Mohandas K. Gandhi, Hermann Kallenbach and Friends: Their 'Experimental Field' South Africa as a Kaleidoscope for Global Microhistory

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KEYWORDS: M. K. GANDHI, H. KALLENBACH, SOUTH AFRICA, GLOBAL MICROHISTORY, MIGRATION, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, IDENTITY

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand (later known as Mahatma) Gandhi is probably known to almost everyone. Not least since the Russian attack on Ukraine and the associated discussions about arms deliveries and peace negotiations, he has now increasingly come again into the focus of peace movements and in the media comment columns, for example in Germany. Scientific editions or translations of his works have appeared in recent years, especially to his 150th birthday in 2019. The same applies to academic publications about him and his work. At least from hearsay, his struggle as part of the Indian independence movement is also known to a wider public.

Nevertheless, most people probably do not think of the early Gandhi who lived in South Africa—with some interruptions—from 1893 to 1914. There he started several campaigns for the oppressed Indians. His almost 21 years in South Africa are hardly known to the wider public, although they were of great importance for his personal development as well as for his fight for independence in India. In South Africa, Gandhi developed central elements of his thinking and methodology, which later

became so important to his politics (Weber 2004, 54).

Although there are certainly some stable elements in his philosophy, his thoughts and actions are nevertheless full of contradictions and inconsistencies 'that make sense only within discrete historical moments' (Menon 2012, 500). Gandhi's African episode has only received increased attention in research in the last few decades (e.g. Guha 2014; Desai & Vahed 2016; Lev 2012)—apart from some older examples focussing on the political history of events (Huttenback 1971) and more or less the personal development of Gandhi and his early career (e.g. Brown 1989). For a long time, Gandhi's stay in South Africa was viewed merely as an overture to India and Gandhi himself as an 'Indian thinker' (Menon 2012, 501; Lev 2012).

In South Africa, one German individual played an extremely important role for Gandhi: the architect Hermann Kallenbach. Despite his actual significance for Gandhi, so far Kallenbach has received too little attention in research and popular representations. For example, in Richard Attenborough's famous movie on Gandhi, he was only allowed a brief appearance. Especially in Gandhi biographies, most of them political biographies, but also in many other works, Kallenbach often was only mentioned in passing or in a footnote (Rothermund 1989, 70-3). Research sometimes, indeed, can be called very 'Gandhi-centric' (Lev 2012, XVIII). It often gave Kallenbach and other friends little space or saw him only as a student or even a "puppet" of Gandhi and not as an independent figure. An earlier exception to this is Thomas Weber (2004, 69-83), who examined Gandhi as a mentor and student of his fellow human beings and also included Kallenbach and other individuals. Another exception are Hunt and Bhana (2007) in their article on Gandhi and Kallenbach and the Tolstoy Farm.

Standard works on Kallenbach include his first biography, published by his great-niece Isa Sarid and Christian Bartolf (Sarid, Bartolf 1997) based on a lot of primary sources. This biography is complemented by the excellent work of Shimon Lev (2012), who focused primarily on the psychological and personal level of the friendship between Gandhi and Kallenbach. Apart from Sarid and Bartolf (1997) with its family connection, Lev was the first author to gain access to the Kallenbach family archive in Israel. Lev and Weber identified Kallenbach as a 'key figure' for Gandhi (Lev 2012, XVII). In 2011, a biography of Gandhi written by journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Joseph Lelyveld caused outrage in India because at one point, regarding the relationship to Kallenbach, the book appeared to question Gandhi's heterosexual orientation. Lelyveld distanced himself from the position later.[1] His book was nevertheless banned in the northern Indian state of Gujarat, Gandhi's birthplace.[2]

The situation with respect to research literature is quite similar with other South African friends of Gandhi. But there has also been an increase in this regard in the last few decades. An early example is Chatterjee (1992), who has worked on Gandhi's Jewish friends, followed a little later by Paxton (2006), who has written a short biography of Sonja Schlesin, the Jewish secretary of Gandhi in South Africa. Other books like Lev (2012) and Sarid, Bartolf (1997) also deal with Gandhis friends although their focus is on Kallenbach and Gandhi. What is still missing is a systematic global history approach, which is all the more obvious considering that time, space and actors are ideal for it. Studies on individual topics, like Kramm (2024) on the utopian communities or Devés (2020) on the global Theosophical networks, have prepared the ground for such a study.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of strong globalisation and industrialisation. New technologies in media, communication and transportation emerged on a big scale as well as a global capitalist labour market. There were large global migration movements and counter-movements arose. South Africa with its settler colonies can be seen as one nodal point of these developments, for example regarding indentured labour and racism. Gandhi, Kallenbach and their friends were located in the middle of this nodal point, being influenced by these global processes, representing them and at the same time shaping them as individual actors or as a group.

