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Whites Writing: Letters and Documents of Life in a QLR Project

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The Question and an 'As It Happened' Answer

In thinking about the South African past and its relationship to the present, there is a crucial question to ask, and a helpful way of responding to this:

... how has it come about such a small a number of whites has been able to impose itself on a far greater number of African peoples to achieve its present [1980] position of dominance, exploitation and power? It is, however, a question that can be answered only... by seeing the nineteenth century as it happened not as it turned out... (Marks and Atmore 1980: 2)

And as for the nineteenth, so the same question and response also apply to the seventeenth, eighteenth and twentieth centuries: how did a tiny number of white people come to dominate and to institutionalise in the form of apartheid a system of exploitation and power over a large black majority? This chapter, and the wider Whites Writing Whiteness project it is part of, is concerned with what 'as it happened' consists in and how this might be researched and theorised, including in relation to 'how it turned out;' and it does so by using documents of life in a Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) project. And the 'it' here is of course never a stasis but what Elias (2000) terms a sociogenesis, a continuous process of social becoming, with the 'how it turned out' of apartheid 1980 as noted by Marks and Atmore having given way, following the 1994 democratic transition to majority rule, to something both different and still changing.

Letters and correspondences are everyday documents of life strongly characterised by seriality and succession – their “one thing after another” temporal aspect - and consequently they provide, not only a humanly rich data-source, but one particularly suitable for investigating changes over time. Certainly epistolary scholarship recognises the strongly performative features of letters (Decker 1998), but they also have a complex referentiality regarding the social and material world outside of textuality without which they would not exist (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920, Stanley 2010, Rothschild 2011). Thomas and Znaniecki’s foundational work in *The Polish Peasant In Europe and America* emphasises that letters are a powerful index of social change because their content and also their form or structure is porous and flexible and so registers the changing ‘moment of writing’ (Stanley and Dampier 2006). Letters and correspondences consequently provide particularly appropriate sources for tracing and analysing the unfolding processes of change, for they are longitudinal data *par excellence*, with epistolary exchanges occurring in a temporal momentum or succession and both “sides” in turn writing, sending, reading and replying.

In South African archival locations, there are numerous extensive family letter collections with contents spanning two, three and sometimes six or seven generations of letter-writing. These contents are replete in documents of life terms; they frequently include diaries and memoirs as well as multitudinous family, friendship and business letters; they were written by people of very different backgrounds, European origins, language groups, economic and social circumstances; and they lived in very different geographical locations too. Investigating these extensive letter-writing networks enables whites writing whiteness, and changes in this over time, to be mapped in detail by tracing out their “one thing after another” seriality over the lengthy time-period from the 1770s to the 1970s being researched. Broad patterns and changes over this period are being investigated across a large group of

such collections, with a sub-set of in-depth case studies involving detailed textual analysis of many composing documents.

Momentous changes occurred in the shift over the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from the diverse responses by white traders, missionaries and settlers to the different African peoples who lived across southern Africa, to early twentieth century segregation and then the rise and seemingly monolithic character of apartheid post-1948. But was this change as monolithic as homogenising terms like “segregation” and “apartheid” imply? What were significant points of transition? Were these the same in the different provinces with rather different histories which formed the Union of South Africa in 1910? Did all whites in a particular locality respond similarly, and if not what were the sources of difference and what changes occurred over time?

‘White writing’ (Coetzee 1988) is not just writing whiteness but also the relationship between self and its various Others; it has characteristic silences and elisions, focuses and absences; and occurs in casual and “fabric of life” ways as well as in people’s stated attitudes and views. Precisely how is whiteness and its Others understood, represented and re/configured in letters and correspondences written by these differently situated sets of people over the research period? Rather than taking individuals or families or organisations as its unit of analysis, the WWW project draws on Elias’ ideas about figuration and develops this as domestic figuration (Elias 2000, Stanley and Wise 2011). A domestic figuration is a social network encompassing family, other household members and a wider group of familiars, with its composition changing over time. In the historical South African context, immediate family lived cheek by jowl with other household members such as tutors, governesses and domestic and other servants. Consequently domestic figuration more accurately reflects how people lived and also the contents of the collections researched, although these are typically described as “family” ones in archival finding aids.

