working towards something far more meaningful than what was provided by the “typical NGO” model. Throughout our interview, Nina framed her process of self-transformation as a journey primarily motivated by the life and teachings of Jesus. For Nina, working with RISE and living in a
black community functioned as an ethical experiment, but this experiment did not take place in a vacuum. The goal of becoming authentically South African was understood as inseparable from becoming more Jesus-like. Nina resonated deeply with the quote she attributed to Mother Theresa: “I followed Jesus, and then I followed him to the poor.”

Initially Nina struggled because she did not know a lot of other white Afrikaners who intentionally moved out of white, wealthy spaces. Nevertheless she thought, “Let me just try it out, because you don’t really know how you are going to react.” What gave Nina a sense of confidence was the belief that “I’m not bringing God to anything, God is already here.” The idea of God being active and already present in her new locale allowed Nina to relax and provided a sense of home, despite her initial struggles to adjust and fit in.

Increasingly, Nina viewed her surroundings not as hostile territory, but as a moral and spiritual laboratory that could help her deconstruct and reconstruct her sense of self. Nina commented that when she first started working with RISE, she quickly realized that she had to “unlearn some things.” Living and working in black spaces forced Nina to reflect on things that “I didn’t think I had, but I definitely had them,” such as a white savior complex. She reflected on how she had grown up in a culture that always associated blackness with poverty and misery and framed black subjects as objects of white pity and charity. Part of how Nina sought to counteract these habits and recognize the complex subjectivity of black South Africans was to emphasize that black people are created in the image of God, deserving of dignity and equality.

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348 I could not find this exact quote cited, but Nina attributed this quote to Mother Theresa.
349 This has also been a strategy used by black religious leaders, practitioners, and theologians as well, as Anthony Pinn argues, in the quest for, and recognition of, complex subjectivity, though this quest need not be framed in theistic terms. Not only do subjects like Nina seek to recognize the complex subjectivity of black South Africans, they also seek to create for themselves a multiplicity of “ontological possibilities, a way of existing in numerous spaces of identification as opposed to reified notions of identity that mark
went through a very beautiful phase of reconnecting [with the idea] that every person is made in God’s image.” Such theology was central to RISE’s larger organizational culture.

Spiritual and social ideals rooted in theological ideas of human dignity and equality productively allowed Nina to problematize the contradictions she encountered between her ideals and daily habits of thought and action. Working with RISE forced her to confront the fact that “I don’t think everybody’s equal”—especially when faced with differences in levels of education. “It is easy for the moment, for the ten minutes, to give someone your attention and think, oh, treat them with great respect, but it is very different for a long term, in a relationship.” As a result, Nina actively wrestled with the difficulty of incorporating values of inclusion and equality in her daily life, and the degree to which she had a “little savior thing […] going.” Perhaps most acute was Nina’s increased understanding of the concept of privilege: “one of the biggest things that started to be very blatant is how much privilege I have, even if I downscale, even if I lay down and decide well I’m not going to earn this salary, I’m going to earn this salary, even if I do all

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dehumanization” (158). Whether theologians like Pinn would regard this as a movement towards a “blacker” religion is a tantalizing question. I am not a theologian, but I do take up how the quest for self-transformation among white subjects intersects with blackness in part three of this chapter, and I find Pinn’s theorization and defining of black religion as the quest for complex subjectivity helpful to this study, both in terms of the emphasis Pinn places on religion being an open-ended process and in terms of foregrounding individual and collective processes of self-transformation. Pinn writes, “Complex subjectivity stands for a healthy self-concept that allows for—even requires—adherence to the privileges and responsibilities associated with those who shape history. It is, then, the creative struggle in history for increased agency, for fullness of life” (173). I see in this definition many of the characteristics found among Nina, Pieter, and other white RISE members who are seeking through their ethics and spirituality to craft a more meaningful life, to develop increased agency in response to the perceived sociopolitical burdens and moral consequences of their ties to a violent racist history (177). Of course, where they diverge from Pinn’s conceptualization is that, in defining what is black about black religion, he links a specific historical and cultural experience of oppression to the quest for complex subjectivity. See Anthony B Pinn, Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).
of that, I still have so much privilege. I have this big safety net that can catch me. If I lose my job now it is not that big of a deal. I can sell my house, move in with a family member.” Nina attributed this growing awareness of privilege to new relationships formed with “people who are really desperate” and recognition that they do not start with the same opportunities, logics, or assumptions.

Nina’s religiosity had shifted dramatically since working with RISE, particularly through her travels with the organization. She reflected, “Generally I experience God as an immensely inclusive God, we just have been to India and that has shaped a big part of that as well. So I experience God as immensely inclusive, I am often hesitant to speak about Jesus, because people like to use Jesus as like the gateway and if you don’t acknowledge his name and then it’s over for you, which I don’t believe.” Once Nina’s spirituality and theology became more inclusive, it also had to become more open-ended, reflecting her growing conviction that “we don’t know all the answers, we have to be really humble, and very careful to speak on God’s behalf.” Nina found the idea or language of God-Within particularly helpful at the time of our interview, as did others involved with RISE. This language reflects the immanent theology of Emerging Christians who emphasize that God works (or fails to work) primarily through human action and identify the self/individual as the locus of action and moral responsibility.350

Although she was uncomfortable with dogmatic Christian belief and practice, Jesus remained Nina’s ethical exemplar. “I think personally I connect [to Jesus] for my own formation. I see Jesus, I feel Jesus as a companion and a friend, like more like a co-conspirator. I am part of this mission that’s his […] I really do feel that Jesus is a part of

350 Marti and Ganiel, The Deconstructed Church, 186.
God’s, of his self, showing us what he is like, and the best way how to live and how to be alive.” She went on to reflect, “I think if it wasn’t for learning what Jesus—I think the context and his words and how revolutionary they were—if it wasn’t for that I don’t think I would be particularly here. I think everything about that draws me, in terms of how to live, in terms of the sneakiness of it all, the counter-culturalness of it all, all of that, I’m just, I’m absolutely in love with it, you know? It’s wild and untamed and it draws me. I think that really, really fuels me just reading the Gospels generally.” A felt connection to Jesus framed and guided many of the choices Nina made.

Nina found herself continually challenged to break social norms and cross social boundaries through her interpretation of Jesus, and yet, by her own admission, she could not resist forms of compromise and accommodation with the radical message and model provided by Jesus. She recognized that she had yet to take seriously the full impact of Jesus’ social and religious message. “So, I think, I think to use the word experiment again, there is a part still of me that says ‘what will happen if I take this seriously?’ You know? So part of me is still, and I think that’s where perhaps even when the compromise comes in sometimes, is that some of the stuff is very revolutionary and I’m like yoh! (laughing), I’m excited to learn still how to be a voice, I don’t particularly want to get killed for it, but I’m sure if...I do ask myself that question: what are the SA voices now that will get us killed? And it is about justice, you know.” Here, Nina reflected also a bit of the nostalgia that many progressive white South Africans have for final decade of apartheid where activists felt certain that they were on the side of justice and prepared in some cases to suffer and die for a democratic South Africa.
No longer affiliated with an institutionalized church, Nina considered RISE her primary spiritual community and sought to resist dogmatic language or practice: “a big part of my philosophy lately is I think we are speaking about the same thing, or at least two parties are, they are actually speaking about the same thing, and my language is explosive to you, so we can’t hear you.” As an Emerging Christian, Nina also sought to find ways to translate Christian ideas and symbols into more non-dogmatic and inclusive terms in order to link her faith with social praxis and appeal to a racially diverse and religiously plural national context. For example, outside of religious spaces, she did not usually identify immediately as Christian. Rather, she waited until she was asked to explain the nuances of her religious identification. Especially concerned with growing alienation from and disillusionment with Christianity among her white Afrikaner peers, Nina remained concerned with finding “new ways to talk” about God to them.

At the same time, Nina emphasized the inspiration and power found in the life and teachings of Jesus precisely because she felt that part of the problem among Afrikaners was that they had depoliticized Jesus: turning him into a therapeutic and privatized source of spiritual power and comfort. Part of her current work with white Afrikaner churches, as well as RISE participants, was to “re-define” Jesus and make him relevant. “I get frustrated when people talk about Jesus and then immediately the cross, so I really try to talk about the life of Jesus. How to live.” Like many missional-minded Emerging Christians, Nina wanted to share a message that following Jesus is not boring but rather it is a social adventure—one that has become lost to many white, wealthy, suburban Afrikaners. As we will see, this emphasis on rediscovering adventure was something Pieter very much shared.
Pieter

After finishing his studies in theology, Pieter moved to Cape Town and then eventually to Johannesburg. At the time of our interview, he had lived in Johannesburg for six years and worked with RISE for a little over a year. Through Pieter’s contacts, RISE had secured a large space, which was formally a club, in the inner city of Johannesburg. Located at a busy intersection next to central municipal offices and public transportation hubs, RISE hoped to use the space to establish a presence in the city. In contrast to the main RISE site, the Johannesburg city site was newer and far more fragmented in terms of formalized programs, especially because no RISE members or staff had residentially relocated to the inner city or worked there full time. Nevertheless, the center was vibrant in that a constant stream of unemployed and underemployed youth came to hang out during the day and throngs of uniformed school children rushed in after school, often enthusiastically greeted by Pieter and other staff members.

Pieter’s role was to oversee an after-school tutoring scheme as well as a variety of other social enterprises connected to the space. Several local non-profits leased offices in the space and there was a side room where fair-trade garments were made. The afterschool program, housed in a large room with twenty computers equipped with internet access, used an innovative open-source online tutoring program for math and reading. Because a black staff member took the lead on tutoring, Pieter’s role was mainly supervisory; he also helped facilitate a mid-week spiritual gathering for RISE staff, members, and local participants, which consisted of reflective exercises and interpersonal dialogue that reinforced core RISE values and practices.
Suburban Struggle

Working with RISE provided Pieter with a way to distinguish himself from his suburban peers. At an individual level, similar to Nina, involvement with RISE offered him a chance to get outside of his white suburban bubble, a bubble that offers white South Africans the artificial experience of being in the racial majority. For these reasons, Pieter found it especially significant to experience being a white “minority” in the inner city. Spending a few days a week working in the Johannesburg city center, and being part of the interracial RISE community, led to significant shifts in Pieter’s sense of self and heightened awareness of race and class dynamics. Pieter’s contact with black RISE members, staff, and participants and other white friends who intentionally lived in the inner city worked to “challenge very specific perceptions that I think not just Afrikaans people, but probably rich people in Johannesburg have about people in our city” and prompted him to seek to engage the urban and suburban landscape differently.

Experiencing the dramatic social and economic differences between urban and suburban Johannesburg on a regular basis led Pieter to develop a number of critiques aimed at white middle-class suburban life. In Pieter’s view, the future of his “people” depended on their ability to move beyond racialized fear and paranoia. In particular, he was deeply concerned with the exaggerated security culture found in the Afrikaans church he pastored in and among his white Afrikaner neighbors. White Afrikaners surveyed in 2013 were the most likely of any racial group to perceive their personal safety as deteriorating, but I often observed during my fieldwork great anxiety and pessimism among white South Africans generally, both Afrikaans and English-speaking, regarding their personal safety, despite the fact that most suburban dwellings have
electric fences, rapid response security teams, and high walls. While it would be irresponsible to downplay the degree to which traumatic violence and crime impacts almost everyone in South Africa, Pieter recognized that the level of fear exhibited in white suburbia remained disproportionate to security threats, especially when compared with poor, black communities.

Pieter’s emerging critiques stemmed from his belief that whites in South Africa were morally and spiritually stunted by 1) persisting racial and cultural segregation 2) individualism and capitalist consumption and 3) unhealthy levels of paranoia and fear. Pieter wanted to find practical ways to encourage white subjects, including himself, to engage South Africa’s diversity with confidence, openness, and respect. Not only did Pieter believe that white Afrikaners were dangerously out-of-touch with the lived realities of black South Africans (as they had been during apartheid), he also believed that Afrikaners were harming themselves by trying to preserve and maintain whites-and-Afrikaans only suburban spaces. In his view, the reproduction of white suburban life was actually a liability for white subjects in that it produced alienation from the majority of South Africans and also inhibited them from developing the kinds of dispositions and skills needed to navigate a pluralistic, multicultural environment.

Pieter shared Nina’s concern with white domestication—withdrawal into the private sphere, emphasis on a privatized Jesus, and a diminished sense of public agency—but his concerns were markedly more social than spiritual. Like most RISE

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While I was in South Africa, a popular through controversial Afrikaner singer and political activist Steve Hoffmeyer organized a “Red October” protest that sought to draw government attention and action with regards to a “white genocide,” despite the fact that of the murders and violent crime committed in South Africa between 1994 and 2009, only 2% of victims were white.
members, Pieter was deeply concerned with persisting racial segregation. He found it ironic that his education in the late 1980s and 1990s was actually more “multicultural,” than the average Afrikaans child in post-apartheid Johannesburg. A popular youth speaker due to his irreverent humor and daring persona, Pieter was often invited to speak at private Afrikaans schools in the Johannesburg area. While these schools are no longer legally segregated, cultural norms, student fees, and language policies serve to maintain majority white, Afrikaans-speaking student bodies. Pieter found it difficult to encounter within these schools pervasive prejudice cloaked in piety. At one school in particular, he told me, the headmaster leaned over to him and said, “I don’t want to be racist, but I must say it is a blessing to have only Afrikaans white kids in the school.” In an agitated tone, Pieter reflected on the absurdity that Afrikaans children in post-1994 South Africa still attended all-white Afrikaans schools that appear virtually identical to schools during the apartheid years, and this was considered by those in power to be a blessing.

Perhaps because of his interest in youth ministry and mentorship, Pieter often reflected on the differences between how white and black children are raised. For example, not unlike most middle-class families, Pieter employed a black domestic worker whose daughter Zinzi he intentionally financially supported. Pieter was quite close to the Zinzi: mentoring her and overseeing her academic progress. The fifteen year old went to a fairly exclusive integrated school in the city center that required her to board at the school, but on weekends, she lived with her mother in a small apartment on Pieter’s property. Pieter understood himself as having made a moral commitment to enhancing the life outcomes and well-being of Zinzi and her mother through long-term employment and educational support.
Pieter’s relationship with Zinzi allowed him to draw a substantive contrast between her and the Afrikaans children in his neighborhood. When an Afrikaner neighbor explained that his thirteen year old white son was not yet “ready” to bike in the neighborhood, Pieter argued that “we are in a beautiful community, in a safe neighborhood, as safe as a Joburg neighborhood can be, and so: when will you be there? When can your son get on his bike and explore the neighborhood? What needs to happen? Does he need to finish his karate classes? Should the DA [liberal party often considered ‘white’] need to win the election? When? When?...In the meantime, you have a healthy boy living in a beautiful community that is never out on adventures. Not he and his mates, never. It is either, I go play at my friend’s house, or he comes and plays at my house.” By contrast, Zinzi was encouraged by Pieter and her mother to use public transport to get to school when he could not drive her, and he took great pride in her ability to navigate the journey from the suburbs to the city.

It seemed that part of why Pieter admired Zinzi was tied to the sense of adventure he felt he had received during his growing-up years in the rural Western Cape. The level of hyperawareness around him, those who treated white suburbia like a “war zone,” deeply disturbed him, especially when contrasted with arguably much more dangerous areas of Johannesburg that he interacted with through his work in RISE. Pieter noted the confident and self-assured ways that black youth navigate environments of risk, and he admired the ways they freely moved through their environments on foot. By contrast, Pieter’s neighbors refused to allow their children to play outside their gated house, leave their property without permission, or walk to school, even though their children’s school was only two kilometers away.
The hyper-paranoia and fear exhibited by his neighbors greatly exasperated Pieter, who rightly recognized that the area he lived in one of the safest areas of Johannesburg. Mentioning a white friend who drives her children to a school only 500 meters away, Pieter asked provocatively: “who is the bad mother: the mother who teaches the child from an early age to get on a taxi, to run the risk of getting hurt, being mugged, or ending up in an accident, but are learning the ways of the city, and are understanding something about, you know, how to handle money, how to trust other people, who not to trust, and so forth, or the child who grows up with this thing that if I step out of this house someone will abduct me, someone will rape me, someone will steal from me, and it’s probably going to be a black person?” Pieter clearly felt that the values and practices being instilled in Zinzi better prepared her for the complexities of life in South Africa and that the racial insularity of white families and the choices they make in terms of how to live in and navigate Johannesburg not only perpetuated racism but also created a state of self-imposed exile, cut off from the richness of relationship with others.

I find Pieter’s questioning of white suburban family and gender norms fascinating because the moral necessity of white suburban mothers taking care of, and protecting, their children from outside threats is often considered sacrosanct, both in the United States and South Africa. Pieter, by contrast, embraced values of risk-taking and urban engagement. Reflecting on white family norms, Pieter reflected on how in suburban Johannesburg: “a good parent is the parent who can protect their children. […] a good husband is the husband that is worried about his wife’s safety. The good mother is the mother that will not work, but drive their children up and down. And I want to critique my culture, and if I can say it, my people. I think it is going to bite us in the ass a few
years from now [...] It is very easy to use your children or your wife as a way of saying, no. I’m not going into the city center, I won’t let my wife go … and I think wives need to own the right to go into dangerous places. Moms need to be able to go into a dangerous place! Your children will be fine, but that’s just me.” He went on to discuss how most of his Afrikaans church friends lived in “security complex settings” and worked very long hours and spent a lot of money to “keep that security environment in check,” only to be isolated and lonely.

Returning to gender and family, Pieter shared how a good friend refused to move into his home with his family until his alarm system was up and running. By contrast, the “story” that Pieter wanted to tell Afrikaans people living in Johannesburg was that “our city is not as dangerous as you think.” In an attempt to resist the security mindset, Pieter took what would be considered by wealthy South Africans to be a radical step by modifying his security system so that armed response teams no longer came to his home when the alarm was activated. For two years prior, he had lived in his home without incident and found it ridiculous to have armed men in camouflage show up at his house when his alarm was tripped by a cat. At the same time, he waited until after his divorce to take this step because his wife would never have allowed this step: “the narrative will be, you are not a good husband. I feel unsafe.” Pieter’s own reasoning for canceling the alarm response was that his neighborhood was safe enough, he knew his neighbors, he had three dogs, and he lived a simple lifestyle, which reduced incentives to steal from him. He contrasted this with his friend who had been held at gunpoint twice in his home. The police told his friend that his high gates, alarm systems and extremely high walls
actually made him less secure because it made it difficult to notice if/when things were amiss.

What bothered Pieter the most was the “highly individualistic identities” found in the suburbs—the movement away from communal relationships as a form of security to outsourcing one’s security to private companies. This individualism bothered Pieter because his own spirituality was deeply invested in, and linked to, the building of authentic connections to others and to one’s surrounding. Pieter was particularly concerned with the security obsession in white suburban communities because of the way it perpetuated a racialized narrative that “black people are dangerous and white people are easy targets and victims” and also because it tended to reinforce the view that black urban spaces were overflowing sites of criminality being kept at bay by suburban fortresses. Pieter told me about a Nike fun run that had been organized in the inner-city neighborhoods with the language of “take back the streets.” His comment was “take it from who?” He then went on to say with anger in his voice “white people from the suburbs have no right to ‘take back the streets’ that they anyway had abandoned in the mid-1990s to go and live somewhere else. And now that the city is starting to become cool again, because local people living in the city are making it cool, now suddenly suburban whites, and rich blacks, want to go and run with their psychedelic Nike shoes in the night because it is ‘their right?’” I find it interesting that Pieter saw white and wealthy South Africans as having abandoned their claim to the city through white flight, despite the fact that groups like RISE and their engagement with urban landscapes can be seen as reflecting a desire to (re)exercise white social and spatial agency and (re)assert cultural capital in a time of white retreat and suburban ghettoization, and perhaps in this regard,
they are not so dissimilar to the privileged (black and white) creative classes actively gentrifying the city center.

_Becoming Just South African_

No stranger to violence himself, Pieter consciously sought to resist white insularity by living a life more open to risk and also to relationships outside the boundaries of the white home, white family, and white suburban neighborhood. At the same time, the dearth of RISE members available to work consistently at the Johannesburg community center and the fact that no members lived in the inner city created an acute sense of ambivalence within the organization about the site due to their preference for ‘incarnational ministry.’ It also created a self-consciousness on Pieter’s part being an outsider to urban life and culture despite his values and ideals of emplacement. Pieter tried to frame this dynamic positively by arguing that the character of the inner-city, home to black migrants from other parts of South Africa and the continent of Africa, was also marked by a kind of indeterminacy. The experience of being in-between and always an outsider that he felt as he shuttled back and forth between his suburban home and congregation and this work in the inner-city created an affective connection with/to those living in the inner city.

Pieter was fascinated by the kind of cultural disorientation and alienation that marked inner-city life, which seemed to mirror his own experience of negotiating white Afrikaner identity in a democratic South Africa. Perhaps one of the most meaningful and difficult aspects of Pieter’s work with RISE was the opportunity it provided him to pursue an alternate white Afrikaner subject position as well as the complexities it revealed. Working with RISE provided Pieter simultaneously with greater consciousness of his whiteness within and outside of black contexts, as well as momentary experiences
of freedom from what Jennifer Harvey calls the “moral crisis” of being white.\textsuperscript{352} Both dynamics fueled renewed commitment to self-transformation and engagement. Pieter reported that most of the time when he worked in the city center he felt ‘very white’ but ‘I have those moments of feeling black, […] which I love.’ This feeling of blackness came from greater familiarity with the city, learning to appreciate certain foods, new relationships, and adopting modes of behavior common to black urban culture (such as the sharing of resources and taking public transport). Nevertheless, this feeling was daily countered by the reality that ‘I’m constantly called \textit{mlungu}, which means white person.’

Pieter wondered whether he would ever escape this sense of being marked with the labels white, male, rich, Afrikaans, or privileged (markers constantly activated in public debates about social transformation) and “relax as just South African.”

In an effort to imagine an alternate subject position, he reflected: “I bring into a room the baggage of being Afrikaans and white, but also the gifts of being Afrikaans and white. And the yearning not just to be Afrikaans and white, but to be maybe Zulu and white, or to be Afrikaans and black.” Pieter’s longing to arrive at a point where he can be ‘just South African’ or maybe to be ‘Afrikaans and black,’ can be connected to Nina’s desire to feel like she lives in the ‘real’ South Africa. Both expressed a utopian desire to transcend the limits associated with whiteness, as well as a more tempered desire to fashion an alternate white self that is shaped by encounters with black life.\textsuperscript{353}


\textsuperscript{353} As I argued in chapter one, these longings are given legitimacy by the Afro-universalism of Nelson Mandela as well as ideas associated with Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance. Mbeki’s famous speech “I am an African,” suggests, in part, that the identifier of African is open to anyone who shares South Africa’s history and is committed to its future. Mbeki symbolically includes white subjects in his (South) African lineage.
of time spent with Pieter and many conversations with him, I came to believe that his desire to be “just South African” was intimately connected to a desire to feel a deeper sense of national and social belonging, as well as a desire to combat a growing anxiety, shared by many white South Africans, that white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, may be denied a future place in the imagined community of South Africa. Pieter went out of his way often in our conversations to share with me that his roots in South Africa go back twelve generations and to emphasize that, given his Afrikaner heritage, he is likely to have slave and indigenous ancestors. This claim to hybridity and creolization has been an important strategy adopted by some Afrikaners in the democratic era to renegotiate their place in the nation-state.\textsuperscript{354} While there is no doubt that this language is often opportunistically deployed to assert one’s entitlement and belonging in the nation-state and compatriotism with the majority of South Africans,\textsuperscript{355} it also can reflect a movement away from the concept of a “pure” white Afrikaner ethnicity, which was a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s and formed the bedrock of apartheid racial imaginaries.\textsuperscript{356}

Pieter addressed the complexity of Afrikaner identity in democratic South Africa most directly when I asked him about the kind of person he was striving to become and his dreams for the future. His answer deserves to be represented in full, due to its poignancy and complexity. It begins with a critique of white suburban life that steeped in a yearning for something “more,” an aspirational yearning to be “South African” in a way that is recognized and embraced by black subjects as legitimate. This desire is then

\textsuperscript{354} Steyn, \textit{Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be}, chap. 8.
\textsuperscript{355} Steyn and Foster, “Repertoires for Talking White,” 28.
tempered by melancholy awareness of complexity and distance. Again, Pieter’s descriptions suggest that in his understanding to “become” South African is an ethical quest, rather than a social fact. Pieter shared that:

What I love about the way that I live my life is the ability to make new connections all the time, and I would die if I live in a community where making connections with different people is not easy, and not necessarily celebrated. So the challenge, for instance, with suburban living, the shopping culture is not a culture of making connections or building relationships. You don’t buy from your butcher, you know, you go to a Woolies, and swipe your card. So I would, I hope my life leads to more and more, um, to… I think, a much more fuller life within a specific neighborhood and community. Where I am not a stranger in a neighborhood, where I sort of start to become a local. I think maybe that is, I have probably if I have to say it, the yearning to be a local. The yearning to not feel like a tourist. To not feel like a, you know, to not feel like someone that has…that somewhere will be chased back to Europe, you know. Which is so crazy, because I am an African. I am! I’m 12th generation African, South African, 12 generations, that’s a long time in this country, um, I have roots in Europe, but those roots have long been forgotten and exchanged for deep African roots. My home language is the youngest language in the world, and it’s an African language, with European roots, but it’s an African language, and I love that. So I, so growing towards becoming a local South African, and there’s lots of people that live their lives being local without making it so fucking complex, without deconstructing, you know, just living it, and I envy that, whether that person is white or black, and on election day, you always meet those people, they are just living life, as South African. ‘What do you mean I am not African?’ you know? Where I sort of go in this narrative of ‘nah, man I have to listen, and I have to do that.’ So I think that’s the answer … to be really rooted here, and um… I don’t know if it is going to be Joburg though, but yeah…Becoming South African I think it has been something that I am reflecting on a lot, for a long time now, even studying, what does it mean for me to be proudly South African, to a point where I am also acknowledged by black people as African, and South African, and that’s I think is going to be interesting to see if that is something that’s going to happen in my lifetime, to be African. Ahhh I don’t know, if I think of Antjie Krog’s journey, and others, there’s someone who has been very much involved in the breaking down of apartheid from an Afrikaner white perspective and her yearnings also, it’s very complex.

When Pieter finished this answer, he sighed, and we sat in silence for a long period, both absorbing the weight of his words and his longing.
Pieter’s response expresses the common white claim to Africanness based on a connection to the land and ancestral roots, as well as the utopian idea contained in the 1955 Freedom Charter that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, irrespective of race. At the same time, Pieter acknowledges that he is “growing towards becoming a local South African,” suggesting that he is not-yet a local, that being a local is about more than where one lives, or how long one’s family has resided in a country. Rather, being a local is an ethical subjectivity: one that involves the recognition and legitimization of others and a demonstrated moral commitment to a specific place. Expressing a kind of envy towards those who are able to live without the burden of consciousness that he has developed through his education and work in Johannesburg, Pieter nevertheless seeks a kind of self-respect or pride that he acknowledges can only emerge through relationships with black subjects. He also recognized that attaining the status of being a local, or being seen as authentically South African, may not happen in his lifetime.

Part 3: Begging to be Black?
I find it highly significant that Pieter ended our interview by referencing Antjie Krog, an Afrikaner author who we were both fascinated with and discussed many times. Pieter deeply appreciated Krog’s ethical, political, and spiritual struggle to transcend, and come to terms with, her conservative Afrikaner background and to publically engage with the social and racial complexities of life in democratic South Africa. I suspect he identified with her frank acknowledgement of the pain, confusion, and loss that accompanies white ethical transformation. While deeply loyal to Afrikaner culture and history, Krog does not shy away from discussing strain with Afrikaner family and friends due to her relationships with black South Africans and exploration of African cultures;
yet, she is convinced that the only viable way for Afrikaners to live in South Africa is through deeper interconnection with racial and cultural others. She seeks to become, in a sense, more African with all the discomfort and negotiation this shift in orientation entails.

Krog rose to global prominence with the publication of a 1999 creative non-fiction memoir *Country of My Skull.* The text is an anguished mediation on covering South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a journalist and coming to terms with her complicity in the crimes uncovered as a white Afrikaner. Her 2009 text *Begging to be Black* represents an equally complex meditation on the entanglement of the colonial and apartheid past with the post-apartheid present, as well as the moral confusion that she as a white Afrikaans woman experiences after the end of apartheid due to the gaps that persist between her sense of self and ways of being in the world and those of the black South Africans around her.

In *Begging to be Black,* Krog’s paradoxical quest for a ‘blacker’ white self emerges primarily out of her desire to confront the reality that black people are the majority in South Africa and to reject the safety and enclosures of a whites-only and Western form of life. At stake for her is “the kind of self” she should “grow into” in order to “live a caring, useful and informed life” within South Africa. She registers a distinctly post-apartheid discomfort with the complexities and contradictions of her social location. Once an active critic of apartheid, she earnestly wishes to transcend the racist past and participate fully in the new South Africa. She recognizes that to have a white

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357 Krog, *Country of My Skull.*
359 Ibid., 92.
360 Ibid., 95.
body twenty years after apartheid is still to have a “sanctity” conferred by the dominant Western world. Not wanting to defend the privileges of whiteness, she wrestles with how and to what extent one can “understand” and “share the vulnerability of the black body” that remains under threat.  

Pieter was clearly inspired by Krog’s ongoing attempts to reject an identity of privilege and embrace a new way of being through engagement with blackness and acceptance of greater risk. In the text, Krog seeks to become “other than myself” by moving closer to her ideal of “blackness.” She seeks to move away from a subjectivity that prioritizes Western values of individualism and dominance, which she associates with whiteness, and towards a subjectivity that prioritizes interconnection and wholeness in line with the South African philosophy of ubuntu, roughly equated with blackness or Africanness.

For Krog, blackness is something set in contrast to the oppressive burdens and constraints of whiteness. In this regard, her use of blackness illustrates what Toni Morrison calls “playing in the dark.” Playing in the dark, according to Morrison, is when white writers use representations of blackness to reflect on the limits of white, Western, culture and construct alternate visions of freedom. As Morrison notes, white American writers have consistently used “blackness” as a sign of the “excessive” – as that which symbolizes “limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread.” As excess, images of blackness can “powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority” and

361 Ibid., 100.
362 Krog, Begging, 269-269.
364 Ibid., x.
“cultural hegemony,” though at times it can also undermine these.\textsuperscript{365} Regardless, Morrison concludes that images and tropes of blackness provide white writers with the means for an “extraordinary mediation of the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious.” What emerges is an “astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity”—in short, a window into the white self.\textsuperscript{366}

Following Morrison, I want to briefly comment on the shared work that blackness performs in Krog’s text and Pieter’s interview and what this reveals about post-apartheid white racial subjectivity. Both narratives expose the ambivalent relationship that they, as a white Afrikaners, have with blackness. Blackness is represented as something to aspire towards as well as a constant threat to white security, comfort, and sense of home and belonging. Whiteness, in turn, emerges as a problematic substance that must be continually reformed in relation to blackness.