This essay attempts to take a kaleidoscopic look at Gandhi, Kallenbach and their friends and relationships during their time in South Africa. This means that the focus is on the different fragments, the diversity and transformations and not on a linear narrative of their relationships. This results in the naming of the sections of this article as 'Set of Fragments', each of which relates to a broader thematic field and can be turned in different directions or put together in different ways. The essay starts with 'Migration', followed by 'Racism and Gandhi's Experimental Campaigns', to close with 'Political Ideas, New Technologies, Social movements and Communities'. As far as possible, the article broadens the perspective to come to a global microhistory (Fischer-Tiné 2019) and will have a look at the individual, the local, the regional, the national, the imperial and/or the global level, depending on the concrete historical situation. This approach has the advantage that it can combine the small-scale nature of microhistory with the large processes and structures of global history.

Gandhi called his autobiography 'My Experiments with the truth'. That is why I chose to make use of the term 'experimental field' for the South African environment as I will have a closer look at the question of how

the actors dealt with the concrete historical circumstances and how they 'experimented' with them. Because of its special social structure with labour and refugee migration, with racism, antisemitism, imperialism and social movements South Africa was a particularly good field for Gandhi's and Kallenbach's experimentation, not just in testing their different methods but also with reference to the formation of identity and communal life. Against the backdrop of South Africa, this essay deals with Kallenbach's role in Gandhi's development into the Mahatma and with Gandhi's role in Kallenbach's development into a Zionist. In doing so, the article turns to Gandhi's subsequently stylised representation of "soulmates" and deconstruct it: In addition to the spiritual dimension of shared influences from philosophy and literature, the material dependencies in intimate friendship will be of particular interest.

First set of fragments: Migration

Gandhi himself came to South Africa as a migrant when the merchant company Dada Abdulla & Co. had offered him a job as a lawyer for a civil suit in Natal: 'Imperial infrastructure and trans-colonial entanglements brought Gandhi to South Africa' (Kramm 2024, 63). There he encountered an environment that was also heavily influenced by migration. At that time, most Asians in South Africa were of Indian origin, apart from smaller Chinese and Malay minorities. A proportion of the Indian migrants consisted of Hindu and Muslim merchants who, like Gandhi, mostly came from what is now the northern Indian state of Gujarat, but most of the other migrants were indentured labourers who lived in very poor conditions and initially worked primarily in agriculture.

From the 1860s onwards—with an interruption between 1866 and 1874 because of an economic recession—labourers, many of them Tamil- and Telugu-speaking people from southern India, came on temporary contracts to South Africa, to escape the adverse circumstances at home like droughts, famines, overpopulation or floods and to meet the high demand for workers. They were hired under conditions of indenture to work on sugar cane plantations in Natal and later on in the railway and coal, gold or diamond mining industries in the Transvaal (Bhana & Brain 1990, 35).

After five years of indentured labour many of the workers decided to stay as so-called "free Indians". Most of them became traders. They were followed, beginning in the middle of the 1870s, by so-called 'passenger Indians', mostly Muslim merchants, 'who travelled independently of any government-sponsored arrangements' (Guest 1996, 15). However, to prevent workers from staying after the completion of their contract period, bit by bit, special discriminating laws and annual taxes

were introduced by the government (Guest 1996).

The main settlement area of the Indians was the settler colony Natal on the east coast with the capital in Durban. In around fifty years, from 1860 to 1911, at least 150,000 Indians are said to have migrated to Natal alone as indentured labourers (ibid., 13). Although the number declined from the 1860s onwards, perhaps because of better opportunities in India in the then booming railway and road construction or in the tea industry in Assam (Visaria 2008, 513), this was a significant number. Among them were some who had acquired land ownership and the right to vote when their contract ended. The white settlers felt increasingly threatened, afraid of losing their control of business and social dominance. By the beginning of the twentieth century, they were outnumbered by the Indians (Guest 1996, 12).

In order to take action against this, the government implemented further restrictive measures, including disenfranchisement and banning land acquisition. Indians were not allowed to leave special areas and had to carry identification documents with them. The main aim of measures like these was to deter Indians (and Asians in general) from immigrating and to encourage them to return to their homeland (Lev 2012, XXI). Something similar happened in Transvaal and the Orange Free State (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 27) with quite smaller proportions of an Indian (or Asian) population. These restrictions also extended to other Asians like the Chinese who were in a special position as they already were even more restricted than Indians. While the first Indians came in 1860, the first Chinese indentured labourers reached the Transvaal in 1904 where many of them worked in the gold mining industry. So, they were also affected by the regulations, even though they arrived later than the Indian workers. Their contracts were even tougher than those of the Indians as these contracts were only designed for a duration of three years and did not offer the possibility of becoming 'ex-indentured' afterwards (Harris 2013, 18f.).

Parallel to Indian and Chinese immigration, Jewish migration to South Africa, and more so to other parts of the world like the USA, was also taking place, beginning in the 1880s. In contrast to Indian labour migration, this was in many cases refugee migration, but sometimes also labour or economic migration or a combination of both, although not at the low level of indentured labour (Frankel 2023, 10). Gandhi's two friends and colleagues Hermann Kallenbach and Sonja Schlesin were a part of this mostly Eastern European migration movement. Both, Kallenbach and Schlesin's family, came from the East Prussian-Russian border area around the small town of Neustadt or Naumiestis in what is now Lithuania. Kallenbach's family had lived on the German side,

Schlesin's family just a few kilometres further on the Russian side (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 18).

