Mothers of Apartheid
Black Domestic Servants and Their Little Masters

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In the middle of the 1986 documentary, Maids and Madams, a film that explores the detrimental effects of black domestic servitude in South Africa, Bernadette Mosala of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), asks a group of young black children standing within the four-sided tin walls of a shanty, “do you think your mothers’ love those white children?” the group responded with a resounding “Yes.”¹ The memory histories presented throughout this work would appear to complement the concerns of these black children. The narratives collected throughout this work communicate a relationship of affect, often deep love and admiration, between some middle-class white children and the black domestics employed to care for them. However, for all the recollections of love, apartheid legislation effectively funneled black women into domestic servitude helping to fracture black family structures, while also utilizing the black female body to communicate subservience within the white household as a daily reminder of the larger system of racial segregation and hierarchization. Therefore, any memories of the love between whites and black domestics are ensnared within the racist, classist, and sexist ideologies that children were introduced and participated in. The children from these narratives must confront the tension between their affect and the ideologies of difference, while also experiencing the violent upheaval of apartheid beginning in the mid-1970s. The tension and anxieties of love, admiration, racism, classism, and sexism during apartheid’s

collapse influenced the construction of these personal narratives and reveals the strained, restructured social relationships of post-apartheid South Africa.

This work situates race, gender, class, bodies, and space into overlapping constructs as methods of communicating national, social, and personal anxieties, while simultaneously being experienced with emotions of love and admiration. South Africa is a place of frontiers and borders, a settler colonial region that legally divided land between South Africa’s racialized communities forcing the internal diaspora of millions of people to *bantustans*, townships, shanty towns, and other racialized communities. In doing so, South Africans of color often lived geographically distant and different lives. However, apartheid South Africa could never feasibly separate white and black existences and petty apartheid actually contributed to the desegregated performance of racialized difference. The frontier and border in apartheid South Africa demarcated white and black spaces, as both a terrestrial manifestation and a cognitive construction. South Africans of color existed on the terrestrial periphery, which supported the processes of abstraction and othering, but when these racialized communities did come into contact, when the frontier and border transitioned to the terrestrial center from a white perspective, the encounters were cast within unequal power relationships. Therefore, I conceive of apartheid South Africa not as a place of fixed frontiers and borders, but rather a place of “oscillating frontiers,” where the perceptual region of white South Africans needed both the distant and the intimate border and frontier. A representation of this occurred in the frontiers and borders of the kitchen and living room and the interaction between whites and blacks. As domestic servants, these women performed a subservient role, a uniquely, extended intimate encounter, with the opportunity for affect, but still embedded with unequal power dynamics. The domestic-child relationship between whites and blacks offered the opportunity to confront the abstraction and othering of the peripheral. However, to address this, black domestics were either housed in separate quarters or travelled home after work, tearing at the possible emotive bonds and exacerbating the ideologies of difference. While domestic servitude offered the opportunity to bridge the disparity between white and black existence, the racism, classism, sexism, and processes of distancing problematizes the affect felt and experienced.
Beginning in the mid-1970s and 1980s, the collapsing physical and emotional space being negotiated in the homes of white families began to be mirrored in the white streets of South Africa’s cities during the collapse of apartheid. The Soweto protests and subsequent State of Emergencies brought the black experience and violent oppression to the forefront of white’s perceptual regions penetrating the “oscillating frontier.” The tensions between affect, racism, classism, and sexism during the violent upheaval of apartheid influenced the construction of these memories and developed new racialized social relationships that entangle nostalgia with current racial tensions.

The Apartheid Archives Project is a transnationally formed scholarly body that gathers and studies the stories of South Africans. Since 2008, the project has been open for public submissions from all South Africans born before 1994. These submissions are reviewed by the researchers and then anonymized unless the narrator desires otherwise, though in many instances anonymity is maintained. This research collected the memory narratives of whites who mentioned domestic work in any manner. These narratives come from people aged from their late 20s – 60s speaking about their childhood. The sources offer a unique perspective that presents opportunities for argumentation, but also highlights the issues with memory formation and how they feature elements of both the past and the present, the lived experiences and the discourses of each of those. A historian must carefully maintain analyses of both, acknowledging the lived experience and the discourses of the remembered event and of the memory construction as it occurred. This work attempts to do so by charting the social contributions of each era, supplanting the memories with other sources.

Scholars of memories and those that deploy memories for their scholarly work have often confronted the ways in which they and others must utilize the sources provided to them. This is explicitly prudent for scholars of South African memories, conditioned by the cultural, political, societal, and


economic structures of apartheid. It is in the remembering of memories and formation of the past for South Africans, which will forever be colored by the divisive lens of the apartheid system. Memories for South Africans that lived through apartheid and into the transitioning and (post)apartheid world may attempt to fit past experiences into evolving ideas and ideals. *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* edited by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee collects sixteen essays which address the issue in diverse and varied methods. The first two essays by Njabulo Ndebele and Andre Brink specifically focus on truth, memory, and narrative. Ndebele’s “Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative” postulates that as more narratives are produced, these “may have less and less to do with facts themselves . . . than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts.”