At its most abstract, blackness promises liberation from the alienations and constraints associated with whiteness and Western modernity. For example, Krog tells her mentor in Berlin, an Australian philosopher, that “Blackness released me from my white capsule. It has liberated me from the rule of all laws; it has taught me how to become other than myself.”\textsuperscript{367} Krog has a deep appreciation for how her relationships with black people, and encounters with African philosophy and religion, has helped to relativize the value of white, Western culture and provided new possibilities for self-transformation. Such discourses were often mirrored by the white subjects I encountered.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{365}Ibid., x, 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{366}Ibid., 16–17.
  \item \textsuperscript{367}Krog, \textit{Begging to Be Black}, 268–69.
\end{itemize}
in my research. Yet framing transformation in this way continues to rely on a well-worn colonial script, one in which blackness threatens the purity of whiteness with contamination or death. Krog’s *Begging to be Black* strategically utilizes this script by showing how encounters with blackness disrupt and reveal the fiction of white moral purity. An aesthetic profaning of “pure” whiteness is further combined with a sacralization of blackness/Africanness, so that ultimately blackness comes to represent a potential redemptive force within white, Western culture. Blackness never quite loses its (colonial) associations with contamination and death. Instead, it becomes a necessary ingredient in the interrogation and transformation of whiteness, which entails a kind of death.

Ideas of blackness liberating whiteness can perhaps be seen most clearly in the emphasis that Nina and Pieter both place on experimentation, risk, and adventure. While they sought to distance themselves from colonial paternalism and white savior ideologies, they often relied on contrasts between civilization and the wild, domestication and adventure, to frame their ethical ideals of social and spiritual transformation. For those affiliated with RISE, Jesus represented something that is “wild” and “untamed” and counter-cultural, and following Jesus provided a means of moving beyond suburban superficiality towards spaces that felt risky, authentic, wild, and free. These spaces were coded as black; or alternately, black spaces were coded as spaces of risk and also opportunity for self-transformation.368

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368 This perhaps may be read as the influence of Black Theology on the orientation of RISE members; the desire to follow a “blacker” Jesus. Alternately, the metaphor is quite gendered in that authenticity is tied to a kind of masculine liberation from constraint. For Emerging Christians, authentic spirituality is often understood to be embodied and embedded in the world, best cultivated outside of spaces of comfort and privilege, and, in South Africa, these spaces tended to be understood by RISE members to be poor and black. Needless to say, this raises uncomfortable colonial and racist overtones in that blackness (especially
At the same time, Krog’s text is instructive in that she often despairs at her inability ever to “fully enter the psyche of someone else, somebody black.” The divide that she feels between herself as a white South African and her fellow black South Africans brings with it a sense “terror and loneliness”.\footnote{Krog, Begging, 267.} One of the most disturbing aspects of Krog’s text is the way in which her idealization of blackness coexists, or swings back towards, negative representations of life in post-apartheid South Africa. Experiences of dissonance and distance prompt Krog to indulge in both Afro-pessimism about South Africa’s present and future as well as romantic idealization of African culture—two common, but problematic, responses among white South African to the relativization of whiteness.\footnote{These tendencies prompt stern admonishment by her conversation partner in Berlin, a white Australian philosopher, who cautions Krog not to let ‘blackness become a voiceless group’ that she privately observes and defines, but rather to seek multiple-way conversations that involve actually listening and speaking to others. Krog, Begging to Be Black, 123. For more on white responses to the post-apartheid context, see Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be; Steyn and Foster, “Repertoires for Talking White.”} Experiences of guilt, alienation, complicity, and fear constantly stand at odds with the unconditional embrace Krog longs to find in “the heart of blackness,” making her vulnerable to temptations of white withdrawal and the seductions of privilege, something I observed among my interlocutors as well.

Part 4: Towards an Ethics of Dwelling

Reflecting critically on their social location and seeking a more expanded, and risky, way of life raised for Nina and Pieter fundamental questions regarding what it means to dwell and make one’s home in post-apartheid South Africa. The narratives of

\[\text{in its non-middle class form) is implicitly and explicitly represented as the antithesis of a commodified, capitalistic, privatized, and spiritually bankrupt white culture, making blackness a signifier of spiritual and social liberation and as well as simultaneously reinforcing links between blackness, excess, danger, and also poverty.}\]
self they shared with me reveal complex longings to help build and maintain a world where it is possible to feel at home in one’s skin and at home among South Africa’s diverse peoples as white, Afrikaner subjects. These longings existed side by side with constant awareness of distance and alienation. As white subjects, not only did they often find themselves estranged from the lived realities of the majority of black South Africans, they also experienced mainstream or normative whiteness as something constrictive and entrapping.

Nina and Pieter’s emphasis on authenticity, locality, and meaningful relationality point towards what Jarret Zigon calls an ethics of dwelling. Drawing on Heideggerian philosophy, Zigon sees an ethics of dwelling as responding to perceived threats to one’s capacity to be-in-the-world that reflects a desire to hold open, or create, possibilities that expand, rather than reduce, the capacity to live and act otherwise. In my view, references to authenticity, while arguably informed by Emerging Christianity, seemed to function for Nina and Pieter as place-holders for the kinds of subject positions they were seeking, which was open-ended and difficult to pin down. This was the case because the kind of person they sought to become, or aspired towards, seemed as yet to not exist. In this way, Nina and Pieter exemplify Zigon’s argument that, “although many of our informants may utilize the dominant moral vocabulary available today, ethical imperatives often exceed that which is intended or meant by this vocabulary,” so the

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371 On the ethics of dwelling, and the concept of dwelling as being at home in the world in ways that open up, rather than close, possibilities of self-transformation, see Zigon, “An Ethics of Dwelling and a Politics of World-Building.”

372 Ibid., 757.
ethnographer needs to pay careful attention to how moral vocabularies are deployed and the horizons they gesture toward. \footnote{Ibid., 747.}

As Griffiths and Prozesky note, “Dwelling is more than just living, and more than simply living on the land where one happened to be born on. It means relating to the land as a homeland, a dwelling place.” \footnote{Griffiths and Prozesky, “The Politics of Dwelling,” 30.} Dwelling is about experiencing a sense of place in one’s world that allows for movement and growth. However, the “search for dwelling is particularly complex and difficult in the case of white South Africans” \footnote{Ibid.} This is the case because apartheid created an “artificial sense of dwelling, which favored whites in every respect and did not truly reflect South African society at all.” \footnote{Ibid., 31.} With the arrival of democratic South Africa, white South Africans found themselves in a new world, searching for a new social imaginary. Many found that their social practices, while momentarily providing a kind of sacred canopy, did little to provide the sense of home or dwelling in the public sphere—creating a pervasive sense of homelessness and exile, despite the fact of maintaining radically disproportionate cultural and economic influence vis-à-vis other groups.

Among Afrikaners in particular, a sense of exile and longing for home has long been a mythological feature of their collective group identity. Prior to apartheid, Afrikaners identified strongly with the biblical Israelites—“the wandering of God’s chosen people in the desert”—and were strongly motivated by the quest for a future home, an ideal waiting to be achieved. \footnote{Ibid.} A quest for self-determination, a homeland,
fueled the kinds of everyday practices and values central to Afrikaner nationalism that also denied the rightful claims of others to dwell in the land as citizens. After apartheid, many Afrikaners saw in democracy a foreclosing of this long-standing quest for home, as they myth of white purity and dominance was disrupted, and they were forced to confront the real South Africa: diverse, plural, and heterogeneous; wounding and bleeding from centuries of oppression. Many responded by trying to preserve, or recreate, a sense of home through emigration and semigration. Withdrawal to securitized suburbs or white-majority spaces, including churches, allowed for a superior us versus inferior them racialized imagination to be reproduced.378

Isolationist responses stand in contrast to what Nina and Pieter and those like them sought to do, which was to try to reimagine themselves as living in Africa and also as committed to Africa in the long-term. They recognized, further, that making a home in South Africa would require negotiation and engagement with those they had been taught to see as other. Such an “awakening” process was not easy, as it tended to exacerbate, rather than dampen, a sense of “misplacement” in the short-term, which I discuss below. Intentional engagement with black subjects and spaces exposed the artificial, and precarious, sense of dwelling that had been constructed by colonial white supremacy and apartheid Afrikaner nationalism, leading to instability and insecurity for both self and others. At the same time, the quest for alternate subjectivities provided glimpses of new forms of sociality that served to disrupt apartheid norms and logics, which, in turn, encouraged further self-transformation and tolerance of/for complexity.

378 Ibid., 36.
In it for the Long Haul

The ethics of white RISE members were deeply shaped by ongoing contact with black South Africans. The fact that such contact was a “choice,” despite the demographics of South Africa, illustrates the degree to which white South Africans have managed to maintain cultural and economic power in the democratic era and resist calls for transformation. In Nina’s case, proximity to blackness was made possible both by where she chose to live as well as by her work with RISE, the latter being the impetus for her relocation. Feeling connection and accountability to the black South Africans that she saw on a daily basis contributed to an increased sense of moral responsibility both for making amends for the apartheid past as well as for resisting ongoing preferential treatment due to her whiteness. Nina reflected:

I think in my time here some people treat me too well and some people don’t want to be my friend at all. And there is always a reason. There is always a reason. Even if it is a bad treatment it is usually an apartheid story or some discontent. And then I have to start there, and say sorry for the past, which I think is important. It is what I represent. Other people treat me just treat me as absolutely superior. And then you have to have a different kind of conversation there. I get so much preferential behavior. Now that I have real black friends it is just so obvious (my emphasis).

The combination of both forming black relationships and confronting black pain became an ongoing incitement for Nina to work against the social meanings attached to her whiteness.

Living in a majority black community as a single white female attracted much attention, criticism, and praise from local residents and white networks alike, but Nina felt committed to living in her community for the “long term.” She described her choice to live in a majority black community as providing “endless education” that brought challenges, frustration, and disappointments but also pleasure. By far the most difficult
aspect of her increased identification with black spaces and ongoing work of self-
transformation was the sense of “misplacement” she experienced, both in relation to her
black neighbors as well as in relation suburban, white, Afrikaner communities.

The suspicion of black neighbors and onlookers became particularly apparent to
Nina when she started to share her home and belongings with black colleagues/friends.
Sharing with others had become a central value for Nina: a way for her to deal with
inherited wealth and disproportionate access to resources because of her status as a white
South African. Nina shared her home, personal belongings, and car with a number of
people over the years. At one point, she shared her home with a young black man. She
related how this was such a “shock” for his family “because they had real stories of being
mistreated” by white South Africans. This was an important moment for Nina because
“then I realized: it is a much bigger deal for him to stay with me than for me to stay with
him.” Here, Nina recognized the emotional discomfort and symbolic burden placed on
black subjects who form close relationships with white peers, given the apartheid past.
Nina described this experience as yet another “part of my awakening.” She
acknowledged that “I am, in all senses, a representation of the oppressor” and because of
the meanings attached to her whiteness, her presence in the community was often very
painful and difficult for black South Africans to accept.

At the same time, Nina also encountered resistance from white friends and family
in response to her relocation. “My family and lots of people were just very worried. And
obviously not for it.” She confessed that one of the most difficult aspects of her choice to
live and work in black spaces was “not having a sense of being understood” by her white
friend and family. Many white friends and family refused visit her at her home for fear of
crime and safety or just emotional discomfort with black spaces. Even though Nina was the legal guardian of her nieces, her brother would not let her babysit her nieces at her home, which highlights the particularly gendered ways that race is mediated in South Africa with primacy placed on “protecting” white female bodies. In this way, Nina as a single white woman was particularly transgressive, and the isolation she experienced from her family is illustrative of the costs associated with her emplacement.

As the years have passed, Nina has been forced to develop various ways of coping with her debilitating feelings of anger and sadness in response to white “ignorance.” One method, already described, is to re-code stressful encounters as moments of “education” recognizing that “every person is in there spot, and they just need to connect the next dot.” She related, however that, “in the beginning… I wasn’t that graceful. I would get so angry and despondent, especially because very few people have mixed friendships, they might have mixed friendships but then it is all still economically in the same class. So comments [by white South Africans] about government, comments about crime and black people, those things are by far the hardest.” While often this kind of white-talk is supported and reinforced by white Afrikaner communities, Nina no longer could participate in such white talk with a sense of indifference.

At the same time, Nina began to recognize how important it was to maintain her connection to Afrikaner culture and networks in hopes of promoting collective change. One way she sought to challenge white fear was to invite white friends and family to stay at her house. While this may seem far from radical, for many white South Africans, any time spent in majority black space is likely to feel uncomfortable and provoke fear and anxiety as black communities are often associated with criminality and fanaticized as
absolutely other. As Nina reflected, “that experience for a lot of people is just… they are so scared, or their husbands don’t allow them to come.” Nina hopes that opening her home and sharing about her work will ultimately help create “spaces of integration.” But where integration does not happen voluntarily, she often creates it by bringing one of her black colleagues with her to white social gatherings “because then it just makes everyone uncomfortable. You can’t talk the same way you do because it is just different.” It was unclear to me what black RISE members thought of this kind of strategy; it seemed that they recognized the utility and also power that came from navigating and disrupting white space through their work with RISE and the networks it provided, and they were also ambivalent about the double consciousness it produced. There is also, of course, the ever present danger of being reduced from a friend to a moral object lesson.

While her relocation was initially difficult, Nina came to enjoy the symbolic reversals and performative possibilities made possible by her location in and identification with black space. Being visibly marked as white, and also marked by her relationships with black friends and colleagues, not only brought deeper awareness of racial, cultural and economic difference, as well as systemic privilege and injustice, it also created moments of play and unexpected humor that were experienced as immensely freeing. “In the beginning it was very hilarious. People are like ‘are you buying a house for your maid?’ I’m like, no, it is all me. And still if I open the door, the surprise on the faces, it doesn’t get old for me, I love it.” She went on to say, “Being pulled over by

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379 During my fieldwork, I often experienced white awe and amazement that I would venture into “black” areas, or that I maintained close relationships with black South Africans. Generally, I was praised for my boldness, as white South Africans spoke wistfully about how they too might one day explore the inner city or black suburbs like Soweto, but a pervasive sense of fear and sense of vulnerability always remained an undercurrent in their conversations with me.
police now, I love it.” Laughing, she related how when police officers found out where she stayed, their shock often resulted in forgetting to write her a ticket.380

Learning valuable coping skills from black friends and colleagues, Nina increasingly recognized the therapeutic and subversive value of humor and symbolic reversal. She particularly enjoyed helping create scenes of symbolic reversal that relied on problematizing both black and white expectations about race and class:

So when we are at a shop, when we are at a coffee place, let’s say, every now and then I would take some of my [black] friends or staff members out for coffee and I would usually pay because I have more money, but what I would do is I give my card to one of them. And then they know my pin, and it is so obvious, like, when the waiter comes, I always get asked first what I want. […] or we would go into the restaurant, and first I would ask the person I am with, and they [the host] would come and ask me ‘Hi maam, where do you want to sit?’ and then I just look at the person next to me, and I always let them guide the process and make decisions. So then already…It’s a small thing but it makes a statement, and then if they pay with a card, even if it is my card, we don’t show that it is my card, but they pay, and it’s like … it breaks down something, you know?

When asked if her black friends enjoy participating in these kinds of reversals, Nina responded “Absolutely! They are even worse than me.” Nina related how a black colleague intentionally plays up the racial tension when he senses black or white hostility or discomfort. If they go to a movie, her colleague will put his head on her shoulder or call her “honey” to subvert people’s expectations or understandings about interracial relationships.

Creating moments of symbolic reversal along with her fellow black RISE members created for Nina “endless education” about the logics of privilege, but perhaps what mattered most to her was how these encounters demonstrated that “we are all in on

380 The fact that Nina now finds her contact with police pleasurable is especially significant as almost everyone in South Africa (myself included) has found themselves the target of arbitrary police action intended to extort money.
it together, which makes it a lot of fun.” Indeed, I observed many moments where the group as a whole appeared to relish opportunities to subvert social norms regarding race and class in a spirit of comradery. For Nina, the sense of mutuality with black friends through acts that disturbed race and class norms provided hope of alternate forms of belonging. What sustained Nina through the emotional discomfort and sense of misplacement was the sense that she is “in it for the long haul” and that she is doing the work of transformation “with my friends.” Positive experiences of interracial dwelling reinforced the value of emplacement and allowed her to feel hopeful and optimistic about social change.

When Nina thought about the future she reflected that “we have signed ourselves up for something we have no idea where it is going to go.” In retrospect, she felt surprised by the directions her life and work had already taken. The priority for her now was to “live with open hands,” conscious of season, while at the same time continuing to commit to her specific locale. Nina found the “romantic idea” of growing old in the community she had chosen intoxicating, but her commitment was bolstered by the more sober recognition that “if I am locally irrelevant, my voice will never matter outside.” Because Nina felt increasingly drawn to work within white Afrikaner churches and within the global RISE structure, she needed the moral credibility that could only be derived from living out the values she affirmed.

While Nina found it challenging to work in Afrikaans spaces, reengaging with white communities, particularly church communities, gave her sense of coming full-circle, of finally bringing the lessons of her life and work with RISE to places in deep need of “transformation.” The shift in focus back to white communities repents a kind of
reverse missionary calling oriented towards white, wealthy, Afrikaner suburbs. White, rather than black, South Africans were now the object in need of salvation. Nina increasingly sought to use the language and ideas of Christianity to challenge white Afrikaners to face their “blind spots.” Here, Nina charitably framed structures of white dominance: “The things with Afrikaner people is they are genuinely nice and good people. That’s the thing. They just have these massive blind spots, that’s all. So they’ve been taught that it is my people and my god, so to break that down.” Nina interpreted resistance to transformation a specifically white Christian problem with spiritual, as much as material, roots. “The thing you have to break down in South Africa is obviously such a strong majority saying they are Christian. So to take that and real life and connect those things with each other, I am seeing progressively more things like that.” Again, Nina appeals to authenticity to describe what is needed among white Afrikaners — the problem, for her, has been that Afrikaners have understood Christianity cognitively, but that they disconnected its principles from immanent application in the here and now, and in so doing, they have failed to be authentic Jesus-followers.

Complexity and Ethical Work

Like other RISE members, Nina remained concerned about the fragile nature of South African democracy and was extremely sensitive to the “tension” and “discontent” building in the community where she lived. At times, she spoke in ways similar to other white South Africans in that she expressed the view that South Africa “can still go either way.” Fear and anxiety regarding impending violence and social collapse is common among white South Africans. As Nina said: “we can either really become more and more of a democracy again or go in an alternative route.” Democracy was associated with the reign of Nelson Mandela, or rather it was not associated with current President Jacob
Zuma who is widely criticized for his disregard of the plight of poor South Africans and government corruption. Despite some pessimism regarding South Africa’s current state, Nina continued to draw hope from the progressive nature of the Constitution, a functioning judicial system, as well as through seeing “small pockets of change” through her work with RISE.

When asked about the most challenging and meaningful aspects of living in South Africa today, Nina paused before answering carefully: “I think those two things are linked.” While she noted diversity was an immense gift, she recognized its challenges. However, unlike most white South Africans, Nina chose to see democratic South Africa as a great laboratory and opportunity for ongoing moral development, rather than hostile territory: “I realized we are very lucky because from a young child you are growing up in circumstances that are the perfect growing ground, you know, if you really want to raise a kid this is the best place ever, because they will deal with all the issues of the world, you know? How to get along with people who are different from you, economically as well as culturally, and how do you deal with issues of poverty and what does the world really look like. I feel we have a mini representation of the world just in one country […] I really came to believe that that is our gift that we have received.” Nina saw the racial, cultural and economic divides in South Africa as profound pedagogical invitations, noting that too often people deal with the “gift” of difference in “ungraceful ways.” Here, she leveled her most strident critiques at Afrikaner culture and media for promoting pessimistic narratives around social, political and economic transformation. She particularly critiqued the narrative that all whites are victims of crime and the black government is inept and useless.
At the same time, in contrast to her earlier righteous rebellion days, Nina recognized that “no issue is ever simple.” In a story all too common in South Africa, she shared with me how her brother’s home was recently robbed. In her daily life, Nina has adopted a cultivated indifference to the possibility of violence and an acceptance of risk due to her own ethics, “I mean here, for me, if something gets stolen […] its fine, I kind of expect it.” But because of her close relationship with her nieces, the incident struck her in a new way. Similar to the issue of medical aid, Nina could not disentangle herself from concern for their safety and feelings of protection that emerged in relation to her family members, even while she also could not distance herself from the knowledge that every day she personally interacts with desperate individuals who have stolen before. To see both sides is immensely taxing for Nina “because no crime is without a story, there would be not be as much crime, if it wasn’t for the border, or the past, or the education system.” Unlike her brother, Nina’s recognizes the connection between racial and economic disparities and high levels of crime. The complexity of contemporary South Africa, the entanglement of past and present, depending on the day, could feel like an insurmountable burden for Nina.

Within black spaces, whether encountering idealization or resistance because of her whiteness, Nina worked hard to frame these moments as a constant invitation to learn: “I think all of those things made me just deeply, deeply realize that it is a privilege for me to be here, and to learn all of these things, and to keep perspective.” Here, Nina affirmed the ethical value of emplacement as a means to maintain “perspective” — a perspective increasingly informed by the needs, desires, and suffering of the black South Africans around her. Developing “perspective,” however, was not an easy process.
Rather, it was one that required *askesis*, or ethical work, which brought its own unexpected burdens and demands. Within the black community where she lived and worked, Nina initially did not want to tell anybody that she was Afrikaans, and because of her accent and fluency with English, she could often pass as “English.” The nuances here are important to understand because it is white Afrikaners who are most associated with the apartheid system.

Yet at the time of our interview, Nina recognized this as part of a cycle that white Afrikaners had to go through if they were serious about facing black demands for transformation — a cycle of despising one’s own culture before learning how to accept one’s cultural background and identity in a new way without denying entanglement with systemic inequalities. Renewed connections to white networks allowed her to remain engaged with dominant white norms, values and habits. While always having the potential to increase cognitive dissonance and withdrawal, renewed engagement with white communities was compelling to many of my interlocutors precisely because, it gave white subjects a meaningful place in the work of social transformation without erasing the white self.

The Cost of Living In-Between

Reflecting on her own journey of critically engaging whiteness, Steyn notes: “A white skin is not skin that can be shed without losing some blood.” For Nina and Pieter, waking up to the “real South Africa” meant constantly facing the harsh reality that the “past” (a code word for apartheid) continued to reassert itself. Living and working in majority black areas daily showcased the ways apartheid-era divides and power structures

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381 Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be*, xvii.
were still in place. Added to this, however, was the cognitive dissonance produced by having access to and moving between different worlds: white and black, urban and suburban, rich and poor, which could exacerbate the sense of misplacement that Nina described.

Throughout my fieldwork, I observed Pieter in a variety of formal and informal settings. I was always struck by his very conscious gift of storytelling and humor, the ways in which he constantly poked fun at Afrikaner cultural practices that seemed backward, conservative or insular. This sense of humor went a long way in diffusing tension and exposing the often exaggerated fears and paranoias of his “community.” His personality was open, curious, and intensely life-affirming. Over time, I began to see how Pieter delighted in forms of creative subversion, ways in which he could symbolically disrupt notions of Afrikaner purity—for example, posting pictures on social media of participation in “black” activities in the inner city, eating “black” food, or taking “black” public transport.

What I started to notice, however, that much of these symbolic reversals were very much aimed at changing perceptions, and provoking responses, within white Afrikaner communities, as well as creating a more open and fluid sense of self for Pieter: one that allowed him an increased sense of national and social belonging and confidence outside of Afrikaner communities. Pieter was perhaps the most vocal and bold of my informants in explicitly naming the benefits and privileges he derived from apartheid and ruthlessly critiquing Afrikaner communities for their insularity and paranoia. At the same time he maintained an uneasy but deeply embedded relationship with white Afrikaner and suburban spaces, exemplified through owning property and actively investing in
neighborhood Afrikaans churches and schools.

The contrast of these activities and practices with those encouraged by RISE often led Pieter to articulate and exhibit an acute sense of being split as he moved in and out of bounded spaces and navigated a variety of loaded relations, even while he idealistically and enthusiastically embraced the possibility of developing a more hybridized sense of self. Because Pieter’s primary employment was being a suburban pastor in a Dutch Reformed Church, he only was able to spend a few days a week in the inner-city overseeing the community center. In a more extreme way than Nina articulated, this dynamic created an acute sense of moving, and existing, between two worlds, or two “communities” as Pieter described it. This created a number of tensions, that while productive in terms of critique and reflection, also proved to be physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting.

Unlike Nina, I believe that Pieter’s choice to remain living in the suburbs perhaps heightened the tensions of being misplaced or in-between as the connections and loyalties that Pieter felt to his “community” were constantly reinforced, even as he longed for increased contact with black South Africans and intercultural understanding. Despite his longing to be perceived as a “local” and a “real” South African as a result of his relation to blackness, Pieter confessed to me the difficulty he had in forming real black friendships and equal partnerships, despite his work with RISE. I suspect this had something to do with the fact that such friendships were not perceived as a matter of social survival in the ways they were for Nina, though Pieter acknowledged, similar together RISE members, that building such relationships was vital and necessary for future transformation. At the same time, I remained struck by Pieter’s tireless efforts to
question and work on himself, his generosity, and his creativity. Pieter faced a variety of structural and personal factors that complicated, and at times worked against, his desire to attain a sense of freedom in relation to his identity as a white Afrikaner male and in relation to suburban white spaces. After suffering a personal tragedy, I was not surprised to hear that Pieter stepped away from working with RISE.

Dwelling and Entanglement

South African literary scholar Sara Nuttall has proposed using the concept of entanglement to explore the subjective and cultural possibilities that have emerged in the wake of apartheid. For Nuttall, entanglement “is intended less to imply that we contest that forms of separation and difference still occur [in South Africa], materially and epistemologically, than to draw into our analysis critical attention to those sites and spaces in which what was once thought of as separate—identities, spaces, and histories—come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways.”

Specifically, Nuttall uses the term creolization to highlight individual and collective processes that seem to transcend apartheid divisions. She argues that for white subjects, increased contact and identification with blackness in post-apartheid South Africa can allow for a type of becoming-other that displaces aspects of white power and privilege.

Nina’s and Pieter’s narratives of self, to quote Nuttall, “stage and speak to forms of whiteness which are about confronting apartheid and attempting to find a way into the

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383 Nuttall is aware of the dangers of invoking creolization but she chooses this term rather than hybridity because “given a properly historical reading, both in South Africa and elsewhere, creolisation carries with it a particularly vivid sense (compared to, say, notions of hybridity and syncretism) of the cruelty that processes of mixing have involved.” Ibid., 25.
future." One of the most significant features of my interviews with Nina and Pieter was how their quests for self-transformation were mediated by intense lived relationships to people and places. Engaging with their surroundings, and the people in those surroundings, took on pedagogical significance in their spiritual and ethical quests to think and act otherwise. Not unlike what Krog narrates in *Begging to be Black*, spatial experiences of belonging and estrangement, as well relational experiences of kinship or alienation, served as constant sources of ethical reflection: both in terms of framing the kinds of subjects they sought to become and in terms of the kinds of subject positions they sought to move away from.

Developing profound and deep connections with racial and cultural others in order to create a shared life together was one of the animating drives of the RISE community, and it is clear from talking with Nina and Pieter that experiences of *communitas*, often facilitated through the intentional crossing of racial, class, and national borders, were deeply impactful. Their reflections work to underscore the connection between *liminality* and self-transformation that Faubion notes. Momentary “liberation from social constraint” through ritualized movement and stylized practices can work to displace a subject and prepare the subject for occupying a new subject position. Working with RISE allowed, for example, subjects like Pieter to explore and blur categories that apartheid ideology would have demanded remain separate (African and Western, black and white, Afrikaans and Zulu) so as to preserve the racial contract that upholds white supremacy.

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384 Ibid., 82.
White subjects in democratic South Africa contemplating a future that includes adopting a black or African identity is precisely why Mbembe has called on scholars to “rethink the African subject emerging.” For Mbembe, the postcolonial African subject is simultaneously displaced and entangled with the colonial (and apartheid) past. At times, colonial and apartheid forms of life and logics appear to erupt into and constrain the present, foreclosing a truly post-colonial future; other times, they appear to be mutable and reversible. Thus, rather than positing an entirely new South Africa that has decisively broken with the apartheid past, we might think of an emerging South Africa that is still entangled with and yet displaced from the logics of apartheid and colonial modernity, which makes the quest for authentic belonging and relationality particularly fraught and complex for white subjects like Nina and Pieter.

Like others involved with RISE, Nina and Pieter were deeply invested in their own self-transformation, and, by extension, the transformation of the privileged white people and communities they remained entangled with. Whites who resisted engaging with black South Africans as equals, whether out of fear, contempt, or indifference, or who found it difficult to live alongside diverse others without trying to change them, were seen as posing a threat to Christian public witness, to the establishment of a non-

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388 Mbembe is careful to note that a sense of temporal entanglement is by no means a specifically African feature, nor is it an indicator of chaos; rather temporal entanglement might be thought of as a distinctive marker of a postcolonial or globalized world in which temporal distinctions between past, present and future and binary logics of absolute difference become increasingly destabilized. He writes, “The ‘historicity’ of African societies […] are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualize outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized.” Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 9.
Thus, at an individual level, I read Nina and Pieter not as primarily seeking to be missionaries to black and urban spaces or especially focused on attracting black and urban subjects to their way of life. Rather, Nina and Pieter can be understood as using their encounters with, and proximity to, black subjects and spaces as pedagogical resources for ethical reflection and intervention with the hopes of creating for themselves a deeper sense of home in democratic South Africa.

Conclusion:
In this chapter, I have sought to illuminate some of the ethical horizon that Nina’s and Pieter’s values, practices, and discourse gestured towards, even if this horizon remains tied more to an imagined future rather than an existing present. Not only did Nina and Pieter understand their social and spatial location as central to the work of transformation, they also, by adopting targeted practices and values, endeavored to create a sense of home, or belonging, in places that might initially be perceived as inhospitable, dangerous, or foreign. Finding one’s place in a shifting and disorienting material, emotional, and racial landscape was understood as something that required both experimentation and increased social engagement. They described the end goal, or telos, of their journey a number of ways: for example, as becoming more fully South African, as becoming more fully human, as becoming Christ-like, as becoming a different kind of Afrikaner, and as becoming a local. What connected these aspirations was a desire to feel more at home and also to gain moral legitimacy as white subjects. Participating in the real

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389 See Geraldo and Marti for a discussion of witness, and how this relates to the concept of being missional, within the Emerging Church Movement. Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 136–44.
South Africa was clearly an ideal yet to be obtained. This was the case because achieving their aspired subject positions required the participation and legitimation of others perceived to be more authentically South African, namely black South Africans.

Nina and Pieter can be understood as pursuing a form of “ethical redemption:” one in which white subjects seek to pay off the debt they feel they owe in light of privileges inherited and granted by virtue of their whiteness in order to free themselves in the future. No doubt Nina and Pieter would emphatically agree with critical race scholar (and Afrikaner) Melissa Steyn’s reflections on the significance of interracial anti-apartheid activism: “working along with South Africans of all cultural groups towards a common cause, greatly deepened my insight into what my whiteness had cost me: the sense of community I had been deprived of; the friends I could have had; the freedom I have never known to inhabit my land other than as some sort of psychological squatter.”

Steyn goes on to describe the benefits of coming to know “in a new way through personal relationships, the deep humanity of the African people I had been raised to fear,” of breaking with social taboos to see the “normalcy and complexity” of black lives. In our conversations, Nina and Pieter described to me the painful joy of learning about and from the other. Exposure to new foods, new cultural practices, new spaces, and new communities was experienced as liberating. Indeed, they reported a sense of becoming more authentically human, “South African, and even Afrikaans as a result of their engagement with black subjects.