How then is social change in South Africa to be explored using the documents of life, the letters and correspondences, that WWW is concerned with? The unfolding usages, variations and changes in whites writing whiteness and its Others is the focus, analysing this around the fundamental seriality and “one thing after another” longitudinal character of letter-writing in inscribing the processes of social becoming or sociogenesis. Temporality and seriality fundamentally mark the longitudinal exchanges occurring in networks of letter-writing; in addition, letters are not simply representations of the social world but are in themselves a form of social engagement and relationship. Consequently sociogenesis can be tracked through comparisons of different letter-writers within a figuration and changes in their letter-writing practices over time; changes regarding a whole figuration over time; and comparisons across figurations at different temporal points. WWW therefore investigates ‘as it happens’ as this was viewed and written about in an unfolding way, by people in a range of networks and over an extensive time-period, using this to address that key question of how a small number of whites imposed itself on a far greater number of African peoples.

This raises the complicated relationship between things as they happened and changed at an everyday, interpersonal and local micro level, and the macro level of “the history” of how it turned out (that is, what historiography represents as the salient or definitional events of the past). Elias (2000) sees the micro and the macro aspects of sociogenesis as inseparably intertwined; indeed, more strongly, he proposes that the accretion of micro becomings result in and produce the macro. This is a gauntlet thrown at the feet of structural approaches in sociology which subsume social life within categorical monoliths like industrialisation, capitalism, globalization and so on, and it accords with “new history” approaches following Thompson’s (1963) dictum that capitalism should be seen, not as a structure, but a relationship. However, while the point made about not imposing static homogenising categories on complex changing contexts and events is well taken, nonetheless many

examples from WWW research indicate that the micro/macro relationship is more complicated and analytically more taxing than this “micro adds up to macro” stance suggests. A number of such examples are now discussed.

Things As They Happened

Periodization and the puzzles of temporality

It has become customary to think in terms of there being nine Frontier Wars between Xhosa peoples and white settlers in the Eastern Cape, dated as 1779-81, 1789-93, 1799-1803, 1811-12, 1834-36, 1846-47, 1850-53, 1856-58 and 1877-79. However, the to-ing and fro-ing of letter-writing from 1820 (when large-scale white migration there occurred) on across a number of settler networks indicates something less clear cut than all-out war followed by delineated periods of peace: a mutual process of attrition with changing mixtures of conflict and peacefulness. Many complicated changes of a backwards and forwards kind on the Eastern Cape frontier are inscribed in letters in Pringle, Bowker and related collections (MS6740, MS19), and these do not articulate closely with historiographical periodization of the frontier wars. Regarding 1850-53, for instance, insofar as ‘war’ is recorded this concerns a lengthy flare up of conflict in the Albany district (between the Bushman’s, Kunap and Great Fish Rivers) during 1851, while the letters of 1850, 1852 and 1853 have a “frontier life as usual” character to them.

What marked 1851 as out of the ordinary for some of these letter-writers was not the increased fighting and settler men being called out for commando duties, which had occurred previously and would again afterwards, but claims and counter-claims concerning the local Boer Commando (Pringle MS6740 f9). A deposition – a formal letter in the form of a testimony providing an account of some claimed events – was written to the local veld-cornet (a role combining legal, military and land arbitration aspects and reporting ‘higher up’ to a district ‘Heemraden’ governing group). It was also sent to William Dods Pringle (1809-

1876), who had been invited to become the local Field Commandant (although he refused). This is accompanied by written witness statements, in a quasi-letter format, sent to the local Resident Magistrate, as well as letters from Major-General Henry Somerset, head of British forces in the Eastern Cape, and from a number of local missionaries. These were written at different points in 1851 and their contents variously overlap, support, undermine, contradict. What was at issue is whether the Commando had held captive some four hundred Khoikhoi (mixed race) women and children and would have massacred them had not there been British military intervention. So states many of these writers, including a British officer and the missionaries; it is however stated to be untrue by others, including Somerset.

What is agreed is that a massacre did not take place; that it would have done, and that it would not have done, are in confrontation. Did the claimed events not happen at all? Was there perhaps a commando intervention but which became exaggerated in re-tellings, for there is no sign in historical accounts of a massacre? Also a generation earlier a commando massacre of what was said to be 1,000 black people had happened elsewhere, so could this perhaps have been conflated with commando raids during 1851? A related Bowker collection contains no mention of such a possibility in its letters. However, Thomas Bowker was a Commandant in the Commando and his brother John Mitford Bowker was a leading light in proclaiming that Xhosa (a powerful African people) and Khoi should be totally crushed, so discreet silence might have been in order here.