The region had a high Jewish population, as the residential and working rights of the Jewish population of the Russian Empire were – at least officially - limited to this area in the so-called Pale of Settlement (in German: *Ansiedlungsrayon*). Under the liberal Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855-81) there was significant relaxation for the Jews in the Tsarist Empire, but this resulted in an anti-Semitic counter-movement under his successor Alexander III (1881-94). As a result, there were even persecutions of Jews and pogroms from 1881 to 1884 and more restrictive laws, which led to a strong emigration movement, especially to the USA and South Africa (Brinkmann 2024, 17, 30, 31, 50). In the Jewish press South Africa—like the USA (Frankel 2023, 30)—was sometimes even described as a 'golden country' (Lev 2012, XXI).

Schlesin's family emigrated to South Africa in 1891 and 1892, Kallenbach in 1896. Of course, both were in a far more privileged position than the contract workers, Kallenbach before his arrival had studied architecture in Stuttgart and Munich. He benefited from the construction boom in the more cosmopolitan Johannesburg and became a successful architect in South Africa (Guha 2014, 165; on Johannesburg: Hyslop 2011, 36). Schlesin later was matriculated at the University of the Cape of Good Hope from 1903 onwards and became a secretary for Gandhi (Paxton 2006). Another Jewish friend of Gandhi was Henry Polak. He did not fit in any of the categories mentioned above as he came from Britain and was sent to his uncle in South Africa by his parents. They did not want him to marry Millie Graham, a Christian and supporter of women's suffrage. Polak did not let his parents stop him and married Millie shortly before he left (Guha 2014, 164). Nevertheless, all three, Kallenbach, Schlesin and Polak, whose family had migrated from the Netherlands and Germany to Britain, 'came from families that had been subject to prejudice and persecution'. Therefore, Guha's argument at first sight has some merit, that they 'were quicker than other Europeans to deplore the unreasoning racism of rulers in the Transvaal' (ibid., 165).

In the words of Kallenbach from 1913: 'It is because I am a Jew that I have better understood and deeply felt and resented the unjust treatment of the Indians in South Africa' (Quoted in Lev 2012, XXVIII). This will be discussed with respect to the diasporic experience later in the paper. At the same time, however, there were also Jews in South Africa who took the British position because—according to Henry Polak's assumption—they feared being put on the same level as the 'dark-skinned Indians' (Quoted in Guha 2014, 457). However, Shimon Lev

(2012, XXVIII f.) assumes that Gandhi's Jewish friends 'were not representative of the sentiment of the Jewish community at large'. As these friends built a strong group Lev also sees in them 'the ideological foundation for Jewish opposition to Apartheid in later years' (Lev 2012, XXIX).

Second set of fragments: Racism and Gandhi's experimental campaigns

The description of the South African manifestation of the globalising capitalist labour market at the end of the nineteenth century already gives an idea of its influence on or its stimulation of racism and its practical effects, for example in governmental regulations not necessarily determined by immigration only. Referring to Adam M. McKeown (2008), Frankel notes similar developments regarding the nineteenth century Chinese and Jewish labour immigration to the United States and the Eastern European Jewish migration through and to Germany. It was 'the desire to exclude certain racial groups that led to the development of the various mechanisms involved in border control and identification and not as a requirement created by the global movement of labour itself' (Frankel 2023, 11).

This found its discursive expression in the images of the "dirty" Chinese, Indians or "Orientals" as well as in images of "floods" or "swarms" (Lee 2003, 45 f.). These images and discourses were in use at the same time for example in the USA, in Germany (Frankel 2023, 14), in England and in South Africa (Guha 2014, 161, 457). In addition, Hyslop (2011, 38) is right in pointing in this context at the turn of the century to the 'rise of white racial states in the Anglophone world', meaning the settler colonies like South Africa but also Australia or New Zealand. There seems to have been less discrimination against Jewish immigrants in South Africa than in other parts of the world (Lev 2012, XXIII). Although antisemitism in society can be observed and there even were some restrictions for them, 'the Jews had a higher status than the Indians' (Lev 2012, XXV) and they identified more with the 'mainstream ruling white group' (ibid.).

Gandhi had studied law in London and worked unsuccessfully as a lawyer in India for some time before moving to South Africa where he was immediately affected by racism after his arrival. He was supposed to help Dada Abdulla, a Muslim merchant friend of his, in a legal dispute in Pretoria. At the time, British lawyers in South Africa were accused of not representing coloured clients well enough. It therefore made sense to leave the case in question to an Indian. During his train journey from Durban to Pretoria, Gandhi experienced racial discrimination when he was ordered by the white conductor to move from the first class to the

baggage car. When Gandhi refused, he was beaten.

Further experiences such as this event, which is in Gandhi's autobiography as well as in the research literature highlighted as the key event that represented the problem of racial discrimination in general, motivating him to advocate for the rights of the Indian minority in South Africa. Although his highly stylised autobiography, written retrospectively, should be read with caution, these were at least radical experiences for Gandhi that certainly shaped him. In the words of Hyslop (2011, 15 f.) Gandhi seems to have been 'deeply traumatized by these events', the more so as he did not 'seem to have previously experienced racial violence or extreme humiliation in India or Britain.' But—as we will see—the event should indeed not be overestimated as 'a moment of epiphany against empire and racism' (Menon 2012, 502).