The tinkering and formation of memories, the process of recreation exists with a set of meanings or conclusions that can be derived from. This is important to consider when focusing on white South Africans who have had their entire discourses and therefore their memories become obsolete. In addressing this, Ndebele continues by exploring the creation of “the bleeding-heart, English-speaking liberal South African, who has no understanding of why he is hated so much when he sacrificed so much for the oppressed.” In an effort to become a ‘good’ white South African, an amnesia develops about the passivity and complicity of apartheid life for English-speaking whites. The blame, and to an extent rightfully so, is shifted to the Afrikaans-speaking white, while English-speakers fall back on a tenuous legacy of progressive, anti-apartheid ideology.

On the other hand, Andre Brink in “Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative” states that “the individual constitutes and invents her/himself through the constant editing and re-editing of

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memories.” Memories are like a puzzle with pieces that must fit within a realm of ‘reality’ and ‘fact’ but are not completely tied to these concepts. Moments can be adopted, rearranged, or completely forgotten as one comes to term with these moments and the structures that existed in the past. Brink grapples with how a “story tacitly narrates an event . . . it is infused with, and transformed by, the notoriously unreliable complex of private motivations . . . that constitute the idiosyncratic, individual mind,” continuing “we can never be sure of it or gain access to it, and that the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors.” It is important to reconsider this and other historical writing is just another recreation with private motivations of an individual’s mind. These narratives are unquestionably shaped by post-apartheid discourses but the mere fact that a post-apartheid discourse exists and that these narrators understand the evolution and shedding of discourses represents a shift in the way people think and talk about their past.

The focus of scholarly works such as Jacklyn Cock’s *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*, Alison Jill King’s *Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Deference and Disdain* and Shireen Ally’s *From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State* has been to unveil and explore this hidden exploitative relationship between whites and blacks in South Africa. This important and necessary research unveiled an often hidden but integral part of South African life. From this research, Cock and then others after her uncovered that the impacts of this “coexisting” between black domestics and white families extended and were more complex than exploitation and seeped beyond into the social order. One manifestation of this was the importance of the black domestic in caring for the child while being forced to ignore their own children.


This harkens back to the introductory paragraph, which referenced the relationship that developed between black domestics and white children in *Maids and Madams*. However, Cock does not interview any white children during her studies. Furthermore, consistent with her Marxist and feminist analysis, Cock argues that “domestic labour is the instrument whereby white women escape from some of the constraints of their domestic roles.”

This analysis shifts the focus back to the black and white adults ignoring the emotive relationship that developed between white children and their primary caregivers. Without interviewing and researching white children’s perspective, Cock maintained that “domestic service [was] the only significant inter-racial contact whites experience, and they experience the relationship in extremely asymmetrical terms,” leading “many white South African children [to be] socialized into the dominant ideological order and learn the attitudes and styles of racial domination.”

Similarly, King’s *Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa* cites the aforementioned quote describing Cock’s “recognition of the seriousness of the impact of racial difference to class positioning in the childcare situation.” Whereas Cock attempted to perform a broad survey interviewing 225 people and focusing on the Eastern Cape, King prefers an “in-depth analysis of a small number of domestic service relationships.”

King’s work is not interested in “Marxist analysis,” but rather the “dependencies . . . and the feelings of the individuals involved.” King begins by presenting a story of a Johannesburg businessman who remembered “his nanny was like a ‘second mother’ to him,” and he repaid this kindness by providing her son with a janitorial position. King cites this as “indicative of the fact that within the childcare provision of domestic service race and class positioning are reinforced emphatically rather than realigned,” and while this may be true- this analysis disregards the relationship that developed and that in this instance the white businessman truly believes

11. Ibid., 3.
13. Ibid., 6.
14. Ibid.
his actions to be invoking emotive bonds.\textsuperscript{15} King, again, touches these ideas when discussing fellow sociologist Bridget Anderson’s work on domestic labor who argued “that when care is bought it ceases to be real care, because this is not a commodity that can be bought and sold.”\textsuperscript{16} The perspective of Cock, King, and Anderson are rooted in sociological work and embedded in an economic perspective that does not allow for the exploration of the feelings because as King writes later, “there are many instances of genuine bonding between employers and their servants, but this is not the point.”\textsuperscript{17} In this paper, that is exactly the point that will be discussed.

Shireen Ally’s \textit{From Servants to Workers} captures the affectual ties established when discussing one domestic worker, Mavis Khubelo’s tight-knit familial love for the white children under her care.\textsuperscript{18} Ally expands upon the arguments in Cock and King by discussing the “‘like one of the family myth’” and that “paid domestic work [is] a practice of power.”\textsuperscript{19} Ally deviates from her counterparts by describing domestic labor as existing “in the tenacious continuities of the logics of apartheid servitude alongside some modernizing transformations.”\textsuperscript{20} Though Ally does not completely agree with Cock and King, she like the others, does not explore domestic labor from the perspective of whites and though this is understandable it creates an incomplete image. As long as certain white perspectives are missing, those from children or in this research of children, the economic paradigm is maintained, and furthermore the unwillingness to understand what the discourses surrounding domestic labor mean for those creating it not just those it is about- the story of domestic labor in South Africa will be incomplete. Arguments like those reiterated in Fish’s article which prefaces Cock’s assertion that the “institutionalised nature,” of domestic labor “was a direct reflection of the predominance of systems of race, class and gender