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391 Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be, xvi.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid.
Nina and Pieter’s desire for authenticity and belonging, and the values, practices, and ideals that emerged from this desire, must be seen, therefore, as a lived response to the open question of what it means for white individuals and communities to dwell meaningfully within a decolonizing and post-apartheid context where “whiteness just isn’t what it used to be.” Whether discussing hopes of becoming an authentically South African, human, local, or Christian, each subject position, or a combination of subject positions, was framed primarily in relation to a hoped-for future. In struggling, as Zigon says, “to find a way to dwell in the world, to be in the world in such a way that one both feels, as it were right, and provides possibilities for becoming otherwise,” Nina and Pieter’s narratives raise more questions than answers.

As a response to the relativization of whiteness and challenges to white supremacy, locally and globally, efforts like Nina’s and Pieter’s can be read as reproducing colonial power relations, since their efforts represented an increased exercise and expansion of white religious, social, and political agency within black majority spaces. As I argued in chapter two, because RISE and similar groups take as their implicit reason for existence the problematization of wealthy, white, Western, Christian elites (this is the self and extensions of the self being critiqued), this made whiteness a centripetal presence in the group, shaping its development approach and collective ethics. However, at an individual level, white RISE members like Nina and Pieter were moving in the opposite direction. They sought to diversify and modify their way of life through dialogical encounter with difference. A constant theme in our discussions and interactions was the hope of eventually dwelling as white subjects alongside South Africa’s diverse

394 Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be*.
peoples within a shared world that was not circumscribed or overdetermined by white middle-class norms. Though at times seeking to bring black friends and colleagues into their cultural worlds, they just as often found themselves as cultural outsiders seeking inclusion within the worlds of others, a process that was variously painful, frustrating, exhilarating, and exhausting.

Throughout this chapter, I have interpreted Nina and Pieter as illustrative of broader trends found in Emerging Christianity. Emerging Christians place high value on building “personalized, trusting, and lasting relational commitments” with others, so that those who might initially be seen as strangers or outsiders become friends and trusted conversation partners. In part, such work allows one to “organically” share with others one’s deepest values and commitments without being seen as a dogmatic, imposing, or impersonal proselytizer. But an emphasis on cultivating deep heterogeneous relationships is also an expression of “religious cosmopolitanism.” Citing Ulrick Beck’s work, Marti and Ganiel describe how in affirming diverse viewpoints and lifestyles, Emerging Christians are actually affirming themselves. Integrating the perspectives of others allows one to learn more about and expand the self. Thus, difference, religious or otherwise, is not seen as a threat, but as a source of spiritual enhancement and personal enrichment.

Emerging Christians understand themselves as living in and negotiating a variety of pluralistic, diverse, and contradictory spaces—both social and religious—and, in turn, they imagine themselves to be “pluralist religious selves.” They express a high interest in maintaining membership in loosely bounded and heterogeneous spiritual and social

397 Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 188.
398 Ibid., 44–45.
399 Ibid., 188–89.
communities. Consequently, cultivating intentional relationships to diverse people and spaces serve as visible “extensions of the values they wish to live out; values that include being open and inclusive, cultivating community, promoting social justice, and so on.”

They exhibit a pluralistic ethos that values “resistance” to homogenization, seeing “tolerance or celebration of diversity as a good in itself” as part of living a more authentic self. At the same time, this vision, while utopian, tends to also come with costs and burdens that can sometimes lead to, or reinforce, the opposite of what is being aspired towards in that they create an acute sense of misplacement or of living in-between, which can exacerbate temptations to withdraw into spaces of white cultural familiarity and middle-class comfort. This danger can be seen in the eventual disintegration of the Emerging Congregation that Nina helped found as they sought to be more inclusive.

Harrold explores how Emerging Christians often describe a deconversion journey of “moving from a place of security and familiarity into an unknown future.” This is often a protracted affair, full of “arduous self-examination as well as adventurous searching.” Many describe rejection, alienation, guilt, grief, loss, abandonment, pain, conflict, and a persisting hope that if superficial and/or oppressive cultural trappings can be peeled away, one might find an authentic self, authentic belonging in community, and authentic spirituality. These elements were not absent from Nina’s and Pieter’s

400 Ibid., 129.
401 Ibid., 188.
403 Ibid., 84.
404 Ibid., 80–84. The tendency of Emerging Christians to emphasize deconstruction (and deconversion) has been linked by scholars to late modern conditions that emphasize individuation—“the conscious effort to choose one’s personal identity and core convictions”—as a marker of maturity, liberation, and authenticity. At its most utopian and optimistic, the idea of modernity, Webb Keane argues, is about rupture from the past and progress into a better future. It presents a call for “humans to act upon their history” (48). In a time where one can arguably speak of multiple modernities, the idea of modernity remains tied to transformation. Processes of conversion (and deconversion), Keane argues “dramatically
narratives of self-transformation, both in terms of initial moments of waking up and in terms of the rational for the practices and values they later adopted. Yet I have emphasized how, for both, the quest for spiritual authenticity was linked to the work of building meaningful relationships across difference, and in this regard, they did articulate far more than other Emerging Christians a sense of what they were moving towards.

Experiences of shared community with racial others created hope for a future sense of home in South Africa and also encouraged them to confront and engage with the enduring pain and suffering of black South Africans and the ignorance and apathy of white family, friends, and churches. In his ethnography, Bielo concludes that a driving value for the Emerging Christians he engaged with, was a desire to reclaim “a lost sense of authenticity in their faith,” for example, by finding renewed value in monastic and pre-Reformation Christian traditions. I share Bielo’s belief that the kinds of individual and collective experiments influenced by Emerging Christianity are bound up with questions of authenticity, but the kind of authenticity my interlocutors were striving for had less to do with reconnecting with church history, tradition, or a past mode of self (which they recognized in the South African context was highly problematic) and more to do with reimagining a place for themselves in the new South Africa. Moral ambitions were always linked to a future destination or subject position: a home, national and local, and a self not yet achieved but in the process of being made. For RISE members, their physical

expresses the general possibilities and virtues of self-transformation” (51). This is the case because “At the heart of this version of the modern subject is the conjunction of personal and historical self-transformation with a vision of a self that must be abstracted from material and social entanglements” (55). See Keane, *Christian Moderns*, 2007. The struggle to free oneself vis-à-vis material, social, and religious entanglements, and the struggle to act upon history, were central to the ethics of subjects like Nina and Pieter.

surroundings, and the people in them, were sites to perform cultural work of place-making as well ethical resources to enhance a sense of belonging that while perhaps not experienced in the present might be available in the future. Put simply, my interlocutors were looking for alternate ways to be within their local and national context. Authenticity was imagined, not as something recovered, but as something discovered and made through a dialectical process of reflection and action.

For progressive white Christians like Nina and Pieter, relationships to people and place served as an ethical resource for reimagining self, spirituality, and community. A quest for authenticity and belonging was tied to practices of emplacement, yet these practices were fueled paradoxically precisely by the felt absence of home, a sense of having been thrown into an unknown world that was exciting and dangerous because it required adaption and change. Notably, a desire to stay committed for the long haul, which meant in part meant staying engaged with the messy and complex realities of South Africa, was often more aspirational than lived. This is the case because an ethics of dwelling depends not only on one’s own actions but also on the acceptance, invitation, and accommodation of others whose very presence has the power to put the self, and one’s social bonds, at risk and to expose the fictions of one’s previous dwelling.
Chapter Four: Embracing the Struggle: Urban Relocation, Solidarity, and Truth-Telling

Introduction

One summer morning, while attending a RISE gathering in Johannesburg’s city center, I met Nigel and Trish Branken. Together with their six children, Nigel and Trish lived and worked in the central urban neighborhood of Hillbrow. Prior to meeting the Brankens, I had heard about them, but my efforts to contact them had proven, thus far, unsuccessful. What made them the subject of my (and so many others’) fascination was the fact that they had intentionally chosen to relocate to Hillbrow from the suburbs in order to participate in community “transformation.” This relocation had garnered much media attention due to the fact that 1) the Brankens are white, and 2) Hillbrow is often regarded as one of the “most dangerous” neighborhoods in Joburg. Clothed plainly, in jeans, tennis shoes, and sweatshirts, Nigel and Trish offered a surprisingly unassuming presence given their larger-than-life reputation. As I witnessed their thoughtful participation in RISE’s reflection and dialogue, I realized that Nigel and Trish felt a deep kinship with RISE members and staff, and were receiving much needed spiritual and emotional support, as they were engaged in similar work in the city.

Whenever I discussed the Brankens as an example of the kinds of subjects I sought to study, I encountered strong reactions from others. Many left-leaning academics expressed immediate skepticism (bordering on outrage), assuming, no doubt, that this was yet another example of white Christian saviors/missionaries profiting off of poor, black communities with little sensitivity to dynamics of power and privilege. I have to admit that I initially held these biases myself, after an initial scan of the Braken website...
and reading a few of Nigel’s social media posts. But over time, I discovered that Nigel’s and Trish’s motivations and practices were far more complex than I initially imagined. My engagement with RISE eventually led to an independent relationship with Nigel and Trish. Over the course of the next few months, I interacted with the Brankens more frequently. This allowed me to see beyond their public personas and media representations to grasp the complexities and challenges of their daily lives.

Similarities and Differences to RISE

The Brankens shared much in common with RISE. Like RISE founders, Nadine and Andre, Nigel and Trish were Christians who sought to express their faith through social engagement and had set up a faith-based organization through which to funnel their efforts. At the time of my research, this organization was called Transform, but it has since been renamed Neighbors. Nigel and Trish decided to move to Hillbrow in 2012 after becoming increasingly aware of the dire challenges of poverty and inequality faced by so many South Africans and their own “isolation” from these challenges as wealthy white citizens.406 One “encounter” in particular that proved life-changing was exposure to the horrific living conditions of a community of blind Zimbabwean migrants/refugees living in a converted warehouse in Pretoria in 2010. They initially became involved with the community after helping two parents unite with their children who had been taken by

406 In a France 24 interview, Nigel explains the motivation for and lead up to their move this way: “My wife and I, who are Christians, started questioning our faith a few years ago. We considered the fact that more than half of South Africans were living in poverty, and we were living in a huge home in the suburbs, very isolated from our neighbours, and consuming so much. And our lifestyle was probably not helping fix the questions of poverty and inequality in this country, on the contrary. So we first decided to start a journey of simplification, and cut back in every way we could. Then, we decided to move to the inner-city. In South Africa and worldwide, urban areas have become nodes of poverty, with inner-city slums growing and growing. We felt we needed to live in one to really understand it.” “From the Cozy Suburbs to Johannesburg’s Most Feared Neighbourhood,” The France 24 Observers, accessed January 8, 2017, http://observers.france24.com/en/20130718-family-suburbs-johannesburg-hillbrow-neighbourhood.
police and social workers. “Just visiting the building and just seeing how people were living was really eye opening to me,” Trish told me in our interview. “I couldn’t really live my life the same way after that.” Yet, what proved really transformative for Trish was the fact that “not only did we help to reconcile the family, but we actually went against social work custom and became friends with them and kind of saw them through the next year.” Through these and other key relationships, Nigel and Trish began a journey of intentionally seeking direct knowledge and understanding of the lived realities of urban poverty and inequality.

Similar to RISE, Nigel and Trish understood themselves to be on a personal quest for transformation that also involved being/becoming moral exemplars to privileged white elites, particularly white Christians. Through their practices and lifestyle, they challenged white friends, family, and the wider public with a vision of an alternate society where white and black, rich and poor, did not exist in segregated isolation, and where the wealthy embraced their social responsibility to build a more just and equitable South Africa. Importantly, this vision of social transformation depended on a relational theology: that is, they understood the formation of deep, meaningful personal and interpersonal relationships between rich and poor, white and black, as the key to lasting social change. Relational technologies of encounter, exposure, and long-term physical and social proximity were all considered vital to the project of white ethical transformation.

The telos of the Brankens’ ethics was often expressed in the language of becoming/being “good neighbors” and “friends” to urban residents.⁴⁰⁷ The ideal of

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⁴⁰⁷ Their organization Neighbors is described as “an intentional Christian community that stands in solidarity with the residents of Hillbrow and communities deeply impacted by poverty, inequality and
becoming/being a good neighbor is interesting in light of the ways in which apartheid, and its policies of racial segregation, were sometimes euphemized as a policy of “good neighborliness.” Apartheid, it was claimed, if practiced justly, could promote racial harmony and eliminate friction through policies of residential separation and “parallel development,” which would serve as a model to the whole world. One DRC minister, for example, justified apartheid using the American adage “good fences make good neighbors.” The Brankens (as well as RISE members) directly challenged this ideology by critiquing the social and physical distance between white and black, which is so often reinforced by fortress-like suburban life. Moreover, they argued that the only way to be good neighbors to their black fellow citizens, especially poor black citizens, was through lived proximity and the sharing of physical and social space.

Nigel and Trish Branken were in their mid-forties, English-speaking, and from a charismatic, evangelical background. In this regard, their cultural repertoire was only slightly different than that most RISE members. However, the Brankens can be differentiated from RISE for two primary reasons. First, unlike most RISE members, Nigel and Trish, and especially Nigel, were unapologetically public and political in their discourses and modes of social engagement, as evidenced by their willingness to use media and social media to draw attention to issues of moral concern as well as their willingness to participate in political protest. They were also much more public about their Christian identities. They were not afraid to refer themselves as missionaries, for example, who were on a mission to change the world.

\[\text{injustice around South Africa. We want to become good friends to our neighbors and good neighbors to our friends.} \]

Second, Nigel and Trish stand out because of the prominent role played by their children in shaping their collective ethics. The Branken children were active participants in shaping the ideals, practices, and issues promoted by their parents: a fact that provoked intense outside scrutiny as well as admiration.\textsuperscript{409} For these reasons, I often refer in this chapter to the Branken family or the Brankens to indicate the many ways that Nigel and Trish, together with their six children, formed a collective ethical subject. As Nigel and Trish made clear to me, their children were part of—and consulted in—almost every decision they made, though obviously by virtue of their age the children had different levels of understanding, agency, and responsibility when contributing to the ethical unit. At the very least, we can speak of Nigel and Trish as forming an ethical dyad—a collective subject that shared a common \textit{telos} that was dynamically shaped by their individual personalities, values, and actions.\textsuperscript{410} While Nigel most often served as the public voice of the Branken family and their ethics, Trish was deeply involved in the translation of their ethical vision into concrete actions in Hillbrow. Yet, as my interview and interactions with Nigel and Trish together revealed to me, their thoughts and modes of speaking were thoroughly interpenetrated.\textsuperscript{411}

While sharing many parallel practices, values, influences, and ideals with RISE, I will argue in this chapter that the Brankens and their life in Hillbrow represents, in many

\textsuperscript{409} The children were also a favored target of critics who charged that it was irresponsible for Nigel and Trish to be intentionally choosing to raise their white children in Hillbrow and, in the process, valorizing/normalizing such an environment. At its most extreme, Nigel and Trish were regularly accused of child abuse from conservative white critics with internet trolls telling them that their children would be raped and murdered because of the stupidity of their decision live in Hillbrow.

\textsuperscript{410} Faubion, \textit{An Anthropology of Ethics}, 2011, 210.

\textsuperscript{411} At first I thought that perhaps this ethical dyad conformed to a typical gendered division of labor consisting of a male role (public) and a female role (private). But through our interactions, I came to believe that their ethics challenged, more often than conformed to, this gendered division of labor. Both, in their own ways, as a result of their ethics, took on a public and social role that included and extended beyond their family.
ways, an intensification (or radicalization) of the subject positions and ethical ideals discussed in previous chapters. In what follows, I consider the many ways in which the particular shape of the Brankens’ ethics prompted critique, contestation, and also admiration. Of particular concern are the ways Nigel and Trish considered their intentional location in Hillbrow to be an act of social solidarity with South Africa’s poor, black majority as well as a key aspect of their own transformation as privileged white subjects. In part one, I explore the key religious movements and influences that Nigel and Trish identified with, and drew inspiration from, in their quest to make a home in Hillbrow. In part two, I consider the broader dilemmas and challenges that emerge in relation to the question of white urban relocation and engagement in post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing on Fabian Frenzel’s study of “slum tourism,” I consider the conditions by which white urban engagements are morally lauded or condemned and the potential benefits of “slumming.” In part three, I link the Brankens, along with the religious movements that inspired them, to what Foucault calls “the courage of truth”—a critical and confrontational mode of being that connects practices of self-examination and struggle with desires to change the world. Throughout this chapter, I draw on informal conversations, interviews, participant observation, media accounts, and social media to show the multiple ways that Nigel and Trish engaged South Africa’s sociopolitical landscape, Johannesburg’s inner city, and, of course, whiteness.

Part 1: An Ordinary Family Doing Extraordinary Things

I begin by exploring the ethical and religious dimensions of the Brankens’ choice to make their home in the urban neighborhood of Hillbrow. Throughout my fieldwork, I spoke with many whites who waxed poetically about what Hillbrow “used to be.” Fondly
discussing the Johannesburg of their youth in the 1960s and 1970s, they remembered Hillbrow as a chic, cosmopolitan, bohemian inner city neighborhood defined by luxurious flats and a café and shopping culture. While the inner-city and its surrounding neighborhoods historically were marked by white ethnic diversity (Jewish, Portuguese, Greek, etc.), starting in the 1980s, Hillbrow became known as a “gray area.” Facing escalating violence and repression in the townships, affluent blacks began to flout apartheid segregation laws and move “illegally” into the inner city. These demographic shifts, along with implosion of apartheid, triggered massive white flight and withdrawal of white capital from the CBD to the northern suburbs. By the mid-1990s, only 5% of the inner city population was white.

Today, most white South Africans associate Hillbrow with extreme danger, disorder, and criminality. While certainly, Hillbrow faces a multitude of social challenges common to dense urban environments in the Global South, the negative reputation it holds as the “most dangerous” neighborhood in Joburg is impossible to disentangle from whiteness. White South Africans exhibit intense fear and avoidance of a space once considered to be their exclusive domain. For most, Hillbrow is a “no-go” zone, and many


work hard to ensure that their own suburban neighborhoods will not become the “next Hillbrow.”

It is against this backdrop that the Brankens’ decision to live and work in Hillbrow takes on its moral charge. Framed primarily in class terms, Nigel and Trish lay out the logic for their relocation from the wealthy (white) suburbs to Hillbrow quite directly on their website:

We are a rather ordinary family doing some extraordinary things. We believe as Christians that God is extremely concerned with the brokenness in our city and nation and that He has called each one of us to get involved in making a difference. To bring change, we need to see the future, prepare for the future and then become the future… or in the words of Gandhi “we must become the change we want to see in the world”. As an organisation, we want to see a world in which the rich do not tolerate extreme poverty and inequality. We want to see many people actually laying down their lives of comfort and convenience for the sake of bettering the lives of others. Seeing people freed from poverty, inequality, racism and exploitation is more important than fulfilling our lust for more things! We want to be part of a society in which people are valued more than things. We want to see the god of consumerism in South Africa bowing its knee to a love motivated revolution which results in freedom from oppression and exploitation. We want to see this for all people, regardless of class, citizenship, race or religion. We dream of equality in every sector of society. We believe that if the education system is not OK for a rich kid, it is not OK for a poor kid. The same goes with healthcare, housing, security. The same goes for rural kids and inner city kids. The same for black kids and white kids. We are not more valuable than the least valued in our society. We are doing our lives in a new way. We are going to live our dream and see this reality briefly described above happening around us. We hope others will join us and this will happen around them too. Who knows, very soon, the world can be a different place!

Though they emphasize that they are an “ordinary family,” the Branken family was anything but in the eyes of most South Africans. The fact that the Brankens themselves go on to say that they are “doing some extraordinary things” betrays how they themselves

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were deeply aware of, and sought to cultivate, a perception of themselves as radical. Of course, the perceived radicality of their lifestyle depends on what it is being contrasted with. For the Branken family, as with similar individuals and groups, this point of contrast was white suburban life and religion.

Development, Urban Missions, and New Monasticism

One way to understand the Branken family and their relocation to Hillbrow is in relation to broader shifts in Christian and secular humanitarian practice, which emerged in tandem to the rise of neoliberalism. In chapter two, I cited Bornstein's ethnographic work on Protestant NGOs in Zimbabwe during the 1990s. At a time when many were suffering under the weight of structural adjustment programs, Bornstein describes how faith-based development discourse began to move from charity and relief towards emphasis on sustainability and development. Bornstein shows how Protestant NGOs began to emphasize a "holistic" development model, which not only sought to acknowledge and address the non-material dimensions of poverty but also viewed processes of material improvement and self-transformation as intertwined. Evangelical NGOs, such as World Vision, also increasingly prioritized spreading the Gospel through the "lifestyle" evangelism of its and employees, downplaying overt proselytizing methods in favor of delivering development goods.

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Also during the 1990s, the concept of social enterprise began to circulate in corporate, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors. The concept of social enterprise emphasizes the role of non-state actors in the provision of social goods and services. In Europe, as Defourny and Nyssens argue, this concept has its roots in Christian charities that sought to combat housing and poverty problems in the wake of WWII, as well as in the participatory and social cooperative political movements of the 1960s and 1970s where “the quest for more democracy and equality in all spheres of life led to a blooming of civil society movements addressing major societal issues, both through advocacy and provision of services.”

In the 1980s, non-profits, co-operatives and mutual societies (termed the "solidarity economy" in France) were increasingly considered to be solutions to persistent unemployment and reduced state services. Groups were tasked with helping increase the inclusion of marginalized groups into the labor market and society more generally, especially in urban areas. Over time, stakeholders began to refer to this work as social enterprise.

The trends described above coalesce in what might be termed the urban mission movement. The Brankens were deeply involved with one of the main bodies of this movement, The International Society for Urban Mission (ISUM). Founded in Bangkok in 2012, ISUM convenes training and leadership development summits and publishes a

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418 Ibid., 2–3. In the United States, the concept of social enterprise has taken on different resonances. It is most often used to describe the “use of commercial activities by non-profit organizations in support of their mission,” or in relation to exemplary individuals whose ideas bring social innovation/change (6-7). Much more individualistic and profit driven than in Europe, the social enterprise turn in the United States has served to place pressure on corporations to pursue greater social responsibility and sustainability in tandem with pursuit of profit.
journal called *The New Urban World*. This network of Christian “thinkers, activists, and leaders” is deeply concerned with urban poverty and rising economic inequality, especially in the Global South. Critiquing “modern mission and development” for their neglect of urban contexts, particularly slums, they seek through “active reflection, personal solidarity, and creative collaboration” to advance peace and justice in the world’s cities.\(^4\) Their goal is to make a long-term, sustainable impact on systemic inequality through “listening to and amplifying the voices of the urban poor” and the development of pro-poor programs that benefit the local communities that urban missionaries are embedded in.\(^5\)

The urban mission movement encourages urban missionaries to relocate to inner city areas, slums, and squatter camps and devotes substantial attention to the problem of how missionaries should deal with issues of wealth and economic privilege vis-a-vis poor, urban populations. While they do not downplay Christian motivations, the urban mission movement mostly follows the lifestyle evangelism plus development model described above. Demonstrated commitment to qualitative improvement in urban life through sustainable development and social enterprise is understood to be the best form of public Christian witness.

In emphasizing relocation and urban emplacement, and critically reflecting on dynamics of wealth and inequality, the urban mission movement shares significant overlap with the Emerging Church Movement, particularly its most socially and politically engaged stream known as New Monasticism. Growing in popularity during the


\(^{5}\) “About ISUM | ISUM.”
2000s in the United States, new monasticism is a term used to describe Christians who are experimenting with alternate forms of community and subject formation that take as their inspiration monastic and other Christian socialist-communitarian movements.

New monastics believe that throughout church history, in response to broader cultural crisis or conditions of oppression, groups of committed believers have fled centers of power and privilege and sought to create alternate forms of life.

They cite as inspiration not only the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century and Benedictine and Franciscan monastics movements, but also sixteenth century “radical reformers,” such as the Anabaptists, and twentieth century intentional community movements like Latin American liberation theology base communities and the Catholic Workers Movement. Advocating a highly committed and shared way of life, emerging Christians adopt the ethos of new monasticism in a “bricoleur fashion, appropriating only selected practices,” or “participate in loosely knit collections of individuals,” rather than

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421 Rutba House, School(s) for Conversion, vii–ix. For an in-depth study of American new monasticism, see Markofski, New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism. Marti and Ganiel and Bielo also discuss new monasticism in their studies of the Emerging Church Movement. See Bielo, Emerging Evangelicals, 2011; Marti and Ganiel, The Deconstructed Church.

422 Rutba House, School(s) for Conversion, ix. While Wes Markofski argues that their origins, motivations, and exemplars are distinct from the Emerging Church Movement, new monastic leaders had significant overlap with and exposure to the Emerging Church Movement, and most scholars Bielo treat new monastics as part of the loose and diverse network that is the Emerging Church Movement.

It is also interesting, in light of the role that the anthropology of ethics plays in this study, that a key American new monastic leader, Johnathan Wilson-Hartgove sees the new monastic movement as directly responding to Alasdair MacIntyre’s conclusion in After Virtue (MacIntyre’s engagement with Aristotelian virtue ethics has been a conversation partner for anthropologists of ethics like Laidlaw and Fabuion, though they critique MacIntyre on a number of counts. In the final pages of After Virtue, MacIntyre argues that in the midst of the Dark Ages, “men and women of good will turned aside from the task of showing up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium” in order to construct new forms of community that can sustain moral life around a common set of practices and virtues. MacIntyre appears to suggest that similar movements are needed in a new “dark age” where both Marxism and liberal individualism have proved bankrupt. (256-263). See Johnathan Wilson, “Introduction,” in School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism, ed. Rutba House (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 2.
living in a highly structured intentional community. This is the case because, unlike traditional monastic communities, new monastics emphasize that there is no one way to be neo-monastic; rather, each community and the individuals identified with that community have to discern for themselves the practices (or ‘rules’) that make sense for them to adopt. What new monastics share, however, is a desire, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, to construct “local forms of community” that provide alternatives to political, social, economic, and religious orders perceived as alienating and/or oppressive.

A wide range of individuals and communities cite as inspiration and/or self-identify with new monasticism. In the United States, new monasticism emerged in response to questions of economic justice and inequality as well as the impact of American militarism and imperialism in a post-9/11 world. Many American new monastics understand themselves as living in the midst of “Empire” and called to resist this empire through the creation of alternate forms of life that prioritize the collective good over individualism and the sharing of wealth and resources over a theology of personal prosperity. New monastics also hope to create alternate social and spiritual spaces for people who are “smothered with Christianity, but thirsty for God” and “disenchanted with church; yet still quite fascinated with Jesus of Galilee.”

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424 As one proponent writes, they understand themselves as differing from “previous waves of Christian intentional communities in the last half-century in a highly significant way: they’re eager to learn from and incorporate the wisdom of the classic religious orders, of monastics and friars, while retaining their own unique, emphatically lay, socially radical identity. Julian Washio-Collette, “About,” Emerging Communities - Ancient Roots, January 6, 2011, https://emerging-communities.com/about/.
425 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 263.
is seen as one who identifies with the poor and oppressed and one who critiques religious and political elites for their callous indifference to social injustice and suffering. This is the Jesus of the Beatitudes who calls the poor and those who hunger for justice blessed and preaches woe against the rich and comfortable.427

Though I never heard the Brankens claim to be new monastics, they cited as one of their primary inspirations a figure considered to be one of the founders of new monasticism, Shane Claiborne, and regarded his 2006 book *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* to be their primary manual next to the Bible.428 In 1998, Claiborne helped form an intentional community called The Simple Way in Philadelphia that has come to serve as a model for many other new monastic communities.429 His importance to the Brankens, and similar groups, is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, during my fieldwork, Claiborne visited Hillbrow, holding a public speaking event that many of my interlocutors attended and helping lead a workshop for African leaders engaged in urban ministry in place like Harare, Nairobi, and Cape Town. Additionally, the fact that the Brankens considered themselves as aspiring towards being (and forming) an “intentional community” in Hillbrow speaks to the influence of new monasticism, and the larger ECM, on their vision of social change. At the time of my research, this sense of community extended beyond their family to include a small group of interns and regular volunteers, which was comprised of young black Hillbrow residents, international volunteers, and suburban volunteers.

Marks of New Monasticism

In 2005, a new monastic community located in Durham, North Carolina compiled a book of twelve “marks” considered to be central to the new monastic movement. Of the twelve identifying traits, four in particular help shed light on the particular values and practices adopted by the Branken family in their quest to live a (white) counter-cultural lifestyle.

Relocation

The first mark is relocation. Like Emerging Christianity more broadly, new monasticism is envisioned as a lived critique of white middle class life and conservative Christianity. As such, new monastics place a great deal of emphasis on relocation away from suburban spaces. Relocation, in the words of one proponent, is intended to physically demonstrate one’s “conversion and commitment” to a new way of life. Though usually understood by new monastics to be residential, relocation can also be seen as any practice that involves redirecting one’s time, energy, labor, and resources away from centers of power towards the “margins.” Such practices are intended to communicate the message that “rather than remaining isolated in safe, suburban pockets of evangelical subculture,” one is willing to “establish themselves in places were social

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430 For a discussion of the “re-urbanization” of American evangelicals in the late twentieth century, particularly in relation to the Emerging Church movement, as well as the historical ways that Christians have sought to engage urban space and city life, see Bielo, “Purity, Danger, and Redemption”; James S. Bielo, “City of Man, City of God: The Re-Urbanization of American Evangelicals,” City & Society 23 (September 1, 2011): 2–23; James S. Bielo, “Urban Christianities: Place-Making in Late Modernity,” Religion 43, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 301–11.

431 Sr. Margaret M. McKenna, “Mark 1: Relocation to Abandoned Places of Empire,” in School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism, ed. Rutba House (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 15.
needs are evident” and willing to reject the pressures of individual economic advancement and white middle-class conformity.\textsuperscript{432}

The practice of relocation is something that the Brankens, along with most RISE members, adopted to varying degrees. For Nigel and Trish, relocation took the very concrete form of moving, with their five children, to a three bedroom apartment in Hillbrow in May of 2012. I visited them many times in their Hillbrow apartment. Located on the third floor of a relatively well-managed building compared to the surrounding buildings, the flat’s limited physical space seemed to miraculously expand to hold a constant flow of visitors, friends, neighbors, and volunteers in addition to their six children. The Brankens also rented two additional flats in their building: one was used to house an education/activity center for neighborhood children. The other housed volunteers, interns, and a four person Zimbabwean family who assisted the Brankens with their development activities and childcare.

In blog posts on their website and in media interviews, the Brankens describe the impact of their relocation journey. On the one hand, their emplacement in Hillbrow has forced them to confront, on a daily basis, the personal and social impact of poverty, inequality, racism, and violence in the form of homelessness, migration, hunger, addiction, and death. On the other hand, they feel liberated from the individualism, consumerism, and rigidity of family life in the suburbs. As Hannah, their oldest pre-teen daughter, happily shared in an interview, “we have lots of friends here and most of them only live a floor up or down. In Midrand, my mom had to drive me to see my friends, and

\textsuperscript{432} Markofski, \textit{New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism}, 2.
we always had to make appointments. Here, they just pop in.”