Remarkably, Gandhi did not stand up for the African populations which was even more discriminated against. Indeed, he had no African friends (Markovits 2004, 81). On the contrary, he initially even used the racist, derogatory term "Kaffir" and feared that Indians would be equated with the African populations (Guha 2014, 181, 293). His statements still reflected his belief in the emerging Western "biological racial science" of the nineteenth century, in racial superiority or civilisational hierarchies with the "Whites" at the top, followed by the Indians and the "lazy" and "uncivilised" Africans located at the bottom tier (ibid., 293; Desai & Vahed 2016, 45, 105, 119). Gandhi was 'partial to the idea of Indo-Aryan bloodlines' (Desai & Vahed 2016, 45). He also never seems to have criticised Indian merchants and their treatment of the African population. During this time, Gandhi tried to specifically use an exclusivist 'Indianness' and the associated differentiation from the oppressed local African population in order to particularly emphasize the connection and loyalty of Indians to the British Empire and India and to thus increase their cohesion (Bhana & Vahed 2005, 151).

Later, from roundabout 1908-9 onwards, while still in South Africa, Gandhi seems to have changed his attitude toward Africans—at least he now wrote some corresponding articles and speeches in which he also complained about their discrimination and assumed some equality with Indians (Guha 2014, 293), although he still sometimes used racist language and stereotypes (Desai & Vahed 2016, 157). At almost the same time, Gandhi also became closer to the Chinese community. Before this turn, they had mostly organised and acted separately. Various considerations played a role here, namely an 'economic exclusivity' which can also be seen on the part of Indian merchants who referred to the category of class by separating themselves from Indian and Chinese indentured labourers at the same time. Moreover, for

Gandhi and the Indians, the distinction between "British subjects" and "non-British subjects" was a central element in their campaigns. And finally, racist reasons or at least a self-perception of a kind of cultural superiority were important on both sides (Harris 2013, 20 f.).

Another reason for this adaptation in his attitude towards African and Chinese communities in South Africa is likely related to a global dimension. In 1905 Gandhi was impressed by various boycotts by the Chinese against the USA and Japan and against their immigration restrictions for Chinese workers. In this context, Gandhi was also likely inspired by the Indian boycotts of foreign products during the swadeshi movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905 and by the victory of Japan over Russia and the subsequent Russian revolution with its strikes and mass mobilisations as an inspiring development (Komarov 2020, 84 f.).

Gandhi's slowly changing attitude towards the Africans and the Chinese are just two examples of the contradictions, learning processes and complex ambivalences during Gandhi's 'experiments with truth'. He did not publish any writing that completely outlined his programme as a whole. His thinking, his writings, letters and articles have each to be seen in a specific context. They were constantly evolving and changing over time, although there were certainly constants. Personal encounters with people, such as the one with Kallenbach, or reading experiences often played a major role in these changes.

Another important factor for the changes in Gandhi's thinking and actions were political developments. In his Transvaal campaign of 1910 Gandhi for the first time was able to mobilise all Indians as a nation without divisions in religious, economic or ethnic groups. All groups were affected by the racial restrictions of the government, the merchants as well as the indentured labourers and others. This happened after the partition of Bengal in 1905 at a time when a radical and increasingly anti-Muslim nationalism was developing in India. 'Gandhi's inclusive and peaceful militancy offered a coherent and inspiring alternative' (Hyslop 2011, 45) for India as a whole.

In the case of his change in racism towards the African population, there is a further temporal connection that is particularly obvious: both in the Second Boer War (1899-1902) between the Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State and in the brutally suppressed Bambatha or Zulu Rebellion in Natal in 1906, which turned out to become a massacre of Zulu-speaking groups, Gandhi and his compatriots formed medical units on the British side (ibid., 42). However, these expressions of loyalty as "British subjects" did not lead to the hoped-for improvement in the situation for the Indian population, so Gandhi was disappointed by the colonial government's lack of accommodation

(Desai & Vahed 2016). He increasingly aligned himself more closely with the African population and at the same time distanced himself from the Empire and the West.

Gandhi's first fight against a bill that denied Indians the right to vote in 1894 was unsuccessful, but it drew public attention to the discrimination and led to the founding of the Natal Indian Congress to represent the interests of Indians. In 1903, the Transvaal British Indian Association was founded to protest against anti-Indian legislation in the area (ibid., 64). In the following years, Gandhi fought against the special taxes for Indians, against registration laws and other discriminatory laws. In 1904 he founded a newspaper called Indian Opinion as a mouthpiece for Indians.

Gandhi's first satyagraha campaign was against the Asiatic Law Amendment Act of 1907 in the north-eastern region of South Africa, the Transvaal. The method of Satyagraha was developed by him and involved a vow taken by those involved. The enemy should not be won through violence, but through one's own suffering. The Satyagrahi tested one's truth by actively risking potential harm to oneself through non-cooperation. With the new bill, authorities in the Transvaal planned to take fingerprints for identification in a registration card. Indians should carry this registration card with them at all times. Many Indians now refused and were arrested - including Gandhi. Although Gandhi ultimately negotiated a compromise, the government did not stick to it. As a result, many Indians openly burned their registration cards, leading to mass arrests (Huttenback 1971, 175-208).