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} King, \textit{Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa}, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} King, \textit{Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa}, 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ally, \textit{From Servants to Workers}, 96.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 98.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 15.
\end{itemize}
inequalities that defined conditions of this time,” will continue to exist oversimplified.21

For more contextualization, Ann Laura Stoler’s *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* discusses children’s refusal to adopt the entirety of adult culture in the Dutch East Indies. Rather, children accept hierarchical structures in “partial and imperfect ways . . . [where] they learn certain normative conventions and not others and frequently defy the divisions that adults are wont to draw.”22 In an attempt to address these concerns, colonial governments passed legislation that separated children form ‘native’ laborers and which supported lower-class children and their families. Similar attempts to separate white children and black domestics occurred in South Africa, where houses would be placed in the middle of lots with domestic quarters being situated away from the main home.23 Instead of the racial hierarchy remaining fixed and similar over time, the racial hierarchy supported by domestic servitude molted over time, connected to the external and internal political, social, and economic factors. For generations, apartheid cast South Africans of color from white spaces, allowing for opportunities of contact to communicate the difference explicitly, while normally relying upon the abstraction of blackness to maintain racial order and hierarchies. Domestic servitude represented the few opportunities for children to connect for an extended time with a South African of color endangering the abstraction and performances of difference that maintained black inferiority. These moments of affect and intimacy occurred within a larger shift of white and black contact as the protests and violent suppression challenged preconceived notions as these middle-class white children grew into adults during the 1990s and 2000s.

The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) is a research organization founded in 1929. The organization purports a liberal

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ideology with support from various religious groups. In 1973, Sue Gordon, a member of various Domestic worker rights’ groups, produced a booklet in conjunction with SAIRR titled *Domestic Workers: A Handbook for Housewives.* New editions were printed in November of 1973, November of 1974, and June of 1975. The booklet presents the ideal relationship between a white employer and a black domestic. In a section titled “The children of the household,” Gordon writes “in all African societies . . . the respect for the aged [is important] . . . it is thus particularly distressing for an adult African to have to take orders from a child . . . care should be taken that children always treat the African worker with courtesy. As always in such matters, example is more important than precept: children will emulate the behaviour of their elders.” This help book captures the complex and conflicting nature of the relationship between whites and blacks. This booklet presents “African” cultural norms within a largely patronizing tone making sweeping generalization that these norms transcend all African societies. Even if we are to take this as just black South African societies, the diversity of black South Africans makes this problematic. Distressing is also an interesting term which has connections to emotions, particularly anxiety and weak fortitude, which could be tied back to the racialization and gendering of the domestic that strips them of power while coding the female and the black as weak. Courtesy, too, has meaningfulness, because it describes the awareness and the performance of politeness. The booklet features consistently problematic language which is couched in concepts of understanding and acceptance, that attempt to frame itself as for the betterment of black-white work relationships.

Another section describes the unfair wage gap and asserts that whites should pay a livable wage to their domestics. Gordon also argues that whites should never yell at their domestic, should take them to the bus stop, and should provide two weeks full paid sick leave. This book encapsulates many of the arguments this paper is attempting to support. The creation of this booklet represents that the ideal relationship between a white employer and


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 17.
black domestic was civil, cordial, and respectful. This booklet’s arguments place itself as a development on past discourses and relations, but this does not mean that it is nuanced in its understandings of race, class, and gender. In “Towards a Harmonious Relationship”, Gordon maintains that “no single simple step that would generate so much goodwill as the abandonment of the terms ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ for African adults,” however this comes after a section which deems the term “manservant” to be acceptable.27 Over time, the ideals of the relationship between white employers and black domestics changed, the ideal language, the ideal actions, how this relationship was ideally talked about and what it all meant changed and evolved over time.

“My name is Mandela, I’m a monkey like you, I live in Soweto, in toilet number two.” The above quote was recalled by a twenty four year old white male when describing his childhood. This rhyme was being propagated into the early 1990s by young white children, which, as the narrator notes, represents the idea that children could accept in such a playful manner the ideas of racism “shows [how] easily insulting racial identities and stereotypes where circulated at the time.”28 This sentiment is shared by another white South African living in Australia who did not remember, “ever being told that whites and blacks shouldn’t mix but I clearly picked up this unspoken message from the divides that existed everywhere around me. This was something I simply accepted as a given.”29 Racialized thought developed the ideological foundations for apartheid and the power of apartheid was in its ability to reproduce these ideas. For many whites, especially children, their isolated existence from blacks fostered the development of ideas of the other and the unknown. A foundation of other-forming comes from the inability or the lack of a desire to understand something new in the colonial experience. For children, their early development in a white community and within white areas formed “a

blanket of comfort that [was] far-removed from the reality of the time and
the reality that a great number of my contemporaries would have grown up
with.”

The pleasure, leisure, and wealth afforded to white South Africans allowed them to exist in a world distant from black life and the often violent oppression of these groups.