In the initial months after their move, the Brankens marveled at the increased sense of community and purpose they felt. They joyfully report scenes of their children thriving as they make new friends, and they also share discoveries of local arts and music education programs found in the city. They do not focus on what they missed, or losses associated with their move. Rather, they describe the spiritual, social, and even material benefits of a life of increased simplicity and social engagement.

Sharing

In line with the value of relocation, new monastics promote living simply and sharing one’s resources with others in order to curb personal greed and consumerism as well as challenge a logic of individual, upward mobility. Sharing their resources and goods with others, while living simply, was a value the Brankens regularly sought to express. One example is their leaning center: a bottom floor flat with an outdoor space that provides music lessons, art lessons, after school programs, and play opportunities not just for the Branken children but neighborhood children as well. The Branken children also enthusiastically embraced the challenge of figuring out new and creative ways to share with others. Eight year old Daniel became the public face of a campaign in 2015 to have Legos donated to the learning center, so that he could start a “Lego club” to share

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434 Nigel and Trish report that one benefit their new living space is less things to clean and less general household labor.

435 The Brankens were found of quoting a saying, attributed to both Gandhi and Mother Theresa, “live simply so others can simply live.”
his passion for Legos with other children in the community.\textsuperscript{436} Apparently this was his independent idea, which his parents supported and helped bring to fruition.

\textit{Reconciliation}

The third mark of new monasticism is reconciliation, which for new monastics means personal and interpersonal rejection of racial segregation in ways that transgress the boundaries and norms of middle-class whiteness.\textsuperscript{437} In most cases, the practice of reconciliation takes on class dimensions due to the close relationship between race and class and new monastic emphasis on poverty and inequality. As I have emphasized throughout this study, new monastics and those they inspire understand poverty and inequality to be primarily relational problems. They believe that wealthy (white) people contribute to systemic inequalities, not due to a failure of empathy, but because they are socially isolated and physically distanced from the lives of the poor. In the words of Claiborne, the “problem is not that rich Christians don’t care about the poor, it is that they don’t know the poor” and “layers of insulation separate the rich and the poor from truly encountering one another.”\textsuperscript{438} The kinds of things that Claiborne targets as problematic include picket fences, SUVs, “charity” projects and mission trips, all which he says “function as outlets that allow us to appease our consciences and still retain a safe distance from the poor.”\textsuperscript{439} When he spoke to a largely white audience in Hillbrow,

\textsuperscript{437} Rice, “Mark 4: Lament for Racial Divisions Within the Church and Our Communities Combined with the Active Pursuit of a Just Reconciliation.”
\textsuperscript{438} Claiborne, “Mark 2: Sharing Economic Resources with Fellow Community Members and the Needy Among Us,” 28.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid.
Claiborne localized his illustration to include electric fences, physical walls, and other security apparatuses that create distance between the wealthy and poor in South Africa.

By emphasizing the value of reconciliation along with practices of relocation, new monastics aim to make poverty and inequality personal to its practitioners who tend to come from white, middle-class backgrounds. But making poverty personal is not an end in itself: increased contact with poverty is intended to produce a shared knowledge base that helps encourage friendship with marginalized and vulnerable populations. Building intentional and meaningful relationships with racial and economic others is seen as a key technology in the quest to move beyond the rigidity and artifice of middle-class life and increase social justice. By claiming the poor as friends, and even family, new monastics hope to communicate that poor lives are just as valuable and meaningful as rich lives.

In order to mitigate the social and physical distance between white and black, rich and poor, the Brankens imagined themselves, not unlike RISE members, to be a bridge between the white suburbs and the black urban center. They regularly sought to provide opportunities for people in the suburbs to visit and experience Hillbrow and confront their stereotypes and fear. The main way that they did this was through a Thursday night soup kitchen event that involved preparing a meal and going out into the streets to share food and pray with local homeless residents (many who the Brankens had gotten to know on a personal basis). The event was preceded by a time of reflection and dialogue in the Branken apartment where volunteer participants were encouraged to “become good friends to our neighbors and good neighbors to our friends.” Helping wealthy suburbanites begin to reimagine urban residents as friends and neighbors (i.e. human)
rather than as amorphous threats was part of how the Brankens saw themselves as working for reconciliation.

*Critical Reflection*

The fourth mark of new monasticism involves commitment to a disciplined contemplative life. In addition to emphasizing traditional contemplative practices like prayer, solitude, silence, and retreat, this commitment can be construed broadly as critical reflection on one’s values and environment as well as willingness to deconstruct previously accepted social narratives. In chapter two and three, I discussed how RISE members sought to critically reflect on the apartheid and colonial past and post-apartheid inequalities. For Nigel and Trish, critical reflection went a step further to focus on intentionally educating their children about the history of religious, social, and political struggle in South Africa and also of brutal repression. On their blog and social media posts, the Brankens routinely describe taking family trips to significant political sites such as Robbin Island, Sharpeville, Soweto, Constitutional Hill, where Mandela and Gandhi were both imprisoned, and Johannesburg Central Police Station where Steve Biko was tortured and murdered. In their reflections, the Brankens, particularly Nigel, often link these sites and figures to the perceived radical/revolutionary life of Jesus, which reinforces a long history in South Africa of understanding black freedom fighters as Christ-like figures who pointed the way towards a new South Africa.

*Transformation and Solidarity*

While not included among the twelve marks of new monasticism, I would like to conclude this section by reflecting on two themes that seemed particularly important for

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the Brankens: transformation and solidarity. Nigel and Trish understood themselves to be engaged in the work of helping heal racial, economic, and national divides through forming new relational networks between urban and suburban, rich and poor. Social workers by training, Nigel and Trish sought to use their institutional knowledge, extensive contacts, and access to elite networks to try to encourage the voluntary transfer of wealth and resources from rich to poor and to try to secure legal aid and healthcare for vulnerable and marginalized populations. In addition to running their education center and conducting homeless outreach, they generally worked as ad hoc social workers in Hillbrow, doing everything from monitoring municipal trash pickup to showing up at court to advocate for harassed local political activists or evicted residents.

Though initially Nigel and Trish used the familiar language of “transformation” to describe their community development work in Hillbrow, in more recent years their primary idiom has shifted to that of “solidarity.” They currently describe their organization this way: “Neighbours (Formerly Transform) is an intentional Christian community that stands in solidarity with the residents of Hillbrow and communities deeply impacted by poverty, inequality and injustice around South Africa.” An important aspect of practicing solidarity for them was describing and reporting on their personal experiences of navigating inner city life.

In line with their understanding of solidarity, they have made the decision to use local public services as often as possible, so that they are not talking simply about or on behalf of the poor and marginalized when they engage in public advocacy, but instead speaking from their own first-person experience about issues of common concern. For example, the entire family used the local Hillbrow public health clinic for their primary
care, which often involved lining up in the early hours of the morning with other neighborhood residents, waiting in long queues to be seen, and adapting themselves to mass-based health practices used by the resource-strapped clinic. In an extreme example, Nigel and Trish chose to use the public hospital system for the birth of their sixth child who was born after they moved to Hillbrow. The result was a harrowing, and traumatic, account of a caesarean section conducted in a hospital that lacked adequate supplies of pain killers and sanitary conditions. Such experiences have given the Brankens a great deal of compassion as well as expertise in the bureaucracies and services provided to disadvantaged populations. They also illustrate how practices of relocation, sharing, reconciliation, and critical reflection can result in taking on a certain amount of embodied risk and vulnerability.

Part 2: Slumming It? Ethics and Contestation in the Urban Center

In his study of urban missional evangelicals in the United States, including those who identify as new monastics, James Bielo argues that their urban engagement depends on a redemptive logic that sees the city as a site of creative disorder.\(^{441}\) By this he means the urban, by virtue of its association with dirt, danger, and difference vis-à-vis the white suburbs, is seen as providing opportunities for spiritual growth and moral development not available in homogenous middle class society. In this way, “the otherness of this city— inseparable from race and class difference—fuels its attractiveness.”\(^{442}\) When considering these remarks in relation to the Brankens and similar groups, I do not disagree with Bielo’s assessment, but I do want to emphasize that the linking of white

\(^{441}\) Bielo, “Purity, Danger, and Redemption,” 271, 279. Bielo cites Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* in this analysis.

\(^{442}\) Bielo, “City of Man, City of God,” 14.
self-transformation with urban engagement and relocation was by no means a strictly Christian affair. In what follows, I consider how the Brankens’ life in Hillbrow fit within larger debates about inner-city transformation, poverty, and inequality and the role of elites, including the media, in shaping these debates. By doing so, I hope to illuminate some of the ways that the Brankens’ relocation and work in Hillbrow interfaced with other urban transformation projects, such as gentrification/revitalization and slum tourism.

It is difficult to capture the immense demographic and social changes in Johannesburg over the last thirty years. Unlike Cape Town, Johannesburg, along with nearby Pretoria, has been dramatically altered by the ending of apartheid, the rise of black political power, and the opening of South Africa to global markets and the African continent. Representing one of the most “densely populated urban spaces on the continent,” Johannesburg, in the words of Gotz and Simone, is a “cauldron of diverse people and agendas,” marked by uncertainty, despair, violence, and possibility. Starting in the late 1990s, migrants from all over Africa began to settle in the inner city of Johannesburg, including Hillbrow and surrounding neighborhoods, searching for economic opportunity and political sanctuary. The resulting cultural and national

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443 Furthermore, the line between religious and non-religious actors, secular and sacred, were quite fluid. Nigel, for example, had no problem collaborating with a variety of groups and organization who were not faith-based or religious on issues of common concern, and they, in turn, did not appear to have a problem collaborating with him, despite his public Christian identity. This understanding of being in the trenches together stood out to me in light of the skepticism about the Brankens’ intermingling of faith, social engagement, and urban improvement I encountered from those who were more removed.  
445 Murray, City of Extremes, 103. Migrants from Mali, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Somalia, Ghana and Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, the DRC, Uganda, and Cameroon have all settled in Hillbrow and surrounding areas.
diversity has created a cosmopolitan feel to the inner city and prompted creative exchange and enterprise. At the same time, rapid demographic and economic change has made overcrowding, scarcity, violence, and exploitation an everyday part of inner city life. According to Martin, 400,000 people now occupy about 42,000 separate residential units, often living in so-called hijacked buildings that lack adequate sanitation, electricity, or running water. This leads to the rather pessimistic conclusion that Joburg’s inner city is a site of “advanced marginality:” a “territorial stigmatized place that operates as a site of spatial confinement and control over those with no place in the city.” For Martin, the inner city life is marked by a constant struggle for survival by residents who lack access to “upward and outward” mobility. Meanwhile, national and local governments, responding to neoliberal pressures, have largely criminalized urban populations and their survival strategies rather than investing in housing and infrastructure. In addition, competition over scarce resources has fueled tension between black South Africans and African migrants, fueling xenophobic violence as migrants are seen as “community invaders” and stereotyped as criminals and threats to local economies.

While these dynamics are serious and real, what such an analysis misses is the ways that urban Johannesburg has become (once again) a site of confrontation between citizens, the state, and other institutional stakeholders. Building on a rich history of urban activism and social struggle that occurred in Johannesburg during apartheid, the past

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446 Ibid., 145.
447 Ibid., 149.
448 Ibid., 150. For a history of conflicts between the city government and white wealthy populations surrounding urban development and wealth redistribution, as well as exploration of the strategies used by white populations to curtail redistribution of wealth to urban areas by the municipality, see Clarno, “Rescaling White Space in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg.”
449 Jo Beall, Owen Crankshaw, and Sue Parnell, Uniting a Divided City: Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg (New York: Earthscan, 2013), 123.
decade has seen a dramatic rise in social action and more militant forms of protest that link activists, students, faith-based and other civic organizations, and the working poor together. These actions often seek to challenge abuses of power, inadequate service delivery, persisting racial and economic inequality, and human rights violations. When combined with the visible cultural production of young blacks residents in the city who have benefited from increased opportunity and access to education, as well as the economic contributions of African and other migrants, such movements lend an unmistakable air of post-apartheid optimism and dynamism to urban Johannesburg, despite its grittiness and violence.

Gentrification and Slum Tourism

The Brankens’ move to Hillbrow in 2012 took place alongside a growing interest among real estate developers to capitalize on growing interest among young suburbanites, wealthy creatives, students, and international visitors in urban culture. While Hillbrow has not been the target of regeneration efforts (apart from a failed attempt discussed in the next subsection), the most high profile experiment in urban regeneration, Maboneng (a Sotho word that translates to “place of light”), sits nearby. The Maboneng Precinct, built in 2009, describes itself as “the heart and essence of the city of Johannesburg,” and the “epicenter of Johannesburg’s urban renaissance.” It composes a several block radius

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450 For example, after a wave of xenophobic violence in 2015, over 30,000 people, including University of Witwatersrand students, faith leaders, and civil organizations marched in the inner city to protest the state’s slow action in quelling and condemn the violence and express solidarity with immigrants. “South Africa’s Johannesburg Marches against Xenophobia,” BBC News, April 23, 2015, sec. Africa, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32432205.

451 Especially in the central areas surrounding Wits University, where I was a visiting researcher.

of shops, galleries, restaurants, lofts, a boutique hotel, and a weekend market that appeals
to Joburg’s young (and increasingly racially diverse) creative class.453 Guarded by private
security forces, it nevertheless offers to visitors a simulacrum of vibrant, unfettered urban
life, free of suburban walls. Predictably, Maboneng has generated praise, protest, and
ambivalence. While its defenders praise it for encouraging creative, young, entrepreneurs,
and featuring innovative design that is quintessential “Joburg” and “Afropolitan,” its
critics charge the development with encouraging displacement of poor residents in
surrounding Jeppestown.454 Residents there have complained of evictions and rising
prices, and these complaints led to protest targeting Maboneng in 2015, which turned
violent when a reporter and protestor were shot in the head by police with rubber
bullets.455

Slum Tourism

An example of private sector investment in the inner city that mediates contact
between South Africa’s urban and suburban worlds, Maboneng is closely linked to the
phenomenon known as slum tourism.456 Slum tourism caters to domestic and international

455 “Protester Shot in the Head with Rubber Bullet in Maboneng,” City Buzz, March 18, 2015, http://citybuzz.co.za/26062/maboneng-residents-protest-housing/. In his article, Nicolson argues that protesting residents are targeting the wrong culprits in channeling their anger towards Maboneng and there is no direct evidence linking Maboneng to evictions of Jeppetown residents, but one can argue that the success of the Precinct has encouraged real estate developers to begin to evict “illegal” residents in adjacent areas.
456 Bahman and Frenkel, Renegotiating Space; Arts on Main, 44 Stanley + Johannesburg, 14.
elites seeking direct experience with poverty, inequality, and/or urban culture. Tours range in form from van and car tours to walking and biking tours, and they are often led by local residents. Fabian Frenzel reports that in 2014, over a million tourists visited a township, barrio, or slum in some part of the world. The majority of these tours took place in South Africa.457

In his book *Slumming It*, Frenzel explores the phenomenon of slum tourism in South Africa, India, and Brazil. What is compelling about Frenzel’s study is the argument he makes that slum tourism can be understood as one response to the “social question” of poverty and inequality. Mapping a historical trajectory that begins with the French Revolution, and drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Frenzel argues that the “social question” emerges in the West in response to the recognition that poverty is not a natural (or divinely ordained) phenomenon but a product of social relations, which raises the question of who is to blame. If God or nature are not to blame then it is human beings. This new way of viewing poverty transforms poverty into an object of social, political, and moral concern, because if poverty is created by human beings, it can be also be changed by human beings.

Frenzel notes that slum tourism was a popular practice in Victorian England and early twentieth century in London and New York, but after WWII it disappeared as a social phenomenon until the 1990s.458 He attributes its reappearance, and expansion to a global scale, at the end of the Cold War to the globalization of neoliberal economic

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457Frenzel, *Slumming It*, 1. Frenzel defines slums as “areas of relative urban poverty,” Slums represent parts of the city that are identified, bordered, and confined where residents experience symbolic devaluation, political invisibility, and social exclusion and serve as “reservoirs of invisible labor, crucial to the functioning of the city, but not acknowledged as part of it by the dominant forces and elites” (10-11).
458 Ibid., 2–3.
policies and the growing unease among “those who are better off” about the economic disparities produced by neoliberalism and globalization.\textsuperscript{459} Slum tourism, according to Frenzel, provides elites with an avenue through which to “come to terms with poverty and inequality” as well as represents an attempt by elites to work through questions of blame and responsibility.\textsuperscript{460}

In South Africa, policy makers embraced slum tourism in the 1990s as means of black economic empowerment, a mode of social enterprise that could directly impact disadvantaged communities.\textsuperscript{461} Though Frenzel concludes that the economic benefits touted by proponents of slum tourism are mixed at best, he does argue, rather provocatively, for the benefits of slum tourism. The import of slum tourism, according to Frenzel, is its potential as a “value-producing practice” that encourages tourists towards deeper social engagement, rather than escape.\textsuperscript{462} While at times reinforcing a dark and voyeuristic view of poor neighborhoods and/or romanticizing poverty, slum tourism, in his view, works positively against the stigmatization of urban residents and their living

\textsuperscript{459} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{460} Ibid., 4, 143–45. Linking slum tourism to the trends I discussed in the previous section, Frenzel argues that people are increasingly looking towards neoliberal “regimes of care” that are experiential and peer-based to work through questions of blame and responsibility. Frenzel writes about how the “humanitarian care sector” emerged in the 1970s and grew through state-critical views on both the left and the right that resulted in the state no longer being seen as the “legitimate provider of responses to the social question” and “large areas of social policy and welfare provision” were then shifted to the private and voluntary sector. He calls this a “post-Fordist regime of care,” which began to play a greater role in post-colonial contexts following the debt crisis of the 1980s (144). Yet as the humanitarian/non-profit industry grew, so did its bureaucracy, and in this regard, Frenzel sees slum tourism as closely linked with other emerging forms of humanitarian action and activism that seeks to close the gap between the suffering and those who seek to respond to this suffering.

Though initially driven by non-profits and development organizations in the 1990s that sought to give wealthy donors and stakeholders a more personal point of contact with projects they supported, slum tourism has since grown to include a range of domestic and international tourists with varied interests.

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid., 7.
spaces. In some cases, slum tourism has the potential to prompt critical reflection on neoliberal policies and systems of inequality as well as prefigure social alternatives to existing divides.

For Frenzel, meaningful (and joyful) encounters through slum tourism push elite participants towards active participation in urban development and political mobilization that challenge the stigmatization of urban residents and areas through new “regimes of care” that are experiential and peer based. Based on Frenzel’s descriptions of slum tourism, there are definitely elements of the kinds of practices described throughout this study that appear similar to “slumming.” I suspect this explains a good deal of the discomfort I encountered in relation to the Brankens, which added to suspicions over their public Christian identities and proselytizing motives. For these reasons, Fenzel’s observations are useful when considering the ethics of white urban relocation and engagement in South Africa, and I am especially interested in the close links he draws between slum tourism and what he calls the professional slumming of humanitarian, academic, non-profit, and development work. In both, there is an effort made to close the experiential gap between the suffering and those who seek to respond to this suffering.

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463 Ibid., 5.
464 I also find it significant that Frenzel roots post-apartheid slum tourism in South Africa with a deeper political and religious history. During the anti-apartheid struggle, visits to townships were often organized for outside international and domestic activists to directly witness repressive conditions and struggle and to provoke political mobilization. Likewise, religious organizations experimented in bringing white Christians into townships so that they could learn about and face apartheid’s brutality as well as see the lived conditions of black South Africans. Frenzel argues rightly, that in light of this history, that the phenomenon of slum tourism and similar practices deserves careful study, but that it has not been given its due by researchers who express instinctive moral outrage on the basis of it practice being voyeuristic and degrading. During my fieldwork, I met quite a few older whites during my research who testified to the role of religious organizations in helping fuel their political radicalization and activism in the 1980s and 1990s. Access to rare spaces of interracial contact facilitated by religious bodies provided them a direct contact suffering and aspirations of black South Africans during the 1980s, in a time of extreme censorship and segregation, and participation in interracial experiments meant to prefigure a “non-racial” future beyond apartheid often led to a life of public service in some form.
One slum tourism project that Frenzel studied was housed in a building known as Ponte City not far from where the Brankens lived in Hillbrow. A fifty-four story round concrete building with a hollow center, Ponte City’s notoriety comes from the fact that most outsiders see it as “the garish center point of a trio of rundown inner city neighborhoods—Yeoville, Berea, and Hillbrow—best known to outsiders for their drug trade, violent crime, and poverty.” Once a symbol of South African modernity (the tallest high rise in Africa), the tower was originally built to house wealthy whites in the 1970s, before falling into extreme ruin during the white flight of the 1980s and early 1990s. At one point the government considered turning it into a prison, but in the mid-2000s, it was targeted yet again for high-end real estate development, which subsequently fell through due during the 2008 financial crisis. This caused the developers to seek a return on their investment by remolding the building and filling it with black working class occupants.

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Footnotes:

Ponte City is noteworthy because it provides an alternate picture of private sector “revitalization” in the city that benefits rather than displaces existing residents. However, this example has only recently received public attention due to the activities of a few of Ponte City’s most high profile residents. In 2012, a white journalist named Nickolaus Bauer moved into Ponte City. After learning the history of the building and the plight of the surrounding neighborhood, Bauer and strategy consultant Mike Luptak (also a Ponte City resident) formed a non-profit youth center for the building residents called Dlala Nje. In order to fund their non-profit work, they began to offer walking tours of Hillbrow in 2013. These tours, which start at Ponte City, have been widely successful in attracting both international tourists and domestic elites to “no-go” areas. After conducting a tour of Hillbrow, many visitors subsequently blog and share on social media their changed perceptions of Johannesburg’s inner city.

While Bauer is explicitly atheist, he frames their decision to live in Ponte City and start an NGO in ethical terms that will likely sound familiar. Bauer claims that relocating to Hillbrow and conducting tours was one way that he, as a privileged white South African, could respond to Nelson Mandela’s call engage in a “Reconstruction and Development program of the soul.” Bauer emphasizes that though his efforts to improve life in Hillbrow are ultimately inadequate when compared with the need for

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468 Frenzel, Slumming It, 115. The use of this phrase is highly evocative in post-apartheid society. In his 2004 Steve Biko memorial lecture, Mandela argued that an RDP of the soul was necessary if the “values of human solidarity that once drove our quest of a humane society” were to win out over “crass materialism and the pursuit of social goals of instant gratification” in democratic South Africa. See Nelson Mandela, “Ten Years of Democracy: 1994 - 2004,” in The Steve Biko Memorial Lectures, 2000-2008. (Johannesburg: Steve Biko Foundation : Pan Macmillan South Africa, 2009), 76.
public and government investment in the city, he nevertheless feels a responsibility to “stay” and be on the “frontline” of an urban transformation he hopes will showcase the human resources and diversity of Johannesburg’s inner city.469

In an interview with The Guardian, co-founder Luptak explains further that Dlala Nje seeks to challenge negative perceptions and demonstrate concrete commitment to change. “Most South Africans live in constant paranoia because of the crime issue. They also live in bubbles. They spend the weekends at braais [barbecues] complaining about things. They are the world’s best complainers but they won’t do anything about it.”470 The implication, of course, is that Bauer and Luptak, along with the rest of the staff of Dlala Nje, are doing something by “challenging perceptions” and “creating opportunity.” On their website, the current staff of Dlala Nje, which is young and skews white, contrasts the deeper life meaning and purpose of their NGO work with the boredom and soul-sucking culture of the corporate world. They express “hope for the future of the city,” and seek to communicate this energetic vision through social media, public discourse, tourism, and their NGO community work.471

Dlala Nje has received much positive press coverage, and much of the feedback of tour participants supports Frenzel’s argument that slum tourism has the potential of challenging the “territorial stigma” of inner city: the “symbolic devaluation of whole neighborhoods that both results from and effects more material deprivation.”472 Tourists report, for example, a shift in perception of Hillbrow as a place of criminality and “barren

469 Bauer, “Living the High Life in a Ponte Penthouse.”
470 Smith, “Johannesburg’s Ponte City.”
“wasteland” to that of Hillbrow as a safe, thriving, and diverse community. The tours provided by Dlala Nje and similar groups offers them an immersive experience in the vibrant cultural and national diversity that defines urban Johannesburg. The tours further draw critical attention to post-apartheid urban strategies that have focused more on policing and evicting the poor than providing service delivery and affordable housing. Tourists walk away with the perception of an emerging, multicultural, post-apartheid environment that needs to be preserved and nurtured through public sector interventions (or private-public partnerships) rather than “cleaned up” through displacement.

For these reasons, Frenzel regards figures like Bauer as urban “pioneers” and “brokers” that act as social and political advocates in the public sphere, drawing attention to the material and symbolic exclusion of inner city residents as well as the richness provided by their human resources. Oddly, however, Frenzel does not spend much time considering the fact that, in being “pioneers” and “brokers,” figures like Bauer and Luptak play these roles precisely because they are white elites and, as white elites, they are considered legitimate sources of truth/knowledge that other residents are not. One wonders if a black journalist living in Hillbrow, or at the top of the Ponte building, would

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473 As one blogger reported about his Hillbrow tour in 2015, “At one point a woman came up to us and asked what we were doing there because a group of white people walking the streets of Hillbrow is not a common scene. We told her we were touring the neighborhood and she immediately smiled and welcomed us. Hillbrow truly is not the scary, barren wasteland I envisioned, but instead a thriving community. [...] Overall, I found my day in Hillbrow to be an incredible experience and not at all like a typical inner city tour where you feel like you are exploiting poor people to feel better about yourself. Instead, our guide was respected and well-known in the community. He spoke to us about being culturally sensitive when taking photos.” Rangecommander, “This Is Hillbrow: Touring One of Jozi’s Most Notorious Hoods,” Ramblin’ Rangecommander, June 25, 2015, https://rangecommander.wordpress.com/2015/06/25/this-is-hillbrow-touring-one-of-jozis-most-notorious-hoods/.

offer the same intrigue or wield the same social power, which is a question relevant to the Brankens as well.

**The Hewitt Family**

I now want to shift my attention to an example of slum tourism that has attracted much more negative press and public scrutiny, especially from black critics. This example has some commonalities with and a personal connection to the Brankens. The Hewitt family, Julian and Ena and their two young children aged two and four, gained international attention when they decided to relocate from their luxurious, gated estate in Pretoria to the nearby township of Mamelodi for a month. Conceived as an exercise in empathy, building bridges, and seeing how the majority of South Africans live, the Hewitt family moved into a one room shack near their domestic worker Leah. For a month, they sought to live on the average budget of a black South African family ($300 a month/$10 a day), and they used the same communal tap and bathroom facilities as Mamelodi residents. During this time, Julian (a self-described social entrepreneur and former business consultant) continued to commute to work in Johannesburg, using public transport.

The stated goals of the Hewitts were personal and social. They wanted to educate themselves and their children about poverty in South Africa, to have “authentic community engagement” with those whose lives they knew little about, and they wanted to start a broader conversation about poverty in South Africa through blogging about their experience in a way that linked their experiences with broader analysis and

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information. Like other slum tourists, the Hewitts first and foremost sought direct, experiential knowledge of the way the majority of South African lived. What the Hewitts discovered, and also blogged about, was that the majority of their income (and that of poor South Africans) was devoted to high food and transport costs without access to cheaper and more efficient alternatives. They also reflected on contrasts with their suburban bubble, noting the warmth and connection of township communal life and the ways their children had become more independent and curious during their stay. These positive representations of township life came despite the fact that, similar to the Brankens, they received resistance from white friends and families who accused them of being irresponsible for taking their children into such an environment. In response, the Hewitts contended that the real irresponsibility of an elite white parent would be to raise children in South Africa without awareness of poverty and who did not have the skills and desires to cross racial, economic, and cultural boundaries.

In many media interviews and on their blog, the Hewitts also connected their temporary relocation with desire to help build democracy, improve future life in South Africa, emphasizing that they wanted their children to “grow up here, not in the UK” and this required understanding the “realities of this country” and being able to cross racial, cultural, and economic divides. Using the familiar metaphor of bridge building, they

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477 They would resist the designation of tourist, given their focus on learning and also insistence that they continue with their daily life routines. But as a temporary and controlled exposure intended to provide a direct experience of poverty and inequality seems to qualify them as slum tourists, according to Frenzel’s use of the term.


distinguished their desires to cultivate empathy and build bridges with the image of rich suburbanites hiding behind their suburban walls. They also expressed the view (without the typical subtext of racial fear) that an “economic transition” was on the horizon in South Africa, due to regarding unsustainable conditions of poverty and inequality, and privileged white South Africans would not be able to claim a second time that they “didn’t know” what was happening in their country.

The Hewitt’s month in Mamelodi experiment was picked up by national and international media, such as The Seattle Times, The New York Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian, and NPR, and these stories received hundreds of comments, generating heated debate. Much of the international media covered the basics of the family’s experiment

480 Ibid.

I suspect, however, that they hoped to be part of a non-violent economic transition, fueled through market enterprise and economic growth, given their deep connection to the business sector, rather than a transition fueled through political revolution and redistribution.

as well as the mixed praise and criticism the couple received in South Africa. What was not generally noted in media coverage is that Ena and Julian Hewitt were Christians, and like so many other of my interlocutors, were motivated to visit Mamelodi in order to make their faith real by cultivating authentic human connection across difference, and they also believed that elites, particularly Christians, have social responsibilities that extend beyond paying their taxes. Prior to going to Mamelodi, the Hewitts actually consulted with the Brankens, whom they did not know previously. They were shocked when Nigel’s first question to them was “why only a month?” Rather than questioning or critiquing their motivations, Nigel seemed far more concerned with whether their temporary relocation would lead to long-term lifestyle changes and a deeper questioning of the “why” of poverty and inequality.483

In response to the Hewitt’s month in Mamelodi, black opinion was divided. Mamelodi residents interviewed seemed to have a largely positive response to the Hewitts. They read the Hewitts’ actions (at least publically) as sincere, and expressed hope that the media coverage of Mamelodi and the living conditions there would encourage politicians and the public to take action in response. “It feels good that people with money care about how we are doing and come to see for themselves,” reported one resident.484 By contrast, younger, middle-class black South Africans with access to their own media platforms were not as charitable. They charged the Hewitts with making a mockery and a form of entertainment out of poverty, and as offering whites a cheap

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483 Mamelodi for a Month blog.
484 Kings, “Mamelodi Rallies around Pale Settlers.”
substitute (even if well-intentioned) for the work of justice and redress. As one black writer put it, “The Hewitts’ empathy project is a performance of the privilege of being relatively wealthy and white. They have sought out, won, and accepted sympathy and praise for living the hardships others experience daily without receiving the commensurate pundits.” To this charge, the Hewitts insisted that they did not seek any media attention or financially profit from their experience, and that their actions were simply about changing themselves and also their children. Critics further argue that the Hewitt’s whiteness and power dynamics has everything to do with the kind and hospitable treatment they received in Mamelodi, and they perceive the Hewitts as arrogantly dismissive of such critiques, in part, by relying on the legitimation they seem to have received from the local community.