The Albany depositions and other epistolary writings invoke a shifting alliance of ‘Englishmen, Fingoes, Hottentots not to be trusted and local boers [i.e. farmers]’ who fought against the Xhosa. Boers (later, Afrikaners) and English-speakers were on same side, but the letters also indicate political and other divisions among the settlers, between those allied with the Commando and Heemraden or not, and regarding how the “Hottentot” (mixed race) troops who fought should be treated subsequently. In addition, time is neither an absolute nor

a given, with the “when” of what was deemed war or not depending on how and where people were situated, and the relationship between what they saw as exceptional and what as ordinary even if conflictual. Also who wrote to whom and why has to be taken into account, for letters are perspectival and express points of view which are shaped by the writer’s views of their addresses and what could be expressed to them, not just about self.

Pinning down the relationship between happenings, social differences and change is difficult even when, perhaps especially when, working in a small compass, because the homogenising effects of scale and lack of contour are absent. “What happens” is experienced differently by differently situated people during a particular period of time, and more profoundly different events occur depending on people’s location, while the effects are not even either. In this case, the exposed frontier-edge position of Pringle family farms, who was and was not involved in the Heemraden group, who held what views about the racial order, all made a difference. Consequently gaining a purchase on this requires a long temporal trajectory and making systematic comparisons over time. Here, the longevity of these collections permits not only looking comparatively at other points in time when “troubles” occurred in the Albany district, but also detailing the to-ing and fro-ing of letter-exchanges across the times between these as well. Doing so shows rivalries and differences between Pringles and Bowkers over a number of generations and emergent very different stances concerning “race,” with the 1881 marriage of Jessie Dods Pringle (seventh child of William) to the liberal magistrate and later politician James Rose Innes one sign of this.

From BaNgwato and BaKwena to ‘darkies?’ Categories and relationships

Elizabeth Lees (known as Bessie) Price (1839-1919) was married to the missionary Roger Price; her letters, journals and reminiscences are voluminous and closely associated with the letters, journals and other papers of her missionary parents Robert and Mary Moffat, brother James Smith Moffat, and older sister Mary who married David Livingstone. Together, these

materials run from 1820 to the 1940s. Living on her parents' mission station in Kuruman in British Bechuanaland (now part of South Africa), Bessie and Roger Price married in 1861 and trekked first to Shoshong and then Logagen, renamed Molepolole, in the then-Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana). They returned to Kuruman in 1885 when Roger Price was appointed to run the Moffat Institute, then Bessie removed to Cape Town after his death in 1900.

Although referred to in archival finding aids as variously letters, journals, autobiography and reminiscences, Bessie Price's writings are in fact of mixed genre, with their basic form being epistolary. Her journals, autobiographies and reminiscences, focused from 1854 to 1883, have an addressee, with questions and direct address made to them; and her letters are typically written on a succession of dates with their contents often of a lengthy 'diary-like' descriptive and aide memoir kind. They were written to keep in touch with her sisters Jeanie and Helen, her mother, and her children when at school in Britain; and also to record the when, what, how and why of things happening in Shoshong and Molepolole. The context was that post took months to arrive; and so while letters presume a response, this would not be expected to occur in a turn and turnabout way; and while the convention is that journals record self/life for self, their day after day aspect lent itself to representing to correspondents her life when opportunities to send letters were as few and far between as receiving them.

Bessie Price's letters contain at times large generalisations about the Bechuana.¹ In 1863, for instance, 'the despicable character of those people' is commented on: this is 'Satan's kingdom' where people are at the level of the beasts; they are dirty (because greasing their skins) and lazily engaged with the moment rather than concerned with 'the life

¹ All underlines, ~~deletions~~ and ^insertions^ in quotations from Bessie Price's writings are in the original manuscripts. Any editorial comments are in [square brackets].