The man’s narration begins by discussing his relationship with his parents and how they never shared any political or racist sentiments. By describing the indoctrination into apartheid ideology as all-encompassing, figures like this narrator’s parents are offered a reprieve from the guilt. In presenting his family life in this manner, this narrator’s submission shares similarities with others, where the passivity and complicity of apartheid life is evoked. The man’s narrative continues “for not only was Soweto a strange, far-away place, so too where people lived there. In my youth, black people appeared as maids and gardeners, and like Soweto, did not really seem to be part of the world I was living in.”

The realization of the separate spheres of existence breaks down the idea. While the people this man encountered did not seem to be a part of the world he lived in, their existence altered the white existence. An unadulterated white community were reminded of black existence through the relationship of laborers, importantly for children—maids or domestics. Similarly, another narrative described how they “grew up in a home in which we employed no nanny or maid or ‘garden boy’ – at least up until my early teens. So my contact with black people as a child was limited to seeing them in the street or working in the homes of friends.”

In apartheid South Africa, domestics were unknowing expressions of black existence and black life for whites. The relationship that could develop would become the unique, solitary bond between whiteness and blackness that could possibly break down the walls created by racism and apartheid. This narrator continues, remembering domestics lying on the grass


31. Ibid.

speaking in their “own language – I remember the foreign sounds more than anything.” In describing the domestics as having different and foreign languages reiterates the ideas of separation. Black South Africans were so much not a part of white South African life that their language and everything that entails felt completely foreign— not South African. Connections can be made to the bantustans and the efforts by the South African government to remove citizenship and to force autonomy on bantustan inhabitants. The distance and difference between whites and blacks existed on two levels. Blacks lived in separate areas and were being expelled from South Africa becoming foreigners. Also, this distance made encounters between whites and blacks as those between people so different that they in fact felt foreign. The narrator continues, “thus black people, although very much in evidence in the outside world, didn’t really exist in my own family world. I viewed them as something strange and ‘other’.” White children were cognizant of black Africans and the position of domestic worker, but when they were not raised by a black domestic, the black African remained an ‘other’ shrouded in mystery and the unknown. Through this we can reconsider Jacklyn Cock’s assertion that domestics were the only mixed racial contact for many whites. Though apartheid attempted to maintain the separation of the different racialized groups, the infeasibility of the plan made this impossible. White and black encounters occurred often, though through performances of difference, such as through employment or petty apartheid legislation. Both of these, presented and represented the differences in white and black life. Domestic labor existed in a different realm, because though these were exploitative, asymmetrical relationships, the opportunity for intimate contact that could develop affect could humanize black South Africans.

The narrator also mentioned that domestics “would wave to me when they saw me but I didn’t know any of them by name.” 33 As children, this white narrator was still conceptualized as innocent by these domestics. In waving, these domestics are being friendly to the white child. This is formed in the narrator’s memory but is juxtaposed to the second part of

sentence which states that he did not know their names. This captures the distance between the two but the possible, fleeting affect that could also be shown between these two groups. Domestics and their relationships with some white children could dispel and disprove the many unknowns and mysteries surrounding whites and blacks in South Africa. Domestic labor in South Africa could not possibly then only reproduce the social order because the formed emotive bonds clarified and questioned the hierarchies established.

A white female in her fifties remembered accepting the difference in apartheid existence. Furthermore, she like many of the other narratives recalled “that the black people we met were mostly domestic workers or garden workers.” While conversing with a friend one day, the friend told her “that her nanny had taken her on the bus with her, one of the old green Putco buses. I felt envious of her and wished that I could go on a ride on a Putco bus too full of singing people. I longed to be part of those singing people.” In this narrative, the narrator’s friend felt the need to share their experience. This means that this friend appreciated or at least acknowledged their domestic and enjoyed the experience. The bond that developed between the friend and her domestic from this shared experience of a bus ride was a source of pride that the friend could compare to the narrator. In forming the memory, the narrator recalled how the people on the bus were singing. The narrator remains critical of other aspects of her life placing whites as either being cruel or into other similar but more moderate categories. In doing this, the narrator establishes a dichotomy between white existence as angry, violent, and unjust while black people are not. The singing people on the bus are friendly, joyous different from the unfair, uptight white people in her life. Also noteworthy is the phrase “to be part of” which situates the narrator clearly away from the people in the singing people in the bus. The narrator understands that she is not and cannot be a member of these people. The separation of white and black life is quite clear for this narrator. Furthermore, the PUTCO bus line was a major mode of transportation for


35. Ibid.
non-whites, legalized by the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953. Whites would then, never ride on the PUTCO bus line unless in the company of a non-white African. Therefore, the domestic served a bridge between white and black existence. The narrator was envious because she did not have this relationship and could not experience the other side of the apartheid world.

