

Significantly, Cape burghers saw themselves as equal to Dutch burghers, in contrast to the VOC, which disagreed and regarded all those settled in its territories as subject to its power and prerogatives. However, the work reveals how dissatisfied Cape burghers “used the means provided by Dutch traditions of protest to influence policies in their favour and were often quite successful” (p ix). Among the Cape’s elite, this tradition of protest dated back to 1658, a mere six years after the VOC settlement was established, when the first petition by disgruntled burghers was presented to the Cape’s commander, Jan van Riebeeck (p 70). Baartman’s extensive archival research coupled with his foregrounding of Dutch traditions of protest have produced a convincing rebuttal of the “Cape patriots” interpretation of the burgher protests of the late-eighteenth century. Twentieth-century efforts to equate burgher protests that occurred in Dutch Africa with “the struggle of an Afrikaner nation in British Africa” were clearly influenced more by the context of their writing than by the evidence. Baartman has delivered an engaging, accessible study that sheds new light on an episode of Cape history that had been considered settled for many decades. It is a fine example of revisionist history.

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### **Liberation behind prison walls**

**Derek Hook, ed, *Lie on your Wounds: the Prison Correspondence of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe***

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The possibility of any interaction between a prospective reader and a book publication is often determined by the cover page. *Lie on Your Wounds* by Derek Hook is an exemplar of this debatable point. Indeed, with the ruthless and brutal nature of the apartheid government’s implementation of unjust laws and dehumanising the conditions of “non-whites” in South Africa in mind, surely one might have expected from one of its most formidable opponents, a militant model declaring war against an imminent enemy. Instead, the cover picture of the iconic late leader of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, smiles fervently at an object absent from view. Interestingly, he does so with a smile that may possibly alert the prospective reader that the book is about a gentle giant and not an authoritative leader who often held a grim and stern facial expression that instilled fear, dominance and power. These visuals, and the title’s further wording (particularly wording such as “the prison correspondence ....” and “letters of opposition to South African apartheid”) and the book’s striking cover design alert the reader of its orientation.

Evidently, the collection of prison letters between Robert Sobukwe, his family, comrades, colleagues, and friends indicate that Sobukwe was indeed a compatriot that adored and provided for his family. Sobukwe consistently used words of blandishment towards his wife, particularly “Darling” and “Hullo Darling” in their correspondence (pp 9, 12, 16, 18, 51 and 345 among others). Amidst the challenges and strains of gaol, Sobukwe maintained adequate communication primarily with his wife Veronica in an attempt to manage the domestic sphere. In a letter dated 9 June 1964, Sobukwe wrote “My girl is growing fast. It’s time, I think, you got her a bicycle...” (p 86) exercising a parental role in an unconventional environment, Sobukwe was concerned with ensuring that his children exercised and maintained adequate health. In other cases, Veronica used the letter correspondence to relay information from Sobukwe to relatives to communicate the well-being of the extended family and financial relationships he had with people in the community. Remarkably, Hook’s selection of letters accentuates the pivotal, selfless, dedicated and mammoth roles played by wives and partners of political figures detained in apartheid gaols. Veronica endured to ensure that the domestic sphere remained stable and she also visited Sobukwe regularly during his incarceration at different places in South Africa. The African idiom “Mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bogaleng” (literally a woman holds the knife at the sharp edge) describes women of endurance and great stature such as Winnie Mandela and Zondeni Veronica Sobukwe, amongst others.

The letters are evidence and justification of the desire for intellectual stimulation and to circumvent the boredom and monotony of incarceration. Sobukwe often requested novels and reading material from Nell Marquard with whom he debated poetry, the arts, formal studies, and literature. The depth of the debates went as far as Sobukwe mentioning “I agree completely that when Hamlet kills Claudius at the end of the play he does not do so in vengeance. You say Hamlet does so as a judge; that he is now fully integrated. I have my doubts” (p 211). Sobukwe’s thirst for up-to-date knowledge was evident in his enthusiasm to follow international affairs including the political upheavals in Harlem and Nehru’s leadership.

The conditions from which some of the prison correspondence was written (pp 53, 333, and 415) sheds some light upon the fundamental need for human interaction, even though through pen and paper. Whilst at Robben Island, as the pictures in the book have contextualised, Sobukwe was prohibited from conversing with prison warders and was secluded from other prisoners, including Ahmed Kathrada and Nelson Mandela. Thus, the construction and response to letters was critical in soothing his loneliness.

The editor’s selection and presentation of Sobukwe’s letters is good particularly when one compares it to other publications on the history of Sobukwe and the PAC. The construction of a publication of this nature was no doubt immensely toilsome requiring the visitation of a plethora of archives. Hook’s compilation of Sobukwe’s letters is structured conveniently for readers and intellectuals who perceive archival expeditions as cumbrous and onerous. The book furthermore provides a foundation for historians envisaging academic work on the life and times of Sobukwe. Most

importantly, the experiences, constraints, and dynamics that Sobukwe grappled with are presented from “the horse’s mouth”, paving the way for a deeper understanding and closeness with Sobukwe. It is unfortunate that the censoring of communication (particularly letters) by prison officials has denied us access to critical information especially on the communication of political ambitions and ideologies. In an age of advanced technological development and the availability of a plethora of digital communication platforms, what shall be said of our lives?

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