The divided response that the Hewitt’s township relocation elicited raises a thorny question when considering the ethics of whiteness in South Africa: that is, which voices

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485 See for example, “Heritage Day Interview”; Martin, “A Month In Mamelodi.” While they would resist the designation of tourist, given their focus on learning and insistence that they continue with their daily life routines, as a temporary and controlled exposure intended to provide a direct experience of poverty and inequality seems to qualify them as slum tourists, according to Frenzel’s use of the term. In reading interviews and media accounts, when faced with the charge of slum tourism and voyeurism, the Hewitts often defaulted to a “personal journey” and self-transformation narrative when faced with criticism by black peers that questioned the political and material implications (or lack therefor) of their experiment. They further sought to avoid charges of slum tourism by emphasizing the care taken to ensure an “authentic” experience. Admirers and defenders, however, saw them as “earning” their right to participate in shaping South Africa through seeking first-hand knowledge and experience of poverty.

486 Polgreen, “Sympathy or Slum Tourism?”


and bodies count in terms of legitimation, recognition, and judgment? While the Hewitts seem to have been “praised” by local Mamelodi residents (poor blacks), black South African critics who spoke from a place of closer social equality in terms of age, power, education and influence had a different take. In the *Mail & Guardian*, for example, critic Sibusiso Tshabalala argued forcefully that empathy and understanding, like charity, in South Africa is limited tool when it comes to necessary social changes in South Africa. Though affirming that the “distant cries of the marginalized continue to exist,” the Hewitts’ experiment with relocation acts as a substitute, in his view, for the concrete measures that would give up “ill-gotten privilege.” As an exercise in empathy, the experiment works to obscure, not reveal, the exploitive racial foundations of poverty in South Africa.489

Professional Slummers: Media and Missionary Gazes

Though the Brankens were sensitive to charges of slum tourism and sought to resist images of them as white saviors redeeming the inner city, I want to conclude this section by reflecting on some of the reasons why it remained so difficult for the Brankens to avoid entanglement with various social scripts that view South Africa’s blighted urban landscapes as in need of elite and/or Christian intervention. As mentioned, the Franken family’s relocation to and life in Hillbrow had garnered much national and international media attention. The Brankens told me that at one stage they were receiving up to six interview requests a week, leading them to put in place a six week waiting period before granting any interviews. This explains why I did not get an initial response from them. Though not averse to using media and social media to advance and amplify areas of

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489 Tshabalala, “Survivor Mamelodi and the Limits of Empathy | Thought Leader.”
social concern, they also were increasingly aware of the need to redirect media inquiries away from themselves so as to showcase the voices of their local “friends,” dynamics I discuss more in depth in part three.

The Brankens’ move to Hillbrow in 2012 and subsequent media coverage is important because it illustrates how practices of white urban relocation are often represented to a broader consuming middle-class public as redemptive, courageous, sacrificial, heroic, and also exceptional. In order to be perceived as counter cultural and morally laudable, the Brankens’ decision to live in Hillbrow depends on a broader elite social and religious imaginary that views the city center as a site of darkness in need of “hope” and light. In external blogs posts and news articles that discuss the Brankens family, Hillbrow is described as “one of the most violent areas in South Africa,”490 as “Joburg’s gritty inner city,”491 as the “center of white fear,”492 and as “Joburg’s most feared suburb.”493 The Brankens’ move to Hillbrow is further represented as a sacrifice, a giving up of suburban comforts and safety, for the sake of a greater good.494 One article represents the Brankens as reflecting the spirit of Nelson Mandela: a figure who encouraged acts of selflessness to help “change the world for the better.”495 Such discourses help reinforce a moral narrative of transformation that encourages white service and sacrifice on behalf of disadvantaged racial and economic other. At the same

491 Young, “In the Heart of Hillbrow.”
492 Eaton, “Hope in Hillbrow.”
494 Eaton, “Hope in Hillbrow.”
time, more often than not, this moral narrative is defined in terms of heroic, individual, acts of empathy rather than in terms of solidarity and redress.

Interestingly, the Branken family and the work of their organization Neighbors, while being extensively covered by national and international media, has not received the same level of public critique that was directed at the Hewitts. It seems to me that their long-term commitment to living in Hillbrow has helped them skirt charges of drop-in and drop-out voyeurism. The Brankens were regarded not as tourists but as residents in Hillbrow. In many ways, they had transitioned, to use Frenzel’s language, from slum tourists to professional slummers. Their vocational/professional identities were built around their life in Hillbrow, and they sought to use the knowledge they derived from their urban immersion to draw attention to the many ways poverty in South Africa was the result of an unjust and inequitable social system that was perpetuated by the rich and powerful. Moreover, for the Brankens, their politics actually seemed to match the values and ideals they expressed in public, creating a sense that they were really living what they believed and believed what they were living.

Yet there was an element of slum tourism involved in the work of Neighbors, due to the fact that Nigel and Trish understood a key part of their ethics as bridge building between the urban and suburban. Because of their commitment to connect the rich to the

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496 Frenzel, Slumming It, 9.
497 For example, the entire family regularly participated in political protests organized by civic groups and supported groups engaged in protest. In line with commitment to social justice, Nigel and Trish actively supported #FeesMustFall—a student-led movement that protested high enrollment fees and institutional racism in South Africa’s university system and called for the decolonization of higher education—that resulted in violent standoffs with university administration and security forces, particularly at Wits University, in 2015 and 2016. The Brankens were particularly concerned with anti-black state violence and drew attention to police brutality in the inner city and elsewhere in South Africa, sometimes physically stopping to intervene in police altercations or documenting abuses with cell phone cameras as they were happening on the streets of Hillbrow.
poor and vice versa, through volunteerism and increased proximity/contact, it was impossible, in my view, for the Brankens to avoid elements of voyeurism and the reinforcement of racial stereotypes of the inner city.

One of the more uncomfortable moments of my fieldwork came when I attended a Tuesday night homeless outreach event. The event consisted of a small core of regulars (the Branken family and a young group of black volunteers) and a rotating group of suburban volunteers with varied levels of regularity and commitment who would go out into the streets and spend time feeding, praying, and dialoguing with homeless residents. The night began with an orientation, some prayer, and some musical worship with an acoustic guitar at the Branken apartment. There Nigel shared some of the harsh realities that he and Trish had been forced to confront as a result of their life in Hillbrow, including a story about the death of a man they knew. The man, who was living with HIV, died on a trash heap after the family tried to call an ambulance for four days. They called Nigel to ask for help. When he arrived, they were trying to keep the body from being eaten by rats. Nigel helped them figure out how to move the body for burial. This story, I assume, was intended to show some of the systemic injustices and precarity faced by the poor in Hillbrow, but it also reinforced an image of the city as a site of death and danger (which is not unrealistic but also problematic when presented for middle-class consumption). Nigel’s story was followed by a short video about an urban missionary who intentionally lived in the slums of Cambodia and some of the communal challenges the slum faced. The video helped introduce the group to the philosophy of urban missional living.
Following the video, the group passionately prayed and sang a few songs before proceeding in a stream of five cars to an alleyway nearby. The group of approximately thirty volunteers proceeded to pass out macaroni and cheese scooped from a large pot and drinks to the homeless who were making their beds in the alleyway for the night. After serving food, the tone of the evening shifted as volunteers were encouraged to talk and pray with the homeless. Nigel gathered a group of volunteers and homeless and led a charismatic prayer, and a young, blond, teenager started singing contemporary evangelical worship songs with a guitar. This continued for about thirty more minutes before we left to do a quick debrief at a parking lot on the outskirts of Hillbrow where some of the volunteers had left their cars.

The first thing I noticed when we arrived in the alleyway was that our group of volunteers dramatically outnumbered the homeless, a contrast all the more vivid given the primary racial demographics reflected by the two groups. Obvious discomfort with the environment, combined with a smaller number of homeless than anticipated, led to many volunteers awkwardly standing around, looking uneasy. My own response was to revert to the (also problematic) strategy of trying to mark myself as a “good white” by distancing myself from the group through asking a young homeless man, age thirty-one, who was in the process of preparing crack to smoke, whether I could sit down and share his blanket. During our conversation, my discomfort increased when the man began to tell me that the real problem in South Africa was middle-class black people who, in contrast to many whites, never help him out when they see him begging on the street. Expressing disillusionment, he noted bitterly that “they don’t even know the meaning of
freedom.” In his view, while they often reference the injustices of apartheid, wealthier blacks ignore the continued misery of the majority of black citizens.

In reflecting on my experiences that night, I have come to see that my visceral discomfort emerged in response to a confluence of factors. First, I was personally uncomfortable with the evangelical-charismatic flavor to the evening. While charismatic prayer, preaching, and music in inner city public spaces is not that unusual in Johannesburg, and many of the homeless seemed to voluntarily participate in worship, the image that will remain etched in my mind is that of a young, blond, teenage male singing confidently a worship song “Our God is Greater,” whose very title combined with the singer’s whiteness asserted a kind of salvific superiority. When the guitarist and his group of singers approached the blanket of the man I had been speaking with, I could not help but notice that he and his friends came over and moved their blanket to the far end of the alleyway away from the group.

The second source of my discomfort came from the distinct sense I had that many of the suburban visitors participating in the event would leave the event feeling like heroes, with the sense that they had done something dangerous and risky by coming into contact with the homeless. On a religious level, they would feel as if they brought “light” and “hope” to those in desperate need of spiritual and moral redemption, no matter what the Brankens said in regards to avoiding moral judgment and false superiority. On a political level, they would feel as if they had brought needed attention to a population neglected by other elites, including or especially black elites. My conversation with the homeless man paradoxically lent credence to this view. His assertion that the real oppression in South African society is from black South Africans, not white, especially
(black) police who are constantly beating him and taking his possessions unsettled me because it reinforced the common white/middle-class narrative that the real problems in South Africa lie with the corrupt and inefficient (black) government and upwardly mobile blacks. Alternately, perhaps the man was just telling me what he thought I wanted to hear, assuming that the best way to benefit from his weekly contact with whiteness was to praise whites as compassionate heroes and criticize black elites.

Witnessing the clumsy attempts of suburban subjects (of which most, including myself, were white) attempting to form relational bonds with the poor in a highly artificial and temporary context, the negative charge of slum tourism became real to me. While the event was supposed to encourage a sense of equality through shared contact and experience, the resulting effect seemed anything but. Because of the disproportionate number of volunteers in relation to homeless, I could not help but feel like we were violating the home of those who reside on the streets, disrupting what little privacy was offered by that alley. I further felt as if we were voyeuristically exposing a population who already had their personal space invaded so regularly. In this regard, my final source of discomfort came from the ways photography and social media were incorporated by the event—many participants, including Nigel, took photos and posted about their experience during and after the event without the expressed consent of the homeless. Regardless of intent, photography and social media turned the charitable act of feeding the homeless into a voyeuristic spectacle.498

498 The event described above was a moment in my fieldwork where I was forced to wrestle with my own questions regarding the power of the white gaze, as both participant and observer, which perhaps is the very point of slum tourism if one follows Frenzel. I left the event with the sense that religious, racial, and class hierarchies were reinforced rather than challenged for most participants. I recognize, however, that there was likely distinctions to be made between the experience of casual participants versus that of long-term volunteers, including Nigel and Trish, who knew many of the homeless by name, and used that night
Though Nigel and Trish seem to be growing in their awareness of the downside/dangers to slum tourism and media distortion (and were actively invested in finding ways to center the voices and expertise of poor, black residents), in my view they suffered from many of the same dilemmas and contradictions that I have described throughout this study. Precisely because they understood themselves as trying to be bridge builders between the urban and suburban, and sought to mediate contact between the rich and the poor, this ethical subject position ensured that ill-informed and problematic behaviors would continue to surface. Bringing white suburbanites into urban space, while perhaps reducing territorial stigma in the long-term or among regular participants, also worked to reinforce perceptions of the Brankens as white missionary saviors, which arguably their own use of social media (much like the Hewitts’ blogging) did not always help.

Part 3: Truth-Telling as a Way of Life

Thus far, I have considered how the Branken family was influenced by the urban mission movement and new monasticism, particularly with regards to their location in Hillbrow, and the ways this location fits into larger conversations about slum tourism and urban revitalization in South Africa. In this final section, I want to consider the public dimension of the Brankens’ way of life. It seems that one reason the Brankens, and others like them, avoided some of the harshest media criticisms levelled at figures like the Hewitts is that their immersion in poor, black contexts went well beyond a short-term visit or experiment. Yet, as I have mentioned, scrutiny and critique were not absent from

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as a kind of social work outreach, checking in with homeless resident and following up on specific needs and individual cases.
the Brankens’ lives. Nigel and Trish were routinely accused, like the Hewitts, of child abuse from critics who felt that it was irresponsible for them to raise their children in Hillbrow and expose them to the harsh realities there, given access to other life options. Some critics worried that they were valorizing/normalizing living conditions that should not be valorized/normalized for anyone. Others took issue with the ways the Brankens were praised for doing what millions of people in South Africa do every day without receiving any media attention or being seen as morally virtuous.

Part of what opened Nigel and Trish up to scrutiny (including my own), and made them so vulnerable to critique, was precisely the fact that their quest for, and mode of, self-transformation was intimately connected to the public sphere. The more I reflected on this fact, the more intrigued I became because publicness is not typically discussed as an aspect of religious movements like new monasticism, and one could even argue that in seeking (or at least not opposing) media and public attention the Brankens seemed to go against the value of simple, ordinary living idealized by new monastics. While I initially judged the Brankens’ use of media, and the public nature of their life and work, to be self-serving, I have come to believe that, while not devoid of self-interest and elements of white messianism, the public or exposed quality of their lives serves another purpose that perhaps can best be illuminated through a comparison to the ancient Cynics and the virtue of truth-telling, which Foucault discusses in his 1984 lectures *The Courage of Truth*.

The Practice of Truth-Telling (Parrhēsia)

In *The Courage of Truth*, Michel Foucault turns his attention to the notion of *parrhēsia* or truth-telling. His concern is with the forms and practices by which a subject
“thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth.” Similar to The Use of Pleasure, Foucault looks to ancient Greece and Rome for answers, noting that the “principle that one should tell the truth about oneself” was central to ancient morality. The injunction to tell the truth about oneself was linked, by the Greeks and Romans, to ideals regarding the good life, at both an individual level as well as the collective level of the city, the state, or even, in some cases, in relation to the whole of humankind.

For the ancients, truth-telling was understood first and foremost to be a critical mode of speaking that put oneself at risk, exposed oneself to the anger and irritation of others, perhaps even to violence and death. Yet despite its risk, the practice of truth-telling, or parrhēsia, was connected positively to care of the soul and well-being as well as the exercise of democracy. Truth-telling involved courageous willingness to

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500 Ibid., 4.
501 Ibid., 11.
502 Ibid., 6.
503 Ibid., 9. Foucault argues that originally parrhēsia was linked primarily to one’s rights, obligation, and duty in relation to the governing of the city and the public practice of democratic citizenship in expressing one’s opinions, but over time it became increasingly linked to the individual, how an individual conducts themselves (ethos) and their formation as a moral subject (33). In other words, the practice of truth-telling increasingly shifts from the political to the ethical domain. Interestingly, philosophers like Plato feared that the practice and virtue of democratic truth-telling in the public sphere by citizens would devolve into anyone and everyone having the right to speak and express their opinions and erase any means of distinguishing between good and bad, worthy and unworthy, speech and speakers (36–40). Part of this fear was linked to the possibility that, taken to its radical conclusion, the practice of truth-telling might become erase distinctions between the elite, slaves, and foreigners or the distinction between the few/elite and the masses/rest. In turn, this would challenge the assumption that ancient democracy was based on, which was that the good of the city equals the good of the elite, and what is good for the “best” is good for the “rest” — a kind of ancient version of trickle-down economics and politics (44). The idea that democracy as a political form blunts the ability to make ethical distinctions and discriminate between good and bad, better or worse, by theoretically putting all voices and bodies on a horizontal plain is one that Foucault notes has been a consistent worry among political theorists in the Western world who fear “mob” or “common” rule (44, 51). At times, this argument has been used to circumvent extension of democratic rights to populations deemed to be inferior (women, black people, etc.) and protect the interests of an elite minority, but at the same time, these worries also point to a situation that we are witnessing now in the United States and an underside of all forms of populism. We live in a time where the white “marginalized” or the “silent majority” assert their right to speak their opinions and “truth: on the basis of democracy, and it is increasingly hard to make distinctions regarding legitimate and
challenge one’s most intimate bonds with others, and it also involved the courage to receive the harshness of truth when it was spoken. In addition, sharing openly one’s thoughts, opinions, and convictions was seen as helping others better care for themselves. The parrhesiast is often represented as a healer who reveals to others the realities of their “present situation, their character, failings, the value of their conduct, and the possible consequences of their decisions.” In speaking truth, the truth-teller exposes to others their “blindness due to inattention, complacency, laxity, or weakness,” speaking plainly, directly, and publically, and leaving nothing to interpretation. For these reasons, the truth spoken is always applied and situational. It deals not with metaphysics but with the concreteness of everyday life. In short, the truth-teller helps both self and others see their conduct and the world around them more clearly.

Foucault argues that there were a number of philosophical schools of thought in the ancient world that regarded the question of courageous truth-telling as central. But he is particularly interested in a form of philosophy that emerged prior to, and in tandem with, early Christianity known as Cynicism. What makes Cynicism noteworthy, for Foucault, is the ways in which it takes up existing ancient themes of courageous truth-telling and fuses them with a highly distinctive lifestyle. As Foucault writes, Cynicism appears “to be a form of philosophy in which mode of life and truth-telling are directly and intimately linked to one another.” While certainly other schools of thought were

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illegitimate, better or worse, good or bad forms of truth in the public sphere, which makes the practice of courage truth-telling also increasingly difficult.

504 Ibid., 12–13.
505 Ibid., 19.
506 Ibid., 16.
507 Ibid., 166.
concerned with philosophy as lived practice, as a way of life, Cynicism seemed to go the furthest in manifesting its values through a distinctive lifestyle.

What makes Foucault’s study of Cynicism interesting in light of my research is the ways that Cynicism eclectically combined the central themes in various philosophical streams, themes that would have been commonly affirmed as virtuous, only to push them to their lived extremes. In dramatizing the act of turning life into philosophy and philosophy into life, Foucault argues that Cynicism provided an embodied challenge, a refracted “mirror,” that offered a much different take on that which would have been taken for granted in ancient philosophy and ethics. In doing so, Cynicism problematized the moral superiority of those who considered themselves to be the best, elite, and most distinguished in society vis-à-vis the masses. For Foucault, the challenge or scandal contained in Cynicism, is best expressed in the Cynic principle “revalue your currency” —the idea that one must voluntarily break with established rules, conventions, customs, laws, and economics—so that their true value and use to human life might be exposed/restored.

I am particularly interested in how Foucault describes the Cynic life as a public life of courageous truth-telling that relied heavily on a technology of voluntary poverty (what my interlocutors might term downward mobility). In ancient texts, the Cynic appears as a “prophet of free spokenness” whose boldness, courage, and commitment to the truth is expressed by his very mode of life. In order to bear witness to the truth, the Cynic must free himself of the opinions of others, and here Cynicism proposed that the

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508 Ibid., 270.
509 Ibid., 239–42.
510 Ibid., 167.
best way to do this is to reduce one’s life down to its simplest and most essential elements by shedding wealth. While Foucault points out that other ancient philosophies wrestled with the relationship between parrhēsia and wealth, most settled on a solution that celebrated the detachment of the soul from wealth rather than material divestment, or they proposed limited “periods of poverty training” as a means of restoring’s one’s capacity for pleasure and one’s priorities. This was the case because ancient morality depended on preserving a distinction between the best/few and the others/masses, and one of the most effective ways, then and now, of marking this distinction is through wealth.

Cynics, by contrast, asserted that the freedom to speak the truth depends on the practice of real, lived, and indefinite poverty. The reasons for insisting on poverty are pedagogical: the practice of poverty provides a means of testing oneself in the face of humiliation and derision and also provides a way to examine the self. In turn, testing produce “positive results of courage, resistance, and endurance,” the very virtues needed if one is to speak truth in the face of violence and death. The practice of poverty, along with other practices that encourage radical exposure to others, trains the Cynic in “resistance to everything to do with opinions, beliefs, and conventions” and allows him to assert sovereignty of self in a way that highlights his dignity and virtue.

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511 Ibid., 256–57.
512 Ibid., 258.
513 Ibid., 260–61. This assertion is rather paradoxical, given the fact that that poverty also increased dependence on others and on fate. In this regard, Foucault shows how such a life would have been scandalously unacceptable to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who understood poverty and begging, as worse than slavery. To desire, and to choose, poverty would have been completely unacceptable and ran diametrically counter to a society that linked material wealth, public honor, and glory with individual moral virtue. In this way, Foucault argues that “poverty pushed to the point of voluntary scandal” is at the heart of Cynicism (260).
Unlike later Christian appropriations, parrhesia was not understood by Cynics as leading to renunciation of self. Instead, courageous truth-telling, as a way of life, was a way of asserting and claiming the value of one’s life, irrespective of outward appearances or external opinions. At the same time, Foucault points out that this assertion of self-value should not be seen as an assertion of radical singularity vis-à-vis others. Rather, in asserting the value of the Cynic life—despite its bareness, poverty, and humiliation—Cynicism also asserted the value of humankind in general, including would have been excluded as virtuous by other ethical systems.

In living an elemental life that exposed oneself to internal and external harshness, the Cynic expressed a refusal to separate himself from the harshest vices and extreme fates of humankind. In this way, Cynic struggle and sacrifice were intended to benefit not only the self but also humanity. Such a connection was important because Cynics understood themselves to be individuals on a mission, sent out “in advance of humanity,” to determine what is ultimately harmful and favorable to the flourishing of humanity. The entire point of Cynic practice is to test the limits, and through testing, to discern what is good and most essential for the self and, therefore, what is good and most essential for humanity. When the Cynic speaks publically and attacks the vices that afflict humankind, particularly the ways wealth, status, and prestige blunt courageous truth-telling, these are understood to be his own vices too. By refusing to separate the self from what is being critiqued, the Cynic asserts a bond of friendship and philanthropy with the very same people who would find Cynicism scandalous and offer derision.

514 Ibid., 262.
515 Ibid., 167.
A Cynic Christian Life? Reading the Brankens through Foucault

While obviously it would be difficult (and anachronistic) to argue for a tight comparison between the Brankens and the ancient Cynics, there are ways in which the ethics of the Brankens, particularly those embodied by Nigel, draw on certain practices and values whose roots Foucault finds in Cynicism, such as downward mobility, living an exposed or public life, and engaging in self-examination and critique.\footnote{In many ways, this affinity between the Brankens and Cynicism makes sense given the ways that they, along with RISE, were influenced by new monasticism, which in turn takes as its primary inspiration the very groups that Foucault claims absorbed (and transformed) Cynic practices and values, such as medieval mendicant orders (286).} One of the things that distinguished Nigel, from other interlocutors, was the degree and intensity to which he engaged in public debate and social critique, including willingness to expose himself and his family to the public eye through blogs, YouTube videos, pictures, and Facebook posts. Though others also used media to reinforce and reflect on their ethics, and to draw attention to areas of social and political concern, few engaged with the same volume and depth as Nigel.

Nigel used media, especially social media, to discuss the motivations and philosophy behind their distinctive way of life, including drawing attention to particular figures and movements that inspire them, and highlighting and transmitting significant episodes in their family life—such as visits to sites of political struggle or participation in political protests.\footnote{Some of the things/people cited who inspire their family to change the world—people like Shane Claiborne or Nelson Mandela or Christian anti-apartheid struggle heroes Franke Chikane and Desmond Tutu as well as a whole host of other local social activists.} The combined effects of these images, anecdotes, and reflections was to assert to various publics, but particularly to an elite and/or white public, that a life committed to sacrifice and struggle on behalf of a collective good and a new South Africa was possible. At the same time, strategic use of media and active participation in the
public sphere combined with the practice of downward mobility opened Nigel and his family to greater degrees of scrutiny, resistance, and contestation. Yet even this scrutiny and resistance was seen as playing an important role in work of transformation.

So what does this have to do with Cynicism? For Foucault, the Cynic life, one form that the philosophical life (philosophy as a way of life) could take, equaled a life of militancy, a life of simplicity, a life of poverty, a life of exposure, a life of bareness, and a life of discernment. As a philosophy of life, Cynicism was an unabashedly public or popular philosophy that did not confine itself to addressing an elite few.\textsuperscript{518} As Foucault writes, “There is no privacy, secret or non-publicity in the Cynic life. […] He gives his own life as testimony to everyone.”\textsuperscript{519} Escewing doctrine and institutions, Cynicism also prioritized ethical work (askēsis): daily practices of testing, struggle, and endurance, which affirmed rather than promoted withdrawal from the world and found moral value in the everyday, common, ordinary, and even the ugly.\textsuperscript{520}

\textit{Changing the Value and an Unconcealed Life}

In ancient literature, the Cynics are represented as shameless, aggressive, or brazen; relentless in their examination of self. They seek to challenge and change the value of dominant norms, institutions, and conventions by taking the moral principles or assumptions at their core and radicalizing them through their lived extremes. In a similar way, Nigel and Trish, through their lifestyle and public engagement, sought to challenge taken for granted values and norms among elites by shifting focus away from moral failures of the poor to the moral failures of the powerful. To accomplish this task required a willingness to participate in public debate and discourse—to live an unconcealed life—

\textsuperscript{518} Foucault, \textit{The Courage of Truth}, 284.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 254.
\textsuperscript{520} Ibid., 207.
and to present oneself simultaneously as embodying an alternate lifestyle and as a symbol of the very thing being critiqued. Such a position demanded that the Brankens remain open to self-examination, even as they engaged in critique of others.

For these reasons, I found it striking that when I interviewed them, Nigel immediately made clear to me that it was ok if I quoted them directly, rather than use a pseudonym, because they had “nothing to hide.” He went on to say that “we understand our brokenness, that we are making mistakes, so criticism is actually something that’s helpful and not something that we are unaccustomed to. Actually, there’s been some pretty hectic things said about us, and it is helpful to reflect on that.” In this way, he made clear to me that he and Trish welcomed critique, even when it was hard to hear. They did so because through modeling a process of self-critique and recognition of moral failing, they hoped to give others the courage to engage in similar processes. Nigel went on, “we have welcomed scrutiny into our lives and we have wanted to lead transparent lives. We try to live transparently, we try to tell people that we are — that brokenness is a healthy thing, recognizing that we are broken people, that we are living in front of a world where everyone is trying to portray perfection.” This explains why everything Nigel posted on social media was public—not only did it allow him to represent and share his own process of self-transformation, and receive feedback on his “brokenness,” it also allowed him to build courage and resilience in the face of critique and resistance.521

521 In Nigel’s social media feed, there are usually some negative or reactionary comments in response to his regular reflections on social injustices happening in the city as well as how he and his family are trying to address, and redress, their economic and racial privilege. These negative comments are also mixed with a number of positive or supportive comments, and increasingly so. The mixing of positive and negative, for and against, served to dramatize an intersubjective debate about the nature of transformation in South Africa. The effect is, not so much to teach or morally persuade, so much as to shake others from complacency to attention and expose their vices through confrontation, polemic, and critique. For these reasons, Nigel refused to delete/defriend people who expressed diametrically opposing
Whether Nigel and Trish were successful at “changing the value” of dominant norms and discourses is difficult to say. Yet even the resistance they encountered served an ethical purpose: it allowed them to clarify their own values; question normative assumptions and expose vices; and examine whether they needed to shift their own practice. For example, when people accused Nigel and Trish of child abuse, Nigel had this to say: “now that goes into the whole issue of race because it is ok for black children to be in this environment in mass, but it is not ok for white children to be here just even one family to bring their white kinds into this community is seen as crazy, that’s not ok. There’s something fundamentally wrong.” To those who might be inclined to link them to slum tourism or profiting off of media attention, Nigel responded by sharing their ongoing process of reflecting on and refining their approach to the media: “We are trying to develop values around media. We don’t want to create a tourism kind of mentality where the press come in and they are taking pictures of us, the ‘heroes’ of the community. In fact, in some of the stories we have done, we have just pointed the press towards our friend in the community. We will say you can’t quote us or you can’t interview us, but we can put you in touch with our friends, so still the story is being told but without us being at the center of the story.” To this end, I have noticed, since the end of my fieldwork, much less media attention regarding the family unit itself, as well as coverage of the kinds of outreach events described in the previous section, and much more attention given to social and political issues of concern. For example, Nigel will often conduct guerilla style journalism, going out into the streets and conducting video interviews with residents who are facing eviction or police harassment. Or he will take views, arguing that he did not want to live in an echo chamber, and for the moral value of hearing opposition.
pictures to document human rights abuses, and then share his images and video with
formal media outlets, his many Facebook followers, and on YouTube so as to expose and
force public attention to social injustice.\textsuperscript{522}

\textit{Self-Examination}

Critical self-reflection was considered a vital tool for a number of my progressive
white interlocutors who sought to come to terms with past and present racial and
economic inequality, and Nigel was no exception. Self-examination was something that
was extremely important to him. He shared with me that when he first moved to
Hillbrow, he was “incredibly judgmental about the [suburban] church we came from”—
to which Trish interjected, “well, I’m afraid I’m still judgmental”—but that he had been
actively working to change his perspective.

“I mean reading the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says take the log out of your
own eyes first before we take the speck out of your brother’s eye, and I have been
recognizing that these things that we judge our neighbors, our suburban neighbors
for, are the very things that we ourselves are repenting and struggling to change in
our own lives: consumerism, materialism, individualism, greed, racism. These
things are so embedded in our lives, we were taught through every bit of
education and how the world works around us, we were taught how to operate in
those ways and to overcome them requires… well, it’s a journey…”

He went on to say: “it’s easy to judge the world, it’s easy to judge others, but I think
judgement has got to start with ourselves.” Whenever Nigel is tempted to be harsh with
wealthy, white suburbanites for not changing fast enough, he remembers that it took them

\textsuperscript{522} Two examples of this are the attention Nigel drew to the seizure of blankets from the homeless by the
police during Johannesburg winter in 2014 and to the 2015 violent expulsion/eviction of inner city
apartment residents by notorious private security forces “The Red Ants.” In both cases, Nigel provided
first-hand image to the media and put pressure on them to cover the story and interview those most
effected as well as provided his own eyewitness accounts. See Greg Nicolson, “Street Life: Joburg
Homeless Face Cruel, Cold, Blanket-Less Nights,” July 9, 2014,
https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-07-09-street-life-joburg-homeless-face-cruel-cold-blanket-
less-nights/#.WHkwrPkrI2y; “Hundreds of Johannesburg Families Evicted by ‘Red Ants,’” The France 24
joburg-ridge.
five to six years to build the courage and conviction to move to Hillbrow, and confesses that he himself struggles with being addicted to “stuff.”

