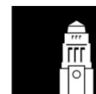

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Will Jackson

The kindness of strangers: single mothers and the meanings of friendship in interwar Cape Town

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Abstract: Just as a friend is often defined as somebody we like, friendship is thought of as a social, moral and emotional good. The aura of friendship is in its virtue. But the meaning of friendship depends on who claims it and who the person appears to be who they describe as their friend. This essay investigates the meaning of friendship in the lives of single mothers in South Africa between the two world wars. The context is Cape Town, where single mothers classified as 'white' or 'European' attracted the attentions of the state. In case records pertaining to the 1913 Children's Welfare Act the meaning of friendship was contested between magistrates, police detectives, welfare workers and single mothers themselves. The struggle over how a case should be resolved was to a great extent a struggle over the meaning of friendship. To the authorities, 'friends' were a disturbing presence in the lives of single mothers. While the image of healthy, secure and stable colonial family units was articulated around the relationship between a mother and a child it was underwritten by the taken-for-granted presence of a male provider. Analysing cases where men were in various ways absent forces our emphasis away from the normative standards that guided child welfare work and into the messier social realities against which those standards were applied.

Article:

On June 12, 1922 a Catholic priest wrote to the Cape Town magistrate's office about four brothers who he believed were suffering at the hands of their father. George Cooper, the priest wrote, had been drinking and neglecting his sons for nearly a year. "Again and again" the mother, Sarah, had been without food. "Only the charity of friends [had] prevented them from starving".[1]

Sarah Cooper had first approached the priest, Fr. Sidney Welch, in February. She was about to be turned out of her room and had nowhere to go. Welch arranged for Sarah's two older boys to be admitted temporarily to a children's home and he found a room for Sarah and her two youngest children – one less than a year old, the other eighteen months. Welch was clear in his letter that the boys' father was to blame for the Sarah and her children's plight. "The only way to save the family," he argued, "is to help the mother". Welch urged that Sarah and her sons be protected from Cooper and be "helped to live their own lives in peace".[2]

The magistrate's office was initially sympathetic. Through a local child rescue organisation, the Cape Town Society for the Protection of Child Life (SPCL), it was arranged that Sarah would be supported with a £2 monthly grant for each of the children. Half the grant was paid to the children's home where the two eldest boys were staying; the other half was paid directly to Sarah Cooper herself.[3] But in May 1923 it was discovered that she had been working for the previous three months as a typist and had been paying a 'coloured girl' to care for her children in her absence.[4] Officials' attitudes towards the Cooper family now hardened. As one pointed out, maintenance grants were intended to "keep the home going", to be paid out only if children were "personally looked after" by their mother. Grants that were used to

pay someone else to care for children equated to nothing more than a "subsidising of low paid labour".[5] When Sarah's two youngest children were subsequently taken from her and placed in a children's home Sarah went to the home and took them away. She had a friend willing to help look after them, she explained, and in any case she remained their legal guardian. At this point (and having previously made no comment at all as to Cooper's character or her fitness as a mother) the Society's case secretary reported, "Mrs Cooper is not making a real effort to obtain employment. She refuses to do anything which she considers beneath her dignity and insists on taking clerical work for which she is not properly trained." Institutional care for her children, it was noted, had been intended to enable Sarah Cooper to take a job. That she removed her children from the children's home only to complain that her need to look after them prevented her from working showed her failure to recognise the Society's better judgement. Cooper, it was concluded, "was not making a real effort to support herself and her children".[6]

Cooper rejected this version of events and criticised the state for failing to compel her husband to remit maintenance payments from Australia where he had been since December 1922. Yet Sarah's evidence was as strategically incomplete as that of the authorities with which she corresponded. "I have never yet mentioned that I was unwilling to maintain my children," she wrote, "and I am quite prepared to do so when I get the opportunity".[7] Cooper thus alluded to but passed over the fact that she had been successfully managing to undertake paid work while keeping her two youngest children with her at home. That had hinged upon the presence of someone else who cared for her children, someone Cooper herself referred to as "a nurse" but a CID detective described as "a little Coloured girl".[8] This is the most powerful absence in the entire Cooper file. Who was this person? How had Cooper come to know her? And what was the nature of their relationship? To the police and the SPCL the care of European children by people they classed as Coloured resonated with prevailing anxieties over racial mixing but

the presence of the nurse girl also represented Sarah Cooper's own attempts to organise her household independently of state control. In his letter to the magistrate's office the priest described 'the charity of friends' as essential to the Cooper family's survival. Cooper herself stressed the value of people willing to support her. "If it was not for my friends," she wrote, "I should be destitute."[9] While the state expended great effort in attempting to locate family members in a position to support Sarah Cooper financially, Cooper herself relied on non-family members – for social, material and emotional support.

This article investigates the contest over the meaning of friendship in the case records of the Cape Town Society for the Protection of Child Life, South Africa's first child welfare society. It starts from the observation that, across all the case files the Society compiled, the single most common family structure was one that involved the absence of men. When women were widowed, estranged from or abandoned by the fathers of their children, they relied on other family members for money, childcare, food or shelter but they also very often came to depend on people outside their families. These they referred to as friends. Signalling a form of sociality that transgressed the threshold of the family and the home, "the friend" was, to the Society, a figure of great uncertainty. Who were these people and what were their intentions? Were they selfless, respectable and able to help and improve single mothers? Or was their presence in women's lives proof itself that women lacked the ability to adequately look after the children in their care?

Based on a close reading of over a hundred case files in which men were absent from their children's lives, in this essay I explore how a language of friendship was deployed to defend or impugn the moral character of single women classed as "white" or "European". To Society investigators the term "friend" was used as a sort of discursive filler. Because in ideal terms a mother's emotional and material needs were to be fulfilled principally by her husband, any intimate social relations that women developed in their absence – especially those outside

their biological families – represented a space beyond the normative expectations of motherhood. In these cases the term "friend" was used as a kind of placeholder or stop gap – for relations that the Society struggled to comprehend but felt bound to control. How investigators described and attempted to regulate these relations not only offers new insight into the intersections of race, gender and class in segregation-era South Africa but also shows how ideas about friendship were conveyed inferentially and through the particular narrative mode that governed each case. How meaning was brought to the language of friendship reflected the ideas and assumptions that percolated through the child welfare regime as well as the scope that investigations afforded women to define friendship in terms of their own. It reminds us that understandings of friendship cannot be extracted from the particular discursive grammar in which they are located and highlights the need to build into our own understandings of friendship the idiosyncratic yet intensely felt intimacies that cluster around particular stages, moments or points of crisis within the trajectory of a (raced and gendered) life.

Single mothers and absent men

Established in 1908 the Cape Town Society for the Protection of Child Life (SPCL) had its roots in the Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Church and the British imperial child rescue movement.[10] Though its primary aim was to prevent cruelty to children, "the improvement of mothers" was, as the Cape Colony's chief medical officer announced, one of the Society's "main planks", to be achieved "through education, precept and even by admonition".[11] Equally, though its public face appealed to an idea of welfare conducted "irrespective of race or creed", the Society was highly motivated by a desire to uplift poor white children and prevent "miscegenation".[12] The social lives of poor white women were scrutinised in ways that did not pertain to those classified as "Coloured" and while ideas about morality, character and respectability infused all of the Society's case work, *how* these ideas implicated women's

relations was inseparable from the much wider endeavour to engineer South African society along racial lines.[13]

The 1913 Children's Protection Act made child cruelty and neglect a criminal offence but it also gave magistrates the power to remove children from their homes and have them fostered, adopted, apprenticed or placed in custodial institutions until they reached eighteen years of age. In practice, magistrates relied on local child welfare organisations like the SPCL, which in turn worked with plain clothes police detectives, to investigate individual cases. Because cruelty and neglect were so loosely defined – measurable only against a sense of what an adequate home environment looked like – much depended on the subjective views of individual policemen and Society staff. To be sure, sometimes parents themselves contacted the SPCL – typically when they described their children as "uncontrollable" and requested they be taken into care[14] – but in the majority of cases, interventions went against carers' own strategies for looking after their children. Typically, the Society's case work was coercive, representing the assertion of its supposedly superior understanding of the needs of children over whatever claims were made by those with children in their charge.