beyond the grave;’ they mock the sick and helpless; they express empty flattery and assume any kindness and sympathy is just a ploy to further selfish ends (15 December 1863, MS5828). In 1880, the emphasis is that ‘we must acknowledge them as “brethren” & “friends” as Christ does us’ and that ‘you [her children] must all love the poor Bechunas’ (5 September 1880, MS5914). Her ‘poor Bechuanas’ here involves a moral and spiritual assessment. For Price, ‘raw natives,’ those who came from beyond the outposts where whites had reached, might have greased bodies and dirty skin coverings, but they had not acquired the trait of unctuous flattery towards whites (23 November 1863, MS5827; 1 October 1879, MS5873; 12 May 1881, MS5940). However, the inhabitants of Kuruman, Shoshong and Molepolole were for Price ‘half civilized’ and she saw the role of missionaries as training them into proper conduct, both external habits regarding labour and internal traits concerning spirituality. BaNgwato and BaKwena children worked from a young age, herding cattle and carrying out domestic labour for their elders, with a succession of them assigned as servants to the Prices. She saw them requiring three months of rigid training and vigilance in case they ‘slipped back’ into their old slothful grubby habits, but could then become helpful and valued (13 June 1879, MS5861). However, this does not indicate any linear change from negativism to tempered sympathy, for Price’s earlier criticisms are tempered. She recognises that, while the negative traits might be representative of Bechuanas in contact with missionaries, those who are ‘unvisited by whites’ are different. She points out ‘There may be a great many exceptions’ and notes many differences between the BaKwena, BaNgwato and other Bechuana groups. She also emphasises the situatedness of what she writes, that ‘I may write ignorantly ... [and] I sometimes change mine opinions ... [because] I write according to my present knowledge & acquaintance’ (15 December 1863, MS5828).

Writing ‘according to my present knowledge & acquaintance’ is a defining feature of Price’s letters and other writings. She responds to new situations as these occur and her

comments shift from general hearsay ones about people, to likes and dislikes about them, to more nuanced “warts and all” appreciations. Thus, for instance, she initially comments that Sechele, then-leader of the BaKwena, was an ‘odious character’ (MS5830), but then closer acquaintance led to a ‘But for all that Sechele was a fine man at heart, & beloved of his people’ assessment (After 1866, MS5990). And once people were better-known, closer-grained distinctions of people’s characters and her dis/like of them are provided. One example involves her very different responses to Sekgoma, head of the BaNgwato (‘a dirty treacherous old Chief ... a despicable & dirty old creature’) and his sons Khama and Khamane (‘always clean & dressed like gentlemen, with courteous & gentle manners’), when living in Shoshong (1862, MS5985). Another is that in the 1880s when she became involved nursing injured and sick people, some of the invalids are ‘poor fellows’ and thought kindly of, while others are portrayed as unpleasant or hostile (20 February 1882, MS5858).

Moreover, Bessie Price’s negative generalisations about ethnic character are not reserved for black groups. She sees white men as swiftly rising above their abilities and worth, ‘immediately unnaturally elevated... once this country’, in her frontier experience with most of them becoming traders, a group she saw having cheating and extortion as the basis of their livelihoods (15 December 1863, MS5828). The Boers living locally are seen in negative terms too, because of their ‘proud & contemptuous’ attitudes to black people, who they ‘oppress shamefully’ (nd, MS5986). However, met at closer quarters, her views change according to situation and her assessment of particular Boer people concerned, as with the Bechuana. Also she and Roger Price as missionary presences are not exempt either, commenting with hindsight, ‘Ah what barbarians & savages we were then, with all our learning & light ... But so we learn slowly, & little by little’ (nd, MS5986).

This raises how Bessie Price saw the missionary presence, as usually the sole whites among many black people. In the 1860s, she comments about the core work of missionary

wives, but not as the teaching role it was conventionally presented as – ‘We wives have precious little of the latter. Our chief work is to keep the Husbands up – up from sinking down gradually into native style of living - & from losing heart & spirits in that great work ...’ (1862, MS5825). The immediate missionary predecessors of Moffat and Price were Johannes van der Kemp and James Read senior, who married African women and were also accused of having extra-marital liaisons with them. Her allusion to this is clear, and also that ‘native style’ might bring loss of faith in the ‘great work’ of Christianising and civilizing. But Bessie Price did become involved in teaching younger BaKwena children and ‘training’ the older children who worked as servants for the Prices. She also accumulated a more permanent closer set of attachments, to child waifs (her term) and orphaned children (23 November 1879, MS5880). This included African, mixed race and Boer children, in 1883 numbering seventeen of them, commenting that ‘I have just felt it a privilege’ to look after them, because ‘realising so keenly’ that her own children could have found themselves similarly dependent on the kindness of strangers if she had died (4 June 1883, MS5966).