Self-examination, for Nigel, took place in private, through contemplative practices such as prayer and journaling, but it also was conducted in the public eye through forms of writing intended to provoke/incite white readers and challenge them with an alternate mode of being. Two blog posts, which have been widely circulated and reprinted demonstrate the ways that Nigel, and the practices of the Branken family as a whole, attempt to model a life of examination and struggle. The first “How We Came to Pay a Living Wage,” written in 2010, describes how the Brankens were forced to confront the fact that they were not paying their domestic worker a living wage. The moment of truth came when Nigel took the child of his domestic worker to the dentist for cavities, only to hear his domestic worker confess to the dentist that she could not afford a toothbrush. At that time, they were paying their worker approximately $350 a month, which they thought was on the high end of the spectrum vis-à-vis their peers. After confronting this harsh truth, Nigel goes on to describe a step by step process that involved prayer, examination of scripture and Christian social teaching, and educating himself about Johannesburg inner city living costs and conditions in order to determine what a living wage might be and what factors needed to be taken into account. This prompted deep questions about the responsibility of an employer to provide for their employees, systems of inherited privilege and poverty. The result of this process was a decision to nearly double their worker’s wages to $500 a month, so that she and her family would

have chance of breaking out of a cycle of generational poverty, and a realignment of the
Brankens’ own family budget and spending priorities.524

The second post, “I am a Recovering Racist,” tackles race and whiteness directly. This post went viral after a number of high profile incidents where whites were caught on social media saying racist things about black South Africans. In the post, Nigel acknowledges complicity in racist attitudes and systems and admits that he and his family have benefited unjustly in many ways, including economically, from a “system of white supremacy.” He goes on to pledge a commitment by their family to “unlearn” habits of white supremacy and to work towards “undoing the legacy that racist systems have put in place.” Confessing that he is a “work in progress,” Nigel proposes, in line with his ethics, that the path to transformation involves intentionally seeking out “deep and meaningful friendships with people of other races” and listening deeply “to the uncomfortable conversations that need to be held” so that the material effects of colonialism, apartheid, and white supremacy can be transformed.

Written in 2016, “I am a Recovering Racist” seems particularly noteworthy because it is much more explicit in its targeting of racial justice and whiteness than what I

524 The total living wage for a family of four in the inner city was calculated to be approximately $900-$1,000 a month, but since the worker was married and her husband also earned an income, the end wage was $500. Given that an extremely high percentage of middle-class families employs a domestic worker to perform cleaning and assist in child care, usually either a black South African or African immigrant, an honest conversation about the nuts-and-bolts finances of worker wages and a public confession that what the Brankens were paying their worker below a living wage (which in comparison to others on the high end of the spectrum) would have been, and still is, incredibly challenging to middle class whites who prefer not to think about or see the conditions that their workers live in or accept these conditions as normal/bearable. They think it virtuous enough to be employing someone and rarely consider the huge disparity between their lifestyles and what they pay their workers, which usually extends beyond a domestic worker to include a gardener and a whole host of rotating household workers. For a discussion of low domestic worker wages, which critiques the Hewitt family specifically, see Maria Hengeveld, “Why Do the Middle Classes in South Africa Pay Their Domestic Workers Such Low Wages?,” *Africa Is a Country*, September 30, 2013, http://africasacountry.com/2013/09/why-do-the-middle-classes-in-south-africa-pay-their-domestic-workers-such-low-wages/.
witnessed in my discussions with Nigel during my fieldwork in 2013-2014, and it also represents an exception to one of my field observations. During my research, while I encountered more than a few young Afrikaners who sought to discuss apartheid and wrestle with the ways in which they personally benefited from its injustice, I never heard English-speaking white South Africans name and wrestle with their relationship to and benefit from colonialism and its systems of white supremacy. In his post, Nigel challenges white South Africans to reject colorblind discourses and also states clearly that one cannot be “non-racist” if one lives in a society that lacks equality and racial justice. In the immediate aftermath of this post, Nigel received both praise and a “stream of friends” unfriending him on Facebook, to which he reflects “I think we all feel threatened when our privilege is confronted.” In naming how difficult it is for whites (including himself) to let go of their normative ways of being in the world and see their complicity in systems of white supremacy, he nevertheless draws attention to how problematic such behavior is.

*Struggling on Behalf of Humanity*

Like the ancient Cynics, the Brankens refused to cut themselves off from those who were likely to dismiss or condemn their lifestyle as either too utopian or dangerously misguided. Instead, they asserted (and actively maintained) a fundamental bond with those who would challenge or dismiss them, which explains why they continued to attend church in the suburbs and participate in some degree of life there despite cognitive dissonance. By constantly, and publically, asserting their connection to wealthy, white, South Africans, the Brankens linked their own practices of self-examination and struggle to change with a struggle on behalf of humanity, particularly white humanity. By highlighting the fact that they were still on a journey of change, and constantly
referencing their ordinariness and brokenness, they refused to allow the option of change, radical change, to be considered out of reach of the average white.

While in many ways, the Brankens were engaged in what might be considered black humanizing work in the inner city (though this remains contested), and focused their immediate, daily attention on confronting, and engaging, the realities of urban Johannesburg, their public discourse and way of life was clearly directed towards wealthy, white, suburban, Christians. They were increasingly convinced that the most urgent transformation needed in South Africa was suburban, not urban. Though the media and elites may see Hillbrow as the black sheep of Johannesburg, Nigel insisted “No, the black sheep of Joburg is the suburbs.” He and Trish alike condemned the judgment, shame, blame, and criticism that suburbanites projected on the poor, insisting that the real object of judgment was the rich, and that Hillbrow was full of “beautiful” and “dignified” people. This kind of rhetoric asserts that real inhumanity and poverty is found in the suburbs, while authentic humanness can be found among those surviving and struggling Hillbrow.

This way of framing Hillbrow, and contrasting it with the suburbs, is important because, despite recognizing “brokenness” in the inner city, and openly engaging with the suffering around them, Nigel and Trish rarely moralized about their urban neighbors. Instead, they turned the mirror on themselves, and by extension those who were likely to identify with them or with whom they were likely to be identified. They sought to expose their own and others’ failure to deal with injustice and racism. In our interview, Nigel used the biblical story of the destruction of Sodom to illustrate this point.

Prior to this journey, I always thought that the sin of Sodom was sodomy and rape, but it is actually the rape of the poor by the rich, it is the neglect of our
duties. It is not acknowledging the covenant of the brotherhood of man and humankind that is actually the sin, the greatest sin that there is. Injustice, inequality, those are the sins that beset our city. […] Then you try to mention that in the churches in the suburbs, and the guys will say, the poor are also sinful. Yes, of course, because the church in the suburbs is only looking at sin from a very narrow perspective. It has looked at sin as sexual sin, sexual immorality, swearing, smoking, drinking, these things which are so irrelevant to our purity. Sure, there are some links between purity and a wholesome life, but the sins that infect humanity and destroy cities and destroy culture and violate everybody are not sins of sexual immorality or drunkenness of these things, but injustice.

For Nigel, the real evils that required combatting in South Africa were poverty and inequality. In response, he and his family were dedicated to the task of exposing the complicity of the white middle class, particularly Christians, in perpetuating the kinds of sins that impact the whole of humankind. They intentionally chose to stay connected to their former suburban world, including their suburban megachurch, despite an increased sense of alienation and cognitive dissonance, precisely because they felt that white middle class Christians were a critical part of their life’s struggle (or battle) to bring about “changes to evil systems that cause brokenness, suffering and decay” to so many.

In our interview, Nigel called these systems “powers and principalities”: a reference to St. Paul and his notion of spiritual warfare, which illustrates the militant aspect of the Brankens’ ethics. Nigel explained the importance of maintaining a connection to the suburbs in light of this militancy:

A lot of our friends who work in these contexts have dialed out from the church in the suburbs, but I don’t think that is helpful because I think the healing of the world requires bridges to be built. In fact, Trish often says that we are missionaries to the suburbs: our lifestyle lives a prophetic witness into the suburbs, bringing the church there, bringing the suburbs into alert and saying, stop what you are doing! Consumerism, materialism, exploitation of domestic workers, your gardeners, everyone else working in your homes, working in your businesses is causing destruction, you know? And that’s the message of our lives. It is not just a message that we are coming here and doing nice charity work in Hillbrow. We do charity, but it is only because we love people who are our neighbors. We
are not doing charity actually. We are confronting the powers and principalities that are in the suburbs. Let’s be honest, the powers and principalities in this city are not sitting in the inner city. They are not sitting amongst the poor. The powers and principalities are sitting in the suburbs. That’s where the control is, you know?

*The Other Life and the Other World*

Cynicism, as a way of life, connected its distinctive lifestyle to social change by asserting that its practices, aimed at changing the value of one’s currency, were linked to a larger struggle on behalf of humanity. In *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault emphasizes that unlike competing schools of thought the Cynic life was not simply about self-mastery and teaching self-mastery to others. Rather, Cynicism was an “explicit, intentional, and constant aggression directed at humanity in general, at humanity in its real life, and whose horizon or objective is to change its moral attitude (its *ēthos*) but, at the same time and thereby, its customs, conventions, and ways of living.”

In this regard, Foucault understands Cynicism to be the first ancient philosophical movement to link a life of otherness with the hope of creating another world.

Cynicism directed itself towards changing the world through a militant ethics of critique, a “practice of combativeness,” that sought to bring the horizon of another world near. Moreover, Foucault argues that Cynicism forms the embryonic core of a form of ethics that will come to play a decisive role in the evolution of Christianity and modernity in the West. Drawing a conceptual and historical link between Cynicism, Christianity (particularly its ascetic and monastic forms), and the revolutionary politics of the nineteenth century, Foucault insists what connects these very different movements are the

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526 Ibid., 287.
527 Ibid.
ways they understand the modeling of a distinct (radical) form of life to be central to changing the world.\textsuperscript{528}

Nigel and Trish Branken were not afraid to admit publicly that they were trying to change the world. While this might sound aggressive, grandiose, or dangerous (and was definitely interpreted by some as such), the desire to change the world was a key motivation for their distinctive way of life and vice versa. The changed world they sought connected a critique of the few—particularly white, wealthy, suburban Christians—with a vision of justice, equality, and inclusion for the many. According to the Brankens, the problem was not simply that white elites were isolated from and numb to the struggles and suffering of the majority of South Africans, it was also that they were complicit in maintaining the very systems that caused such suffering. Expressing their allegiance to a life of otherness, modeled on the life and teachings of Jesus, particularly those of the Sermon on the Mount, they understood true Christianity to be that which “shakes up the world.” To be a radical follower of Christ, for the Brankens, meant living intentionally, courageously, sacrificially, and lovingly towards the poor. Like the ancient Cynic focus on lived practice, they understood the best, or highest, form of Christianity to be “not that which is preached from our pulpits, proclaimed or prophesied from our platforms, but rather that which is practiced by ordinary people.” Because of this understanding, the Brankens chose to practice downward mobility as an expression of solidarity with South Africa’s black majority. Their use of public services, for example, was intended to

\textsuperscript{528} Foucault sees Cynicism as forming “the matrix, the point of departure in a long series of historical figures in Christian asceticism” that link a spiritual battle against one’s own “sins and temptations” with “a battle for the whole world,” particularly early Christian asceticism, the medieval mendicant orders, and militant groups before and after the Reformation. He further links Cynicism with the “revolutionary militantism of the nineteenth century” and elsewhere in the text with modern art and twentieth century revolutionary leftist politics. Ibid., 286.
communicate a refusal, as privileged subjects, to use their access to wealth and resources as a means of avoiding the “inconvenience” and “indignity” experienced by so many.

By publicly modeling and sharing their way of life through multiple media platforms, the Brankens did manage to raise many questions regarding blame, agency, and responsibility in democratic South Africa. Nigel used almost every medium at his disposal to challenge the racialized view, so common among middle class South Africans, that the ultimate target of blame for post-apartheid inequality is a “corrupt” and “inefficient” (black) government and therefore the answer to poverty lies in privatized and marketized solutions that require little collective sacrifice in comfort and convenience on the part of the rich. In response to the social question of poverty and inequality, the Brankens asserted that white lives were no more worthy or deserving than black lives, and they argued, through their lifestyle, that changing the different values attached to white and black skin was indeed possible because problems of inequality and racism were human-made and had a human answer. Nigel continually, and often, referenced the “dream” he had of a better world: a world where those who were wealthy and white lived very differently alongside their poor and black neighbors.

The dream Nigel expressed was the dream of a new South Africa: a non-racial, democratic South Africa marked by justice, equality, and inclusion for all. Living in Hillbrow, for the Brankens, was considered to be a way of living out this dream in the here and now, a way of prefiguring a world where white and black live side by side, share their resources, and struggle together for change. What kept the Brankens going, in the midst of a rather grueling life, was the hope that by modeling a life of white transformation—a life marked by relentless self-examination, public exposure, and
downward mobility—and showing its moral, spiritual, political, and social benefits, the Branken family could be a “sign of hope” to others. Recall how Foucault emphasizes that the Cynic saw himself as a “scout” for humanity, as one who runs ahead, in order to bring humanity to alert about the kinds of conditions, practices, and values that promote human flourishing and decay. In a similar way, as I mentioned earlier, Nigel and Trish imagined their lifestyle to be a “prophetic witness to the suburbs” regarding their excess, isolation, and complicity. They sought to tell the truth about their own racial and economic privilege, and the foundations of human suffering it relied on, and they sought to tell the truth about the privilege of others. In doing so, they refused to distance themselves from the “sins and struggles” of the white and wealthy.

I find it significant that more recently Nigel seems to have thoroughly rejected any narrative that would assert a radical break between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This refusal both indexes common white middle-class critiques and refracts these critiques through the lens of his life in Hillbrow. In Nigel’s view, South Africa of 1976 is not that different from South Africa in 2015, 2016, and 2017 because the poverty, inequality, criminalization, and dehumanization of black life continues unabated. Yet, this is simply the case because the “new oppressors” have replaced the “old,” thus drawing a moral equivalence between white and black and undermining a critique of white supremacy, but rather because the values of greed and power of the white elite have infected and co-opted the struggle of the African National Congress and Mandela’s dream of a new South Africa.

In the run up to local elections in 2016, Nigel describes in an article published by the Mail & Guardian (the newspaper of choice for most whites) his vision for change in
South Africa and how this connects to the Brankens’ life in Hillbrow. He wrote, “To truly transform South Africa, we need a political, economic, moral, and spiritual revolution. That’s why I moved to Hillbrow—to demonstrate what this new world could look like” Reaffirming the principle that one must *live* the change one wants to see in the world, he went on to indict “the church” in South Africa for buying into values of greed, consumerism, materialism, patriarchy, individualism, and racism, which he regards as causing the “moral crisis” facing South Africa. The true moral crisis, he asserts, is fundamentally about “how we spend our coins,” an interesting statement in light of Cynic fascination with monetary metaphors and practices.\(^{529}\)

In light of these conditions, Nigel reveals his plans to vote for the Economic Freedom Fighters, a party to the left of the ANC which came to the fore during the national elections of 2014. This party has drawn much criticism from sectors of the white populace due to the fact that wealth and land redistribution is at the center of its agenda and it adopts an explicit (and militantly so) pro-black and pro-poor platform. The EFF has accused the ANC, and particularly President Zuma, of perpetuating neo-colonialism and extending the power of white supremacy in South Africa as well as engaging in their own practices of greed and corruption.\(^{530}\) In Nigel’s explanation of his vote, he says, rather simply, that, while having many good leaders and policies, the ANC is in need of serious reformation, and the other opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, is not an option because of their pro-middle class policies and failure to be representative of South Africa.

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\(^{530}\) The EFF’s leader Julius Malema, is the former leader of the ANC youth league, and so he brings the legitimacy of a former insider when he accuses the ANC of betraying the promises of South Africa’s democratic revolution and rescinding on their commitment to the development of the majority.
Africa in their leadership and base in terms of race and class. By contrast, he praises the fact that he sees EFF members in the streets of Johannesburg, helping the poor when facing evictions, and protesting abuses of power. Bolstered by the moral credibility earned by showing up alongside the poor in the streets, he concludes that they are the only opposition party with a chance of putting issues of economic transformation on South Africa’s political agenda.

In a similar Facebook post, written in 2014, Nigel does not name the EFF as the party he voted for in the national election, but the implications are clear in light of his admission in 2016. In this post captures the heart of his vision for another world. He argues that hope for South Africa’s future lies not in a piece of paper but in “our collective active citizenship and in creating the world we dream of around us through how we live.” In this regard, he claims that he will not vote out of self-interest, or to advance his own freedoms, but instead seeks to vote in light of the “political, economic, and social exclusion so many of my neighbors feel.” For Nigel, to be a good neighbor in Hillbrow, is to care about the exclusion of those he lives with over-and-above (white) class interest. He writes, “I have personally discovered that as I have positioned myself living among those on the margins, observing the injustices against them, listening to their cries and stood with them in solidarity, that it has shaped me and changed me.” He hopes that it will shape and change EFF activists as well, and that together he, and the EFF, and so many others might one day create a new mass social movement to wage war on postcolonial poverty, greed, and the persisting power of whiteness.
Conclusion:
Like so many of those I have referenced in this study, the Brankens were motivated to pursue a distinctive way of life first and foremost by their desire to faithfully follow Jesus and his teachings, particularly those expressed in the Beatitudes. The entire family sought to live a different kind of Christianity from that found in their white, suburban church: one which directly engaged issues of poverty and inequality at a daily, experiential level. They further sought to create a microclimate in their local neighborhood, especially in their apartment building, that prefigured the kinds of changes they hoped to see in South Africa more broadly. The family’s choice to move into the inner city of Johannesburg functioned as a material rejection of South Africa’s racial and economic divides and also highlighted post-apartheid white flight and urban abandonment.

The Brankens’ ethics asked elites to move beyond charitable paternalism or empathetic concern to acknowledge the relationship between their privileged lifestyle, “capitalist exploitation,” and persisting anti-black racism. In embracing a lifestyle of solidarity, downward mobility, and public exposure, Nigel and Trish never denied their privilege. They were very careful to recognize that no matter what choices they make, they will likely never be “poor” by virtue of their education and skin color. Even in Hillbrow, their standard of life was still quite high compared to their neighbors. Most other units in their building, for example, were divided and sublet to multiple families with minimal use of electricity and other utilities, while they rented three units for their family, their volunteers, and their learning center.

Given the tendency of outside observers and the media to frame the ethical practices of the Brankens as heroic and sacrificial, in this chapter, I have tried to offer a
more nuanced view on how themes of sacrifice and struggle manifested in the Brankens’ lives and discourses. To be clear, Nigel and Trish, while affirming the necessity of white elites sacrificing some of their comfort, convenience and wealth for the sake of a greater good, did not generally represent their ethics as painful or burdensome, though I witnessed their mental and physical exhaustion. When themes of pain and suffering did emerge in our conversations, it was largely about the pain and suffering of those around them who were struggling to maintain their homes in the midst of threats of eviction, struggling to find shelter and food for their families in the midst of poverty and disability, and struggling to find relief from abuse, addiction, and trauma. At the same time, they were careful not to moralize such pain and suffering as personal failing (noting how this was a persistent and problematic tendency of suburban Christians); rather, they consistently tied the pain and suffering of the poor to systemic injustice and sought to engage compassionately, rather than judgmentally, with Hillbrow residents.

The Brankens’ primary focus of judgment and transformation, I have suggested, was always themselves and other white South Africans. Yet similar to the charges brought against slum tourists, and the Hewitts in particular, the Brankens can be critiqued for valorizing/normalizing the very conditions they sought to change by constantly presenting their experiences of living in Hillbrow as transformative and ethically generative. I am not sure there is any way around this criticism, and it is an important one for my interlocutors to wrestle with, if they are serious about giving flesh to ideals of equality and justice. I have sought, however, to demonstrate the various moral logics at work in the Brankens’ decision to move to Hillbrow, in hopes that this will add to discussions about white ethical legitimation in South Africa and elsewhere.
Despite efforts to decenter themselves, by virtue of their commitment to publicness, it was impossible for the Brankens, as white subjects, to avoid receiving praise and criticism for doing the same things that millions of black South Africans do every day. The positive attention they received, and the ways their story was communicated and understood by others, often at a global scale, demonstrates that no matter how vigorously the Brankens tried to use the mediums at their disposal to advocate an ethics and politics of redress, there will always be those, at home and abroad, who prefer to see the Brankens as singular heroes, charitable saints, and white saviors. Likewise, there will always be critics who refuse to make virtuous that which is considered a necessity: the giving up of ill-gotten privilege and wealth. In this way, the Brankens illustrate a problem shared by many projects focused on white racial transformation. The more they sought to problematize whiteness, the more they identified with it. The more they critiqued and identified with it, the more they drew attention to its hegemonic durability, and reinforced, paradoxically, their own privileged status
Conclusion: The Challenge of Consciousness

Introduction

In his landmark study on the historical evolution of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, Daniel Magaziner remarks that “before politics, there was self-fashioning.” In other words, before transformed into a political movement, the Black Consciousness Movement was primarily an ethical project focused on self-transformation. Magaziner goes on to describe the ways young black activists, inspired by the Black Power movement in the United States, European existentialism, and liberation theologies coming from the Americas, engaged in experimental social practices that revolved around the quest to “think through and beyond their predicament” of racial oppression. This process initially involved a radicalization of Jesus, who was seen as the first freedom fighter to die for the oppressed. While critical of institutional or traditional Christianity for the ways it legitimated white supremacy and/or promoted black escapism, BCM activists nevertheless drew a connection between what they saw as Jesus’ mission to model an alternate way of life in relation to the dominant social systems of his day and their own.

Moving between immanent critiques rooted in the violent, racist conditions of existing society and an eschatological hope of an alternate world, BCM activists argued that the path to social transformation involved practicing the liberation of black minds, bodies, and souls from the power of whiteness in the here and now. Written at a very different social and historical moment, this study nevertheless takes seriously the past and

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532 Ibid., 6.
present struggles by ordinary people in South Africa, including those part of the Black Consciousness Movement, to imagine a future—a better world—beyond the visible present, and it asserts that such aspirations and the practices they engender (even if ephemeral, contradictory, and small-scale) matter. They matter for the individual and collective subjects who are engaged in the work of ethical experimentation, and they matter in terms of the way they challenge, shape, and in some cases transform, contemporary social debates regarding the good.

Within South Africa’s long history of social and political struggle, religion has played an ambiguous role. From the first arrivals of missionaries to the so-called church struggle of the 1980s, many scholars such as Bongmba have argued that religion, while increasing the “colonization and proletarianization of South African society,” has also worked to create new forms of sociality that brought together white and black, African and Western, into zones of contact.\(^{533}\) Such zones have been marked by critique, conflict, and collaboration, and they have played a significant role in shaping ideas about social change, religion, and secularity in the modern West.\(^ {534}\) In line with this tradition of scholarship, I have tried to show throughout this study the ways that religious actors—directly and indirectly—have contributed to debates regarding the creation of a new South Africa. Whether this vision is understood in the post-Mandela era to be the non-
racialism of Nelson Mandela and ubuntuism of Desmond Tutu; the redistributive and militant politics of the Economic Freedom Fighters; or something much more open-ended and indeterminate that contains elements of all three still remains to be seen.

While I have not spent as much time exploring how an ethics of whiteness fits into wider discussions of postcolonial political transformation, an interest in the relationship between religion and the postcolonial informs the deep theoretical and conceptual background of this study. If South Africa’s apartheid system can be seen, as Mahmood Mamdani has argued, as a symbolism of colonialism taken to the extreme, post-apartheid South African can also be seen as sharing in and reflecting the postcolonial conditions and dilemmas faced by so many other contexts in Africa. These conditions include what Bongmba calls the “privatization of power” as well as an increase in “exclusionary political praxis”; leading to the curtailing of civil society, the suppression of a free press, and an overall reduced capacity by citizens to contest excesses of power through legal and political channels. In addition, the postcolonial period has brought the “pauperization of the state,” whereby the state no longer has the means or the will to promote the common good.

Such conditions have led to the suspension, and in many cases the reversal, of the democratization, detribalization, and deracialization liberation projects promoted during

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535 Mamdani, Citizen and Subject.
536 Bongmba, The Dialects of Transformation in Africa, 10–11. Indeed, some days it seems that the modes and logics of domination that defined the colonial and apartheid eras in South Africa seem only to replicate and reproduce themselves in new forms and through new bodies in the post-apartheid era. In 1977, black theologian Allen Boesak critiqued the “pseudoinnocence” of white South Africans—a cultivated naivety and strategic ignorance regarding the agony of human suffering of black South Africans under apartheid (3–4). Today, one could argue that a certain section of black elites have joined many white South Africans in such pseudoinnocence. Though they may paternally and opportunistically call for greater charity and empathy towards the poor, they seem unable to face the entanglement between the comfortable lives they lead and the harsh, exposed lives of millions more. See Boesak, A Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power.
the first decades of independence in Africa, including in South Africa during the first decade following apartheid.537 As Bongmba mournfully writes, “the dream of a thriving society has all but faded” because the “systematic pauperization of Africa’s political vision has derailed the liberating vision that ushered in uhuru (liberation or freedom).”538 This means that “although all Africans are citizens in the postcolonial state, the vast majority have been accorded a second-class status and treated as subjects.”539 Certainly, this was the sense that I encountered among many black South Africans living in poor, majority-black areas during my fieldwork. So often, they feel as if they have yet to experience a real or meaningful sense of participation in the creation of a new South Africa. Feeling often as citizens without the deep sense of citizenship promised to them by figures like Mandela, life for them continues to be a struggle to exist within a racially and economically divided society whereby they feel excluded from the material benefits of democracy and globalization provided to many of their white counterparts.

The Past is Not Another Country

Part of what I have discovered during the course of my research and writing is the ways in which the postcolony that is South Africa, and the role of whites in it, remains thoroughly entangled with the epochs that have come before. At a broad level, this is obviously true given the visible legacies of colonialism and apartheid, but at a much more fine grained level, there were many intriguing ways that the individuals and groups I studied were returning to, or discovering new connections with, the intellectual,

538 Ibid., 23.
539 Ibid., 40.
theological, and activist traditions of the late apartheid years, including efforts made then by white Afrikaner and English-speaking South Africans to break with the dominant religious, cultural, political, and economic systems of their day. While this process of (re)discovery and appropriation seemed to still be emerging at the time of my fieldwork, there are similarities one can draw, for example, between the actions of white figures like Beyers Naudé, Nico Smith, and Klippies Kritizinger—all white Dutch Reformed ministers who turned their back on the apartheid regime and the white Afrikaner churches and relocated to minister in black churches and communities. Nico Smith in particular is interesting because after being the first white person to receive permission to live in Mamelodi in 1986—the same township where the Hewitts’ spent their month—he organized an experimental exchange between white and black church communities that saw one hundred and seventy whites move in with black families in Mamelodi for four days and thirty-five blacks move in with whites in the Pretoria suburbs.  

Many older whites that I spoke with during my fieldwork who were involved in the anti-apartheid movement, and continued in one form or another to be active in the public sphere, spoke about the significance of Smith’s experiment on their conscientization as well as other interracial gatherings organized by religious bodies during the 1980s, such as the Methodist Church or the South African Council of Churches. These gatherings provided a space where white liberals could interact and worship with black South Africans, hear their political and social views, and see firsthand the repression they were facing. While many in this older group no longer considered themselves to be religious or Christian, they spoke movingly of the impact of these kinds

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of experiments and social spaces on helping them, during the height of apartheid, imagine an alternate world where black and white might live well together as neighbors and citizens.

The Afrikaners featured in this study in some cases spoke of the direct personal influence that white Afrikaner figures like Naudé, Smith, and Kritzinger played in their own ethics. They also described a growing reverence for figures that they had grown up fearing or seeing negatively as political agitators, such as Nelson Mandela or Desmond Tutu. Likewise, the Brankens often spoke with admiration of the black struggle heroes who had played a role in shaping their vision of a new South Africa. Figures like Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Frank Chikane, Beyers Naudé, Bram Fischer, and so many others who have come to be regarded as “prophets” who helped pave and point the way to a new South Africa.⁵⁴¹

A growing interest among my interlocutors to engage with black activist and liberation theology traditions that simultaneously critique both the abuses of state power and also the ways Christian churches reinforce and sanction the status quo intrigues me because it comes alongside a dramatic rise in political activism targeting the post-apartheid state, and with it, a rise in activism by some progressive black religious leaders. Focused particularly around President Jacob Zuma, and his leadership of the African

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⁵⁴¹ I have also written in a forthcoming chapter, included in edited collection on the Emerging Church Movement, about how some Africans inspired and influenced by the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) in the early 2000s and the practices of the ECM, particularly those of new monasticism, extended the critiques of neoliberal economics and imperialism developed in the United States and the United Kingdom to critiques of colonialism, apartheid, and whiteness. In the process, they began to engage with postcolonial thought, Black Consciousness thought, and Black Theology. Thus, what started out of a desire for a more renewed or authentic Christian faith, and was inspired by the ECM’s “ancient-future” form of spirituality, eventually led to increased engagement with South Africa’s histories of racism and the problem of whiteness.
National Congress, but also critiquing white elites and wealthy excesses, it appears that a prophetic politics, drawing on the 1985 Kairos Document and Black Theology, is once again emerging as a point of reflection among a certain section of religious leaders.\(^{542}\)

Similar to how it functioned during apartheid, this form of prophetic politics seeks to draw on religious resources and sacred symbols to communicate that God is on the side of those struggling for justice; seeks to acknowledge the ways churches reinforce conditions of suffering and oppression; seeks to involve itself in public campaigns aimed at bringing about structural change.\(^{543}\)

While, of course, the governing African National Congress is still viewed by many as the party of black liberation and freedom, the ubiquity of state violence coupled with other forms of violence that target black bodies in the last decade has raised profound questions for many struggle stalwarts about how a black-majority government can exist simultaneously with policies that systemically harm black citizens. Thus, it may not be too much of a stretch to posit an increasing “spiral of involvement” between the state and activists religious leaders, similar to what Borer describes in her work on the role of churches in the apartheid struggle.\(^{544}\)

During the 1980s, when thousands of people experienced arrest, detention, harassment, torture and death, prominent black clergy such as Frank Chikane, Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak often used the symbolism of their religious office to publically contest state power and lend a transcendent aura to the quest

\(^{542}\) “The Kairos Document (1985).”


\(^{544}\) Borer, *Challenging the State: Churches as Political Actors in South Africa.*
for black liberation. During my fieldwork, I witnessed similar forms of religious activism, which I have written about elsewhere, and such actions have only continued since 2014. The most prominent recent example, surprisingly, involved a white Catholic priest who was shot in the face with rubber bullets by police in 2016 after he refused to let them into his church. In an image that has been widely circulated, the priest is shown frocked in white and standing at the gate of his church, where he was sheltering protesting Wits University students, facing a tank-like vehicle about ten feet away. Minutes later, he was fired upon.

I hope I can explore more thoroughly in the future the resurgence of prophetic politics in South Africa, which seems to have emerged in relation to an increase in anti-black state violence. The closest point where this nascent post-apartheid prophetic politics and the ethics of whiteness seemed to meet would be in the activism of the Brankens. I do not find this surprising in that they were the oldest people featured in this study, and Nigel, in particular, was quite involved with the social and political transition from apartheid to democracy, having worked on redistributive justice and violence prevention programs during the early 1990s. In his activism, Nigel shares much in common with another prominent white religious activist in urban Johannesburg, former Methodist Bishop Paul Verryn. A white English-speaking South African, Verryn has long

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545 Borer, *Challenging the State*; Chidester, *Shots in the Streets*.
been a flashpoint of criticism and debate. Relocating to Soweto in the late 1980s, and a signer of the original 1985 Kairos Document, in 2008, at the height of the Zimbabwean refugee crisis and xenophobic violence, Verryn turned Johannesburg’s Central Methodist Church into a sanctuary for hundreds of refugees. Unafraid to call municipal and national authorities to make good on their promises of inclusion and democratic participation, Verryn has drawn significant criticism for his militant style, though few can argue with the longevity of his commitment to the most vulnerable in South African society.