The focus on mothers in these investigations was in part a reflection of the ideological commitment to motherhood that motivated child welfare initiatives across the British Empire at this time.[15] But it also reflected the absence of men. The reasons for this are several. The discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa in the final third of the nineteenth century attracted tens of thousands of single male migrants.[16] Many regarded South Africa only as a temporary source of high wages, their aim being to earn as much money as possible before returning home; those who fathered children while they were in South Africa commonly lacked a conscious sense of family – and family responsibility – in doing so.[17] As Marjorie Levine-Clark explained, the empire created ample opportunities for neglectful husbands to make

themselves invisible.[18] Empire, as John Tosh put it, offered men "a flight from domesticity".[19] If domestic relations soured, leaving was always the commonest male response.[20]

The instability of the South African economy fractured family relations further. Recurrent economic downturns – one account lists ten separate recessions between 1896 and 1939 – created sudden spikes in unemployment, forcing men away from their homes in search of work.[21] A man who went up-country looking for a job may have promised or intended to return to the mother of his children but there was no clear line to distinguish between a woman who had been abandoned by her children's father and another who was merely awaiting his return.[22] There were also large numbers of soldiers moving through Cape Town in the early twentieth century. Almost 450,000 imperial troops from around the empire served in the British armed forces during the South African War. At points during the conflict there were over 10,000 concentrated in Cape Town alone.[23] Renewed immigration in the decade after the war more than doubled the city's population yet despite attempts to encourage female migration, the vast majority of new arrivals remained transient and male.[24] Over 70,000 South Africans fought in the First World War – in German South West Africa, Egypt and in France. Besides those injured and killed, a significant number of men took their discharges abroad.[25]

Many single mothers were widows.[26] Silicosis – or "miners' phthisis" – reduced the life expectancy of white miners to 29 years by 1910.[27] The 1918 influenza epidemic killed over half a million South Africans.[28] Case files in the SPCL archive bear these numbers out. Besides influenza, men also died from malaria, pneumonia and tuberculosis. Others were killed in industrial accidents on the railways and in the mines. Some were said to have drowned at sea.[29] Others were in prisons, mental hospitals or work colonies.[30] Though the cultural connotations pertaining to each of these scenarios were distinct – it was easier to portray a widow than a deserted woman as being distressed through no fault of her own – the overriding threat they presented to the prevailing social order was the same. This is because poor white motherhood

was understood through the filter of the emerging "poor white problem". Rapid urbanisation (and with it the spectre of racial mixing or "miscegenation" in dilapidated urban slums), intensifying public attention to the issue of inter-racial sex and the carving out of a new field of socio-medical knowledge concerning the lives of South Africa's poor all made single white mothers an object of particular concern.[31] But the rise of the poor white problem and the anxiety over miscegenation were both in part a result of the high levels of chain, repeat and return migration through the subcontinent, as well as their heavily gendered dimension. In this light it is important not to assume that "poor whites" were always Afrikaans-speakers – a misleading impression given by much of the existing historiography. Of those itinerant men that feature in the SPCL records, a majority are English speaking, with their origins in the British Isles. "Poor whiteism" was a British as well as an Afrikaner phenomenon.[32]

Friendship and motherhood

Understandings of friendship have always involved clusters of related concepts. In the classical world these included goodwill, benevolence, charity and love.[33] Other ideas associated with friendship – trust, honour and support – point to the socially mediated nature of identity and status while others – sympathy, kindness, affection, fellow-feeling – emphasise friendship's emotional dimension.[34] These are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Historical accounts often show the instrumental or pragmatic aspects to friendship working through a discourse of sentiment. Friendship is no less friendship because it involves the circulation of debts or obligations.[35]

Friendship, then, is both instrumental and affective. *How* these combine in any given social and cultural context, is what determines the other perennial feature to friendship: its simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary nature. In their introduction to the only book-length study of friendship in modern South Africa Jon Soske and Shannon Walsh describe their intention to avoid assuming that cultural entanglement necessarily disrupts or diminishes

difference. Their focus instead is on "the inverse: how intimacies expressed through friendship produce and structure difference".[36] That SPCL investigations also operated to produce difference is borne out in the ways in which perceptions of women's friendships were raced and gendered. Relations between European women and Coloured people were not recognised as friendship. Nor were those between single mothers and single men. Yet women themselves used the term to describe all of these relations. Just as friendship produces difference so it can defy it also.[37] Its versatility alone – that is to say, its ability to stand for relations for which there was no obvious and preferable alternative – gave the term "friend" its essentially slippery, transgressive nature.

In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ideas long associated with the virtues of friendship – kindness, compassion and sympathy – become increasingly imagined in the context of what we might call benevolent relations of distance or power. The ascendancy of bourgeois ideas about poverty (and with it, the emergence of the modern ethos of charity), combined with the imperial ideology of the civilising mission, created not only an intellectual conviction but a feeling – and one that was itself integral to the identity of bourgeois whiteness itself – that there was something necessary and desirable in the improvement of "other" people's lives.[38] In his account of philanthropically minded late Victorians, Seth Koven took seriously their view of themselves as "friends to the poor" but emphasised the power differential between those giving and receiving help as well as the ambivalence in philanthropists' contradictory impulses to "love the poor" while at the same time disciplining their disruptive power.[39] Though the ladies of the SPCL (if not the officers of the Cape Town CID) saw themselves acting in the spirit of friendly intervention, their "friendly" demeanour was restricted to their identity as SPCL agents. Though cloaked in a language of sympathy, pity and concern, these were relations of distance and, often, disapproval.[40]

The relations with people that single mothers described as friends, by contrast, were relations of closeness. That reflected the nature of case work, not only because the relations they described were often intimate but also because the format of the case file itself generated perspectives that were characteristically close up, seen across landings and yards, down streets and alleyways and in rooms where people ate and slept. Woodstock, where most of the SPCL's work was carried out, was one of the poorest parts of Cape Town and also one of the most racially mixed. At the turn of the twentieth century the area was only recently populated but it grew dramatically. As many as 538 buildings were erected in Woodstock in 1900 alone. Between 1899 and 1904 the number of factory workers doubled.[41] Working conditions were "unpleasantly similar to the sweat shops of London".[42] Indeed, to respectable, middle class Capetonians, Woodstock was viewed as a place of urban squalor, comparable to the rookeries and tenement slums of London's East End.[43]

To a great extent, then, the work of describing friends was about fixing people into place, through frames of references that could make the nature of an otherwise unknowable relationship transparent.[44] The fact that these cases were framed by the absence of men, however, means that the configuration of women's friends was gendered in particular and powerful ways. Homo-social friendship was understood through a lens that saw traits of compassion and pity as primarily female attributes. Though to latter-day eyes what many of these case files reveal most clearly may be the economies of care by which women lived intimately and collaboratively with others, to those scrutinising these relations at the time, female friendship served as an index of white women's capacity to *be* white women. Extending care, as well as the ability to seek it out from a reliable source, were indicators of a normative model of compassion given and received. When women presented themselves as motivated by pity it appealed to the improving ethos of the SPCL. Giving a friend a place to stay was to save her from degenerating. Implicit here was the idea that "respectable" women who helped others

in distress knew – *because* they were respectable – of the danger to South Africa that poor white mothers presented.