Something similar happened in 1913. The Transvaal government passed a law according to which only Christian marriages were valid. The British responded to the protests and satyagraha campaigns with violence and mass arrests. At the same time, the railway workers went on strike, so the government was ultimately overwhelmed by the situation and passed the Indian Relief Act of 1914. This law led to non-Christian marriages being recognised again. In addition, the registration requirements and the special tax for Indians were abolished (ibid., 324-31). So, Gandhi and the Satyagrahis achieved many of their goals. Gandhi returned to India in 1914, where he was able to make use of his South African experiences and experiments.

Third set of fragments: Political ideas, new technologies, social movements and communities

Gandhi's South African inner circle consisted primarily of Jewish friends. In addition to Kallenbach, Schlesin, the journalist and lawyer Polak and a few Jewish businessmen, the British lawyer Lewis Walter Ritch should

be mentioned (Lev 2012, XXIX). In this respect Johannesburg was very important to Gandhi's trajectory, but at the same time ambivalent: On the one hand, Gandhi was able to observe all the negative sides of industrialisation and capitalism, like air pollution, capitalist exploitation of labourers and their lung diseases and the ruthlessness of the government. On the other hand, he benefited from the city's inspiring cosmopolitanism, especially by his interactions with its Jewish community. Some young Jewish intellectuals, like Kallenbach and Polak, were heavily inspired by Theosophy and were able to instil an excitement for the 'philosophy' in him, too (Hyslop 2011, 40f.).

It can be assumed that this environment, despite the political disappointment with the liberal government in Britain, had a great influence on Gandhi's civilisation-critical and anti-modernist book 'Hind Swaraj' (1909) which he wrote on a steamship on his way back from London to South Africa (Menon 2012, 502). Although 'Hind Swaraj' rejected the modern Western civilisation, its state, its imperialism and capitalist economy in favour of an imagined traditional Indian self-government, Gandhi's 'political project depended on the modern technologies, which he denounced' (Hyslop 2011, 46; also Kramm 2024, 67f.). For mass mobilisation, the circulation of ideas and personal contacts in networks, the newer and imperial technologies, medias and infrastructures at the turn of the twentieth century were indispensable. The telegraph, the steamships, the railway, new postal systems and connections like the Suez Canal or newspapers enabled simplification and acceleration in communication and transportation. These rapid globalizing changes also gave rise to counter-movements that longed for a simpler world (Kießling 2024, 197; on antisemitism Wyrwa 2019, 16-18, 22-8).

This also helped in spreading ideas around the world—like Theosophy which became a global religious, esoteric or even social movement at the turn of the century with lodges of the Theosophical Society in the USA, in Latin America, in Asia as well as in Europe and also in Africa (Devés 2020). The first lodge in South Africa was built in Johannesburg in 1894 and re-established in 1899 by the abovementioned L. W. Ritch, entangled with English and Indian lodges (Lev 2012, 6). The "Eastern" spirituality of Theosophy turned—like Gandhi and other thinkers and movements of his time—against the materialistic world while it paradoxically was using the means of the same world at the same time (Strube & Krämer 2020; Guha 2014, 163).

Vegetarianism was another such globally widespread idea associated with reform movements of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and was also important for Gandhi and his friends (Gregory 2007, 3). Both, vegetarianism and Theosophy, were closely

related. Theosophy's particular interest in Asian religions may also have contributed to this. At least some of Gandhi's ideas were heavily influenced by his time in London and by Victorian England as a whole, as Leela Gandhi has shown. There he already came in contact with Theosophy and Vegetarianism but also with pacifism, animal rights or Christian ideas (Gandhi 2006; Menon 2012, 502). Nevertheless, during his time in England, Gandhi never became part of the theosophical movement. His political work in South Africa remained more important, all the more so as Kallenbach in particular was an ardent theosophist (Hyslop 2011, 41).

Another thing that Gandhi and the aforementioned friends had in common was that they belonged to a diaspora: one was Indian, the other Jewish. They had similar experiences with oppression, sometimes with violence, with prejudice or with stereotypical competitive thinking and envy in the event of success. One could speak of different forms of anti-colonial resistance on both the Indian and Jewish sides. Gandhi drew such comparisons early on, namely for the first time in 1895, and later repeated them. He quoted comparative texts from the Cape immigration office on Russian Jews, which he contrasted with a text from the Pretoria Chamber of Commerce on Indians (Chatterjee 1992, 29-37).

However, his own statements were also not free of stereotypes, for example when he praised their generally good handling of money in Indian Opinion in 1906 (Lev 2012, XXV f.). This ambiguity towards Jews also seems not untypical for the time. The German Indologist Paul Deussen, for instance, who visited India in 1892/93 and Egypt and Palestine in 1890, had Jewish friends and was married to a woman of Jewish origin, but at the same time adhered to antisemitic stereotypes (Delfs 2017). In any case, both groups, Indians and Jews, were immigrants who were still searching for an identity in their new South African environment. 'The immigrant Jew and the immigrant Hindu or immigrant Indian Muslim all shared a sense of loss of an *Ur*-community' (Chatterjee 1992, 19).