Changing configurations of whiteness/blackness and roles and relationships are not one-sided, of course. Missionaries at that time had appointments dependent on acceptance by and the invitation to live among them of the peoples concerned. There was indeed some competition among frontier peoples to have as “their” missionary a high status person. Roger Price seems to have been valued by Bechuna leaders, considerably helped by Bessie being the daughter of the renowned Robert Moffat. However, although his counsels were welcomed, his advice was often ignored, and few permanent converts were made among the BaNgwato or BaKwena. As well as describing Sekhomi as ‘heathenish as ever’ but also ‘a wise politician & just & upright,’ Bessie Price wrote that ‘He treats me like a little pet, whom he likes to tease’ and calls her by a diminutive. It is difficult not to think that the Prices more generally were a kind of exotic pet kept by Sekhomi and the BaKwena, as a sign of their

forwardness, useful in providing goods and medicines, and especially welcome as teachers of writing and reading. This is whiteness and those who represented it being successfully kept in their place, which was to provide what was wanted and not to make unwanted incursions on prevailing ways of life.

Overall regarding whites writing whiteness and its Others, Bessie Price's letters indicate that the closer to the domestic figuration of the Prices and their children, adopted children and servants, then the more likely people are to be named and to be liked and disliked for their own particular behaviours and characters. The further from this, the more that ethnic distinctions are made, and ethnic and other homogenising descriptors (Bechuanas, Boers, traders) are used to characterise people in general terms. In addition, the way Price wrote was highly responsive to the situation and her then-current state of knowledge about people and events, so that initial comments and assessments often give way to later more nuanced ones. And while there are many changes over time, these are not linear or general, but of an up and down and back and forth kind.

The sister Bessie Price mainly wrote to, Jeanie, did not keep any of her writings after March 1868. The letters to her children in Britain end in 1883. Her journals and reminiscences span a number of periods, including between 1868 and 1879, but cease thereafter. A small number of letters from 1899 exist, written to the youngest Price daughter, Christian (Kirstie), and also a few around Roger Price's death in 1900 addressed to 'Sons & Daughters all.' There is, then, a hiatus between 1883 and 1899-1900. This is a lengthy period in which much would have happened at local and interpersonal levels, while the broader context involved economic and political changes occurring in the wake of the discoveries elsewhere of diamonds and gold and the vastly increased patterns of migrant labour that eventuated.

The few short later letters are from Kuruman, where the Prices had removed in 1885, and they contain comments unlike those in Bessie Price's previous writings by deploying colour rather than ethnic categories:

I can't tell you how I long for Xmas, yet not impatiently I think, having plenty to do ... Also, I want to be especially busy for our poor darkies while I have time, having long felt it a bitter reproach that I did so little for them. Last Sunday I began the old afternoon's children's service ... (9 May 1899, MS5971)

What hard times some of us wd. have if our bit of good was not reckoned up for us! These poor darkies here for inst – acknowledged by every one to be the most wretched race – yet they even have their virtues – hidden as it were. (30 May 1899, MS5972)

The word 'darkies' is a colour category in the form of a diminutive, and thus has a double diminishing effect regarding the people living around Kuruman. 'Poor' as a qualifier is often used in Price's earlier writings about the Bechuana but as attached to ethnicity and its sub-divisions and related to people's perceived lack of spiritual grace. 'Poor darkies' is very different in tone and effect because it diminishes and patronises. In these later letters there are no named, known, hostile or charming people, but instead a dark wretched 'race' one feels sorry for, with no information about what the 'poor' and 'wretched' consisted in. So what might have changed between 1883 and 1899 in how Bessie Price saw and represented the black people she lived among?

One possibility is that there was actually no change in her views, that Kuruman was not Shoshong or Molepolole and she was using a generalised colour category because of the ethnically mixed population of Kuruman compared with these more isolated places. Remembering the dialogical character of letter-writing, another possibility is that in writing to the adult Kirstie, her mother was perhaps accommodating her terminology to her daughter's views, using terms she would relate to. It is also possible that, removed from a context in which Bessie Price and her family were present on license and subservient to black

authority, and relocated where her husband was clearly top dog, her ideas about hierarchy perhaps changed because of the elevation in her circumstances and relationship to other people. And another possibility is that Price's changed usage is a sign of a more general shift, the transmutation of ethnic into colour divisions, resulting from wider macro-level changes during the second half of the century.