A thirty year old white African remembered growing up “in a lower middle class white suburb. At that time my only personal encounters with black people were our maids and gardeners. The fact that my parents had a full time maid when they weren’t particularly well off themselves is telling in any event.”36 This quote recalls the class structure embedded in the South African experience. Domestics represented a status symbol for many white Africans. Within the hierarchical structure of apartheid, there existed layers of whiteness based upon ethnic differences such as English-speakers, Jews, Greeks, Portuguese and class differences. The narrator is very aware of the different class their family was a part of. Nevertheless, the family employed both domestics and gardeners represents that the employment of black South Africans was something to seek, to ascertain in the development of the dream white South African lifestyle. For white parents, domestics were a symbol of their success in life. Even though the narrator grew up in a lower middle class life their maid had separate quarters which he “would at times want to visit the maid in her room in our garden (“the maid’s quarters” is the term I remember being used) but was not allowed by my parents.”37

In Rebecca Ginsburg’s *At Home with Apartheid: The Hidden Landscapes of Domestic Service in Johannesburg*, houses in South Africa were built to accommodate domestics and to separate their existence whenever possible. Within the house, the employers set out parameters including domestics’ inability to use white toilets or use silverware. Ginsburg writes about how “popular ideas about hygiene and ‘Black germs’ . . . justified practices like the use of separate plates, outdoor toilets.”38 Through the efforts of international


and domestic activists and the relationship between domestics and white people the ideas on contamination changed. By the late 1970s and 1980s, ideas around black domestics possibly contaminating whites were no longer acceptable or utilized. Ideas of contamination were shed and replaced with the idea of whites letting blacks use the same items. In a (post)apartheid world, many black domestics are now free to use the same items as whites. The fears that domestics will ‘Africanize’ your items no longer exists. The constant relationship of black domestics and whites bridged the gap during the evolutions on the acceptability of racial discourses. The narrator continues by struggling with “an old outdated order with what I know today, it is difficult to untangle and label “racism,” before continuing “I was taught as a child to always be polite to the domestic workers and can certainly remember being fond of all the women who worked in our house.”

This section represents the conflicting and problematic ideas that whites maintained black domestics. The whites in this instance would contend that in “being nice,” this narrator is challenging the notions presented by Cock about the relationship between domestics and whites. Not only did Cock consider children passive receptors of asymmetrical employer/employee relationships but that also parents were actively developing ideas of difference and other-ness. By using ‘polite’ the narrator could be presenting respect and admiration for their domestics. Also, the narrator describes being fond or having an affection or liking to his domestics. If we are to assume this, we can understand this narrative as an example that white existence was not only not always hostile but also welcoming to black existence. However, “being nice” can be viewed in an entirely different perspective. While ‘polite’ can mean being respectful and nice, it also carries with it connotations of Western civilization and bourgeois behavior. Polite posits a relationship based upon the norms of white life onto the black domestic. Furthermore, the idea of being taught to be ‘polite’ could be in an effort to prove this families’ desire to appear civilized and nice. The narrator’s utilization of ‘fond’ is imbued with an asymmetrical power dynamic. Fond such as ‘polite’ have connotations of difference and

of false or problematic affect. They are terms of ‘being nice’ but intertwined with concepts of power. The narrative explores “a kind of detachment . . . either . . . learnt from my parents or decided for myself was the only viable way of relating and this is what allowed racism to go unquestioned. Don’t get too involved. Remain professional. (I don’t want to know.)”

This section would seem to prove Cock and other scholars assertion that distance was a central part of the white and black experience. Rather I see this as representing the understanding that racism exists unquestioned until a connection is made between people. The development of affect removed, though never entirely, from the societal constructs, was an effective tool in breaking down the racialized barriers. Domestics linked white children to a possible non-racial or anti-apartheid understanding. However for the narrator in post-apartheid South Africa “these experiences continue to have an impact on me.”

The narrator concludes by expressing that they “know much more about these peoples lives and will even have conversations about current South African politics (albeit still in broken Afrikaans).” In Maids and Madams, language is often brought up as a barrier between domestics and their white employers. In this instance, the narrator and the domestic share a language of another group. This breaks down the barriers that may have existed or persisted and their desire to speak even while struggling represents an attempt to become involved in their experiences, ideas, and understandings- linking them as people. This narrator engages with the idea of acceptability by saying that they know more about them and talk to them. This could possibly show that this narrator has developed a new perspective and set of beliefs. However, the narrator uses distancing terms like ‘these people’ which maintains the distance and difference. This narrator ruminates on the relationship between domestics and whites and questions how they


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.
would establish such a working relationship.\textsuperscript{43}

The narrator considers questions of domestic labor in South Africa in a post-apartheid world. The questions are left unanswered as South Africans still work through and try to understand the structures that controlled their life and continue to do so. Though these answers are difficult to find, the experience of a white person and their domestic precipitated the questioning process and the reflection of the different lives of blacks and whites in South Africa. By questioning the meaning and intricacies of the relationship, this white narrator represents at least some shift within the some whites’ perceptions of black domestic labor.

A woman in her twenties living in the Guateng province recalled moving to South Africa from Botswana with her “domestic worker (Doris) [who] was like a second mother to me.”\textsuperscript{44} The woman remembers Doris “being a part of our family” as they explored the coastal regions as neither had seen the ocean.\textsuperscript{45} This young woman places a high level of affect and importance to Doris, her domestic. However, it should be noted that Doris was a part of her family and not her own. Without further background on Doris, this situation cannot be explored further. However, for all of the affect that whites attach to their domestic it is paramount to consider the distancing that domestic labor caused in black family structures. During their holiday, the narrator and her sister innocently demanded ice cream from their parents which became “the first day in my life that I realized people weren’t all the same and equal in the eyes of the world.”\textsuperscript{46} The family entered a Milky Lane, a South African dessert shop, and waited for service. After some time, the narrator’s father asked for service from a waiter but was ignored. Some more time passed when a manager walked towards the family and said “he wouldn’t serve us if ‘she’ was with us and that they

\textsuperscript{43} Narrative N50, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009-URL:http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced=U/Collections&c=124877/R/AG3275-B-1-41-50, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{44} Narrative N26, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009-URL:http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced=U/Collections&c=124875/R/AG3275-B-1-21-30, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{45} Ib\textit{id}.