At least a selective reading of Theosophy could provide a remedy here, as its founder, the Russian Helena Blavatsky, assumed the formation of a 'nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color' in her description of the aims of a Theosophical Society. Another aim was 'to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science' and to promote the study of 'Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science'.[3] The members therefore had plenty of room for scepticism, for example towards occult or racial or elitist elements in Blavatsky's thinking (Chatterjee 1992, 3 f., 18 f.). The universal primal religion of the Theosophical Society offered

a new opportunity for identification that can be seen in Gandhi's 'general belief that all religions refer to the same truth' (Bergunder 2014, 420). This could be put to good use in Gandhi's form of cultural nationalism in which he tried to bridge religious or ethnic divisions (especially between Hindus and Muslims) in favour of an anti-materialistic and antimodernist Indian nation. This was a different form of a nationalism than that of the radical or the moderate and modernist nationalists in India (Bevir 2020).

His nationalism was different in another way, too: 'Unlike other anti-colonial leaders, who aimed to portray themselves as masculine, modern, and (often) militaristic, Gandhi produced an image of his body that played on the British stereotype of the weak and feminized Hindu' (Hyslop 2011, 48). When he visited London in 1906, he witnessed a demonstration by the suffragettes, a women's movement engaging in civil disobedience for the right to vote. The women participating in the demonstration were imprisoned because they did not pay their fines. Gandhi was impressed by their resilience. In 1907 he wrote: 'When women are manly, will men be effeminate?' (Desai & Vahed 2016, 72). Sonja Schlesin, Gandhi's secretary, and Millie Polak, Henry Polak's wife, both were influenced by the suffragettes in their concerns for women in Gandhi's campaigns (Paxton 2006, 17).

The now frequently discussed question of Gandhi's sexuality in connection with his living in Kallenbach's home (Guha 2014, 600 f.; Lev 2012, 18-22) perhaps appears in a different light, namely as a part of a conscious and experimental play with such gender- and other images (more general Malhotra 2021). Both Gandhi and Kallenbach must have been aware of the resulting impressions because every 'element of their relationship broke social conventions of the time', regarding class, 'race' (a white and an Asian man), having no black servant as 'well-off homeowners' and that 'two men shared a home' (Lev 2012, 21) from 1907/08 to 1910.

The ideas mentioned above were put into practice, for example in new forms of communities. Again, it seems to have been a global characteristic of the nineteenth and early twentieth century to carry out such utopian ideas in a community form. Gandhi had founded his Phoenix settlement in Natal in December 1904 pushed by Henry Polak (Lev 2012, 35). Ashrams existed as a community form in India before Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi combined these traditional forms with new inspirations (Kramm 2024, 58 f.). Gandhi's ashram, a small farm, organized like a village, where everyone received the same salary without distinction of position, race or nationality, was inspired by John Ruskin's work on the principles of political economy, published in his book 'Unto This Last' (four articles beginning in 1860) (Bartolf 1994, 200).

The aforementioned Jewish lawyer and journalist Henry Polak suggested that Gandhi should read this book. The residents of the settlement worked in a printing press and on the Indian Opinion newspaper, founded by Gandhi in 1903. Polak's journalistic experience also benefited the newspaper (Chatterjee 1992, 74-8). Kallenbach was an important person in the conceptualisation of the schoolhouse for the settlement, later he became the responsible trustee of the Phoenix settlement, and Phoenix became the model experiment for the unique Tolstoy Farm. Both ashrams are viewed as 'prototype for future ashrams in India' (Lev 2012, 34; see also Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 25).

At the same time, Gandhi had a lasting effect on Kallenbach in becoming vegetarian and experimenting with food, his body and nutrition in a spiritual way (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 15 f.). Other life changes involved reducing spending and targeting the improvement of lives of the poorest people. Kallenbach became increasingly involved in the Indian struggle in Johannesburg and became one of the most prominent white supporters. He not only became Gandhi's bodyguard, but also an important link between him and the Indian community, for example when he visited Satyagrahi in prison or picked them (or Gandhi) up from there after their release.

In 1908, Kallenbach and Gandhi began living together in Kallenbach's house in Johannesburg for almost a year and a half. They later shared a tent near Johannesburg. The growing trust was reflected in Kallenbach becoming the financier of Gandhi and his family, after which they called each other the 'Upper House' (Gandhi) and the 'Lower House' (Kallenbach), named after the British Parliament, the House of Lords and the House of Commons (Lev 2012, 16; Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 17). Kallenbach was obliged to save all money and spend it only with the approval of Gandhi (Lev 2012, 17). When Gandhi travelled to London in 1909, Kallenbach was appointed secretary of the India British Association, which was his first official position. In addition, he began to financially support Gandhi's newspaper Indian Opinion, which was in trouble at the time. Kallenbach became Gandhi's representative (Lev 2012, 86 f.).