What happened with whiteness and its Others?

So what do the things that people represented and debated in their epistolary exchanges discussed in this chapter suggest about whiteness and its Others and the processes of change?

Bessie Price's epistolary writings pose the question: was there a change, and of what kind? The Pringle and other Albany letters use distanced categories and sub-categories throughout, even in the earlier period of the 1820s to 40s, with the continued turmoil and unsettled relationships in contested frontier areas relevant here. Another extensive collection, Forbes Family (NAR, A602), spans the period 1849 to 1930 but in Natal and Transvaal and contains letters from a large assortment of people, including friends and wider kin in Britain and Australia, as well as immediate family letters, diaries and other writings. Similarly to the Price materials, the Forbes domestic figuration and distance or closeness from it impacts on whether and in what ways categories or personal identities and relationships are used to characterise other people, so that generalisations about Amaponda, Swazis and "Caffers" coexist with those about Boers, Frenchmen and Germans and also there are specific comments about people named as Mukiquza, Umquaku, Pretorius, Humman and so on. However, for the Forbes family this exists over three generations from 1849 to 1930 without major changes in how different black and white categories, groups and persons are written about, and no sea-change in the periods before and after 1900 is discernible.

Thus far WWW research has added more questions to the key one posed by Marks and Atmore, rather than provided answers. It is however clear that 'as it happened' is

important - but needs to be expanded. Did it happen for everyone, in the same way, and at the same time? Relatedly, different material and political circumstances, people and places, have to be taken into account, for the letter-writing Bechuanaland missionary wives, Albany gentleman farmers and impoverished Natal tradesmen turned farmer-prospectors discussed here were very different in their family backgrounds, material circumstances, moral viewpoints, and also the unfolding materiality of how and where their lives were lived. On one level, it is a matter of “watch this space,” for further work on the many collections to be investigated will expand the temporal boundaries back to the 1770s and forward to the 1970s, and provide greater purchase on the complicated character of change in South Africa and the role of whites writing whiteness and its Others in this. On another, the uneven, non-linear and fractured qualities of the unfolding relationship between the local interpersonal and micro-level of ‘as it happened’ and the macro-level of ‘as it turned out’ indicated here are likely to remain in evidence including over the *longue durée*.

Whites Writing: Letters as Documents of Life

Letter-writing is fascinating in offering small glimpses into other lives, with its artfulness enhancing rather than detracting from its attractions, as does the fact that it is also characterised by referentiality, albeit in a complex and tricky way. Letters and related forms (eg. text, email) are not straightforward factual accounts of how people live, but evidence of how they represent changes in how they understand their lives and their relationships with their addressees, with “how” here recognising changing conventions about letter-writing and also of the material means available for engaging in it. It is from this porous character and representational trickiness of letter-writing that its capacity to act as an index of social change derives. The letters discussed here and the many more being researched as part of WWW of course open up, not “the past” itself, long dead and gone, but something more interesting -

changing views and representations of what was the unfolding present for the people who wrote them.

Many documents of life are researcher-generated in interviews and similar encounters and are in a sense meta-accounts, rather than being of the moment that their content addresses. However, archival documents, including letters, are instead “found” and have recalcitrance in the sense that they represent their own “internal” concerns rather than responding to “external” researcher expectations and requirements. Letters, especially letters *en masse* and written over the *longue durée*, not only have the defining features of seriality and sequence, their longitudinal core, but are also characterised by the immediacy of their content and the highly porous character of their form. *En masse* and over the *longue durée*, WWW’s detailed investigation using letter-writing as its data-source not only enables a close-grained detailed focus on particular lives, but also the analysis of broad patterns and changes over time and as such changes occur - that is, in a prospective rather than retrospective way. In addition, rather than claiming quality and focus, and conceding quantity and scale to more mainstream social sciences methodologies, the WWW project uses documents of life in a way that supports quality and focus *and* quantity and scale. It is a truism that sociology came into existence as a means of investigating social change at a systemic level within capitalism, industrialisation and imperialism; a QLR project using prospective data of a documents of life kind can hopefully deliver on this.