\textsuperscript{46} Ib\textit{id}.
don’t serve ‘her kind’. He said she had to leave and wait outside while we ate.” The family left even though Doris contested saying “that she didn’t mind waiting outside but my dad had made up his mind and we left.” In this memory, this family exists removed from South African society. Doris is an important part of this difference. The two young girls frustrated by the lack of ice cream and emotionally charged moments were left confused until their “father sat my sister and I down and tried to explain to us the intricacies of the system of Apartheid. He explained that in South Africa people didn’t like the black people and thought they were different to us. He also made the point that we should not change how we think and always remember that we are equal no matter what anyone says.” The two children are introduced to the racialized world and how their family accept an alternative narrative. This experience may not have happened so soon or even at all if Doris had not been a victim of the racist sentiment of South Africans. The young woman continued to ruminate on the experience saying “I guess a lot changed within me. I have always remembered it and as have matured I have questioned more and more how that made Doris feel.” In this memory, the narrator is able to return and attempt to explore the meaningfulness of it. The close affectual bond described by the narrator coupled with the experience represents the possibilities that black domestics had for white children. The narrator wondered “if I was a bad person because I was white/ I think that it made me question my identity and the role of colour in discrimination. When I think back on it I feel pity not only for Doris but for my parents as well. They were helpless and could not fight for her, they could not demand that the manager serve us and could not change things for Doris; I often wondered how that made them feel.” This part of the narrative marks a shift. This experience fosters and develops ‘white guilt’ in the narrator. This ‘white guilt’ becomes a common attribute for many white South Africans of the post-apartheid world. It expresses a disgust and refusal of past discourses but also suffers from


48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.
bouts of amnesia. Furthermore, it places the focus of the experiences back onto the whites. This narrative becomes less about Doris and more about the guilt of being white and African.

In the white suburb of Westville in the Natal (KwaZulu Natal) province, a forty year old female focused on her memories of blacks how they always existed in a world subservient to her and other whites. This was part of the normalized world where “people of other races were “other”, that we should be separated from one another, and that this represented a “harmonious” equilibrium.”\textsuperscript{50} The narrator discusses how, “A black person never had a surname . . . My friends’ maids were introduced to me as “Beauty”, “Precious”, “Lydia” and the like.”\textsuperscript{51} The narrative makes a stark shift in tone when the narrator plainly states that her experience with her domestic was a “wake-up call.”\textsuperscript{52} The narrator remembered

I was brought up by a Zulu maid, Crezentia Zaca, who we called ‘Zaza’. . . . My expectation that she would approach our relationship from a position of complete subservience was sorely misplaced. When Zaza told me to pick up my clothes from the floor, I did not feel the need to take her seriously. I uttered a few choice words to her, with racial connotations, and received in turn a few hard slaps to the bottom.\textsuperscript{53}

The narrator grew up with the understanding that subservience was acceptable. She refused to take orders from Zaza because Zaza should have supported the subservient role that the child understood. The child utilized racial words, another example of how easily racialized language and hierarchical thought existed for developing white children. The repercussions for this took the narrator aback. However, the narrator remembered that she was going to tell her parents about “this “gratuitous” assault on me, and expected her to receive the appropriate sanction. My hopes were dashed when my mother asked her what had happened, and

\textsuperscript{50} Student Narrative SN37, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009- URL: \url{http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124882/R/AG3275-B-2-27-38}, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
preferred her version to mine (Zaza did not lie).”54 The child had adopted expectations of the differing levels in the hierarchy between whites and blacks. She describes the actions as being assault connected with ideas of crime, violence, and aggression. She expected sanctions, a very politically structured term instead. The mother placed her trust with Zaza as the primary caregiver and understood her in contrast with the white child. The narrator was horrified that “Zaza was given full permission to use whatever force it took to discipline me. There were several instances after this when she had cause to smack me. And smack me she did.”55 This narrator’s mother did not share the concerns of contamination and allowed Zaza to physically touch her daughter. Furthermore, by trusting Zaza with discipline, Zaza could influence and teach the narrator how she felt necessary. Zaza’s influence extended into the daily life of the family, where she would prepare and cook meals and “she would look after us when my parents came home late from work.”56 The narrator continued fondly speaking of how

Zaza became my authority figure and I had to answer to her. She was the one who gave instructions. She was the one who taught me to be honest, courteous, neat and clean. She was the one who corrected any undisciplined behaviour. She was the one who showed me that boundaries are essential. Zaza was one tough cookie.57

The relationship between Zaza and this white woman was not entirely one-sided. The narrator remembered with the exuberance of a young child with a deep affectual bond that she would place a frog near Zaza’s room “watch her go berserk. Frogs were “tokoloshes”, evil creatures associated with black magic.”58 For the narrator this part of the memory is invoked with a tone of playfulness and fun between two people. This is an important moment for the narrator to discuss this along with all of the positive influences that Zaza

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
had on her. The relationship between Zaza and her white family developed into one “of friendship and mutual respect . . . They [Zaza and the narrator’s mother] had a lot in common: integrity, honesty, intelligence, an admirable work ethic, self-discipline.”