Hetero-social friends could also be seen as worthy but were complicated by sex.[45] To divert attention from whatever sexual element existed within their relations with men, women emphasised men's altruistic motivations. Men, they claimed, not entirely implausibly, offered help and support out of kindness. That aligned with a view of friendship that had prevailed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one depicting a friend as someone "who could open up avenues to assistance"; someone who was in a position to help by influencing those in power.[46] If a woman was able to attract the support of a respectable man, he would have access to social networks and cultural capital that women did not. Respectability here included not only sobriety and hard work but also anything that ruled out the possibility of sexual motivations. If a man was married already, the friendship he extended was on behalf of his wife as well as himself. One credible source of compassionate support, as we have seen already, was the ever-chaste Catholic priest. Widows also received help from the friends of their deceased husbands. These relations were also ideologically safe because women were configured not as agents but as objects – as recipients of care. No less alarming than single mothers having sex, meanwhile, was evidence that seemed that showed their disregard for the home. And so, accounts involving friends frequently described what Aristotle saw as friendship's less laudable grounds – friendship for pleasure's sake. Here it was not so much the case that pleasure was described more often in hetero-social than homo-social friendships – or that pleasure described the circumstances in which "immorality" transpired – but, rather, that these were scenarios inhabited by men *and* women *and* children, in which the lines between inside and out, family and friend, Coloured and white, adult and child, had *all* become blurred.

Economies of Care

In the absence of their men-folk, single mothers in Cape Town relied to a great extent on each-other.[47] Often, the chance of taking up paid employment was only possible when women shared accommodation or cared for children on each-others' behalf. Catherine Bligh left her children with her landlady while she went out to work. That enabled her to earn the money needed to make her contribution to the rent.[48] Elsie Tyler, who had two children with two different men, both of whom had deserted her, worked as a kitchen maid in a café, for which she earned eleven shillings per week, plus food. She left her two children during the day with her friend, Mrs Oppel, to whom she paid five shillings weekly. At night Tyler and her children stayed with her married sister rent-free.[49] When Ada Gray went to work as a cook, she left her children at home with another woman, Mrs. Barnes, to whom she paid seven shillings per week. That Gray and Barnes lived together enabled them to share the costs of rent, childcare and paid employment.[50] Other times, women found refuge with female friends after they were unexpectedly let down by men. Following the death of her husband in July 1930, Margaret Jones lived with a man who promised to marry her. When he deserted her the following year, Margaret stayed with a friend who allowed her and her children to stay rent free.[51]

These relations were reciprocal and collaborative but women also stressed their emotional aspect. In June 1931 a woman named Mrs Carr told a CID detective that she had taken in another woman and her children "out of pity after her husband left her". "She does the housework and some sewing for her keep," Mrs Carr explained.[52] In other cases single mothers depended on "charitable neighbours" for money or food.[53] When Hentie van der Merwe's husband died in September 1933 and she was evicted by her landlord she took her two children to live with a married couple with three children of their own. "I am staying with Mrs Swart," Hentie testified in February 1934, "she is a friend of mine. At present she is allowing me to stay rent free….I do not want to part with my children as they are all I have". Mrs. Swart endorsed this statement. "I have known Mrs van der Merwe for a long time," she said, "my

husband and I agreed to take her in for a time to help along. She is no relation to me. We are still willing to help."[54]

Emphasising their enduring nature and their compassionate aspect elevated the moral standard of these friendships. After Ethel Shields was deserted by her husband in 1913, she was helped by a woman who later described herself as "a great friend". "I often used to give her money and clothes", testified Lizelle Snyman in February 1919, six months after Ethel died. Before her death, it seems, Ethel and Lizelle were living together. Afterwards Lizelle "took possession of the house". She also took the children. When the children's maternal grandmother argued that she should have custody, Lizelle defended her own claim to their care on the basis of the closeness of her relationship with Ethel:

> I done everything [sic] I could for her before her death. She asked me to look after her children and not to give them to her mother. I promised to look after the children and at the same time took possession of the house….I am still paying for the furniture…I have done everything I could for the three children and should be very sorry if they were taken away from me. If ordered by the Magistrate to hand them over to their grandmother I will do so. Legally I have no claim on them.[55]

A police report gives some clue as to how Lizelle's petition was received. Significantly it accepted her claim that she and Ethel were "great friends" and judged the children well looked after in her care. Lizelle Snyman was a respectable person, it was also noted, and her house "clean and tidy". The fact that the children's grandmother was elderly, estranged from her husband and dependent on her adult children for support counted against her own claim to custody of the children. Though there is no evidence in this case to indicate what the magistrate eventually decided, the police report is striking nevertheless for its recognition of the value of female friendship. In the five years between her husband's desertion and her own death, it

seems, Ethel Shields had managed to provide for herself and her children principally by means of her relationship with Lizelle.

To child welfare practitioners, sensitive to the idea that the character of a person 'rubbed off' on those around them, the quality of a mother could be discerned not only from how she, her home and her children appeared but also from the quality of those they identified as friends. These kinds of judgements were especially critical when friends cared for one another's children. When the husband of Hester van Zyl died in 1917, Hester had her three children looked after by 'an old friend' in order that she could go out to work, first at a dye factory and then as a live-in cook at a private house. Although these arrangements proved unsustainable – her friend had five children of her own to care for as well as the three van Zyl children – Hester then arranged for her children to go to a Mrs Bryant, "a great friend" in Hester's words, where they stayed for the following eight years. In this case, both Hester herself and the friends who looked after her children were deemed 'respectable' by the SPCL and the children judged to be "well cared for".[56] Hester, one police detective stressed, had 'done everything she could for her children'. "In my opinion," he wrote, "this is a most deserving case".[57] Later police investigations described Hester as 'a very respectable and hard working woman' who was 'doing her best to bring her children up properly'.[58]

The fact that Hester was judged to be a good mother ensured not only that she was able to maintain her relationship with her children but also that she received financial support from the state itself.[59] In another case, it was noted approvingly that a woman who had been "drinking and leading a very loose life" had subsequently moved in with a "very respectable woman" who "took her in out of pity and on the condition that she behaved herself".[60] Women who shared the Society's own interest in restraining other women's immoral tendencies claimed their own moral virtue by extension. Significantly, the Children's Protection Act, though concerned primarily with children in the care of persons other than their biological

parents, exempted from its provisos "near friends acting without reward".[61] Good friendship was judged by an absence of self-interest. Those who took in other people's children described being motivated to do so out of compassion or concern or because it was the wish (sometimes the dying wish) of the child's biological parents (most often the mother).[62] If the SPCL or the police found those in the care of a child as being, in various ways, undesirable, however, any kind of compassionate motivation on their part – any capacity for kindness – was downplayed.

