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RENDERING VISIBLE: The underground organisational experience of the ANC-led Alliance until 1976

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of underground organisation from the 1950s until 1976, though it also draws on material prior to and after these periods. It delves into an area of social activity that has been relatively invisible in scholarship on South Africa and resistance history. The study considers the concept of underground operations. It is taken to include not only the place where the 'final' activities may have taken place, but those countries where cadres were trained or housed, even if this would normally be characterised as located in 'exile'. It is 'outside', but it such activities are also treated as part of the underground phenomenon considered as a whole.

At the level of historiography the thesis is a re-reading of early ANC underground, partly giving a different interpretation to existing literature, but also relying on the insights of oral informants. The establishment of the SACP underground is fleshed out through interview material, but the thesis challenges the notion that the Party controlled the ANC, arguing in contrast that the conditions of the alliance demanded limitations on SACP's autonomy.

In the period after Rivonia the conventional historiography speaks of a lull and an absence of the ANC and its allies. The thesis provides evidence to contradict this showing that while there may have been silence, there was never absence. It also probes the relationship between ANC and Black Consciousness, where it shows far more overlap than much of the existing literature has disclosed.

The study is at once a historical narrative and also an attempt to characterise the social character of this area of study, the special features that go to make up clandestine organisaton. Within this characterisation of underground activity, the thesis also probes the gendered nature of these activities, the definite impact of concepts of masculinity and femininity within a conventionally male terrain. Related to these questions the thesis probes the relationship between the personal and organisational, both at the level of individual decision-making and notions of love and realising emotions.

The chapter on gender examines the denial of manhood to African men and considers ANC masculinities and assertion of the need to regain manhood in that context. The thesis also examines the entry of women into the male world of the army and underground, explaining many of the difficulties and the countervailing efforts of women as well as certain men to assert the rights of women to equal participation. The chapter on the impact of revolutionary activity on the personal examines the subordination of individual judgement to the collective and in the personal sphere, notions of revolutionary love, found not only in South Africa but in most revolutionary struggles, where 'love for the people' tends to displace inter-personal love.

The final chapter –by way of an epilogue- examines the outcomes of struggles after 1976, initiated by various forces including the underground organisation. In this period ANC hegemony begins to consolidate and the character of that hegemony is broken down into various components.