But why South Africa and why whites? To say capitalism is to say imperialism as the highest stage thereof; to say imperialism is to invoke the “scramble for Africa” and the competition for new markets and sources of labour externalisation as well as imperialist possessions; and to say this is to bring the territories that became South Africa into sight. Consequently, if the aim is to understand the processes of such change in an international arena, then South Africa is the eye of the tiger. Also, it is inappropriate that black people

should be the focus if the aim is to understand that key question posed by Marks and Atmore, concerning how white dominion came about. It came about day by day, encounter by encounter, and it was whites who assumed authority, claimed land and resources including human ones, exerted power, and instituted dominion. However, the question remains, *how* did it come about? To address and answer this is to unscramble that other puzzle, of social change and the complexities of the relationship between the local and interpersonal micro-level, and the macro-level - that is, its complex sociogenesis or becoming.

Appendix: The Research Project This Chapter Is Based On

The research discussed here is part of a set of inquiries investigating how South Africa came to be as it was during apartheid. The major components are:

Olive Schreiner Letters Project: Funded by the ESRC (RES-062-23-1286), the OSLP has transcribed the c4800 letters written by Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), an English-speaking South African and an important writer and social theorist. These are now published in a fully-searchable edition, the Olive Schreiner Letters Online, which supports a wide range of secondary analysis (<http://www.oliveschreiner.org>). It also analyses Schreiner's letter-writing over time as an extension of her theorising, using a project-designed Virtual Research Environment (VRE) and its publications contribute to theorising letters and epistolarity, and also to South African historiography by exploring the ideas and activities of a leading social commentator as well as theorist (see here, <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/TeamPublications.html>).

Post/Memory: Women's Testimonies, Memorialization and the Concentration Camps of the South African War: Funded by the British Academy, the Post/Memory project has explored white women's role in the growth of proto-nationalism 1899 to 1948, researching events in 'at the time' sources concerning the refugee camps (aka concentration camps) of the South African War; how the 'memory' of these was subsequently represented by proto-nationalist

women in their autobiographical testimonies; and later uses of these in memorialisation activities instituted by successive Nationalist governments. Its focus is the over time production of these testimonies as unquestionably ‘the history’ and the related expunging of contrary versions in the post/memory process (Stanley 2008).

Whites Writing Whiteness: Funded as an ESRC Professorial Fellowship, the Whites Writing Whiteness (WWW) project investigates how and why the configuration of “race” has taken the form it has in South Africa. It explores changing representations of whiteness and its Others in the context of social, economic and political transformations occurring from the 1770s to the 1970s, and the relationship between the local and interpersonal micro-level, and macro-level social change. It does so by investigating letter-writing and letter-exchanges in a wide range of social networks over this period.

WWW is a qualitative, documents of life based, QLR project. It explores how people cooperatively and antagonistically interpreted and represented people and events in their letters. Core research questions include: In what ways was “race” enacted from the early colonial period, through imperialist interventions, to the 1948 National Party election victory and apartheid, then Sharpeville, the 1970s and the winds of change? What resistances and accommodations occurred in different areas of the country, and from what individuals and networks of different ethnic, political, economic and religious standing? And, how did people represent such things to each other over time in their letters, correspondences and other documents of life?

Useful Further Reading

Marc de Villiers’s (1987) *White Tribe Dreaming: Apartheid’s Bitter Roots as Witnessed by Eight Generations of an Afrikaner Family* explores the South African past as represented and understood at a personal and local level by Afrikaners. The de Villiers family letters, diaries and papers are referred to but alas not drawn on in any depth. Its conclusions have been

overtaken by the post-1994 political transition, but it provides a still interesting and readable discussion of the historical construction of whiteness.

Baur and Ernst's (2011) chapter, 'Towards a process-oriented methodology: modern social science research methods and Norbert Elias's figurational sociology', provides an admirable discussion of how Elias's ideas can translate into research practice. Many discussions ignore Elias's emphasis on the processual and refusal to separate the substantive and the theoretical, while their chapter returns to such root matters.

Julie McLeod and Rachel Thompson's (2009) excellent *Researching Social Change: Qualitative Approaches* combines discussing case studies of research-based exemplars with setting out how qualitative researchers can think about and research change in social and inter-personal life. Memory, being, generation, affect and temporality are considered and the principles and practice of Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) helpfully discussed. They emphasise that 'a qualitative approach to longitudinal research is able to provide the "close-up" shot of real lives, with a focus on plot, story line, turning points and defining moments' and recognise the 'inherent seriality' it involves (61).

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Cory Library, Grahamstown: Bowker Family, Elizabeth Lees Price, Pringle Family.

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