Powerfully, the narrative concludes with the praise and language of emotive bonds that developed “because of absent parents, she was the only person I could turn to. And she was always there for me. And she stood for so much that is good.” Often, whites employed domestic laborers and from this white women could seek employment. This narrator remains removed from her own parents and for her, the figure that replaced her parents was Zaza. The woman she had originally expected to listen and to follow her commands developed into a beacon for the narrator. She continues

My role model was a black woman. And I came to emulate and not challenge her. And I am eternally grateful that I did. Because she made me the person that I am today. Because she inculcated in me a value system that showed me that “the other” is no different in matters that count. . . It may seem strange to some that my experience with one black person could have changed my mindset in such dramatic terms. But it did.

For this narrator, the deep affectual bonds that were established between Zaza and themselves is unquestionable. The narrator dedicated their narrative to the memory of a woman who played an integral part in the development of the narrator. The experiences are relayed nostalgically but with poignant emotional depth. The appreciation and bond between the two influenced the outlook and future actions of the narrator. Zaza was caring for a child, possibly separated from her own, probably exploited in the apartheid system but nevertheless, Zaza planted the seeds of non-racial, anti-apartheid thought which countered the discourses being produced by the apartheid government.

Phyllis was the domestic worker for another forty year old female from the Eastern Cape. This narrator explores ideas of sexual other-ness and private space. The narration begins, “I am bored, and I need to ask Phyllis


60. Ibid.
something. I burst into her room. The door was half shut I think, but I have no respect for her privacy, there are no boundaries between her space and mine.”  

This section of the narrative explores ideas of status and space and personal privacy. For the narrator, Phyllis’ room is not a boundary and she can explore and enter whenever she wants. The teenager could have been raised or thought that Phyllis did not deserve any privacy and that Phyllis’ space may well have been hers but was also free to access for the whites in the family. This means that the status of Phyllis is diminished if existing at all as though she has her own space, she possess no privacy. The teenage child witnesses Phyllis having sex with a man, the moment startles the young woman but also excites her for she continues wanting to be enveloped in his arms too. We are having a relationship across the ‘colour bar’; he is a young activist... It is 1976, he is becoming increasingly politically active. He is a leader. I am in love with him, and of course I am against apartheid. He is murdered, like so many other young men of the time, at the brutal hands of those masquerading as public protectors. I survive, to join the struggle, to tell the tale.

Ann Laura Stoler in *Race and the Education of Desire* explores Dutch colonial fear in the East Indies of children and the sexualization of the other. Stoler writes that literature was developed on “the central theme of protecting children from the cultural and sexual seductions of those charged with their care.” These fears would have been shared in traditional, conservative South Africa as ideas of child sexuality were filtered through religious doctrines. In this instance, the narrator is not focused on Phyllis but the man she is with. The narrator constructs the sexual experience with the liberation of herself from the Christian discourses that oppress her and combines it with a confused passion of the other that forms in her stories of anti-apartheid activism. The narrator captures the importance that Phyllis had one her life by concluding “since my mother is absent, all of us know

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62. Ibid.

where we can get our comfort, enfolded in the large warmth of our ‘nanny’s’ arms.” These young white children isolated from their parents developed tight-knit emotive bonds with those figures around them,

besides my sister, she is my favourite person in the world in those years – she is young, beautiful, full of fun. When she is angry with us, she knocks us on the head with her third finger, it is so painful we shriek, but it passes very quickly, unlike some other pains I know.⁶⁵

The narrator returns to her sweeping love story of mixed race to describe curtly but hauntingly that Phyllis like many other non-white Africans met a violent end for “she also died young, just like my hero, ultimately a consequence of the same violence. I found this out much later. I never knew her story. I never asked her. Just wrote my own.”⁶⁶ The violence of the apartheid system became a part of this narrative. The narrator recalled that even though Phyllis was a part of her life and an emotive bond developed, the child still existed in their own sphere. Domestics for this narrator did not necessarily bring them into the black existence. Instead, domestics created momentarily connections that could develop more complex and nuanced understandings of the world.

Another forty year old female from Durban, a coastal town in the KwaZulu Natal province made the focus of her narrative on “the relationship I shared with the woman who was employed in our family as domestic worker and child-minder.”⁶⁷ She continues

“As the youngest child of working parents, I spent a great deal of time with Emily. We developed a strong bond that spanned many years, beginning when I was strapped against her solid back to teenage and early adulthood when we mulled over prospective suitors; fashion and haircuts.”⁶⁸

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65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.