Gandhi's second ashram in South Africa was founded in the Transvaal in 1910 to help Indians and their families arrested during the Satyagraha campaigns. Since he did not have the financial resources, the architect Kallenbach offered him a piece of land. One can agree with Shimon Lev: Without Kallenbach, the farm probably would not have existed (Lev 2012, 35). It was described as a 'high point in the relationship between Gandhi and Kallenbach' (Hunt & Bhana 2007, 174). Although Gandhi actually placed great value on lack of possessions and often criticised Kallenbach for his supposed luxury, he was, on the other hand, dependent on the

resources of the generous architect. The latter became Gandhi's right-hand man. Not only the farm, but also the campaigns benefited from his organisational and logistical skills (Lev 2012, 37-9). Although Gandhi described Kallenbach as his "soulmate", one must nevertheless agree—apart from the financial dependencies already described—with Magaret Chatterjee (1992, 54), who spoke of a 'tyranny of love' on the occasion of the 'Articles of Agreement' written by Gandhi in 1911 between the 'Upper House' and the 'Lower House'. According to the agreement, Kallenbach, who was traveling to Europe at the time, would not be allowed to get married, he should travel third class and he would be allowed to visit his family in London (Lev 2012, 47 f.).

Most of Gandhi's letters to Kallenbach are similar to those to other friends - including, for example, requests to live ascetically or follow certain diets. However, letters that are similar to the agreement or even have romantic or jealous impressions, for example that Kallenbach should not look at a woman with lust, cannot be found from other friends, to whom he apparently applied different standards. For Kallenbach, the standards to which he exposed himself were more important (Lev 2012).

The farm's name Tolstoy Farm is inspired by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, whose 1893 work, 'The Kingdom of God is Within You', greatly influenced Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence (Bartolf 1994). The book presented a new form of organization for society based on an inter-pretation of Christianity with a main focus on universal love and poverty. Tolstoy and his followers were 'opposed to imperialism and violence' (Hunt & Bhana 2007, 177). Beginning in the 1890s there emerged an international Tolstoyan movement with communities around the globe, in the United Stated as well as in the Netherlands, in Britain, in Chile or in South Africa (Alston 2014, Chapter 4).

In 1909 Gandhi visited the English community which influenced his writing 'Hind Swaraj', in 1911 Kallenbach met with Tolstoyans in Britain (Lev 2012, 51). The aforementioned British lawyer Lewis Ritch, who also was a great admirer of Tolstoy and had already written to him himself, now established contact with Gandhi. There is no evidence that Kallen-bach defined himself as a follower of Tolstoy before his encounter with Gandhi. But: Gandhi's experimental understanding only fully developed during the time in which he lived with Kallenbach. So, it was more of an interplay of discussions and experiments that came into effect here. Vegetarianism, asceticism, simplicity, living in a village, nonviolence or the emphasis on manual labour were some of the elements to be found in Gandhi's philosophy and practice (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 24).

However, Gandhi 'formulated his own influential strategies mixing [...] various elements in his own way, and in so doing went beyond Tolstoy'

(Christoyannopoulos 2020, 201). Bodily experiments 'included refraining from the vices of alcohol and drugs, and also sexual desire' as part of spiritual character building and strengthening the body (Kramm 2024, 71). Kallenbach added German sporting aspects to the programme of the farm when he 'introduced practices of bodily fitness from the life reform movement' (ibid., 70; German *Lebensreform*), again, a movement critical of industrialisation and materialism.

Interestingly, Gandhi saw Kallenbach 'as a representation of Tolstoy himself': a wealthy and middle-class man, an architect with some success who lived a 'hedonistic life', a man of action who suffered emotional torment and crisis in his search for truth, and who went through 'a socio-religious transformation'—comparable to Tolstoy's life (Lev 2012, 29-33.). When Tolstoy finished his book 'Anna Karenina', he was suffering from what we today would probably call burnout. In response to this crisis, he took a spiritual view of his innermost being before he published the two books 'My Life' and 'A Confession'. Both Kallenbach and Gandhi wrote letters to Tolstoy expressing their enthusiasm and asking his permission to name the farm after him (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 20, 22). Along with Kallenbach, Gandhi translated his Gujarati pamphlet 'Hind Swaraj' (Indian Home Rule) into English after discussing it with his German friend and even sent a copy to Tolstoy. Kallenbach even seems to have planned a translation of the book into German.

The farm itself was shaped according to Gandhi's and Kallenbach's ideals, influenced by Tolstoy, of subsistence farming, horticulture, propertyless crafts, and the other ideals that were already important to the Phoenix farm. Kallenbach made his contribution not only as a manager, but also as a teacher. He even learned how to make sandals at the German Catholic monastery Mariannhill near Pinetown and passed this knowledge on to Gandhi and others at the ashram (Sarid & Bartolf 1997, 24; Lev 2012, 42). Here Kallenbach's German origins paid off.