The Challenge of Black Consciousness

How will white and black South Africans negotiate the future that is to come? How will they continue to try to answer question of what it means to live well together in the strange place that is South Africa? Throughout this study, my focus has been predominately on the ethics of white subjects, particularly those involved in faith-based development work, and yet such ethics cannot be thought outside of questions of intersubjectivity and the dynamic social and political forces at work in South Africa. It is no surprise that race remains a salient category in South Africa. Though there has been growth among the black middle and upper classes in South Africa, the pain of apartheid and colonialism persists in the form of visible white wealth and extreme black poverty. In addition, South Africans are yet again facing deep moral and political questions regarding inclusion and belonging in/to the nation, especially in regards to xenophobic violence.


For an insightful analysis of these dynamics, see Dilip M. Menon, “Living Together Separately in South Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 2 (June 2013): 258–62; Tawana Kupe, Eric Worby, and Shireen Hassim,
Struggles for access to economic resources and opportunities, as well as debates regarding the limits of national inclusion, have raised new questions not only about the ethics of whiteness but also about the ethics of blackness.

The philosophy of Black Consciousness has enjoyed an intellectual and political resurgence in South Africa recently, and its historical development provides some interesting parallels with the groups and individuals I have studied. As mentioned, Black Consciousness activists of the 1970s understood social change to emerge out of processes of self-transformation. The philosophy of Black Consciousness, as articulated by Steve Biko and other black activists, emphasized that without a shift in individual and collective subjectivities, structural and systemic change would remain an elusive goal. As such, it proposes that black people must first adopt a specific “attitude of mind” and “way of life” based on self-examination that allows black subjects to “rise and attain the envisioned self.”

Biko invited those on the underside of apartheid and colonialism to explore their surroundings and test their possibilities through the conscious pursuit of freedom, and in so doing, define their own values in distinction from white society. Concurrently, Black Consciousness developed its own critiques of whiteness, and these critiques continue to be an important resource for radicalized black activists in democratic South Africa who are concerned about the slow pace of social change and convinced of the urgent need for racial redress and the redistribution of resources. Thus, I would like to spend some time

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in this conclusion thinking through the challenges posed by Black Consciousness thought to the ethics of whiteness I have discussed.

Inclusion and the Social Question

My interlocutors often found themselves caught between Steve Biko’s many critiques of white liberals and his great challenge to the “true” or authentic white liberal to focus his or her efforts on dismantling racism within white spaces and communities. In Biko’s 1970 essay ‘Black Souls in White Skins’ and 1972 essay “White Racism and Black Consciousness,” he discusses the complicated (and morally compromised) position of white liberals.552 His reflections on apartheid-era liberalism and in particular, its tendency to understand racial inclusion to be essential to the work of social change are especially useful when thinking through the predicament of the white progressive Christians I studied. Both RISE and Neighbors were inclined to identify racial and economic segregation as an urgent social problem. They sought to distinguish themselves from conservative whites, while emphasizing the need to build relationships across race and class divides through their organizations.

Biko was quite critical of the white liberal tendency to see the creation of racially inclusive organizations as most effective means of social change. Instead, he challenged whites to focus their efforts to dismantle racism on engaging and confronting white society and to leave blacks to focus on their own development (material and ethical)

552 Steve Biko had very harsh criticisms and significant concerns regarding the role of white liberals in the struggle against apartheid. At the time that he was writing, he was referring mostly to white English “leftist” “liberals” or “non-conformist” who sought to differentiate themselves from conservative white Afrikaners and the apartheid government. White liberals, in Biko’s view, sought to absolve themselves of charges of white racism by opposing apartheid segregation and appealing to the “troubled conscience” of English-speaking South Africans. Steve Biko, “Black Souls in White Skins?,” in I Write What I Like, ed. Aelred Stubbs (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2006), 20.
within black communities. Biko especially critiqued white liberals who, while condemning apartheid’s racial divisions, had failed to sufficiently examine and deal with their own internalized superiority. Until such self-examination occurred, Biko questioned the utility of racial integration/inclusion as a means for challenging the status quo and ending apartheid.

Noting that racially integrated organizations were almost always the creation of whites, and led by whites, Biko worried that this led to the undue (and harmful) influence that whites were likely to exercise in these organizations due to their whiteness. He was also suspicious of how race and class interests would influence the kinds of political and social solutions that white liberals proposed. Instead of advancing the interests and goals of black individuals and communities in the most urgent ways possible, Biko argued that integrated groups created a structure by which white liberals were in a position of “setting the pattern and pace for the realization of black man’s aspirations” while simultaneously ensuring a central role for themselves in the process of change.

Yet Biko’s major opposition to so-called integrated organizations stemmed from a fear that such organizations could all too easily serve as a prop for white egos rather than a tool of genuine social transformation: “instead of involving themselves in an all-out attempt to stamp out white racism from their white society, liberals waste a lot of time trying to prove to as many blacks as they can find that they are liberal.” At the same time, Biko reflected on the qualities that would define or characterize the “true” or authentic white liberal within a context of racial injustice. The true liberal would not

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553 Ibid., 21–23.
554 Ibid., 21.
555 Ibid., 24.
remain indifferent to black suffering and white cruelty but would “leave blacks to take care of their own business while they concern themselves with the real evil in our society—white racism.”\textsuperscript{556} For Biko, white racism (not racial separation) was the problem to be addressed, and he defined racism as the power of one group to discriminate against another for “the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation.”\textsuperscript{557} According to Biko, if whites were serious about social change, then they would focus on educating white society about the evils of white racial power and prepare them so that when political, social and economic transformation occurred, they would not resist.\textsuperscript{558}

For Biko, the authentic white liberal could demonstrate their commitment to racial justice through the seriousness with which they engaged and challenged white society’s racism and by recognizing that their struggle was not on behalf of blacks but on behalf of their own future liberation.\textsuperscript{559} He assumed that challenging white racism might well bring the risk of estrangement from one’s family and the broader white community and would be difficult, and he also warned that true white liberals should not expect blanket condemnation and suspicion from black South Africans, nor to receive automatic embrace, because “white society collectively owes the blacks so huge a debt that no one [white] member should automatically expect to escape.”\textsuperscript{560} Therefore, the true white liberal must continually prove his or her commitment to transformation by 1) educating

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{556}Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{557}Ibid., 27.
\item \textsuperscript{558} Biko, \textit{I Write What I like}, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{559} “All true liberals should realize that the place for their fight for justice is within white society. The liberals must realize that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not the nebulous ‘they’ with whom they can hardly claim identification. The liberal must apply himself with absolute dedication to the idea of educating his white brothers that the history of the country may have to be re-written at some stage and that we may live in ‘a country where color will not serve to put a man in a box.’Biko, “Black Souls in White Skins?,” 27.
\item \textsuperscript{560} Biko, \textit{I Write What I like}, 71.
\end{itemize}
white communities about how their history and future will need to be reimagined and by
2) voluntarily divesting of privilege and welcoming the rise of black group consciousness
and demands for social justice.

In my introduction to this study, I suggested that my white interlocutors departed
somewhat from Samantha Vice’s argument regarding the need for white political
withdrawal and public silence to accompany a focus on private self-transformation. In
many ways, Vice’s line of argument is rooted in Black Consciousness thought and
politics. Biko often emphasized that black subjects should be the ones to set the terms by
which whites would be accepted and in which conditions of mutual respect would
prevail, and in the meantime whites should work on themselves and work in white
communities.\(^{561}\) Certainly, one aspect of Black Consciousness thought that continues to
resonate in democratic South Africa is the insistence that real integration, or inclusion,
remains impossible within a context of racial inequality and subjugation. According to
Biko, only once internalized superiority and inferiority are overcome and conditions of
inequality eradicated can “true” integration occur. Importantly, true integration does not
mean assimilation of blacks into an “already established set of norms and codes of
behavior set up and maintained by whites”; rather, integration is about “free participation
of all members of society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing
society as determined by the will of the people” where the values and style of the
majority group dominate.

Though shaped by the majority, Biko explained: “this need not cramp the style of
those who feel differently.”\(^{562}\) In this way, he envisioned a future where each group could

\(^{561}\) Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 73.
attain “its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another” and out of this would come a “genuine fusion of the life-styles of the various groups.” Of course, whatever joint culture would emerge would inevitably “exhibit African values and be truly African in style.” This vision definitely seemed to influence how my interlocutors understood the ideal of authentic South Africanness.

Creating a context where black subjects living in South Africa were able assert themselves fully and demand respect vis-à-vis whites was essential to Biko’s humanist vision. Yet true integration, in Biko’s view, could only occur after blacks had confronted a system of inequality and dismantled it, and whites had lost their power to determine black life. In other words, non-racialism—liberation of humanity from racial categories—could only come once the power of whiteness had been destroyed through the assertion of black power. By contrast, I have argued that those I studied sought, in the midst of systems of inequality, to prefigure sociopolitical alternatives to the segregated and divided society around them. Contra Biko, they remained committed to racial integration or inclusion, not only as an end goal, but also as a means for social change, which is why they placed a lot of emphasis on contact and exchange between white and black, and between those who “have more” and those who “have less.” This commitment was premised on a desire to model an alternate society through their ethics and distinctive way of life.

563 Ibid., 22.
564 Ibid., 26.
In my view, emphasis on integration or inclusion by groups like RISE and Neighbors can be read as sincere attempts by South Africans who lived through the end of apartheid to live into the reality of a new South Africa, which, in its most optimistic and exuberant expressions, held forth the promise of extending a common African identity to all. For example, in chapter two I discussed how RISE sought to bring all of their community development initiatives in line with the utopian vision of the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP, created with the input of thousands of South Africans, envisions a South Africa in 2030 where “everyone feels free yet bounded to others; where everyone embraces their full potential.” It goes on to state “we have received the mixed legacy of inequalities […] but we have agreed to change our narrative of conquest, oppression” and have “actively set out to change our lives in a way that benefits the broader community.” The NDP looks towards a time when South Africans feel safe “because of the strength of our belonging” while at the same time recognizing “multiple, overlapping identities” that are cosmopolitan and multicultural in nature. The goal of the long-term development plan is to create a national culture grounded in a shared sense of “being African” and committed to values of peace, interconnection, respect for difference, and a new work ethic that prioritizes service, collective well-being, and the flowering of individual talents.

At the same time, an emphasis on cultural exchange, racial inclusion, and celebration of diversity and multiculturalism within a larger social context still marked by structural racial inequality meant that RISE’s more radical and redistributive impulses could easily become depoliticized and blunted. For example, in chapter three, I discussed how Nina was not unique in her acknowledgment that, while she sought to resist undue
privilege and live out an ethic of downward mobility, she had not taken a “vow of poverty” and still enjoyed many of the comforts of white middle-class life. Despite living in a black community, she continued to have a relatively nice house and car, access to wealthy and luxurious spaces, and travel and educational opportunities, which is why her focus on sharing these things became an important practice of self-examination and also a form of micro-redistribution.

The fact that white middle-class tastes and norms could all easily be accommodated within a framework of inclusion and celebration of diversity raises Biko’s concern that emphasis on white-black cultural exchange within integrated organizations can easily become a project of assimilation that serve to justify and promote white dominance. It seemed to me that at times, because white middle-class habits and tastes were so deeply ingrained, white subjects found ways to legitimize or justify the continuation and enjoyment of these tastes on the basis of sharedness. However, I have also suggested that an emphasis on the sharing of resources and the sharing of cultures was a subversive strategy intended to disrupt and symbolically contest spaces and things assumed to be the exclusive preview of those who were white and/or wealthy.

At the same time, the work of inclusion and the sharing of resources between middle-class white subjects and poor, black individuals and communities could all too often carry vestiges of paternalism and colonial mission mentalities. Melissa Steyn sums this position up perfectly when she writes about white post-apartheid efforts to

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566 Recall my opening vignette in chapter two, where I offered the image of the white Afrikaner host guiding the rest of the RISE group in wine-tasting at his suburban home. Biko was particularly suspicious of white liberals who invited blacks to their homes for parties: “in this sort of set up one sees a perfect example of what oppression has done to black — for they have been made to feel inferior so long that form them it is comforting to drink tea, wine or beer with whites who seem to treat them as equals.” Biko, “Black Souls in White Skins?,” 25.
universalize white/Western culture that expresses a “faith that European [or white] diffusionism will provide the desired influence on the future and benefit ‘blacks,’ provided they are receptive to its efficacy.” 567 As faith-based development organizations, the groups I have discussed are perhaps more guilty of faith in Christian diffusionism in that they saw the Christian values they endorsed as exercising a positive and desirable influence on South Africa’s future and particularly on the black spaces in which they lived and worked.

I have sought to show the many reasons why groups like RISE or Neighbors seek to construct white ethical subjectivities via proximity to blackness as well the desire to create a non-racial spiritual community. An emphasis on values of inclusion and building relationships across race and class divides occurred, in part, because my interlocutors seemed to understand this as the only means of developing a deeper or fuller sense of belonging in democratic South Africa. My interlocutors suggested, implicitly and explicitly, that the only way to earn their place in the future-to-come was to engage in critical self-reflection on whiteness alongside, and in dialogue with, black South Africans in the hopes of developing a joint culture that involved common ethical, social, and political practices.

However, in many ways, an ethics that emphasizes relationship building and inclusion across race and class divides seemed out of step with the social and political mood in South Africa, which is currently leaning much more in the direction of Black Consciousness’ famous maxim: “black man, you are on your own!” In the face of continued racialized inequality, elite paternalism, and resistance to change, young black

567 Melissa Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be, 66.
South Africans are not waiting around for someone to create spaces for them to exercise the conscious practice of freedom. They are creating spaces for themselves, and in this, as with any ethical enterprise, there is hope and risk. Educational institutions, in particular, have once again emerged as the site for a new generation of black South African to pursue militant quests to define themselves.

Thus, it will be interesting to see how progressive white subjects engage with emerging ethics of blackness. The recent involvement in and support of political movements associated with radical black politics by Nigel Branken gives some hints in this regard, but I am not in a position at this time to assess how this involvement has impacted Nigel or raised new questions regarding his own ethics. I do think that the example of the Hewitt family, and their frustration with the criticism they received from educated black South Africans, begs the question of which black voices, and critiques, count in legitimating an ethics of whiteness. Such questions, no doubt, are ones that the Brankens and RISE will have to deal seriously with in the future if they are committed to being recovering racists. In many ways, the emphasis on white/rich and poor/black within a development framework worked to shield the individuals and groups I studied from the more radical black political and intellectual critiques, though it also provided a means through which they might come into contact with these critiques.

Relocation and the Question of Sustainability

In 1970, Biko wrote that “blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment. Theirs is a struggle to get out of the situation and not merely to solve a peripheral problem as in the case of the [white] liberals. This is why
blacks speak with a greater sense of urgency than whites.”\textsuperscript{568} Biko insightfully recognized that white liberals are often in danger of compromise or accommodation with white supremacy due to their investment in white worlds and ability to escape to them as needed. He wrote, “They vacillate between two worlds, verbalizing all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skilfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privilege.”\textsuperscript{569} In democratic South Africa, these observations remain as pertinent as ever. White South Africans generally remain indifferent or naïve about the extent of black suffering, even though extreme poverty and inequality remains highly visible. Even those who do seek to expose and educate themselves to the realities of poverty and inequality continue to find elite spaces alluring.

I have argued that groups like RISE or Neighbors, by emphasizing practices of relocation, created for progressive white Christian participants an increased sense of existing between two worlds. Though at times increasing the temptation to withdraw and/or leading to the re-entrenchment of white privilege as Biko warned, the experience of vacillating between two worlds produced by living and working in black spaces can be understood as ethically productive in that it provided necessary space for those I studied to develop alternate white subjectivities. As James Faubion has observed, experiences of displacement and liminality often serve as the gateway to the ethical domain.\textsuperscript{570} In the case of RISE, an increased sense of existing between two worlds was shared by black and white members alike and served to spur the development of shared practices and values framed around larger projects of self- and social transformation.

\textsuperscript{568} Biko, “Black Souls in White Skins?,” 22.
\textsuperscript{569} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{570} Anthropology of Ethics, 97.
What sustained my interlocutors was the sense that they were at the cutting edge of transformation in South Africa: working to actively redefine community at both national and local levels so as to fall in line with the ideal of a democratic and non-racial South Africa. Though at times difficult (as well as exhilarating), building dialogical and pedagogical relationships with black South Africans invited the Brankens and white RISE members to embrace complexity, problematize their whiteness, and enter into new forms of community that increasingly made the questions and concerns of black South Africans unavoidable. Further, the choice to stay engaged in South Africa’s social challenges and resist white tendencies towards emigration and ghettoization through practices of relocation and sharing offered ethical possibilities beyond paternalism. Living and working within black spaces motivated them to pursue transformation, precisely because, once outside of white spaces, they could see the effects of apartheid and colonialism first hand and grasp the depth of white alienation from the majority of black South Africans. This alienation indexed urgent social problems that, if left unaddressed, could dramatically impact the present and future security and well-being of black and white South Africans alike.

I was profoundly struck by the sense among those I studied that they were “in it for the long haul,” which in light of pressures to withdraw to white-dominated contexts was a powerful political statement. My interlocutors did not view what they were doing as charity work; rather, they saw the sharing of their skills and resources with marginalized communities as a form of redress that was about securing their own future flourishing through signaling their commitment to living in a transformed South Africa. This meant weighing opportunities for their own economic advancement alongside the
need to advance those who had been oppressed by their parents and grandparents and staying present with the messy, painful, and complex realities that define South Africa.

The ongoing devaluation of black life in South Africa was seen, not as peripheral, but as a central matter of urgent concern to many of my white interlocutors who understood that their own future belonging—whether they would ultimately be perceived foreigners or as citizens—was at stake. If committed to building and staying in the new South Africa, they recognized that there would be no escape from black demands for transformation and discontent. They were also increasingly aware that privilege creates its own prisons. In response, they expressed a deep desire to resist fearful obsessions over security, to reject paternalistic behavior, and to live lives of openness in hopes of a flourishing collective future. Whiteness, by contrast, was often seen as something constrictive, something that stunts the imagination, something that must be problematized, something that causes alienation, and something that puts various forms of belonging at risk, which is why many felt a responsibility to remain engaged with white communities, particularly white church communities.571

Developing greater consciousness of black suffering, and consciousness of white alienation from this suffering, rarely occurred for my interlocutors without experiences of displacement from white, middle-class life and identities, which they framed positively as the practice of relocation. But practicing relocation, while also seeking to respond to Biko’s call to engage with white communities, had its own challenges. Most of my interlocutors chose to maintain some degree of connection to white churches,

571 I found the growing focus on white communities by white members (as a kind of reverse missionary activity) interesting and significant in light of Biko’s view that ‘true’ white liberal was one who fights for their own liberation by focusing their energies and critiques on transforming white communities.
communities, and culture. This choice speaks to their desire to maintain bridges between two worlds that often seem unbearably divided and to engage white communities on issues of poverty and inequality, but it also represents a need to maintain some form of connection with white communities so as not to experience total dislocation from spaces of cultural and familial comfort.

That being said, existing in close proximity to black communities inevitably increased a sense of alienation in relation to friends, family, and wider publics, especially when forced to confront the racist fears, judgment, and stereotypes expressed by these circles. Yet living and working in black communities also involved confronting, and facing, the suspicion and fears of black subjects, especially in relation to the apartheid past. The mental and emotional toll of feeling a kind of double alienation, I contend, contributed to the kind of fatigue and physical burn-out I witnessed.

What helped mitigate some of the emotional burden of existing in between was relationality: forming intimate relationships with black peers, colleagues, and neighbors that could provide a sense of being part of a common vision and common quest, which is why so many of my interlocutors stressed forming *friendships* with black South Africans in the spaces they lived and worked. While I am highly suspicious of such language in that it seems to fall into the trap of positing spiritual equality without recognizing the impact of social inequality on the relationship in question, the goal of developing friendships with black South Africans, while never existing outside a field of power relations, served a vital pedagogical and ethically supportive role. Indeed, such relationships took much time to build and entailed precisely the kind of humility and active listening/virtuous silence that Vice proposed that whites cultivate in her article. In
our interview, for example, Nina explained that it took a long time before she felt like she could claim someone as a friend in her community because “I needed to be bestowed the idea of friendship.” Here, Nina implies an awareness that access to black lives and black pedagogues is not a right. Rather, it is a gift.

Because power differentials, cultural differences, and histories of oppression created significant challenges to building long-term trust and rapport with black South Africans, the work of racial self-excavation required a high degree of willingness by white subjects to face discomforting truths, regardless of recognition or embrace by others, and a high tolerance for ambiguity. I often wondered whether the religious experimentation, social transgression, and political engagement I observed among my interlocutors would eventually lead to disenchantment, withdrawal, and even backlash that would ultimately undermine moral ideals of diversity, inclusion, equality, and justice.

As Packard notes in his study of Emerging Church congregations in the United States, a preference for the organic over the institutional often meant that the activities and organizations my interlocutors were involved in necessitated living somewhat “unsettled lives,” which involved high energy and time investments.\(^{572}\) Small numbers combined with a reliance on the “labor of the willing” could make things unpredictable, especially when morally fraught decisions about family, education, and finances came into the mix. Such dynamics not only produced mental and physical exhaustion, they also tended to leave development programs and black participants and staff who benefited

from them in a lurch whenever the energy/capacity/interest of white volunteers or leaders waned.\textsuperscript{573}

Liberating Whiteness?

Many African traditions—intellectual, political, moral, and spiritual—emphasize the importance of African agency and responsibility in the midst of situations of violence and oppression, as well as ways in which the overcoming of oppression involves the nurture of intersubjective and relational bonds. In chapter one, I spoke about some of these traditions in South Africa, particularly the Afro-universalism of Mandela and the ubuntuism of Tutu. I ultimately leave it to South Africans themselves to answer the question of whether the ethics of my interlocutors fall within, or alongside, these traditions. I have tried to highlight throughout this study, however, that those I studied did not see themselves as separate from the future of Africa: separate from its challenges and separate from its possibilities. Their commitment to a shared future with black South Africans is part of why I argue that they sought to move beyond a privatized ethics and engage in some degree of public reflection and political action.

Though deep and sustained engagement with the traditions and thought associated with radical black intellectual, political and religious movements by my interlocutors was still emerging, the generalized influence of these traditions—via the anti-apartheid struggle and ideals of a new South Africa—had seeped into the beliefs, values, and practices of my interlocutors in the sense that they were actively endeavoring to develop

\textsuperscript{573} Ibid., 83–84. As Packard concludes that ECM functionally precludes many from participating in the time-intensive activities necessary to sustain an unsettled life. “To the extent that this life station matches up with class, racial and ethnic divides, the Emerging Church will never be able to successfully court the kind of diversity it professes to desire, at least here in the United States” (84).
an appreciation for the “beauty and value of black bodies” and to see black lives as meaningful and “weighty,” to use Anthony Pinn’s language.\textsuperscript{574} Their strategy for doing so most often sought to extend the benefits and sacred value often ascribed to white bodies to all bodies. At the same time, my interlocutors were also trying to develop a new understanding of public life that placed blackness at its center. These two desires often came into conflict and tension because the first impulse is about expanding the sacred canopy of whiteness and the second impulse is about displacing and deconstructing it altogether.

The ethical practices that my interlocutors deployed were also intended to increase their own capacity to engage in practices of self-examination by placing them outside of the normative power of white, middle-class values and expectations. This is why contact with, and proximity to, poor and/or black spaces and people was understood as so ethically productive and also why their practices remained so controversial. The practices that my interlocutors adopted required black subjects to perform emotional labor on behalf of white moral transformation, but they also brought white subjects into contact with the pressing political concerns of black South Africans.

Whether this led to the kind of damage that philosophers like Biko and Vice feared is not something I am in a position to fully answer, but I have sought to highlight throughout this study the many tensions and risks attached to the ethics of whiteness. The black and white subjects actively engaged in the practices I have described were not unaware of many of these tensions and risks. Yet, they seemed to accept the risk of harm

\textsuperscript{574} Pinn, Humanism, 18.
that interracial contact and engagement with whiteness could bring in the hopes of finding a way to dwell together.

To return to Samantha Vice’s claim that the ethics of whiteness are best pursued in private, or semi-private spaces, one of the key criticisms of this view from those sympathetic to her claims regarding the need for white ethical transformation was that it denied the intersubjective nature of ethical life as well as the urgent need for white and black South African to interact and face each other within a democratic space so as to overcome internalized notions of superiority and inferiority. Though not the intention, Vice’s privatized ethics of whiteness seemed to legitimate white withdrawal, which many argue is one of the primary obstacles to racial, social, and economic transformation and redistribution in South Africa. At the same time, seeking more social engaged and public forms of white ethical transformation are not devoid of their own problems and critiques, many which have been discussed throughout this study.

All of the progressive white Christians I engaged with were seeking in some way to live in solidarity with black South Africans and to wrestle with the implications of their whiteness. In this regard, the journey and insights of Klippies Kritzinger, a white Afrikaner theologian and minister, who has wrestled with what Black Consciousness thought and its ethical implications for white South Africans after apartheid, might offer some interesting points for reflection. For Kritzinger, Black Consciousness provides a “challenge and stimulus to develop a liberating praxis and theology for and among white people.”

Similar to many RISE members, Kritzinger’s own awareness of racism began

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during apartheid as a university student when he developed his first friendship with a black person. As he became aware of the impact of the apartheid system, he describes growing anger and shame with regards to Afrikaner “leaders” and increasingly saw blacks as his “people.” When Kritzinger became a member and minister of a black church, this shift in identification led to further alienation from the mainstream white Afrikaner community.

Despite practicing relocation, Kritzinger recognized that this shift “did not make me black or take away from that fact that I was a beneficiary under apartheid.” For these reasons, Kritzinger continued to self-consciously identify as white in order to express how his identity was “racialized by the power structures of apartheid.” Despite facing some uncomfortable truths, Kritzinger credits Steve Biko, and black liberation movements in general, with offering him an invitation to become “another kind of white person”: one who joined “the struggle against racist laws, political structures, and social system” rather than resisted this struggle.576 To be committed to black liberation, Kritzinger realized, was to also be committed to white liberation and to accept moral and political responsibility for apartheid and intervening in its ongoing effects.

As Black theologian Allan Boesak wrote in 1977, “the question is no longer whether whites are willing to do something for blacks, but whether whites are willing to identity with what the oppressed are doing to secure their own liberation and whether whites are aiding that liberation in their own communities.”577 While I have tried to avoid terms like liberation, in that it seems to imply total transcendence, this is not what Kritzinger had in mind when he discusses liberating whiteness. Rather, he claims: “An

important dimension of a liberating whiteness is to deconstruct the hegemonic white identity of colonialism and develop a hybrid identity which integrates the divergent impulses that shape life and community in post-apartheid South Africa.” The act of hybridizing whiteness is important because “white racist discourse […] created the illusion of a homogenous identity, defined as a power position over the black ‘other.’” Drawing on the work of another Afrikaner, sociologist Melissa Steyn, Kritzinger emphasizes that hybridizing whiteness is not “becoming black,” but rather about creating a new narrative of whiteness that urges “whites to enter into dialogical, appreciative, committed relationship with the continent that whiteness came to conquer.”578 The challenge for progressive white South Africans, then, is to actively wrestle with shifting power relations and to seek new ways of being white within a postcolonial, democratic nation without also losing sight of continued black suffering as a result of colonialism and apartheid.

Conclusion:

In this study, I have explored multiple answers to the question “How do I live in this strange place” that extend beyond questions of the individual to that of the collective: “How do we live in this strange place?” The question of what it means to live well in post-apartheid South Africa as a beneficiary of systems of white supremacy, and what it means to live well alongside those who have been on the underside of white supremacy is a question that surfaces over and over in this study. Undoubtedly, in order to be seen as oppositional or counter-cultural to dominant white middle-class norms, my interlocutors

578 Kritzinger, Liberating Whiteness, 17.
and the movements that inspired them depended on a wider assumption of being seen as “out of place” in black contexts.\textsuperscript{579} From an anthropology of ethics perspective, one could go so far as to argue that it is only against a prior backdrop of inherited/ascribed wealth and privilege that the lifestyle and practices promoted by movements like new monasticism or my interlocutors become intelligible as ethics (voluntary self-fashioning) rather than being seen simply as a given or imposed external condition. To embrace practices of downward mobility and simplicity—and to have them recognized and legitimated as virtuous—assumes not only that one has access to wealth, resources, and upward mobility, but also that one is socially recognized by wider publics as having this access, which allows the act of choosing otherwise to carry its moral charge.

The link between freedom, ethics, and elites is not a new observation. Foucault notes in his studies the ways that ethical reflection and self-fashioning for the ancient Greeks was largely seen as an elite domain, and Cynicism in particular plays on this understanding and contests it.\textsuperscript{580} While undoubtedly elites were not the only ones who engaged in the ethical work of self-fashioning in ancient Greece, Foucault’s observations underscore the fact that what tends to be recognized as ethical and virtuous depends on forms of social legitimation that are deeply influenced by the most powerful and dominant in society. Similarly, if ethics is tied to the conscious practice of freedom, as Foucault argues, then material and structural constraints will impact the degree and scope to which individuals are able to fashion the self.

Arguably, ethical constraint is part of the insidious nature of poverty, inequality, and racism that people intuitively grasp when they discuss the non-material aspects of

\textsuperscript{579} Bielo, “Purity, Danger, and Redemption.”
\textsuperscript{580} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2}; Foucault, \textit{The Courage of Truth}. 
poverty or the ways that such systems strip people of their dignity. In this way, an ethics of whiteness may well work to expand the ethical domain for all, to the extent that white ethical practices are linked to the work of creating social spaces that enhance the capacity to shape the self among vulnerable and marginalized subjects. Certainly, this was something that my interlocutors aspired towards and what advocates for a holistic or social justice model of development seek to encourage.

Increased scrutiny and contestation of whiteness is an unavoidable dimension of post-apartheid public life. The continued cultural and economic hegemony of white South Africans, frequent examples of white indifference to black suffering, and routine evidence of ongoing anti-black racist attitudes all serve to provoke constant debate, anger, and anguish in the public sphere regarding the hope of a new South Africa and ideals of social, political, and economic transformation. While iconic black leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu have lent credence to the idea that white South Africans can earn moral legitimacy and a place in the nation through embracing progressive social change, there remains little clarity regarding the concrete options available to white subjects who seek to participate in a politics of redress or the kinds of practices that might sustain alternate forms of life. I have sought to respond to this lacuna by exploring the kinds of questions and conditions that incited those I interacted with to pursue aims of self- and social transformation and the tensions and contradictions produced by such aims.

The question of what it means to live well as a white racialized subject in a society shaped by histories of white supremacy and colonialism is a question that that cuts through the current global political moment with incisiveness. As the election of
Donald Trump or the rise of far right white nationalist movements in Europe illustrate, racial progress and increased tolerance of difference is not inevitable. It takes deep and sustained work to forge societies where difference is valued and embraced. This work inevitably involves the formerly colonized and the former colonizer, the former citizen and the former subject, reworking together social categories of inclusion and exclusion, the meaning of citizenship, as well questions of ethics and the human.

For all its faults and failures, South Africa is one society that has attempted to do just that. Though increasingly under threat, the vision of a democratic, non-racial revolution that will result in justice, equality, and inclusion for all still runs deep and wide. This project is one whose future remains unknowable, and yet whose past stretches back almost to the founding of South Africa itself, where, alongside the rise of racist, white supremacist, and Christian nationalism, a counter-vision of social and spiritual equality was emerging. At first this vision was articulated in primarily Christian terms, but over time it has been reformulated into broader humanist or secular terms, whether Mandela’s Afro-universal vision, Mbeki’s African Renaissance, or Biko’s vision of a new humanity.