68. Ibid.
Again, the ideas of contamination is being explored. Contamination was a discourse that maintained the racializing other explored in Ann Laura Stoler’s *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. However, here the narrator describes being strapped to the back of her domestic. This connection repudiates the contamination discourses that are discussed in 1920s and 1930s Dutch East Indies. Over time, these similar discourses in South Africa of contamination fell away from acceptability. This narrator strapped to their domestic backs did not care nor believe in the contamination from Emily. This white child would then grow up and not utilize these discourses, therefore, discourses about domestics fell away, this “discursive shedding” represents the change over time between some white employers and black domestics. On the other hand, it cannot go unnoted the phrase “strapped against her solid back”. There are strong racializing connotations to the selection of this phrase. These words construct an image of Emily that is linked to animalistic language. It is unlikely that the narrator would have used similar diction, which means that this narrator in all of her descriptions of affect and of liberalization was still influenced by the racial and hierarchical thought of the apartheid system. The socialization of difference and of subservience remained an aspect of this narrator and many others.

Their discussions were not always about mundane, daily activities. The narrator remembered political conversations, where “Emily introduced me to the ideas of Oliver Thambo, Nelson Mandela and the ANC at an early age. I have clear memories of listening to her stories about the men who were locked in prison because they were fighting for the rights of black people.” Emily and this narrator had a more direct political experience than the other narratives discussed. In the other narratives, the domestics seemed to influence the white South Africans as their affectual relationship humanized blacks. Emily served as a direct conduit for the radical politicization of this narrator as she remembers it. The narrator continued,

“These conversations usually took place when we were alone together . . . I can still see myself tucked up under my blue eiderdown while Emily stood at the window, looking out at the street, and explaining to me why our neighborhood, the schools my siblings and I attended, the stores where we shopped and the restaurants where we ate, were only
inhabited by white people.”

The two even discussed within the white suburb the narrator lived in “who treated their domestic workers respectfully and who did not. I became very conscious, when entering the homes of friends, of the tone in which they addressed their employees, whether they were given their meals in tin bowls and mugs, and whether they were referred to as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’.” The narrator recalls with a tinge of regret of how she was “unaware of the full implications of the circumstances that had enshrined Emily as my primary protector.” She remembered how she felt loved and supported but “did not ponder what her commitment to me meant for her relationship with her own children. Ever since I could remember I had clung to her skirts and delighted at the clicks that ran so easily off our tongues.” Again, though Emily is painted with terms of endearment, appreciation, and of meaningfulness, the narrator’s language is difficult to reconcile. Consistently, the narrator uses metaphoric flourishment that suffers from connectivity to racializing language. It is difficult to parcel out the meaningfulness of a quote that is couched with affect and admiration but delivered with problematic language. The narrator continued by remembering “sitting on Emily’s lap while she braided my hair, icing Marie biscuits together at the kitchen table and napping under the trees in the nearby park are peppered with disturbing memories.”

The relationship between Emily and the narrator led them to reflect on

“one final thought. It is both a hope and a regret – the hope that she was aware of the central role that she played in my life and the regret that she moved away before I had the opportunity to tell her myself. I left home to attend university where I learned all about race, class and gender yet this awareness only translated into a full appreciation of the one person in my life who was immeasurably

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70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.
This narrative reflects the complex and difficult relationships between post-apartheid white adult’s memories of white children and their domestic. This narrator clearly believes in the relationship that existed between themselves and Emily. They attach deep meaning to their time spent together and problematizes how the relationship was formed and what it meant. Furthermore, Emily developed strong sentiments through politicization and humanization of black South Africans. However, this narrator engages in a rhetoric of white guilt, which as we have seen earlier, returns the focus back to the white person and their emotional and psychological pain during apartheid. Also, this narrator sometimes utilizes diction which invokes racial and other forming language that seems to relinquish or diminish the influence that Emily had on this narrator.

Domestic labor was often hidden and not discussed, until Cock’s *Maids and Madams* presented the exploitation of the black woman in South Africa. Cock and those that followed wanted to bring a voice to this group. In doing so, these works explored the many facets of domestic life including unfair pay, poor conditions, disturbances of the black family structure, and racialized discourses of difference, contamination, and space. From this, Cock and those that followed generally accepted the argument that domestic labor in South Africa reproduced the unequal hierarchies. These unequal hierarchies reproduced in white children would then become the hierarchies these future white employers would utilize. However, as the narratives above have shown this does not completely capture the story of domestic labor in South Africa. Rather, the relationship that sometimes developed between white children and black domestics did not entirely reproduce the apartheid system. These stories of playfulness, affect, and emotions challenge previous arguments. In a way, domestics in South Africa represented bridges between black and white existences. In developing a deep emotive bond, the barriers that existed could be eroded. Domestics gave white children a face, a mind, an object of affect that could lead to anti-apartheid or non-racial sentiments. It is possible to consider domestics as political activists for the development.

of anti-apartheid thought in some members of the white community.

However, it is important to remember that these memories from white South Africans are also representative of the tension that these people experienced growing up in South Africa during the violent attempts to maintain white power structures. In this way, the white South Africans who submitted memories to the Apartheid Archives Project were working through the tensions and anxieties of that period and the current South African political and social climate. Many problematic colonial discourses remain present for white South Africans and the black domestic has become co-opted as a nostalgic representation of white guilt. Many of the black domestics in these narratives are venerated, but tragic characters communicating tensions and anxieties over white privilege in South Africa, which are constantly being rearticulated through non-political power structures in (post)apartheid South Africa.
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