Miscegenation and maternal failure

The dangers of friendship are most clearly apparent in cases where white women had relations likened, either by themselves or those investigating their case, to friendship with people described as "Coloured". Beatrice Hall, for example, had eight children and was in "very poor circumstances" following the death of her husband in 1923. Although for a while she received financial support from the Society, a police report written in February 1926 stated that Beatrice was "very friendly with several Coloured people living in the vicinity". "To my mind," the police detective added, "[this] is not what one would expect from a European woman."[63] Shortly afterwards her grant was reduced.[64] Caroline Meyer described how she adopted the daughter of a ("European") friend – a single woman who died in 1907 when her daughter was two years old – after the mother's death. "I adopted her as my own," Caroline said, "I have always been fond of her and done everything I could for her".[65] The Society took a different view. "Jessie has no affection for her foster mother, Mrs Meyer, who is coloured", they reported.[66] Adding the fact of Meyer's racial status worked to compound her perceived lack of kindness, apparent in her adoptive daughter's lack of affection for her. Another witness, a woman who employed Jessie as a nurse-maid, added that she considered it "a shame, for a European girl to have to live and work for a coloured woman".[67]

Such was their underlying antipathy towards miscegenation that case investigators failed to recognise relations between "Europeans" and "Coloureds" *as* friendship. In April

1922, for example, the Society reported the case of six year old Dannie Mostert. He and his mother, both European, were known to be living with coloured people in Salt River.[68] Dannie's father had died, his mother was struggling to work and Dannie himself was observed to be thin and poorly clad. Notably a CID report depicted Dannie's mother, Susanna, as friendless. "The only income she has is what she earns herself. She has no friends or relatives able or willing to assist her." Yet the same report also disclosed that Mostert left her son in the care of the women with whom she lived whilst she went out to work and that she depended on them to feed her son in her absence. That these people were classed as Coloured prevented the Society from seeing their motivations as selfless or benign. This is not to say that people racialized this way were deemed incapable of kindness: in cases involving *only* Coloured people it was quite common for women who looked after other people's children – as well as the mothers of those children themselves – to be judged to be acting selflessly, in an effort to relieve or lessen another's distress.[69] When a white child was found in the care of Coloured people, however, the social relations around that child were framed through the lens of racial degradation. "She was formerly living with coloured people," reported a welfare worker in the case of Mary Jennings and her three children, "but we have managed to get her out of these surroundings".[70] "The mother and child", another report in the Dannie Mostert file recorded, "sleep with coloured people in the same room" – a detail cited as evidence of parental failing.[71] "She depends on them," the police detective observed, "Mostert has absolutely nothing but what she stands up in".[72] Despite her wishes to keep her son with her, the Society arranged for Dannie's removal to a children's home. It is not clear what happened to him when he was released or whether he maintained contact with his mother.

Coloured care of European children was most alarming when it appeared that a white child had been permanently adopted by a woman described as coloured. Since as early as the 1890s colonial society in Cape Town had been intermittently panicked by the vision of

European children being adopted or fostered by coloured men and women.[73] Members of the city's Muslim population, in particular, were thought to be relieving white women of the care of their children as a deliberate technique to expand their numbers. White girls, it was said, were especially desirable because they could be raised as prostitutes. European children might also be married into Coloured families, leading to future generations having paler skin – a sign of cultural capital in an environment in which phenotypical appearance was crucial for the accordance of social status.[74] When Elisa Dillon, a "European" widow, was admitted to hospital in 1916 she gave her two sons into the care of a Muslim man, Ahmed Ibrahim who, when questioned later by the police, described Dillon as "a great friend". An anonymous letter received by the Society in October 1919, however, warned that Ibraham intended to "turn [the] boys into Malays".[75] Underpinning that belief was the idea that Coloured families who took charge of white children did so with a distinctive lack of care. Their motive was one of exploitation: children were not objects of love but resources to be used.[76] Yet impoverished white women were likely to find support in places more high-minded citizens saw only as sources of racial or moral depravation. In March 1922, a "Coloured girl" came to the house of Annie Williams to ask if Annie would give shelter to a girlfriend of hers who had nowhere to stay.[77] Later in the day the friend arrived, a "European girl" who gave her name as Rosanna di Stefano. Rosanna admitted that she was pregnant and asked Williams if she could stay until the birth of her child. Three weeks after her child was born, Rosanna died. It later transpired that she had migrated to Cape Town from Italy with her parents. When they returned to Italy they left their daughter behind, working as a governess for an English family at Rondebosch. Rosanna, it was believed, came from a good family and, in seeking sanctuary with Annie Williams, was hoping to conceal her pregnancy.[78] "Di Stefano," a police report concluded, "was unlikely to be her real name". A year later, Di Stefano's baby, still in the care of Annie Williams, also died.

Evidence pointing to what friendship actually entailed is, in this case, extremely thin. All we know for sure is that Rosanna di Stefano, a white woman, was described as the friend of a "Coloured girl" who – like "the coloured girl" in the Sarah Cooper case – remained nameless, her identity obscured in the archival record by the prospect of miscegenation that her proximity to white female vulnerability represented. That silence, however, does bring a series of questions to the fore. To what extent did inter-racial friendships constitute especially valuable social capital in circumstances where white women already felt themselves to be ostracised – or in danger of being ostracised – by "white" society? Did the particular circumstances around pregnancy and child birth bring about particular kinds of inter-racial intimacies, intimacies that the existing scholarship on race and friendship in colonial societies has yet to address? And might we see not only the fact of one woman providing shelter to another but also the adoption of a woman's child by another as involving, if only in part, an element of compassion? The last of these questions is impossible to answer but asking it nonetheless helps to highlight the enduring power of an archival bias that prohibits the possibility of kindness and compassion extending across racial bounds. No less importantly, it highlights the need for histories of friendship to incorporate – besides the conventional variables of class, gender, religion and, especially in the colonial context, race – the additional factor of time. Case records describe friendships taking place. They are framed by the extraordinary life events of birth and death and both those conducting investigations and those subject to them wrote their accounts of friendship around the narrative pivot of the calamitous and unforeseen: the death or disappearance of someone on whom one financially depended, a sudden and unforeseen eviction, the consequences of an unintended pregnancy. More pervasively, they point to the particular hardships that accrued to those poor white women who – unlike any other group in South African society – bore responsibility for reproducing in the circumstances of their own and their children's lives the myth of racial distance. They remind

us that understandings of friendship need to be plotted not only in a quotidian cycle of days and weeks but also in the out-of-the-ordinary events that punctuate a life.

White women who gave their children over to Coloured people represented in the eyes of the SPCL the final stage on a continuum of maternal failure. Underlying their interpretation of a scenario such as this was the idea that white women had forsaken their responsibilities *as* white women. Forcible incarceration at a "home for friendless girls" not only bore eloquent expression to the idea that there could be no friendship between poor white women and people classed as "Coloured" or "Native"; it also performed the coercive work of rerouting emotional economies in ways that aligned with a system of racial segregation. In cases where single mothers were seen to have friends or friendly relations with men, another dynamic was at work. As their supposed superiors, men were judged *able* to extend kindness to women in a way that poor white women and Coloured people could not. Even if relationships between single mothers and white men involved sex, they could still – provided there was no question of money being paid – be deemed to contain the nobler, morally virtuous aspects to friendships. But the kinds of intimacies that were described when both parties were women – living together above all and contributing to a common, household purse – described hetero-social friendship as no less valuable *for mothers* as marriage.[79] Only when contradictory voices emerged – most powerfully when an absent father reappeared in the case record – did the credibility of these relations break down.

Friendships with men

When women were widowed or abandoned by the fathers of their children, securing the support of a new male breadwinner was one way of keeping their children fed and their households afloat. Cohabiting with men could keep a household economically viable yet, alongside drinking, violence and inter-racial intimacy, was one of the most recurrent indicators of 'a bad woman' and an 'unsatisfactory home'. Society inspectors used the terms "friend" and

"friendly" as euphemisms for sexual relationships, while women themselves tried to insist that the men they knew were motivated only by kindness or concern.[80] The problem was all the greater when the man in question was classed as "non-white". One case file recorded that a European widow, Elena Murphy, was "living with and being supported by an Indian waiter". She had "lowered her standard of living," it was reported, "and apparently [had] no interest in her child". Though no concrete evidence was offered for this particular claim, Elena herself knew the importance of the way she framed her relationship with the Indian man. The transcription of her statement reads:

> I am now living with an Indian waiter ~~as his reputed wife~~ (deponent wishes this deleted as she states she is not his reputed wife). He gives me a home and supports me…I have nothing. I would be destitute if it were not for the Indian.[81]

Murphy knew that to admit of a sexual relationship with an Indian would devalue her character in the Society's eyes. Instead she emphasised the help she had received from him. Yet the SPCL struggled to see past her "immorality". Both Murphy's children were taken from her and placed into institutional care. Another widow, Henrietta Reynolds, was reported to have a dressmaking business but police reported she was "being kept" by a sailor. Reynolds herself described him as a friend. "He sometimes gives me a little help," she added.[82]

On some occasions, however, investigators were willing to accept the value of male friends for single mothers. Whatever sexual element these relations may have comprised, if they secured a woman within something that resembled what officials regarded as a stable family home, they were deemed worthy of support. Audrey Dunn, three years after being deserted by her husband, told the Society that she was living with a man, Henry Langlands, stating she was "obliged to do this as she had no means of support".[83] At first, the Society judged these arrangements 'most unsatisfactory' but a subsequent police report took a softer line.