There remains a pervasive sense in South Africa (what some have called the “exceptionalism” of South Africa) that South Africans have a moral responsibility to break the bonds of racial inequality, not just for their own sakes but on behalf of the world. It is here that the United States and South Africa, so often compared, arguably show their greatest divergence. In South Africa, at least for now, the “dangerous memory” of past mass movements and struggles to overthrow the shackles of economic exploitation and white supremacy and to imagine an alternate world remains alive and
Furthermore, as painful as they often are, public debates regarding the need for economic and social transformation and about the moral responsibilities of elites and white South Africans demonstrate that many South Africans, both white and black, are still actively reflecting on what it means to embrace, pursue, and live into a future different from the past. While some of the trajectories imagined are more violent than others, the intimate link drawn between ethics, social transformation, and political action continues to be as strong as ever.

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Appendix: Religion, Whiteness, and South Africa Literature Review

The deep implication of religion in South Africa’s history of colonialism and apartheid is well known. Perhaps less well known, but still widely studied, is the role of religion in shaping the anti-apartheid struggle and the modes of ethics and activism that accompanied this struggle, particularly black-led responses to racial injustice and conceptualization of a South Africa beyond apartheid. Yet, there has been surprisingly little analytic attention given to the role of religion in shaping post-apartheid debates about race, whiteness, and the new South Africa or in the shaping of white ethical subjectivities. Moreover, while the relationship between religion and white supremacy has been vigorously debated within the study of Black Religion as well as Black Theology, it has received little attention within the broader field of Religious Studies.

With a few notable exceptions in American religion, the relationship between religion and white racialization has rarely been explored, especially in contexts outside of the United States. This gap has consequences. Not only does it allow the role of religious institutions, traditions, and practices in systems of white supremacy to remain opaque, it also leaves unanswered the empirical question of what resources religion might offer to white subjects seeking to transform themselves and their communities. My research responds to this gap by placing the efforts of the white racialized subject and its efforts transform the self and the role of religion and spirituality in these efforts at its center. Building on historical and anthropological studies that reveal the entanglement of whiteness and religion in the conquest, colonization, and marketization of southern Africa, I emphasize the role of religion in shaping white responses to post-apartheid racial inequality and privilege.
Whiteness and Religious Studies

Within the broad interdisciplinary domain of Religious Studies, explicit studies on whiteness and religion remain limited. In the United States, not only has the role of religion in white identity and group formation been largely absent in Whiteness Studies literature,\textsuperscript{582} Blum argues that it is only recently that the “deep, powerful, and nuanced relationships between whiteness and religion” have been studied in the United States by scholars of religion.\textsuperscript{583} One of the primary subfields in Religious Studies to engage whiteness is theology and theological ethics.\textsuperscript{584} Such work builds on the fact that critiques of white dominance were foundational to black liberation theology both in the United States\textsuperscript{585} and South Africa.\textsuperscript{586}

Whiteness has also been discussed in sociology of religion, particularly Michael Emerson’s work on white Protestants (mostly evangelical) and multiracial congregations in the United States.\textsuperscript{587} Other sociological work has explored how white evangelical


\textsuperscript{585} Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition.

\textsuperscript{586} Boesak, A Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power.

attitudes in the United States are hastening or hindering racial integration and social justice in churches and universities.\textsuperscript{588} There has also been historical exploration of whiteness in relation to the history of American Judaism,\textsuperscript{589} American Buddhism,\textsuperscript{590} the Civil Rights Movement,\textsuperscript{591} and representations of Jesus in America.\textsuperscript{592} A growing body of literature also addresses the historical and contemporary relationship between whiteness, conservative evangelicalism, and politics in the United States.\textsuperscript{593}

In South Africa, a substantial body of literature treats the relationship between race, religion, and whiteness prior to 1994: discussing and assessing the impact of European missionaries on indigenous populations\textsuperscript{594} as well as the social and political role of the Dutch Reformed Church and English-speaking churches in the support,


maintenance, and resistance of apartheid.\textsuperscript{595} Given the depth and breadth of this scholarship, it is shocking that there is currently no full-length text that focuses on the complex intersections of religion, spirituality, and whiteness after apartheid. One way to explain this absence might be the way the current relations between whiteness and religion are complex and trouble what David Chidester calls “a national narrative of oppression and liberation” that surrounds representations of South African religion.\textsuperscript{596}

In post-apartheid South Africa, there is some empirical evidence that religion and spirituality have worked to mediate, challenge, and reinforce racialized social and cultural boundaries after apartheid. The popular assumption is that Christian churches, particularly charismatic churches and the Dutch Reformed Church, foster social segregation and operate as spheres of “semigration” for white people.\textsuperscript{597} One survey has found that the white Dutch Reformed Church has resisted moves towards greater inclusion and placed racism quite low on their agenda.\textsuperscript{598} On the other hand, there have been a few ethnographic studies on multiracial, formerly white, evangelical/charismatic congregations that have significantly transformed their demographics and adopted a


\textsuperscript{596}David Chidester, \textit{Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), x.


stance of inclusion both in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Such congregations seek to align themselves with national ideals of cultural pluralism and the African Renaissance by emphasizing participation in the future of South Africa. Such moves are noteworthy given the prevalence of Afro-pessimism among white South Africans. As Elias Bongmba has remarked, “the renaissance project is a moral project that demands a critical appropriation of Africa’s heritage, yet it also invites Africans to face the future with a new sense of self that respects what Africans have to offer.” Researchers found that the voluntary nature of participating in a multiracial community, and optimistic focus on the resources and potential of Africa, was valued by white and black congregants alike, although some participants complained about slow changes to leadership structures and superficial social engagement.

Unlike their multiracial evangelical counterparts in the United States, Jubilee Community Church in Cape Town has engaged discourses of reparation along with discourses of reconciliation to address inequality on structural as well as personal levels. Leaders at Jubilee provide biblical and theological justification for reparations and have worked with a religiously based South African group The Restitution Foundation. This research builds on work that American scholar Jennifer Harvey has done on efforts by mainline Protestant congregations, such as the Episcopal Church and

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the Presbyterian Church USA, to confront racism and acknowledge institutional complicity through frameworks of reparation. Harvey has argued that when white people confront and struggle against white supremacy they face a “moral crisis” of being white. She suggests that acts of reparation can provide white people with the means to form a reconstituted self that is not paralyzed by guilt.

Another area of ethnographic research on whiteness and spirituality has looked at Pagan/Wiccan movements and white adoption of African spiritual practices. Taking advantage of the religious freedoms guaranteed by the liberal constitution, white South Africans have increasingly explored alternatives to Christianity. In a study of white Neopagans in Cape Town, Annika Teppo found that Pagan spirituality served to reinscribe racial boundaries through ritual practices. The individualistic nature of Pagan spirituality allowed white practitioners to withdraw from public, urban spaces and build private, controlled, white spaces that were then fortified—and sanctified—through religious beliefs and rituals. Categories of purity and danger were deployed in rituals directed at neutralizing threats of crime and violence. As Teppo concludes, “in these rituals, the image of threatening Blacks is renewed, and the exclusive White space is reconstructed again and again.” Thus, white Pagans collectively are generally no more progressive (or transgressive) on questions of race than other white religious groups in South Africa. White Wiccans often experience political tension with black Africans over

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Harvey, Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty, 4.


Ibid., 37.
their adoption of the title “witch” and express antipathy towards African spirituality.

The picture is more mixed when considering white South Africans who have become izangoma, or traditional African healers. Becoming a sangoma is still a somewhat subversive act, politically and religiously, because it “questions the previous racial categories [of apartheid], defying and transgressing the boundaries of proper whiteness.” Teppo found that rather than withdrawing from the public sphere, white sangomas are more likely to cross racial and social boundaries to engage the harsh realities of South African society by entering into black townships for rituals and training. The respect granted by black Africans to sangomas affords white sangomas with a sense of safety and belonging as new kinship networks are formed. Black trainers who support white sangomas have also found novel ways to justify inclusion of white South Africans, despite their critics who are suspicious of cultural appropriation. Yet vast power imbalances are still operative. White sangomas have access to wider social networks than their black colleagues; often choose to service a suburban white clientele; and produce romantic/exotic tales of their training for public consumption.

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608 Teppo, “‘My House Is Protected by a Dragon’: White South Africans, Magic, and Sacred Spaces in Post-Apartheid Cape Town.”
610 Teppo, “‘Our Spirit Has No Boundary’: White Sangomas and Mediation in Cape Town.”
611 Ibid.
that reinforce colonial ideas about Africa. Differences in social and economic capital are also often elided by white *sangomas* who view themselves as emancipatory and progressive healers who mediate between racial, cultural, and religious divides and other seemingly incompatible divides (rural/urban, male/female, and wealthy/poor).

Studying Whiteness in South Africa

In post-apartheid South Africa, whiteness is a marked category, but a category that is engaged in a variety of ways. As I argue in this study, some of these engagements can be conceived as voluntary ethical projects aimed at self-transformation. While there are many ways to conceptualize whiteness. Whiteness can be: 1) a mode of self-identification; 2) a social category used to mark status differences and produce hierarchies within a racialized system; and 3) a cultural marker used to designate individual and collective difference. In my view, the individual, social, and cultural meanings attached to whiteness together create a kind of white *habitus*: a system constructed by enduring dispositions, tastes, practices, preferences, moral norms, epistemologies, and ideologies—all of which are deployed in symbolic and material contests for capital. Contra Bourdieu, however, my research seeks to investigate historically contingent processes that may produce gaps or cause contradictions to emerge between individual, cultural, and social meanings of whiteness whereby it becomes possible for white subjects to think, and act, otherwise. While not minimizing

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613 Wreford, “‘Long-Nosed’ Hybrids? Sharing the Experiences of White Izangoma in Contemporary South Africa.”

continuities between the apartheid and post-apartheid periods, my research seeks to uncover the impact of social and political change on contemporary white South Africans and their engagement with these changes. Because the bulk of scholarship on whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa has been done by white South African academics, my research offers an alternative perspective on whiteness, ethics, and social transformation.

Critical Whiteness Studies

Whiteness Studies (or Critical Whiteness Studies) emerged as a distinct academic field in the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Two significant texts are credited with the rise and consolidation of whiteness studies. The first is Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* where Morrison defended the value of “serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters.” The second is Richard Dyer’s *White*, which responded to Morrison by focusing on representations of white culture and white racial imagery in white film and photography. Dyer specified that part of his goal was to make whiteness “strange” so that white people could recognize their particularity rather than continuing to regard themselves as universal, human, transcendent, normative, and superior.

For many scholars, the initial goal of Whiteness Studies was to problematize the racial identity and cultural practices of the dominant white majority in the West through explicit focus on whiteness. Academic work initially came from legal studies, history, feminist studies, education, and cultural studies, but sociological and anthropological

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studies of whiteness also emerged. These studies explored the social and cultural meanings attached to whiteness, and emphasized the need for empirical study of whiteness.618

Whiteness Studies, as an academic field, has faced a number of internal and external critiques. The primary concern is that “whiteness studies” reflects the individual and collective self-interest of white researchers and maintains white privilege in the academy. Whiteness Studies, as an academic enterprise, is thus feared to collapse into white identity politics.619 The connection between whiteness studies and antiracist politics is another topic of debate as the study of whiteness seems to offer progressive white academics an attractive avenue through which to challenge white racism.620 A third critique concerns the conceptual vagueness and reductiveness of whiteness as a category of analysis: the extent to which whiteness comes to represent anything and everything related to privilege and dominance.621

Social scientists have also critiqued literary and cultural studies of whiteness for ignoring the material realities of racial stratification and focusing too heavily on


individual identity performance. Social scientists have focused on how the production of racial identities and groups, including whiteness, is a process of both affiliation and external ascription used to maintain social boundaries and hierarchies of power that are historically contingent. Thus, they argue that whiteness cannot be understood apart from its role in racialized social systems. Because of the historical and social variability of racial categories, as well as significant limits to this variability, they argue that there is a need to rethink whiteness with greater theoretical and analytic complexity, including how it relates to categories of gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality, and to take account effects of globalization and specificities of local contexts.

The value of social scientific study of whiteness is that it can provide insight more broadly to dynamic processes of race-making and culture-making, which counters several problematic tendencies in Whiteness Studies: the tendency to focus on whiteness as an unmarked category, the overdetermination of white racial dominance, and a failure to attend to the dynamic forging of social status. As many scholars caution, it is important not to overstate the case for white racial unconsciousness. Throughout Western history, white racial identity has been asserted and group mobilization has occurred in response to social change and challenges from subordinate groups. In settler colonial contexts like

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622 Ibid.; Hartigan, Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People.
626 Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies.” In White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism, 8.
South Africa, white power was never taken for granted, prompting elaborate systems of justification and defense.\textsuperscript{627} In the United States, there has also been a significant rise of white racial consciousness and anxieties in the post-Civil Rights eras due to increased visibility and influence of social movements based on identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. In this context, whiteness has been reinterpreted as a social liability or as a victim status,\textsuperscript{628} and white racial consciousness has also been directed towards antiracist political projects.\textsuperscript{629}

In my research, I have tried to illuminate the extent to which whiteness can be conceptualized as a marked category, especially in South Africa.\textsuperscript{630} Melissa Steyn has argued that in South Africa, whiteness has never had the quality of invisibility due to its status as a demographic minority, and, currently, it must contend with a state power publically committed to breaking down white racial privilege.\textsuperscript{631} By giving greater analytic attention to a context where whiteness does not appear to function as an unmarked category or an uncontested norm, this study also challenges the view that whiteness is a static marker of power and privilege. As one South African scholar argues, whiteness should not be viewed as a “taken-for-granted negative essence, a place less


\textsuperscript{630} Hartigan, “Who Are These White People?: ‘Rednecks,’ ‘Hillbillies,’ and ‘White Trash’ as Marked Racial Subjects.”; Hartigan, \textit{Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People}.

\textsuperscript{631} Steyn, “As the Postcolonial Moment Deepens: A Response to Green, Sonn, and Matsebula.,” 421.
looked into, a site of unredeemed racism and assumed uniformity." This raises the question of whether there could be alternative meanings attached to whiteness beside racial or national dominance.

Some scholars have argued for an emerging “third wave” in Whiteness Studies that is international and interdisciplinary. This wave examines the empirical role that “whiteness and white identities play in framing and reworking racial categories, hierarchies, and boundaries.” Whiteness is not treated as a static or uniform category of identification, but rather as one of many social relations that shape individual and group identity. Attention is given to the “nuanced and locally specific ways in which whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed, and reinvented.” The focus is on cultural practices and discursive strategies used by white individuals and groups as they struggle to reconstruct or transform their white identities (and privilege) in post-apartheid, post-Civil Rights, and post-imperial contexts.

My research can be placed within this third wave of whiteness studies, and specifically responds to scholars who have called for whiteness studies to be engaged with modernity, the history of European colonialism, and postcolonial contexts. I am particularly interested in tracing the intersections between whiteness, late modernity, and

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633 Frankenberg, “Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness.”
635 Ibid., 8.
postcoloniality. In *Postcolonial Whiteness*, Alfred López argues for the need to explore the role of white cultural norms in postcolonial contexts: how and why whiteness retains its power, status, and desirability after the formal end of the colonial and apartheid eras. López critiques the fact that whiteness studies has been dominated by studies in the United States, which often elide questions of colonialism, while postcolonial studies has rarely attended to questions of European colonial and post-colonial whitenesses.637

López also points out that there are a number of white subjects and groups who consciously view themselves as postcolonial. Yet, there is little elaboration given as to what postcolonial forms of whiteness concretely look like. One possibility emerges in David Hughes’ ethnographic study of whiteness in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Here, postcolonial whiteness is marked by a loss of spatial and social agency and an inability to exercise mastery over one’s physical and social environment; a position deeply at odds with the colonial project.638 Another possibility is found in post-imperial Britain where an awareness of empire informs a re-ethnicization of white Englishness, the production of racialized class hierarchies, and a framework for assessing Britain’s economic progress or decline relative to the rest of the world.639

In post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa, white South Africans have been forced to learn new ways of relating to other racial groups, especially black South Africans who now hold significant political and demographic power. At the same time, white South Africans must also work actively to justify their belonging in a nation state

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increasingly influenced by forms of African nationalism. One way this belonging is justified, I contend, is through demonstrated commitment to projects of self- and social transformation. In such projects the goal of transformation may not be to reject whiteness _per se_. Rather, the goal could be to achieve an alternate form of whiteness that seeks to manage the excesses of privilege in an ethically responsible way.

Given current political and economic realities in South Africa, it is difficult to see the annihilation of whiteness as a meaningful social category, which is why López’s call to attend to “post-mastery” forms of whiteness remains relevant. Whether loss of white agency and control is perceived positively or negatively, what is clear is that white subjects in the postcolony are no longer able to set the terms of their spatial and social belonging unilaterally. Shifting power relations between the formerly colonized and former colonizers _may_ allow for new modes of individual and collective identification, but these modes of identification will need to be negotiated intersubjectively. As Achille Mbembe argues, for white subjects to have a stake in the present and future socio-political order in South Africa, “transformation” will require cross-racial consensus on what it means to achieve “particular forms of ethical life” as well as considerable risk.

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642 Mbembe, “Passages to Freedom,” 17.
Whiteness Studies in South Africa

Over the last decade, scholars within South Africa have begun to argue for the value of studying whiteness: primarily in the social sciences and literary/cultural studies. Such scholarship has been met with a measure of resistance similar to critiques in the United States. Critics fear that it will feed white nationalism, divert valuable resources in academic contexts struggling to embrace Africanization, and create neo-essentialist frameworks for understanding race. But South African academics who defend the study of whiteness have responded by emphasizing the need for more nuanced and intersectional ways of approaching white identity; calling for an acknowledgment of a multiplicity of “blacknesses” and “whitenesses” that are emerging in democratic South Africa; and arguing for the ongoing need to interrogate the power of white cultural norms and entitlements. Scholars have shown how “hegemonic whiteness” in South Africa is both gendered and classed and explored differences and similarities between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking white South Africans to question the role of ethnicity in constructing whiteness. Finally, they have focused on how race continues

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to work in psychic, symbolic, and political ways despite post-apartheid ideals of “non-racialism.” These attempts to nuance and particularize whiteness by South African scholars—as well as locate moments of entanglement, fluidity, and change—need to be critically interpreted against the backdrop of the essentialist ideologies of apartheid as well as the current political context, which continues to be racially charged. Racial markers of difference continue to be deployed strategically by all groups, and, in this regard, ethnicity and culture remain important dimensions of post-apartheid “white talk.”

In *Ethnicity Inc.*, Jean and John Comaroff argue that within the context of neoliberalism, ethnicity, rather than race, is increasingly becoming a site of self-conscious fashioning that creates, or re-creates, important affective, spiritual, communal, and geographical ties as well as a site of commodification where ethnicity is marketed and sold as a natural, essentialized property. Their work helpfully points to the contradictory ways corporate identities can be mobilized in the service of self-making and as a means to access material benefits. The latter use lends itself to sharpening divisions between groups and increasing conflict. In contemporary South Africa, both trends are apparent. Race, culture, and ethnicity, imagined as bounded and fixed entities, continue to be

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mobilized by corporate and political elites for profit. Racial categories are also central to
government policies of redress.652 At the same time, symbolic identification and dis-
identification has been an important means of redefining self and community in response
to apartheid and new social conditions.653

Like all social constructs, race in South Africa continues to hold material
significance in individual and collective life and exercise differential effects. Contrary to
Jeremy Seekings’ conclusion that “race no longer structures economic advantage and
disadvantage” due to government affirmative action policies, whiteness is not
disappearing as a visible marker of economic privilege or as a marker of cultural
difference.654 Nevertheless, the social status and meanings attached to whiteness have
shown dramatic fluctuation and contestation since the formal end of apartheid. The
relative status of whiteness in South Africa reveals some similarities and significant
differences to how whiteness is understood in other contemporary settler colonial
contexts, such as the United States and Australia.655 In these contexts, white people
largely retain political, cultural, and economic dominance. By contrast, in South Africa,
white people have lost political power, and their cultural dominance is contested. Though
they retain economic power, this power is subject to increased competition due to the
rapid growth of black middle and upper classes. What this means is that the whiteness of

652 Daniel Hammett, “Requiring Respect: Searching for Non-Racialism in Post-Apartheid South Africa.,”
653 Mohamed Adhikari, _Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured
654 Jeremy Seekings, _The Continuing Salience of Race_ (Discrimination and, 2008), 1.
655 Meredith J. Green, Christopher C. Sonn, and and Jabulane Matsibula, “Reviewing Whiteness: Theory,
Stevens, “Tactical Reversal or Re-Centring Whiteness? A Response to Green, Sonn, and Matsibula.,” _South
Response to Green, Sonn, and Matsibula.”
South Africans is subject to contestation at every scale of society, though the level of intensity and degree varies according to context.

Changing White Subjectivities

Shifting power relations have forced white South Africans to engage others who have their own sense of rights, entitlements, and possibilities. A significant strand of research has investigated the subjective experiences of white South Africans as they encounter change through analysis of literary writing and other forms of discourse. These studies have found that white people articulated feelings of displacement, stigma, victimization, loss, and uncertainty as they adjust to the “relativization” of whiteness and worked actively to reframe what it means to be white in the new South Africa. Notions of home and belonging have been destabilized, and though there have been significant efforts to restabilize these through manipulation of geographical and social space and rhetoric, high levels of threat, fatigue, and anxiety persist. Widespread experiences of ambivalence and ambiguity reveal a significant contrast with the height of the colonial

656 Steyn, “As the Postcolonial Moment Deepens: A Response to Green, Sonn, and Matsebula.”
658 Steyn, Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be, 85; Vestergaard, “Who’s Got the Map? The Negotiation of Afrikaner Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa.”
and apartheid eras where the privileged boundaries of whiteness were strictly enforced through state violence.

In response to dislocation, some white South Africans embrace notions of hybridity and Africanization, viewing cultural shifts as an opportunity for new experimentation with a more heterogeneous identity or as a way to self-reflexively dealing with white shame and guilt. It is this latter group that remains of particular interest in my research. While a small group, they have often been quite vocal about their desire to embrace processes of change for ethical reasons; yet there has been little attention to their practices and how they work to challenge or reinforce racial and economic inequality.

Efforts at transformation are complicated by the fact that among white Afrikaners there has been a strategic attempt to surrender group “purity” in order to secure a place in South African society. The boundaries of Afrikaner culture are now widened to include other racial groups; thus, “creolizing” Afrikaner identity and distancing Afrikaners from the ethno-nationalism of the apartheid past. Yet, redrawing Afrikaner boundaries to include Coloured South Africans is often done on the basis of perceived cultural similarities, and no attempt is made to include black Africans. The rigid divide between white and black groups makes even more significant those attempts made by white South Africans to engage African culture and blackness; resist discourses of Afro-

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664 Verwey and Quayle, “Whiteness, Racism, and Afrikaner Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa.”
pessimism; critique white economic privilege; and work against cultural parochialism and social segregation. Yet this group continues to be under-researched; perhaps because it is assumed that they are simply making, as Bourdieu puts it, a virtue out of necessity.  

Attempts by some white South Africans to identify as “African” has been met with mixed responses from black South Africans. Sally Matthews found that among undergraduate students, most black students felt that it was illegitimate for white South Africans to call themselves African, though some black students supported this claim through appeals to non-racialism, fluidity of identity categories, or on the basis of demonstrated commitment to Africa. Some black students also felt that “westernized” black people should be excluded from the category “African,” which illustrates a significant binary in post-apartheid South Africa. Matthew’s study reveals the extent to which beliefs about essential, significant, and innate differences between groups remain salient in post-apartheid South Africa.

Cultures of Privilege and Affluence

Another strand of scholarship has drawn attention to the ways white affluence generates new forms of racial and cultural segregation and how colonial and apartheid ideologies still persist. Perhaps the most significant arenas of white hegemony are the private business sector, suburban social space, and academic institutions where white academics dominate knowledge production and dictate institutional norms.

Richard Ballard has discussed the phenomenon of “semigration” or partial emigration among white South Africans who seek to maintain boundaries of comfort and safety through gated neighborhoods, security systems, and exclusive social spaces that work to keep undesirable others out. This phenomenon should be held in tension with what Annika Teppo calls the “publicization” of formerly private, exclusively white spaces, such as the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Mall in Cape Town. Certainly, formerly exclusive spaces are now taking on a public, multiracial, and socially mixed dimension that are experienced as pleasurable by participants as they experiment with new identities. Nevertheless, acts of hostile resistance to the government expressed via media, withdrawal from the public sphere and emigration abroad remain common responses to the relativization of whiteness.

Like the United States, white privilege and power in South Africa have been preserved through recourse to what Steyn calls “strategic anti-essentialism.” Colour-blind and neo-liberal ideologies capitalize on the liberal democratic framework of the state while simultaneously using tropes like the Rainbow Nation to maximize group


advantage. Despite increased interracial contact, many white people continue to “think white” and believe that whiteness ought to be the cultural norm in South Africa. Over the past two decades, scholars have also identified a growing attachment by white South Africans to global, white, Western culture expressed through aesthetic tastes and consumption, which works to draw Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans into a single “white” or “Western” group. In her study of white students in a black-majority desegregated school in Durban, Nadine Dolby finds that white students felt doubly threatened by black violence and black economic prosperity. While they dreamed of psychologically and physically escape from “blackness”, they simultaneously sought to reassert their white identities through affiliation with white global culture.

Among English-speaking white South Africans in particular, there is a common tendency to prioritize individualism, cosmopolitanism, and class identity over cultural identity, and capitalize on international links, which serves to obscure whiteness and preserve cultural hegemony. While white English-speaking South Africans express a liberal belief in racial integration; acceptance of blacks is premised on acceptance of a white, Western, ideology and joint class interests. This leads to the conclusion that as long as elements of white “modern” western culture remain highly desired by other racial groups in South Africa and circulated globally, white South Africans will continue to exercise significant cultural and economic power and be able to position themselves as

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676 Steyn, “As the Postcolonial Moment Deepens: A Response to Green, Sonn, and Masebula.”, 422; Vincent, “The Limitations of ‘Inter-Racial Contact’: Stories from Young South Africa.”


678 Salsbury and Foster, “Rewriting WESSA Identity.”

Given this state of affairs, and extreme economic inequalities, just how white South Africans choose to engage their economic and cultural privilege remains a question of vital social significance.

Whiteness, Religion, and Ethics in South Africa

When it comes to South Africa specifically, themes of religion, spirituality, and ethics together remain minimally discussed in social scientific and literary/cultural analysis of post-apartheid whiteness. Thus, I see my project making a key intervention into scholarship on whiteness in South Africa by attending to the role of religious and spiritual discourse and practice in changing white subjectivities. A few white South African academics have discussed openly the ways in which they, and other white people, might best go about unlearning “whitely habits” of privilege so as to confront white privilege.\footnote{Sally Matthews, “White Anti-Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa.,” \textit{Politikon} 39, no. 2 (2012): 175; Sullivan, \textit{Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege}.} I discussed in my introduction how philosopher Samantha Vice reflected on whether or not, given her white privilege, it was possible to “live well” in South Africa today.\footnote{Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” 323.} Vice concluded that white transformation is best pursued through silent reflection, acceptance of shame, and political withdrawal. This proposal was met with a firestorm of media debate and an entire journal of academic responses,
demonstrating the public and intellectual significance of Vice’s loaded ethical question “How do I live in this strange place?”

Within theology, religious studies, and biblical studies, some white academics have suggested that transformation is best pursued through an embrace of risk and vulnerability vis-à-vis others. For white biblical scholar Gerald West, white transformation also involves betraying “sacred texts” in order to make his own religious tradition of Christianity a site of contestation. For West, troubling race involves working personally to trouble the norms of religion in order to build cross-racial coalitions of social transformation.

The diversity of these approaches demonstrate why anthropologists of ethics have called for greater attention to the variety of ways individuals attempt to work on their selves — this case, on the “white” self. Given the highly religious nature of South African society, religious discourse and ideals may frame and motivate a wide range of quests for transformation: whether this transformation is understood as acts of reparation for the racist past, as resistance to global Western hegemony, as becoming African, or as simply trying to “discover what is worth living for in the midst of troubled times.” Wherever religious symbols, language, and practices are prominent in ethical engagement with whiteness, I include such efforts in my research scope.

685 In a 2001 census, 79.6% of South Africans identified as Christian; 15.1% no religion; 1.5% Islam; 1.2% Hindu; .2% Judaism; .03% African traditional; 1.4% undetermined; and .06% undetermined (Brown 2009, 4).
James Perkinson’s 2004 book *White Theology* provides a North American example of an attempt to articulate an ethics of whiteness that is morally persuasive to others. His is an effort to make white skin “bear another meaning” both for oneself and for people of color.\(^687\) In trying to articulate a “white theology of responsibility,” Perkinson lays out a number of practices that will allow one to move towards “racial maturity.”\(^688\) Such practices involve self-reflection, hearing and internalizing black critiques, learning to confess complicity, struggling against white privilege, confronting fear, giving up certainty and bodily control, and passing through moments of self-horror. Perkinson describes such practices as rituals of baptism, exorcism, and idol-breaking. Importantly, for Perkinson, self-transformation involves “not a denial of the tragic, but embrace of its suffering” and relentless self-confrontation through interracial encounters.\(^689\)

Themes of suffering, redemption, and symbolic reversals are common to religious discourses of transformation, but themes of suffering, self-sacrifice, and desire are also present in secular attempts at white ethical transformation. Emma Kowal’s ethnographic work on white antiracists working in the field of indigenous health in Australia sheds light on the role of suffering and stigma in the lives of liberal, progressive whites who are committed to a post-colonial ethics.\(^690\) Kowal finds that, among her informants, experiences of pain and pleasure work in important ways to affirm commitment to post-colonial practices of restitution and to manage the self-imposed stigma of whiteness.


\(^{688}\) Ibid., 2, 186.

\(^{689}\) Ibid., 196.

Suffering hardship through public service in indigenous communities was viewed as pleasurable because it countered the stigma of dominance; likewise, experiences of acceptance from indigenous people helped relieve white antiracists of the fear of harming others and reassured them of their moral goodness. In such contexts, white antiracists also deliberately worked to privileged indigenous desires and meanings over their own.

Anthony Pinn has been critical of the way “particular bodies accept stigma in order to open space for large-scale social transformation.” His critique is directed primarily at the ways black Christians moralize (and normalize) the suffering of oppression through identification with Jesus in order to provide existential meaning for the stigma of blackness. Given this critique, the connections between the self-stigmatization of white privilege, antiracist suffering, and ethics made in the examples offered above needs to be carefully and critically examined, which I have sought to do in my study. My interlocutress did report a kind of suffering that emerged as a result of encounters with blackness: experiences of misplacement, alienation, and dislocation from white friends, family, and other networks, but they rarely described this as suffering. Experiences of discomfort were always intermingled with always experiences of pleasure and meaning derived from increased contact with and exposure to blackness. In this way, much like white antiracist health workers in Australia, the pedagogical function of suffering in the lives of the progressive whites I studied were bound up with the kinds of relationships they were seeking to establish with others.