At the same time as Gandhi's ashram, the communal Zionist settlement form of the kibbutz was also created in 1910. Zionism was a fairly diverse national movement that aimed to establish a Jewish nation state in Palestine. It emerged as a reaction to the rise of European antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century. Both forms of settlement, Gandhi's ashram and the kibbutz, have clear structural similarities: both were organised cooperatively by equal residents without private property. Some of the early kibbutz settlers were inspired by Tolstoy, as were Gandhi and Kallenbach. This included a shared utopia of changing the world, manual labour, self-sufficiency, thrift and the desire to be an example for others. There was a structural difference regarding gender segregation in the sleeping quarters at the Tolstoy Farm, which was not

the case in the kibbutzim. However, a much more serious difference in content lay in the attitude towards non-violence. The circumstances in Palestine did not seem to allow such pacifism for the Zionists, although the Zionist writer and kibbutz pioneer Aharon David Gordon, for example, certainly had sympathy for it (Chatterjee 1992, Chapter 4).

Kallenbach had already dealt with Zionist ideas in South Africa. The majority of the Jewish community there adhered to Zionism, not least because of their refugee experience, but unlike Gandhi's Jewish friends. And Kallenbach's family in Europe also had similar contacts. In addition, in 1912 and thereafter, he had received letters from a Jewish pioneer who had migrated to Palestine from Eastern Europe, urging him to become one too. Kallenbach became increasingly concerned with this question and even became a member of various South African Zionist organisations (Lev 2012, 74-79). The pioneer's letter emphasized the parallels to Tolstoy's farm in South Africa. Overall, it is reasonable to assume that Gandhi's ashram and the first kibbutz arose in parallel, benefitting from Tolstoy's ideas (Chatterjee 1992, 81 f.). However, Kallenbach's contacts with Zionists could also be an indication of influences from Zionist directions on the ashram.

Kallenbach, as a German citizen, was interned by the British in a prisoner of war camp on the Isle of Man in 1914. It was not until 1917 thathe was released again in a prisoner of war exchange. In the meantime, he had only sporadic and diminishing correspondence with Gandhi. Kallenbach no longer felt comfortable in Berlin and so he returned to South Africa in 1920 to work as an architect again. The rise of National Socialism and increasing antisemitism in Europe deeply shocked Kallenbach in the 1930s. He became increasingly involved in the Zionist movement (Lev 2012, 113-19). After being asked by Zionists for help in convincing Gandhi to support the Zionist cause, he first visited Palestine to see for himself. He finally travelled to India to meet Gandhi in 1937 and again in 1939 (ibid., 123, 141).

They had different opinions of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Gandhi had to think about the Muslims and the pan-Islamist Khilafat movement in India and saw himself as a mediator. According to Ephraim Meir 'this stance is understandable in the framework of Gandhi's political struggle for a unified India, but it was unfavorable to the Jews in Palestine' (Meir 2021, 7). In November in his article 'The Jews', Gandhi spoke out, without consulting Kallenbach, and recommended that Jews in Palestine and Germany practice satyagraha against the National Socialists. Kallenbach and Gandhi were and remained at odds on this point (Lev 2012, 125-128; Meir 2021). Their global lives took different directions.

Concluding remarks

The almost 21 years that Gandhi stayed in South Africa are central to Gandhi's personal development. Here he started his experiments with the truth. Here he developed, tested and refined the idea of the ashram as a communal way of life and of satyagraha. Here the Indian Opinion was created as a model for later newspapers. Here he came into contact with personalities and literature that influenced him. South Africa's diverse social environment and its conflict structure contributed to this as well as the sometimes radical global social, political and technological changes and the counter-movements of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

As this essay has shown, in a nutshell, South Africa confronted Gandhi and his friends with large global and regional processes of refugee and labour migration, racism, antisemitism, imperialism and various social and religious movements. Of course, Gandhi's relationship with Kallenbach was particularly close. Nevertheless, the stylisation of a soulmate must be questioned when one considers the determining relationships of dependency, Gandhi's behaviour, which is sometimes described as tyrannical, and the disagreements regarding the Palestine question and Zionism.

The contacts with Kallenbach and other Jewish friends who, like many other immigrants, were looking for an identity and experimenting with various globally circulating ideas and movements such as Theosophy, Zionism and vegetarianism were crucial. Everyone worked in the common experimental field South Africa. They inspired each other and brought from their home-countries and from their travels new insights and their experiences with them—from Eastern Europe, from Britain, from India as well as from Germany and elsewhere. Conversely, they also had some influence on developments there. The new global communication and travel options had a strengthening effect and were used, even though there was a scepticism regarding the new and imperial technologies.

At the same time, their ideals were continually challenged and they themselves were not free from the ideas that they should actually reject. Although they had similar influences, they could develop in different directions, depending on their place of origin, on local, regional or global political circumstances or on individual characteristics. This is most evident in Gandhi and Kallenbach and their attitude towards Zionism. The example chosen shows that a global micro-historical approach is able to reveal such contradictions and fragmentations. In doing so, it contributes to a differentiation of global history, which is sometimes presented in a somewhat too linear and teleological way.

Endnotes

[1] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/outrage-over-reviews-of-new-gandhi-book/articleshow/7811322.cms [last accessed 28 November 2024].

[2] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/30/gujarat-bans-gandhi-book-gay-claims [last accessed 28 November 2024].

[3] https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.THEOSOPHY [last accessed 28 November 2024].

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