> During the late war Mrs Dunn's conduct was very unsatisfactory. Her husband was addicted to drink and the children were allowed to run about the streets…[but she is now] living with a European man named Henry Langlands and as far as I can ascertain they get on well and are happy together…Mrs Dunn has been leading a very quiet life since Langlands has been with her. Langlands does not drink and on the whole things appear to be very satisfactory. The only thing [is] they are not married.[84]

It was on the basis of Langlands' supposedly stabilising influence that Mrs Dunn was deemed a 'fit and proper person', able to look after her children.[85] "The only thing against her now is that she is living in adultery with the man Langlands," a later report read, "Langlands is a hardworking man, they appear to be happy together. The children look upon Langlands as their father."[86]

The fact that Dunn and Langlands were unmarried in this case counted for less than the apparent affection shown between them. Friends has morphed into fictional kin. That Langlands was looked upon by Mrs. Dunn's children as their father terminated her status as a single mother. And the fact that Langlands worked hard and did not drink suggested he might constrain the otherwise dangerous sexuality of a single mother with a doubtful history of her own. In so many other cases, however, single mothers were deemed immoral on the basis of their associations with men.[87] After the father of Albert, Thomas and Emily Lane deserted his wife reports reached the society regarding the behaviour of their mother. "The mother's conduct has been very unsatisfactory during the past few years," reported the investigating police detective, "I am not prepared to say that she is living an immoral life […] men do visit her at times but for what reason I am unable to state."[88] Lane's nine year old son told police that his mother was kind to him yet he also disclosed that she went out at night with her friends. "Mrs Lane is well known to several soldiers at the Castle", a police detective reported, "I have also seen her in the company of sailors." Though he had no firm information to show for it, the

investigating officer nonetheless had "not the slightest doubt" that Mrs Lane was "meeting men at night".[89] Another woman was noted to have frequent male visitors. Molly Reagan "was a supposed dressmaker," it was reported, "but did little work and as she had to live there was only one conclusion as to the reason of the visits of the male friends".[90]

When "immorality" was suspected, as in this case, the term "friend" was used ironically. Sex was not named explicitly but was conveyed in part through the suggestion that these relations were categorically not what they claimed to be. Though transactional sex was often hinted at in these reports, however, it was also the fact that mothers were engaging in forms of sociality outside the home, at times (late at night) and in practices (drinking and gambling) coded male that marked these women as transgressive. Women who socialised in the evenings, who drank or played cards showed an inadequate commitment to the welfare of their children and to the project of their home.[91] This was friendship for pleasure's sake, not friendship as a form of compassion or support.

By contrast, the idea of a friendship as motivated by purely virtuous motivates was most effectively conveyed when it referred to a person who had died. Offering support to a widow, for example, could be configured as the expression of male friendship. These relations were entirely honourable because, through the expression of compassion to female and juvenile dependents, they described a form of male, homo-social caring that extended, as it were, "beyond the grave".[92] In 1934, the SPCL identified widowed mother of five, Charlotte Owen, as "a superior type" who was "devoted to her children". Significantly, she had the support of a builder and contractor, Mr Kite, described by the Society as a "friend of the family". The involvement of a man with the ability to help the family – Kite had apparently allowed the family to live rent free for several months "when they were having a hard struggle to manage in the early days" – gave the family narrative its morally upright, deserving quality. "It was well worth helping Mrs Owen", the Society's General Secretary reported, "an extremely good

mother" who should be "saved from degenerating into a poor white type".[93] Another widow, Susanna Grieves, was similarly judged "respectable and hard-working" whose children were well cared for. She also had the support of one of her dead husband's friends. Harold Kean described himself as a "great friend of the late Robert Grieves". Kean had promised Grieves before he died that he would do everything he could for the children. He claimed not to have charged Mrs Grieves anything for her room since her husband's death, four years previously.[94]

The presence of the dead in these narratives reminds us that male absence was seldom complete. Men hovered at the edges of these stories. Their presence could be felt remotely. One final case well illustrates the point. Herman Hass was a German interned during the First World War as an enemy alien at Fort Napier barracks in Natal. His wife, Manchester born Dorothea, continued living in Cape Town in his absence with the couple's two children. Herman's involvement in the case shows how one man took his wife's friendships as the grounds on which to impugn her character, but it precipitated an angry riposte. In a letter sent to the Society in November 1918, Herman wrote: "my wife is English and has been a good wife and mother till I was taken from home…but I think she has made some friends of doubtful reputation and taken to drink".[95] Dorothea admitted to drinking occasionally, though "never to excess", but her husband's accusations were enough to prompt a full investigation by the Cape Town CID. Dorothea, it was reported, worked as a bar maid. Neighbours reported that she was often out in the evenings and that she brought soldiers and sailors to her house where they remained until the early hours of the morning "drinking and singing". Dorothea's husband requested that his wife be "severely reprimanded":

> I think if my wife were asked to attend at court before you and…cautioned and told that she would be watched, till such time of my release, and also told not to bring any man to our home, I think it might bring her to her senses.[96]

A subsequent police report depicted Mrs Hass in pejorative terms. Neighbours confirmed she was a "bad woman". Her own daughter was known to be associating with a "young loafer" whose own mother was said to be "a loose woman".[97] But it was the presence of a taxi driver in witness reports that generated greatest disquiet. Hass himself had written about "a taxi driver" who accompanied Dorothea home in the evenings and who remained in her home until after midnight. The man, Hass suggested, might even be mixed race. A second police report investigated this claim:

> Mrs Hass…herself admitted to the Magistrate at the interview above mentioned that the taxi driver Smith was a very good friend of hers. This Smith drives Mrs Hass home to her house two or three times a week and remains in her bedroom for a considerable time. He now leaves his motorcar on a piece of vacant land opposite Mrs Hass's house…whilst engaged with the lady inside the house. This occurred as late as last week.[98]

The husband wanted the taxi driver reprimanded as well as his wife because, in his words, "such beasts are a great danger to married people's homes in the absence of a husband". Dorothea, however, rejected her husband's accusations. "The taxi driver referred to in my husband's letter," she told the magistrate, "was a man whose mother was a very good friend to me". Writing back to her husband, she forcefully denied the suggestion that their friendship was anything but respectable:

> You speak about the gentleman who takes me home in his car. How dare you call him a half-caste? He is a Britisher and a man who has fought for his king and country, had three years in East Africa and he and his people have been the best friends I have ever had in the world. And if it was not for him my children would have been dead because when they were so bad with the flu and we could not get a doctor it was him and his brother who brought doctors every day. He is nothing to me, only a good friend.[99]

Stating that Smith was *only* a good friend ruled out the possibility of any romantic or sexual dimension to their relationship. The stress on help – "it was him and his brother who brought doctors every day" – configured the friendship as motivated only by the desire to relieve distress. Emphasising that the friendship was with Smith's mother as well as Smith himself cast the relationship as inter-generational, between families rather than individuals. Dorothea's emphasis on Smith being "a Britisher", meanwhile, who had "fought for his king and country", was in contrast to her own husband's status as an enemy alien. Being absorbed into the emotional economy of the Smith family made friendship in this case a patriotic act.

Dorthea's entreaties, however, ultimately failed. On March 25, 1919 a police detective, a constable and two women patrols officers arrived at Dorothea's house and, after some initial resistance, removed both children and took them to a Salvation Army Home. The following day they were placed on trains, to Pretoria and Grahamstown respectively, to children's homes both several hundred miles from Cape Town. The reason for the children's removal is not only because Herman Hass was able to present himself as a concerned and committed husband whose absence did not reflect any desire on his part to neglect his family responsibilities. It also concerns the presence of another friend, without whose involvement the Hass case might never have existed at all. On July 17, 1918 one of the SPCL's "lady inspectors" wrote an account of a report she had received from a woman called Mrs. Marlow, a woman described as "a friend of Mrs. Hass". The inspector explained:

> A few days ago Mrs. Marlow's little girl went to see the Hass children and the eldest girl told her (Alison Marlow) that the night before, 4 sailors slept there with them in the house, her mother being away and they had a jolly time of it…Would the patrol ladies kindly see into this but Mrs Marlow's name must not be mentioned.[100]

Friendship here most certainly did not describe women working together against or beyond the reach of an anxious and interventionist state. Rather, friendship *created* the connection between

the state and the otherwise ostensibly private domain of a family home. That initial communication between Mrs Marlow and the police detective made the life of Dorothea Hass and her daughters *into* a case. It set it in motion. As with so many of these case records, what was at issue was the question of motive. Were friends good or false, well-meaning or manipulative, symptomatic of a woman's bad character or the thing that redeemed her from it? In this case, it is likely that Marlow presented herself to the police in the role of Dorothea's friend. Though she knew that Dorothea might interpret her actions differently – hence the need for anonymity – she also knew that the identity of 'friend' conveyed her own credibility and moral character. Kindness, as the SPCL knew only too well, could mean not only saving a person from ill-fortune but also from themselves.

Conclusion

The case records of the SPCL can be read in different ways and for different analytical aims. These are histories of impoverished family life; of childhood "from below", of the micro-level politics of respectability, domesticity and race. But they are also histories of what happens in the absence of men. Existing scholarship has already had much to say on the value colonial society placed on mothers and wives. At a time when white supremacy was believed to depend on the size and fitness of the "European" population, the primary contribution that white women could make to the future of South Africa was in birthing and raising healthy children. In the twentieth century women unable or unwilling to perform this labour were targets of state intervention in ways they hadn't been before.[101]

Case records bear out the overriding ideological commitment to the motherhood ideal. Men were referred to as wastrels, drunks or ne'er do wells but very rarely as bad fathers. Whereas a mother's death was considered justification for the adoption of her child, the death or absence of a father was not.[102] And in thousands of cases, investigators commented on the character and respectability of a mother: how she was perceived was paramount in determining

the quality of a child's home and the care that it received. Case records contain much more, however, than simply the illustrative evidence for what we already knew. When men died or deserted their families, families remained but in a form that contravened the *ideal* of the family to which the child welfare practitioners were devoted. While the image of healthy, secure and stable family units was articulated around the relationship between a mother and a child it was underwritten by the taken-for-granted presence of a male provider. Analysing cases where men were in various ways absent forces our emphasis away from the normative standards that guided child welfare work and into the messier social realities against which those standards were applied.

Single mothers' friendships happened in the absence of men. Women who were widowed, had fallen pregnant unintentionally or had been abandoned by the fathers of their children were perceived as vulnerable but they were dangerous too because their strategies for survival could transgress what the SPCL understood implicitly as comprising a "white" childhood. These included developing intimate social relations with people outside a woman's biological family – people described both by single women themselves and by those who contributed to their case record as "friends". Friends were difficult for police and SPCL inspectors to comprehend, the essential ambiguity of their status as intimates from beyond the family marking them out as potential sources of disorder.

It is precisely that uncertainty that makes friendship in these case records historically revealing. In their attempt to, first, understand and then act upon single mothers' friendships, investigators created a commentary that can be read both for the extent to which women relied on friends to survive *and* the ways in which accounts of these relations appealed to certain ideas about friendship, validating or disqualifying them in the process. It is important to stress these are not incompatible objectives. With such a large cohort of case files we can see clearly how, in the absence of men, women developed close relations with people outside their

families. In circumstances of great precarity, friendship was an important social resource. Indeed, the fact these relations were valuable was one reason why they presented a problem for the state. In dozens of cases, only some of which I have had the space to describe in detail here, women developed relationships with friends that were no less intimate than family relations. They lived together. They care for each other's children and for each-other. And, in perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the porous boundary between friend and kin, they agreed to look after another's child when a mother was too poor or too incapacitated to do so herself. When children were informally adopted the line between family and the world outside most dramatically collapsed.

Contests over friendship in the case record reveal the extent to which extra-familial relations offended a constituency of feeling that was guided both by a bourgeois understanding of female respectability and a deeply held aversion to "miscegenation". Yet case records also show the extent to which poor white women's social relations contravened these standards. At a time when, as Philip Bonner has argued, the economic decline of poor whites in South Africa propelled the rise of white racism, the extent to which poor white women developed close relations with Coloured people might appear surprising.[103] While it would be idealistic to see single mothers' friendships as proof of their freedom from the racism that was apparently so pervasive in South Africa at this time, it nevertheless forces us to confront the extent to which particular life circumstances – single motherhood in this case – can attenuate or complicate prevailing ideologies. As Bonner admits, the closing of the social and economic distance between whites and other races had contradictory effects, fostering the development of a multiracial culture *and* cultivating the most vicious forms of racial prejudice and race hysteria. Explaining that coexistence needs to incorporate not only class and gender but family structure and patterns of everyday sociality as well. Similarly, historical accounts of friendship need to meaningfully factor in age – not simply by using age as one variable amongst others by which

to define a group of friends but in recognising that the constraints and capacities for friendship must always reflect an individual's position within the life cycle, itself a biological reality and a social construct.

The increasing power of the child welfare movement forced men as well as women to account for their social lives in ways they had not before. The language of friendship was central to this discourse because, although at the centre of every child welfare case was the quality of the care extended to a child, it was care between adults that was most difficult for investigators to apprehend. The child welfare workers cared *about* impoverished white women in the way that one cares about a social or political problem. Though occasionally they might give out "friendly advice" or moral exhortation they did not care *for* the women into whose lives they intervened.[104] That double meaning is instructive. What alarmed child welfare practitioners above all was the idea of friendship as signifying social relations that involved the work – the practice – of care. Though white women themselves used the word "friend" to describe their relations with Coloured people or with unattached men, the SPCL preferred the adjective, "friendly". That gave the impression that elements of friendship could exist between two people without dignifying transgressive relations with the identity of "friend".

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[1] The names of all children, family members and friends in this essay have been changed to protect their anonymity. Where the original name was Afrikaans I have substituted another Afrikaans name. When the original name was English – or German or Swedish, for that matter – I have used an appropriate alternative. Other names have not been changed.

[2] South Africa National Archives, Cape Town Repository (KAB), Children's Protection Act (CPA), 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Sidney R. Welch, St Mary's Church, Cape Town, to Cape Town Magistrate's Office, June 12, 1922.

[3] "I know she is doing her best to manage", the magistrate explained in requesting the minister grant a "round sum" of £10 per month for the boys. "She is very attached to her children," he went on, "and is by no means satisfied with the present arrangements". 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Cape Town Magistrate to Department of Education, November 1, 1923.

[4] Much depended on the terminology that was used to assign racial identities to human subjects. In this essay, for the sake of consistency I use the terms, "Coloured", "Colour" and "European" as they were used in the original sources. I use speech marks when I am quoting directly.

[5] 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Acting Secretary of Education to Cape Town Magistrate, October 5, 1923

[6] 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, M. E. McLoughlin, Secretary, SPCL, to Cape Town Magistrate, January 31, 1924.

[7] 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Sarah Cooper to SPCL, February 15, 1924.

[8] 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Sarah Cooper, statement, August 3, 1923.

[9] 1 (CT) 19, 97/22, Sarah Cooper, statement, August 18, 1922.

[10] Linda Chisholm, "Class, Colour and Gender in Child Welfare in South Africa, 1902-1918", *South African Historical Journal* 23, 1(1990): 100-121; Sarah E. Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860-1895* (Basingstoke, 2015); Jennifer Muirhead and Sandra Swart, "The Whites of the Child? Race and Class in the Politics of Child Welfare in Cape Town, c. 1900-1924", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 7 (2015): 229-253.

[11] Child Life Protection Association Formed, *Cape Times*, May 1, 1908.

[12] Muirhead and Swart, "The Whites of the Child". Though roughly equal number of children classed as 'European' and 'Coloured' feature in the case files, black South Africans are almost entirely absent. This reflects both the recent history of forcible segregation in Cape Town and the SPCL's ideological concern with white and coloured children only.

[13] I discuss the racialisation of children in the child welfare case record in Will Jackson, "An Unmistakable Trace of Colour: Racializing Children in Segregation-Era Cape Town, 1908-1933", *Past and Present*, 238, 1 (2018): 165-195. On Cape Town itself see Vivian Bickford Smith et al, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town, 1999).

[14] Examples include 1 (CT) 2, 262/19; 1 (CT) 5, 268/19; 1 (CT) 16, 208/21; 1 (CT) 26, 156/23.

[15] Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop* 5 (1978): 12-13. For Afrikaans culture see Elsabe Brink, "Man-made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the Volksmoeder" in Cherryl Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: D. Phillip, 1990); Marijke du Toit, "The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, 1 (2003): 155-176.

[16] Stephen Constantine and Margery Harper, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 122-36.

[17] Lis Lange, *White, Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg* (London: Ashgate, 2003), 14.

[18] Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'From "Relief" to "Justice and Protection": The Maintenance of Deserted Wives, British Masculinity and Imperial Citizenship, 1870-1920', *Gender and History* 22, 2 (2010): 309.

[19] John Tosh, "Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain 1880–1914", in Timothy P. Foley, ed., *Gender and Colonialism*, (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995), 72–85.

[20] Olive Anderson, "State, Civil Society and Separation in Victorian Marriage", *Past and Present* 163 (1999): 171.

[21] Philip Bonner, "South African Society and Culture, 1910-1948" in Robert Ross et al, eds., *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Volume II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 260.

[22] One woman testified in November 1921 that her husband, whom she had married in 1908 had gone to Rhodesia as an engine driver in 1917, returned to Cape Town in April 1921 and left again soon after. He had not sent any money during these times away. He was subsequently jailed for failing to support his wife and children before disappearing once again. 1 (CT) 17, 253/21.

[23] Bickford Smith, *Cape Town*, 14.

[24] James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 381.

[25] Dozens of files in the South African archives relate to men who had travelled to Europe during or after the First World War and had failed to provide for the mothers of their children in their absence. For graphic examples, see South African National Archives, Pretoria Repository (SAB), JUS 852 1.100.25; JUS 906 1.487.25; JUS 894 1.402.25.

[26] Older widowed women often lived with their adult children, sometimes looking after grandchildren as part of an extended familial economy of care. The majority of cases involving a language of friendship involves younger adult women, between the ages of 18 and 45.

[27] Bonner, "South African Society and Culture", 264; Elaine Katz, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1994).

[28] Howard Phillips, "Black October: The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa" (PhD diss, University of Cape Town, 1984).

[29] See, for example reports of the deaths of David Harris, 1 (CT) 1, 37/19; Francis Watts, 1 (CT) 2, 76/19; Bertie Mack, 1 (CT) 3, 105/19; Dawie Swart, 1 (CT) 3, 109/19; Tobias Walsh, 1 (CT) 26, 188/23; Samuel Reynolds, 1 (CT) 89, 53/33; Enock Murphy, 1 (CT) 37, 139/25.

[30] 1 (CT) 2, 97/19; 1 (CT) 14, 144/21; 1 (CT) 17, 255/21; 1 (CT) 18, 48/22; 1 (CT) 19, 95/22/28; 1 (CT) 26, 161/23; 1 (CT), 28, 261/23; 1 (CT) 29, 15/24.

[31] Vivian Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis: Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016); Timothy Keegan, "Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in Southern Africa, ca. 1912", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, 3 (2001): 459-477; Jeremy Martens, "Citizenship, 'Civilisation' and the Creation of South Africa's Immorality Act, 1927", *South African Historical Journal*, 59, 1 (2007): 223-241; Susanne Klausen, *Race, Maternity and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa, 1910-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Grace Davie; *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A History of the Human Sciences, 1855*-2005 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[32] To be sure, the prevalence of male mobility to a certain extent reflects authorities' own perceptions of the home as a female space. A small number of case records do describe women who deserted their families or moved outside of Cape Town. See, for example, 1 (CT) 1, 33/19; (CT) 94, 19/34. From other archives, see also KAB 1 (KWT), 6/1/25, 17/30/1; SAB GG 1183, 28/91; JUS 886, 1,313,25; JUS 950, 1, 1724, 26; JUS 976, 1, 1322, 27.

[33] Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Gary M. Gurtler, eds., *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, eds. (New York, 2014); Koenraad Verboven, "Friendship among the Romans" in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Paechin (Oxford, 2011), 404-421.

[34] For overviews, see Ray Pahl, *On Friendship* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) and Barbara Caine, ed., *Friendship: A History* (London: Equinox, 2009)

[35] Allan Silver, "Friendship and Trust as Moral Ideals: An Historical Approach", *European Journal of Sociology* 30, 2 (1989): 274-297; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Peter Robb, "Mr Upjohn's Debts: Money and Friendship in Early Colonial Calcutta", *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, 3 (2013): 1185-1217.

[36] Jon Soske and Shannon Walsh, "Thinking about Race and Friendship in South Africa" in Soske and Walsh, eds, *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* (Johannesburg: WITS University Press, 2016), 9.

[37] Leela Gandhi*, Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham NC: Duke University Press 2006).

[38] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London: Faber, 1984), 283-317; Amit Rai, *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race and Power, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002); Camilla Boisen, "The Changing Moral Justification of Empire: From the Right to Colonise to the Obligation to Civilise", *History of European Ideas* 39, 3 (2013): 335-353; Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). On 'feeling', see Joanna Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment: The Death of Livingstone and the Myth of Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[39] Seth Koven, *Slumming*: *Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 284.

[40] On distance and the power differential in relations of compassion, see Elizabeth V Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing our Attention to Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997) and Dider Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)

[41] During the preceding fifteen years, the population of Cape Town itself had doubled – to almost 80,000. Vivian Bickford Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 44.

[42] Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), 26.

[43] Bickford Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice*, 131.

[44] That "unknowable" aspect is helpfully theorised in Allan Silver, "Friendship and Trust as Moral Ideals: An Historical Approach", *European Journal of Sociology* 30, 2 (1989): 274-297.

[45] No mention – itself a notable silence – is made in the case files of sex or romance between women.

[46] K. D. M. Snell, "Belonging and Community: Understandings of 'Home' and 'Friends' among the English Poor", *Economic History Review* 65, 1 (2012), 4.

[47] For a comparable context, see Ellen Ross's account of working class motherhood in turn of the century London. Ross highlights the important of female cooperation and the extent to which mothers shared in the labour of caring for children and going to work. Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45, 133-135. See also Melanie Reynolds, *Infant Mortality and Working-Class Child Care, 1850-1899* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), chapter five.

[48] 1 (CT) 20, 121/22/28, CID Report, 29 July 1922.

[49] 1 (CT) 7, 188/20, Elsie Tyler sworn affidavit, undated.

[50] 1 (CT) 31, 114/24, CID Report, 15 August 1925.

[51] 1 (CT) 84, 6/32, Margaret Jones, sworn statement, 22 January 1932.

[52] 1 (CT) 14, 133/21, CID Report, 15 June 1921.

[53] See for example: 1 (CT) 28, 257/23/31; 1 (CT), 29 40/24; 1 (CT) 72, 17/30.

[54] 1 (CT) 94, 5/34, Hentie van der Merwe and Maria Swart, sworn statements, 14 February 1934.

[55] 1 (CT) 1, 45/19, Lizelle Snyman, sworn statement, 7 February 1919.

[56] 1 (CT) 6, 101/20, General Secretary, SPCL to Cape Town Magistrate, 15 April 1920.

[57] 1 (CT) 6, 101/20, CID Reports, 20 April 1918 and 30 November 1924.

[58] 1 (CT) 6, 101/20, CID Reports, 19 November 1925 and 8 April 1926. Other cases where women gave their children into the care of friends include 1 (CT) 21, 127/22; 1 (CT) 4, 179/19; 1 (CT) 89, 53/33.

[59] From 1918 until 1926, Hester received £1 a month to support her eldest son. This she combined with her own wages as well as contributions from her eldest daughter.

[60] 1 (CT) 4, 164/19, CID Report, July 22, 1919.

[61] Children's Protection Act (No. 25 of 1913).

[62] See, for example, the case of Gertrude Harris, 1 (CT) 1, 37/19.

[63] 1 (CT) 29, CPA 43/24, CID Report, February 16, 1926.

[64] 1 (CT) 29, CPA 43/24, G. I. Tawke, Case Secretary, to Magistrate, March 31, 1926

[65] 1 (CT) 15, 170/21, Caroline Meyer, sworn statement, June 20, 1921.

[66] 1 (CT) 15, 170/21, Magistrate to Secretary of Education, August 5, 1921.

[67] 1 (CT) 15, 170/21, Report of PCC Davis, South Africa Police, June 20, 1921. See also 1 (CT) 7, 174/20; 1 (CT), 15, 164/21; 1 (CT) 54, 179/27.

[68] 1 (CT) 19, 67/22, Magistrate to O/C Cape Town CID, April 19, 1922.

[69] See for example the cases pertaining to Cimpie de Bruin, 1 (CT) 1, 2/19; Florence Wood, 1 (CT), 41, 57/26; and Harold Peters, 1 (CT) 101, 227/34.

[70] 1 (CT) 66, 75/29, Elizabeth Steenkamp, sworn statement, April 17, 1929.

[71] 1 (CT) 19, 67/22, Nurse Wahl, Observatory House, Report, December 18, 1922.

[72] 1 (CT) 19, 67/22, P.C.C. G. Johnson to Divisional C/I Officer, Cape Town CID, May 8, 1922.

[73] Prinisha Badassy, "'This Sinister Business in Babies': Infanticide, the Perils of Baby-Farming Scandals and Infant Life Protection Legislation, South Africa, 1890–1930", University of the Witwatersrand interdisciplinary seminar in the Humanities, 5 March 2012.

[74] Burman and Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", 385.

[75] Both boys were subsequently removed from Ibrahim's care. 1 (CT) 5, 275/19, George and Matthew Dillon.

[76] Besides those described here, other good examples include those described in 1 (CT), 19, 91/22/28 and 1 (CT), 7, 168/20.

[77] 1 (CT) 21, 128/22, Annie Williams sworn statement, August 4, 1922.

[78] 1 (CT) 21, 128/22, CID Report, August 8, 1922.

[79] The proportion of women in the SPCL records who lived with men in relationships likened to informal marriage is substantial. See also Burman and Naude, 'Bearing a Bastard'.

[80] 1 (CT) 2, 94/19; 1 (CT) 3, 105/19; 1 (CT) 3, 106/19; 1 (CT) 12, 001/21; 1 (CT) 23, 205/22; 1 (CT) 37, 121/25.

[81] 1 (CT) 37, 139/25, Elena Murphy sworn statement, October 2, 1925

[82] 1 (CT) 89, 53/33, General Secretary SPCL to Commissioner of Child Welfare, 4 March 1938; Henrietta Reynolds sworn statement, April 5, 1938.

[83] 1 (CT) 18, 38/22, Hon. Secretary SPCL to Cape Town Magistrate, February 27, 1922.

[84] 1 (CT) 18, 38/22, CID Police Report, March 20, 1922.

[85] 1 (CT) 18, 38/22, CID Police Report, May 8, 1924.

[86] 1 (CT) 18, 38/22, CID Police Report, August 28, 1924.

[87] 1 (CT) 4, 172/19; 1 (CT) 7, 190/20;1 (CT) 14, 133/21; 1 (CT) 15, 163/21; 1 (CT) 15, 198/21; 1 (CT) 16, 208/21; 1 (CT) 16, 223/21; 1 (CT) 18, 48/22; 1 (CT) 23, 212/22; 1 (CT) 19, 54/22; 1 (CT) 26, 298/23; 1 (CT) 42, 110/26; 1 (CT) 51, 22/27.

[88] 1 (CT) 33, 14/25, CID Police Report, January 29, 1925.

[89] 1 (CT) 33, 14/25, CID Police Report, July 16, 1925.

[90] 1 (CT) 4, 44/19, CID Police Report, November 4, 1919.

[91] For good examples, see 1 (CT) 101, 250/34, Lucy Durrell sworn statement, December 8, 1934; 1 (CT) 89, 49/33.

[92] A significant number of these cases date from the immediate aftermath of the 1918 influenza epidemic. For an example of a family friend intervening after the death of both parents, see the case pertaining to sisters, Hannah, Martha and Edith James 1 (CT) 4, 182/19.

[93] 1 (CT) 98, 118/34, SPCL General Secretary to Cape Town Magistrate, May 30, 1934.

[94] 1 (CT) 4, 246/19, CID Police Report, November 5, 1919.

[95] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, Herman Hass to Wynberg magistrate, November 26, 1918. For other examples of an absent father claiming that the mother of his children was not fit to care for them see the testimonies included in 1 (CT) 6, 102/20, 1 (CT) 4, 179/19 and 1 (CT) 89, 49/33.

[96] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, Herman Hass to Wynberg magistrate, November 26, 1918.

[97] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, CID Police Report, August 14, 1918.

[98] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, CID Police Report, 20 December 20, 1918.

[99] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, Dorothea Hass to Herman Hass, undated.

[100] 1 (CT) 2, 65/19, A W. Kidd report, July 17, 1918.

[101] Susanne M. Klausen, *Abortion Under Apartheid: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Women's Reproductive Rights in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

[102] Burman and Naude, "Bearing a Bastard", 405.

[103] Philip Bonner, “South African Culture and Society, 1910-1948”, in *Cambridge History*, 273.

[104] 1 (CT), 84, 19/32, P. E. Dr Kock, Principal, Westcliff Public School, to SPCL, February 10, 1932.